

Chapter 3

Dynamic Symmetry

The term “Dynamic Symmetry” (D.S.) is not new. It is based upon mathematical curves found in nature. The study of it reveals definite laws of growth. It also manifests in sub-atomic movements, in molecular functions, in surface tension and in gaseous “behaviorism.” A recognition of it may explain some of the phenomena of sugars and starches, of indeterminism in the physical world, the laws of valence, vibratory activity, and changes of state. D.S. might also explicate innumerable formations and growths in the vegetation world. It has already been applied to both art and science at Yale University and elsewhere.

But man is not from the earth alone, and more than material laws are needed to understand him and to help him on his devious ways. The soul, his vital essence, has come downward, so to speak, as if from some high heaven. So there is another and in a sense a reciprocally opposite way of looking at things than the common sense view. We might perceive as from our heart and love-nature first, then look through the mind, emotions and appetites in turn. All of these aspects of personality can better be appreciated in the light of D.S.

Intuition is a faculty of heart and comes into play through the heart which is its natural sphere. Moreover the logic—and such a word can be applied—connected with the deeper aspects of personality is extremely intricate. It is difficult to disprove that every aspect of man’s nature and personality can be explained in terms of atomic and vibratory phenomena. Nor need we restrict these terms to what is sensible and manifest. In states of joy, ecstasy and love we may recognize other aspects of movement and of life, and come to the heart of Dynamic Symmetry. Telepathy and metapsychical phenomena also become clearer in the light of D.S. Besides, what we hold to be true today may not always be clearly expressed in the terms of yesteryear.

Every movement of the body includes pulsation, ebb and flow. Yet we stand on our own feet and hold our own positions. When something goes amiss, the internal organs suffer, there is disease, there is pain. If we examine closely we discover that infringement of rhythm is one of the basic causes of **wrongness**, and our lack of understanding of the whole operation of the rhythms of breath and blood may lie close to the root of our difficulties.

Rhythm is of utmost importance in our lives. It is born of the earth and brings us the strength and qualities of earth. It characterizes our respiratory and circulatory systems which respectively bring and hold vibrations and forces from the external world, perhaps from the internal world also. When there is a defect in rhythm, there is a lack of balance, and then, whatever movements we may indulge in, produce loss of psychic power. This is one of the reasons for the coming of debility, disease, danger and death. The so-called dances of Isadora Duncan, based upon other than heart-concentration, had no rhythmical foundation and so led to destruction. Her life was no different.

A similar analysis may be made of music. It is questionable whether music without rhythm is really music at all, though it be produced by musical instruments. Children playing with clay do not create works of art and a baby with a paint box and brushes is not necessarily a genius. True art touches every plane of nature and every phase of existence. Each art has its fundamentals, the omission of which is damaging, and all the arts may be bound together by a cosmic, holistic, or universal aesthetic.

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Emphasis upon the after-beat has its own definite result, different from that of steps taken with the down-beat rhythm. It produces duality, division and opposition or contrast. The after-beat stress is downward and should be used only when one wishes to direct forces downward or to produce a momentary contrast. It may have an association with Yin and with "water," but "fire" turned downward brings the destructive lightning. The dancer will quickly perceive that her synchronization with rhythmic pulsations adds to her psychic power.

Movement throws the center of gravity in the direction to be taken so that it is no longer concentrated about a point. The tight-rope walker, skater, skier and gymnast are well aware of it. The dancer has a more intricate art and must control this gravitational line whether she be posing, performing adagio, or whirling. In order to maintain control, she should begin with her heart-concentration and let its influence permeate her every step. And if she can keep her breath under a steady rhythmical control she should soon master her art.

In order to exemplify these teachings we turn to the study of movements beginning with those taken upon the floor and enter the world of dynamism.

Backbone Supine and Taut

This position has already been suggested, first as that taken by an infant, and second as one of the fundamentals of Static Symmetry. When we turn to dynamism we may regard it as a movement with the value of "zero;" that is to say, one remains relaxed and listens to music. As one advances in meditation he can dispense with the quiet supine position. In the cultivation of dynamism music is an essential for it sets up the vibrational activity in all aspects of personality and helps to develop the finer side of man.

