

# Essential Motion: An Improvisational Movement Approach to Embodied Awareness and Its Relationship to Rosen Method Bodywork

By Karen Roeper, MS Counseling and Dance Therapy  
Karen@ielephant.com www.essential-motion.com  
Rosen Method Senior Teacher and Founder of Essential Motion  
with Jane Flint, MA Human Development

*"EM brings many of the learnings of RMB to a new vertical awareness, by following our moving bodies."*

## PREMISE

Essential Motion (EM) is based on the premise that by learning to use the body as a reference and guide, we are able to access the source of our being, creativity, and wisdom. When we move we can experience the aliveness of the body. We can feel and express ourselves. In this way, movement is the forgotten language of the soul.

## INTRODUCTORY INVITATION

Before you begin reading this article, I want to invite you, as you are sitting here, to take a moment to pause. Sense your feet, soften your tongue, and allow your breath to come as it does. As you read, remember to check in with your body and sense how the words of this article land within you.

## INTRODUCTION

Between the years of 1987-1995, I created EM, which draws upon aspects of Rosen Method Bodywork (RMB), improvisational movement, authentic movement, mindfulness training, and dance/movement psychotherapy. EM is a somatic discipline that enables people to expand their body awareness. For some people, their familiar pattern of physical awareness is limited to pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensations. For others, their familiar patterns are not physically grounded and are almost exclusively thought patterns. In order to "unhook" from these familiar patterns, it is necessary to become disoriented. This means we need to let go of 'knowing' in order to open to another level of experience. We need to reorient our relationship to our moving body and develop a new kind of intelligence, one that is based on learning to listen to the body.

What can happen as people embark on somatic work is eloquently expressed by Gabrielle Roth, an American dancer and developer of the 5Rhythms movement practice:

As you free your body to receive the power of being, all kinds of feelings start to flow: old feelings, new feelings, dark and light. Being alive is dangerous. It means feeling, feeling things you might not want to feel or thought you never would. Being alive means having a heart and expressing it. In freeing the body, we free the heart to experience the power of love (Roth, 1989, p 59).

## Intention

The intention of EM is to create a safe container/space of heart, openness and curiosity that allows people to learn how to find freedom and trust in their own moving bodies. By discovering and re-engaging with their own ease and playfulness, their own authenticity, their own unique way of moving, people learn to use their bodies as a reference and guide. This attunement and practice enables an increased ability to sense and respond to the environment and to become more present, powerful and open-hearted in the midst of day-to-day experiences.

## Process

EM includes two primary modes: one-on-one coaching sessions and group work. In a one-on-one EM session, the client and coach face each other. As the client follows the movements of her own body, the coach witnesses her, whether she is standing or in motion, and guides her with verbal suggestions. Often the coach's body reflects the client's movements. Sometimes in reflection the coach exaggerates the client's movements, so that the coach can feel in her own body what is happening for the client, and also so that the client can feel seen and reflected.

Frequently, one-on-one EM sessions occur in the context of an EM group. Group sessions enable participants to be witnessed by others and to practice remaining with their own unique ways of moving while interacting with and learning from the movements of others. Although aspects of EM group work are mentioned throughout this article, the emphasis is on demonstrating the coaching process of one-on-one EM sessions, and, to some degree, to contrast and compare EM with Rosen Method Bodywork (RMB).

## How RMB and EM Differ

In RMB, the client experiences being touched by another's hands, hands that listen rather than manipulate. Through RMB, the client learns what it feels like to be touched without goal, direction, or other purpose. For the client, RMB allows the possibility of releasing unconscious holdings, and experiencing greater ease through being touched. The RMB client can rise from the table with a tender sensibility that being at ease allows.

With EM, the client experiences a similar release of unconscious holdings, but rather than discovering this release through the touch of another while on the table, she experiences it through listening to her own body and following her own movement under the attentive guidance and compassionate eye of an EM coach. Because the client is supported and grounded by her own body, her essence emerges as she integrates the guidance and suggestions of the coach into her own natural movement. She can step into the world with a sense of greater ease and carry that ease into her work, into her life, and her love.

