

The Phase of Initial Submerging

May this writing articulate that which we already know. May it stimulate questions for which each practitioner finds personal answers. May we assist each other further in our joint venture of healing through WaterDance.

When does a WaterDance truly begin?

Beginnings are mysterious. The new moon, hidden in darkness, heralds a cycle of experience that reveals its nature gradually as it unfolds. The rising sun flushes the night sky crimson and orange in what the Arabs call the false dawn; only as it clears the horizon does it truly dawn. In the same way, a WaterDance could be said to start either with the first words spoken with a client or when we take her into our arms. Yet, it is from the actual first moment of *submerging* that a WaterDance begins in essence. The physiological and psychological shifts that occur then are quantitatively greater than those preceding this point. The entire session before this moment is a prelude, a preparation.

Arriving at the portal

Don Juan, the Yaqui Indian teacher, tells Carlos Castaneda that fear will be with us as we leap across the chasm into the unknown; it is not a sign of unreadiness. The person deciding to receive WaterDance may still have fear. She chooses wisely to go forward despite her fear, courageously sinking into it to unmask it as an illusion. The initial submergings of WaterDance are where she meets her fear. This phase could be seen as a gateway or portal to experience. The portal is within the receiver. Floating our partner, figuratively speaking, before the portal, we may find it closed. Given time, it opens from *within*.

Entering the canal

In the first ever WaterDance class at Harbin Hot Springs, Arjana played a game with us in the pool. We each requested what kind of birth canal we wished the group to form for us, then passed through it underwater. The requests ranged from peaceful to chaotic, slow to fast, tight to free, happy to tender. The initial submerging phase of WaterDance is like a *birth canal*: it cannot be avoided. It can be quite effortless and blissful, but for some it is difficult. It may appear frighteningly narrow, lacking room to proceed, turn

back or maneuver. Adjusting our simile slightly, we could imagine an over-land water canal joining two bodies of water. Such a canal has locks corresponding to successive stages of acclimatization. One by one, they drop or raise the traveler to new levels of consciousness, eventually opening onto a vast inner sea. If rushed, emergence into this world will bear the marks of a forced passage: the sojourner will not be at peace; her experience will be marred by the persistence of fear. The mechanisms of the locks require time to function. *Patience* is our gift to a receiver in this process. The receiver is assured of a sense of comfort and safety by allowing as much time and as many repetitions as needed for the transition to underwater. It is better that she be slightly impatient, wanting to go under sooner than for her to feel pressured or rushed; better to create desire than to generate resistance.

Navigating the passage

Those born under the sign of Cancer possess the inherent urge to nurture that which is young and to foster growth. Delicate beginnings need an environment of love and protective care. Our role in this phase of WaterDance is that of a sensitive, Cancerian pilot: to provide supportive, attentive guidance through the straits, opening partner to her inner sea. Bump roughly against the sides and she may awaken from her dream of becoming before she attains the *other side*.

A Life Metaphor

When the events of a session assume the proportions of a *life metaphor*, the potential for profound healing is present. The receiver has arrived at a state of such vulnerability that each moment becomes charged with meaning and the power to heal. Early impressions, mistaken judgments of ourselves and of life that have boomeranged back to become our experience can be released and reprogrammed. Your loving presence as the giver can serve as confirmation to the receiver that she is worthy of love unconditionally, that life is supportive, that Love is all there is.

Receiver places the noseclips on herself and thereby steps under her own volition to the portal, to the challenge. "I'm ready," she says, as she entrusts herself into something beyond her control, which is fitting, for the deeper lesson is usually one of *surrender*. Those receivers who take over to set the timing of their submergings may well be empowering themselves, yet how often I have had the sense of *control masquerading as self-*

expression, of the fullness of the lesson being missed, of a lesser victory for self.

Be Not Surprised

The spiritual path has been symbolized as a golden spiral. Ascending in cycles, the aspirant returns to the same issues again and again, learning from them from more and more evolved levels. The issues are not transcended after the first encounter; instead they serve as touchstones along the entire way. Thus, even the *experienced receiver* can be triggered in this baptismal phase. There may have been a primal fear passed over previously on the journey within, so that in a later session she finds herself confronting it, focused on that transient moment of discomfort or panic. Rather than smoothly making the transition, she focuses on the feeling of the transition.