One may experiment with different pieces and notice their varying effects. Thus one may discover the part that music plays in the life of the "soul." One will learn about changes in heart-beat and respiratory rhythms under the diverse influences of music.

These exercises may be done on the floor, on the ground or on top of the bed. If a radio is handy, they may even be performed in bed.

Backbone Fixed, Body in Motion

There are two types of this exercise. In the one a person lies like an infant, with arms and legs in action, but maintaining heart-concentration. This should be continued until the life-force is felt in the limbs and in the entire body. It is excellent for drawing vital currents from the earth. A variation is to keep the arms by the sides moving the legs bicycle fashion. This strengthens the legs and is fine for those who need exercise without reducing waist and bust.

The Crawl

In the crawl one is like an animal except that man usually goes on hands and knees and not strictly on all fours. But here again one must not neglect the heart-concentration and rhythm. In the mime and in dramatic dancing, it is true, one may forego a degree of rhythm for the sake of realism. But for spiritual development, whether we imitate children or animals, or move by instinct, rhythm is requisite.

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Hands-and-feet crawling is so ungainly that it is usual for two to team up to represent horse, donkey, or elephant. Even though it be for humor the work is best done when such persons concentrate together. Harmony is an essential both of spirituality and of art.

Most movements begin from an upright standing position. Here we enter into a very complex field in which all the principles traditional or determinate may be retained. By traditional are meant folk dances and those themes which have been preserved for many generations. By determinate is meant any art form which belongs to a school or group of teachers or even to a single teacher. There is no need to criticize any method. Dancers usually have little knowledge of physiology and less of mechanics, so it is well to understand some of the principles of each in order to add to grace and to minimize lassitude and fatigue.

Of course, properly speaking, D.S. applies to movements in which the whole body, carried by the feet, changes position in space. Usually this is to the accompaniment of music, and with a purpose or program in view. In ancient times the program was chiefly borrowed from Scriptures, sacred poetry, or folk lore, and traditional chants and verses were recited. Such was the original idea of choreography. Verses might even be sung or chanted with modulations, for poetry, music, and dancing were not separated. They were all aspects of one art.

During the dance the dynamic center of gravity may take a pivotal course, or trace a complex pattern, or no exact pattern at all. The body has four basic types of movement which may be classified according to the "elements" of the ancients which "elements" are still recognized in parts of the Orient. Each one of them has its peculiar purpose and characteristics. In "Nature's Finer Forces," the Hindu Rama Prasad has presented the science of these elements to the public. Whatever else may have been written about them, their nature will never be understood by those who do not cultivate a sympathetic point of view. It is useless for a scientific philosopher to demand or request sympathy and understanding for his views while denying validity to the outlook of others.

Along with "earth," "water," "fire," and "air" there is a fifth, the "ether" or the **akasha** of the Hindus. The ether-akasha extends through space and is the source and final repository of the others. It is also the refining element and the one which represents stillness. Cultivation of it enables one to hold any position indefinitely. In Tibetan art one finds it in the supreme position, dominating the others.

Earth Position

There are several aspects of the earth position. Earth movements force the body to inhale more deeply and draw in air and vital life force. They strengthen the spine and circulatory system, but do not alter the condition of the blood. They may well be preceded by a concentration upon earth. The sustaining of this concentration is very helpful.

Kneeling. Kneeling is a common position for children and primitive people. It is required in many folk occupations, such as pounding grain or washing clothes in a stream. Here the feet are anchored while the hands, head and even the whole torso may move. Kneeling is therefore a part of some folk dances, while in others one moves from or toward it.

There are indeed two forms of kneeling which are similar anatomically. In the one kind, a person is in prayer or devotion. So we find the kneeling position in many ritualistic prayers. It indicates

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reverence, humility, modesty and service. Its moral value is great. And the psychic and moral effects are not different because the spirit of devotion is absent. That is, to stay weak itself is ennobling, especially when regarded as part of a sacred duty. One may move the arms and torso in rhythm without leaving the floor. It is possible to exhibit grace and beauty in such movements.