Richard Strozzi Heckler, author, coach, and consultant on embodied leadership describes how this experience unfolds:

Instead of avoiding or rationalizing our feelings and sensations, we ... hear them as information that can guide and heal us (Strozzi Heckler, 1984, p 8).

EM shares some of the objectives of Rosen Method Movement (RMM) such as opening people up and supporting them in their release of long-held, frozen, or stuck places in the body through movement.

However, there are several significant areas of difference between EM and RMM.

For example, movement in EM is improvisational and non-prescriptive in nature. EM coaching serves to address emotions that arise during the movement experience. In EM, the practice of witnessing is focused on reflecting each person's own individual movement. In addition, EM allows for one-on-one witnessing and a greater range of feedback that is personalized. Moving and being seen by another creates a powerful framework for greater self-awareness, while establishing a connection in the moment between the client and the coach.

RMM presents a prescribed manner of movement that creates a different kind of container. RMM's pairs work focuses students on replicating a movement demonstrated by the teacher and enabling a verbal and sensory dialog between the pair. RMM is designed for a group context and does not have a one-on-one emphasis. Given these various points of departure, this article does not address further comparisons between RMM and EM.

That said, many EM participants who were hesitant to explore more improvisational movement have said that RMM served as an important entryway for them.

## History

My interest in how body, mind, and emotions interact has been with me from an early age. One of my earliest memories is sitting on someone's lap and matching my breath with theirs. I would synchronize my breath and allow my body to soften into them. I had an innate sense of connecting. This is a very kinesthetic memory. Additionally, I was supported and encouraged, as a child, to trust and explore my own way of moving. I started taking creative and improvisational movement classes at age three. That early training of listening to my own body is a significant part of how Essential Motion developed. Receiving RMB myself was another very important aspect of learning and developing EM. I learned to recognize when something felt true in my own body and realized I was able to trust the information my body provided.

At the time that I was studying RMB, 1984 -1986, I was spending many hours in the dance studio improvising. I began to see the correlation between what I was discovering in improvisation and what I was learning in RMB. I learned to be open to the thoughts, doubts, judgments, and questions that presented themselves to me. I learned the importance of "not knowing" and the freedom that comes from being in that state.

From there I learned to recognize if there was flatness when I spoke, or if there was no response in my body to what I was saying. Later, as I became an RMB practitioner, I began to recognize my own body as an instrument that became more attuned to nuances, such as being able to recognize the subtle changes in the breath or the softening of a muscle in a client. I began trusting my intuition and learned to sense those nuances with my eyes and my hands. I became more sensitized to affect and to the shape of the body. I also learned the process of listening deeply to my whole body for guidance, and of trusting my intuition. And, finally, I learned to allow myself the possibility of expanding into -- rather than contracting away from -- whatever arises. I nurtured my curiosity, my openness to receive, connect and learn things outside my assumptions, my desire to know and appreciate the other person. I began to experience my work like a treasure hunt, looking for those moments of "Yes" in myself and in others when we drop into ourselves with a sense of authenticity.

## The Influence of RMB on EM

I realized that, like my experience in the dance studio, RMB is a very creative and improvisational process. I began to share my discoveries through improvisational movement classes that I offered to the Rosen community. As my RMB training progressed and my eyes became more sensitive to the increased ease I was seeing in the movements of my clients, I began offering individual movement sessions. In these sessions, I noticed people discovering greater aliveness and freedom in their movements as they followed their own unique movement, their own lead, as opposed to how they'd been taught to move. Group work soon followed with the added dimension that each person could be supported in their discovery by being witnessed by peers who reflected what they saw in each other's movement.

In these ways, RMB was the base training that has allowed me to speak from my own embodied self-awareness. At this point in my development, around 1995, I began to call my work Essential Motion.