Breath

Now, let's get down to the nitty-gritty! The high level of attunement with partner required in WaterDance is especially critical in this phase of a session. A mistake in judging the breath can have a devastating effect now. Therefore, follow the breath very closely, more closely than at any other time in a WaterDance. Be absolutely certain of where receiver is in her breath cycle, taking no chance that you are off. Wait until a clear exhale before signaling. Go to Under Head position to better hear the breath and feel the abdomen, if necessary, or use the Accordion to generate a breath rhythm. A third alternative is to do some bodywork to evoke a deeper breath.

The following are indications that partner is ready to remain under longer:

- 1) *the head arches back* underwater when the rest of body has surfaced;
- 2) *the head turns to the side* underwater when the rest of body has surfaced;
- 3) once surfaced, *partner waits before exhaling* and taking the next breath.

Body Position

Certain body positions work better than others for the initial submergings, depending upon general and individual factors:

- 1) Sideways submerging seems generally to be preferable to face up. Shanti Mook tells me research shows that sideways submerging activates

the *diving reflex*, which is in fact the shift in physiology that the receiver makes.

2) Turning the receiver's face toward us can be tried if having the face turned away isn't working. This can give more sense of security, more of a sense of being with the practitioner.

3) If partner is having difficulty dipping under, rolling to face down early on would be counterindicated as a rule. In this case, the surface seems far away, hard to return to.

4) Partner's back against our abdomen generally gives a sense of security. Such an embrace however, could also be experienced as claustrophobic. One client of mine who had been nearly drowned by a parent was able to 'cross over' only when I released her upper body completely. As can be seen, the values associated with positions are *entirely relative*, so be observant and flexible.

5) Having some part of the body above surface generally gives security. Partner senses she is at the surface and not in danger. Going all the way under she loses her reference, for total immersion is total whether at the pool bottom or one inch below surface.

Movement

In the first submergings, the following points apply, in general:

1) For the sensitive, *a minimum of movement* is preferable. Too much movement could be distracting. The inner action is enough to occupy partner's attention; she is coming to terms with herself.

2) *A gentle ongoing rhythm* is helpful. It creates a comforting biokinetic environment that invites surrender.

3) Movements that radically change the receiver's orientation in space are not helpful. Somersaults, inversions and rolls would fall in this category. When the receiver begins to wonder, "Where am I? Where is the surface?" she has *lost her reference to air*, hence to life.

4) Although it is usually good to maintain a continuity between each initial submerging, it can also be right to *shift the energy*. Holding patterns may appear underwater that were not present on the surface. Also, after a difficult but successful immersion a person may tighten up a bit or need a break. In these cases, changing sides, resorting to broader, freer movements or literally moving to a new place in the pool can all be helpful. The key here is to keep the physical body *in flow*.

5) Look for *micro-movements of fear*:

- a) signs of discomfort as the water plays about the face, such as tensing the neck, furrowing the brow, fidgeting, clearing the hair
- b) turning the face slightly toward the surface when submerged
- c) lifting the head slightly to get to the surface faster

A Hypothetical Immersion Sequence

- 1) Give receiver time to adjust to the noseclip once she puts it on. The quality of the breath will guide you.
- 2) Begin to let the waterline rise on the face and play about the cheeks. I think of a WaterDance level as contrasted to a Watsu level. The WaterDance waterline is higher, not as clearly defined, the mouth more than the nose is the focus and less of an issue because it can be closed and water taken in can be spit out.
- 3) Bring the head in sideways to bisect the face a few times.
- 4) Cover the nose.
- 5) Cover both eyes.
- 6) Immerse to the temple.
- 7) Take the entire head under.
- 8) Add a roll away to bring partner's back against your abdomen.
- 9) Hold partner still by the knee and shoulder, facing away from you.
- 10) Continue with moves on the surface in which the upper body remains free, such as Thigh Aikido.