Squatting on haunches. Though this may appear quite difficult to us, it is the natural relaxed position of many aborigines, e.g. the natives of many parts of Africa. It is not often employed as a basic position in the dance but is included in the wild movements of the Cossacks. Their very vital dances combine "fire" and "earth," and they exhibit these qualities in their natures, especially in their daring.

Water Positions and Movements

It is to be noticed that the elements, other than earth, signify movements rather than poses or positions. A dancer cannot stay long in a fixed pose to illustrate fountain or waterfall or rain. Water has definite movements in nature and a very determinate effect upon the body. This effect is seen in the tendency to bow and bend, like the foliage of trees. And, as has been stated, water has a close affinity to Yin.

Yin is thus near kin to water, and Yang to fire. Yin and water dominate in the arms which hang naturally from either side. They tend to curvilinear movements. They promote grace, beauty, gentleness, loveliness and sympathy, as well as sadness, pity and affection. All of these emotions and feelings may be illustrated by the arms. A person with awkward arms is generally lacking in one or more of these qualities. It is possible to develop the character through an artistic correction which is nearly always taken with a better spirit than a personal correction or moral teaching.

Eurythmic concentrations on water are only proper by the seashore or on the bank of a stream or the edge of a lake or near a waterfall. Otherwise it is best to suppose that the kingdom of heaven is within man, and that it is possible to awaken in the heart all qualities, characteristics and properties which appear in the manifestation. Thus the dancer may develop her own water-spirit and become even as a nymph.

Water movements are characterized by gentle step, light feet and agility. The force of them is toward the left and downward. They go well with drapes, light clothing, sashes and streamers. The color green belongs to water, while yellow and black are associated with earth. White, too, harmonizes with the spirit of water.

Fire Positions and Movements

For the most part, fire is the reciprocal opposite of water. Its tendency is to raise the body and also to draw it toward the right. Its pull is somewhat stiffer than that of water, for it is connected with Yang. Its movements develop courage, energy and force. They also warm the body quickly. Indeed there is a tradition in India that the musician or dancer who invoked fire and did not know how to control it might become a living torch.

Fire dances are illustrated in the war, sword, and weapon dances of many peoples. Participation in them seems to make the body insensitive to pain, to rouse the adrenal glands and to produce an antitoxin in the blood which heals wounds more quickly than otherwise. This was certainly true

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in the case of the Zulus who participated in the First World War. They seemed quite definitely to be able to withstand suffering and to recover much more quickly than their white brothers who did not dance.

It should be noted that fire has the distinctive rhythm of three; that is to say of three beats to the measure. Earth has four beats to the measure, while water and air are associated with curvilinear movements so their stresses are not so well illustrated by integers.

Air Positions and Movements

The air appears in all movements from side to side, even when the body lies upon the floor. Even in rolling from side to side or rolling down a hill, the air element expresses itself. Lack of control of it produces dizziness and vertigo. This is also true in the case of inebriates. The crossing of legs and arms, the swinging of limbs and torso, are associated with it. It denotes vitality, changefulness, a mental rather than a material outlook, wit, humor, spriteliness, nervousness and intoxication. Ordinarily it tends to draw one from repose and it aids in the increase of tempo. Probably all rapid dances, (e.g. Satarello and Flamenco) may be considered as air types.

The air element also consumes more psychic energy but at the same time aids in its restoration, especially as one is lifted from the ground. In the story of Antaeus, that giant grew stronger each time Hercules threw him on the earth, and became weaker when he was lifted into the air. With psychic energy it is the opposite, as it may increase when one is elevated. But it must be assimilated too, else one will follow the path of Nijinski. This great genius, or "jinn," was able to lift his body into the air and even to hold it in space. He had invoked psychic power and could use it against the material gravitational forces, but lacking breath control and ignorant of the connection between breath, body and mind, he became "mad."

The concentration and practice of the science of these elements is of tremendous value in the training of body, emotions and mind. When mysticism is taught as a science, as the Vedantists and Sufis would have it, the student learns to employ these elements as his servants, and thus he perfects his own nature and helps others. Sufi Inayat Khan has also elaborated on this point in his *The Mysticism of Sound*, Grace, beauty and art are truly ways toward the realization of God, and if they are felt rather than thought, their value is supreme. This knowledge brings us to the consideration of the metaphysical aspects of Spiritual dancing.