Many of my clients who also happen to be RMB students or practitioners say that EM offers them a way of exploring and expanding what they discover on the table into a new vertical awareness. Pille Naeris, a trained Rosen practitioner, certified Essential Motion leader, and Family Constellations coach in Sweden, puts it like this:

To me the most important benefit with Rosen was to get to know myself, learn about new sides of myself that I didn't know. My main way of survival had been to understand things. I needed to know why things were the way they were. I was very mental and had been interpreting life as black and white. Rosen shifted that perspective. That was not an easy process, but oh, so worthwhile.

After a couple of years I started to wonder, what do I do with all my feelings, how do I come out with what is inside? This is where Essential Motion is such an important tool! Nowadays when I feel nervous about something, before a course, workshop or whatever, I always use my body as a tool: feel my feet, feel my breath, and feel my center. This was a big and life-changing perspective, to BE in my body — especially in challenging situations. I could not facilitate Family Constellations without Essential Motion.

## What Happens in an EM Session

I want to share my process as I work with someone in an EM session. This section will be followed by a section of case reports that illustrate these processes.

In a one-on-one EM session, my primary concern is to create a climate of safety, openness, and trust between my client and myself. I approach the session with an openhearted curiosity and an intention of being available to the person and to whatever transpires in our collaborative exploration. I immediately sense the person as they walk into the space. How are they moving: slowly, quickly, energetically, enthusiastically, rushed? Does it seem that they are in pain anywhere? I often gauge this by their gait, their posture, how they greet me, their facial expression and the general field they present with – are they slumped or are they upright and “in themselves?” Is there a tentativeness, sadness, guardedness, and openness?

I am also aware, as I stand in front of the person, that they are taking in all of me as well. There is certain

vulnerability for me in this that is different than when I am giving a RMB session. When I face someone in an EM session, I am opening outwardly to the person while I am simultaneously opening inwardly to myself. My image is that we are both opening into a common field. One of my favorite Rumi quotes comes to mind:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*  
doesn't make any sense (Rumi, 1989, p 59).

Within this field, a connection begins to develop between my client and myself. I am listening and attending to the person with my whole body. In the beginning of a session I often ask my client what they might like to explore in the session. As they share, I continue to sense their bodies and how they express themselves physically. I may notice a particularly emphatic gesture in relation to what they are saying, or they may shift their tone of voice or the quality of their movement in a given moment. If there is a clear disconnect between their words and what is happening in the body—as in an RMB session—I take note of that. For example, the person might say they are angry about something and yet there is no corresponding emotion reflected in the body.

After the person has shared, I ask them to close their eyes and notice what they are aware of in their body. I may, at this point, refer back to a particular word/gesture combination, or a particular movement of theirs that I felt a response to in my own body as I witnessed them. I reflect what I noticed, and ask the person to return to that movement and/or those words. I ask them to go into the movement more deeply and I join them in their movement. My experience is that being seen and reflected helps the person sense what is happening in their bodies. This gives them an additional reference point for the possibility of inhabiting their bodies in new ways. When they follow where their body takes them, they naturally move away from explaining why they are here and towards the somatic experience that is underlying this “story.” The exploration continues from there, as is demonstrated in the case reports that follow.

Throughout a session, I use my own body as a reference point to inform me of possible suggestions and guidance to offer the person and to support them in coming into a more embodied experience of themselves. I’m actively listening to my own physical responses of tightness, openness, emotions and sensations. Because I rely on my body as an instrument and am in a state of attunement with the person in front of me, I experience moments of truth or “Yes” in my body that I reflect back to the person. My experience of these “Yes” moments is similar to what is often called empathy: staying in touch with my own heart and mind while simultaneously holding an attuned awareness of the other person.

Using my body as my ongoing reference is crucial. It allows me to stay present with the client while remaining sensitive to and aware of my own inner experience. Using the practitioner’s own body as a reference is also similar to RMB work, the difference being that in EM the client and I are facing each other. I reflect them with language and body movement rather than with touch. In EM, the client is free to observe and to move, either by herself or with me as the practitioner.

Sometimes I wonder where a session is going or if it is really going anywhere, internally thinking I really have no idea what I’m doing. When these voices arise, I catch myself, come back to my body, open

my field more to acceptance and open my heart to myself, to this person, to this moment. I tell myself: "Whatever is happening is what is happening and it is enough." By acknowledging my own doubts in this way and extending compassion to myself in the moment, I can then more fully accept the other person and hold a space for them to accept themselves. I can come back to being in the "field beyond right doing and wrongdoing."

Bessel Vander Kolk, M.D is a clinician, researcher and teacher in the area of post-traumatic stress and related phenomena. Although the case reports in this article don't address people who were dealing directly with post-traumatic stress, or with specific or immediate trauma, Vander Kolk describes from a more clinical perspective much about working with the body that can happen in EM. He states:

Somatic therapies can help patients to relocate themselves in the present by experiencing that it is safe to move. Feeling the pleasure of taking effective action restores a sense of agency and a sense of being able to actively defend and protect themselves (Vander Kolk, 2014, p 218.)

## CASE REPORTS

Following are three case reports that demonstrate what may occur in a one-on-one EM session. Each is described from my point of view. Each represents a client at a different stage of work in Essential Motion. For purposes of demonstrating growth, one of the three case reports, Anya's, is divided into two different EM sessions that occurred a year apart.

I believe it is important to point out that the method for writing up these case reports involved reviewing videos of each of the people represented here as I worked with them in one-on-one EM sessions. By reviewing each video multiple times, I was able to focus on those moments of transition and transformation that are most representative of EM sessions. Video was an integral part of a 3-month intensive EM workshop called Eyes of the Beholder in which each of the people in these case reports participated. To participate in Eyes of the Beholder workshops, each person signed a videotape release form. The real names of these clients are not used in these reports.

### Henry

Henry is a middle-aged man who is healthy and fit. He trained in RMB but didn't go on to become a practitioner. He has no prior experience with EM and has come to EM to redefine his capacity for self-expression. He states that, when he was a child, his mother was a singer. Learning to fill a space with his own expression came later in his life. He has some experience performing in theater.

Some EM sessions are very verbal and some are not. In Henry's case, he was not very verbal. This required that I notice and name what I saw in his body to enable him to find words that might help him anchor his physical and emotional experience. What was striking to me was that Henry seemed to have a natural capacity to tune into his body. My verbal interaction was primarily guiding him back to his body again and again. Through this guidance he was able to identify for himself an experience of resistance. I worked with him on his aversion to his own self-identified resistance. Ultimately, as he was able to accept his resistance, he was able to be more fully present rather than trying to hide his resistance.

Initially, Henry is standing and facing me, eyes closed. The slight quivers I notice in his facial muscles at times immediately touch me. His arms are to his sides and appear to be somewhat held. I guide him into his

body by asking him first to feel his arms. He shakes his arms a bit. As in RMB when we say someone is “doing the breath,” it looks to me like Henry is consciously “doing” his arm movement rather than allowing his arms to really take the lead. When someone is doing, it feels to me like they are outside of themselves. There is a certain effort and holding of the breath that I see. In my own body, I feel restless, uneasy and am aware of holding my breath. Here, I feel a distance from Henry, like I can’t connect with his movement. For me, that feeling of disconnection is something that stimulates my curiosity and I wonder what kind of guidance I can offer to help Henry find more connection to himself. I try modeling taking a breath and letting out a sigh to see if that shifts anything in him, as my experience shows that this often encourages a person’s movements to be more effortless.

Henry now appears to go into a deeper inward listening or journey and begins to gently sway. I am swaying with him and reflect the swaying to him in words, as his eyes are closed. It appears that there is some relationship between his arms and his neck and throat. I ask him to notice his neck. At that prompt, his arms begin to rise and Henry takes a breath. My sense is he is allowing himself to go deeper. At this moment I feel it is important to reinforce my intention of holding a space of safety and trust. After he takes the breath, his head goes back, exposing his throat. He lets out a brief sound that has the quality of a stifled sob and begins to cry. I am beginning to have a sensation of my heart opening in my body. To me it seems as if the rising of his arms stimulated the rise of the emotion in him.

My intuition is to remind him of his breath again. Because of my RMB training, my eyes are drawn to a point between his shoulder blades and near his solar plexus and I choose to place one hand on his chest and one hand on his back.

His eyes are still closed and I suggest that he let his head drop. Often, dropping the head will allow people to let go of the thinking process a bit. At that, he makes a sound that is someplace between a laugh and a cry. With my hand lightly on his back, opposite his heart, I follow the direction that he seems to be taking and support his downward movement, suggesting through words and touch that he round his spine and relax his jaw.

I am still noticing some effort in his shoulders and encourage him to follow his body and soften his neck. He makes a sharp intake of air and says, “I felt something let go.” Now he is hanging way over, arms dangling, hands occasionally touching the floor. I ask him what he is noticing in his body right now. He responds that he is noticing a question mark, an unknowing. After a pause he identifies the feeling as that of “a frightened child, a playful child, a sad child.” Here he allows himself to really go into the experience of being a child, playing and jumping “like a gorilla,” he said. That is followed by a laugh. I am moved to witness Henry’s animation as he allows the energy of his young child to emerge.

Henry might not have been able to get in touch with his child in this way if he hadn’t been moving; one can discover their inner child on the table, but movement affords an additional kinesthetic experience of the young child.

Daria Halprin describes this kind of kinesthetic experience in relation to improvisation. She says:

In improvisation we can try things out, make discoveries, take risks, and do it again if it doesn't feel right, be silly, brave, nasty, or enraged, tear things apart, put it all back together (Halprin, 2003, p 19).

Henry remains bent over in this gorilla-like position for a long time. Internally I am aware of being curious and remind myself of the need for patience in this moment. My attention then goes to his legs and I simply ask him to feel his legs. Then there is a shift and, to me, the animated child disappears. Henry stands and starts to walk. I notice that he seems to be floating a bit above his body, as if his awareness isn't in his body and he is watching himself. His doesn't appear to be aware that his hips and legs are underneath him. I mention that to him. "There is some truth to that," he says, and as he says it, he drops into his hips a bit.

This is an exciting moment for me. I feel more sensation coming into my hips as I resonate with Henry's response. Dropping into his hips is an indication of his awareness coming into his body, allowing him to have moments of just being. When he pops out into self-consciousness and begins "doing" again, I guide him back to his legs. "Yes!" I say. "Allow yourself to come down into your legs. Feel your legs." Henry starts stamping as he walks. As he does so I notice his hands release. "There, did you feel what happened?" "Yes," he says, "I kind of let go up here," gesturing with his arms and shoulders.

"Yes!" I say. "Yes. There. There." And as I say that his face relaxes. He drops his head a bit, then clears his throat and wipes his eyes.

With this, I sense he is getting grounded, a feeling similar to ones I experience in an RMB session when the client is "arriving more fully on the table." Because this is an EM session, I offer Henry some words to help him embody this arrival in his body.

I suggest, "While you are standing or walking, try saying, 'I'm simply present.'"

Henry begins saying several times, "I'm simply present," while walking around. After a bit he stops and says, "I'm not there yet." I am touched by his honesty and self-awareness.

"It comes out a little bit like a question," I reflect.

"I feel resistance," he says.

"Do you know what that is," I ask?

"Fear," he states immediately. My heart softens as I feel great compassion for Henry and his fear as he shares this.

Even though he has said, 'fear' I choose to stay with the word resistance, as that is the original sensation he had identified.

"So where do you feel resistance?" I ask.

He responds by holding his hands over his heart. I place my hands over my own heart reflecting this gesture back to Henry so he can see and feel me with him.

"Try saying the words and acknowledging the resistance," I suggest.

He continues to hold his hands over his heart and begins saying, "I'm simply present and I feel some resistance here." He seems to be taking some time to engage with this, pausing between attempts. "I'm

simply present but I feel some resistance here." He looks up and says, "There's always some question here, which I think I try to cover up and pretend isn't there."

The *aversion* to the resistance and the underlying fear seems to be what is holding him back from being fully present. It is the core and the turning point of the session. As with RMB, this often happens towards the end of the session.

"If you let the question be there," I suggest, "it is very powerful."

After a bit he says, "It feels okay to have it."

"Every time you allow it," I say, "it shifts a little. There is a bit of softening in your body." I am also aware of a growing feeling of tenderness in me towards Henry as he allows more and more of himself to be seen.

After a while Henry says, "I feel like I am opening up to letting the resistance be there."

"Yes letting it be," I agree. "I'd like to invite you to say it to the group."

Henry turns and speaks to the group and says a number of times. "I am simply present and I feel some resistance here." Again, Henry utters a gasp, a sob, and a cry. "It feels sincere," he says. "I am feeling my resistance."

"Our resistance is a part of us that is really important to embrace," I say.

"I am present and I feel some resistance. It's as simple as that," he says.

"There you are," I reflect.

Facing the group and expressing his discovery to them afforded him the opportunity to have a "real world" experience of letting go of his aversion to the resistance in the presence of others while being present with himself.

Vander Kolk expresses this power of noticing and mindfulness like this:

Body awareness puts us in touch with the inner world, the landscape of our organism. Simply *noticing* our annoyance, nervousness or anxiety, immediately helps us shift our perspective and opens up new options other than our automatic, habitual reactions. Mindfulness puts us in touch with the transitory nature of our feelings and perceptions. When we pay focused attention to our bodily sensations, we can recognize the ebb and flow of our emotions and, with that, increase our control over them (Vander Kolk, 2014, p. 208).

### **Anya**

This case report follows Anya, a woman in her thirties, with a background as a dancer. She was trained in RMB. In addition to serving as her RMB supervisor, I worked with her in EM before this first one-on-one session, captured on video. I remember well the two sessions reported here as a turning point for Anya. The embodied transformation she experienced in the first session became an important anchoring reference

in her life. This allowed her to build on the work, as presented in the case report of the second session described here. Today, Anya has been an EM leader for nearly a decade.

As a dancer, Anya was able, even in the first session reported here, to access her physical and emotional expression. My interactions with her focused on using words to see how they landed with her. The challenge that I worked on with her, described in the case reports of both sessions, was noticing how her conceptual self—judging, thinking—got in the way.

A year later, in the second session reported here, it took less verbal interaction between us for her to use her natural expressiveness to access her feelings and use her body as a guide. Her discoveries came much more readily.

### Session 1

Anya stands facing me and we are being witnessed by a group of students taking an EM intensive. She is beginning to bounce slightly.

In the beginning of a session I believe it is important to give the person a sense of safety by starting right where they are—be it in movement or in stillness.

I prompt her, “Start right there, continue bouncing gently, taking a couple of deep breaths.”

Her arms are over her head and she begins voicing something that sounds like “ahhh.” Her head shakes and she continues to bounce, the bounce movement getting larger and her voice changing and getting louder: “arrgghh, ooohhhh, uuunnhhh.”

During an EM session I am continually reflecting the person either in a quiet subtle way or more actively, depending on what is transpiring in the session. This is similar to how, in a RMB session, we shift the intensity of contact with our hands. There are also times in a RMB session when we shift the location of our hands, as when our attention is drawn to another part of the body or our intuition guides us there. In this moment, as I am physically reflecting Anya, my attention is drawn to the tightness in her jaw.

I suggest to her to let her jaw go and to feel her feet.

Anya stamps her feet and continues sounding. Her stamping becomes more forceful and her sounding is more consistently an “unnhh.” In this deeply intuitive process I trust where my eyes are drawn, a trust I gained as an RMB practitioner. My eyes are now drawn to her spine.

“Let your spine be loose,” I say, as I place my hand lightly on her spine. Often when I offer a prompt or guidance such as this, I am in an open exploration with the person and really don’t have a sense of where it will lead.

With that suggestion Anya’s shoulders and neck become a part of her movement.

“Continue sounding,” I suggest. “If there are words, let them come too. You don’t have to look for words.” This offers another possible opening for Anya’s self-discovery, something I might propose in an RMB session as well.

"Yuck," Anya says, followed by the "unnhh" sound. Her elbows are in motion. Her head is bent downwards. She is shaking with her arms over her head. "Yuck. Yuck."

In many ways, Anya appears to be able to move with ease, yet because of a disquiet I feel in myself, I sense that there is a barrier to her feeling at ease within herself. This is frequently true for people trained as dancers. I didn't need to guide her movement, but I sensed that what she did need was a way to become more conscious of an inner struggle that I perceived. To provide her with a possible opening to that struggle, I prompted, "Any other words?"

"Judgment," Anya says. "I am judging all the time." Tears come. "It hurts right there." She gestures to the middle of her back. I sigh and feel an internal sense of relief and appreciation as she is able to articulate this.

"So judgment is one word. Are there any other words?" I ask softly.

"Objectify," Anya says, definitively.

I suggest that she keep moving and let her movement expand. "Can you feel when you are in yourself? When you feel you are inside say 'In.' When you are observing yourself or feel that you are being observed say 'Out.' And if you are feeling judgment, say 'Judging.' Every once in a while say the word 'heart.'"

"In. Out. Judging. Heart," Anya responds.

"And remember," I remind her, "You can use the whole space."

Anya moves and uses the words for a bit: "Out," she says spreading her arms out in front of her. She shakes a bit and then says, "Out." With hands over her head, she says, "Judging" followed by, "Out. Out," and a pushing sound with her tongue and lips.

I am feeling two things at this juncture: one is that Anya has gotten to an important place of self-awareness at this point. The sense of disquiet that I had been feeling earlier has shifted. I'm feeling softer in my body. I am curious to discover what new possibilities might be available to Anya with this process and feel that a new opening would be helpful. The other is that I sense there is enough trust and safety established between us at this point that I can introduce another possibility to her. If I had been doing an RMB session, this is a point at which I might have moved my hands. In this work, which is also exploratory and improvisational, I decide to offer her another possibility by suggesting a new word. "Try adding, OK." There are times when I am working with a person that I truly feel guided and can surprise myself by what comes to me to say.

"Like everything is OK?" she asks.

I appreciate that she asks for a clarification. "Just OK," I say softly. "Just see what happens when that word comes, what reverberations in the body that word has." To me, 'Everything is OK' is a concept rather than a feeling. I am hoping she can simply explore how 'OK' lands in her body, without a story or concept.

"OK," she chuckles, then "OK. Out." She is standing with arms over her head. A big breath comes with shoulders raised. "OK. Thhppthh." She is sounding louder and louder. The sounds become an "ahh."

"Judge," she says, with arms over her face, and bending down to the floor and then to sitting. Then in a few minutes, "Judge," again but this time, said more quietly.

I am noticing my heart opening more and more as I witness Anya and can see her body softening. I ask, "Is there a sound there?"

Anya is squatting and rocking, bouncing a little. She makes an "rrr" sound followed by a chuckle. She continues to squat and rock and bounce. Then she stands and says, "I feel uncomfortable."

She is now actually able to articulate what she has been sensing in her body. This is an important moment in the session. A vital aspect of EM is bringing the person into a moment-to-moment awareness of their sensations and creating an environment that is safe enough for the person to dare to drop into their discomfort.

As Bessel Vander Kolk puts it,

At the core of recovery is self-awareness. The most important phrases in trauma therapy are "Notice that" and "What happens next?" Traumatized people live with seemingly unbearable sensations. They feel heartbroken and suffer from intolerable sensations in the pit of their stomachs or tightness in their chests. Yet avoiding feeling these sensations in our bodies increases our vulnerability to being overwhelmed by them (Vander Kolk, 2014, p 208).

"Go with that," I say. "Just feel as uncomfortable as possible."

Anya goes back to the floor and her sounding changes to something more like "Yeow," a cry, then a sob. She is sobbing now and pounding, stamping, pulling at her shirt. She moves into more of a fetal position, but sitting up. "This being uncomfortable is starting to feel really uncomfortable now." I smile slightly and feel a growing sense of excitement within me as her awareness of this discomfort indicates to me that there is now the possibility of a huge doorway about to open up for Anya.

"Notice what's shifting," I suggest.

She laughs and then continues to sit and shakes her head, her movements getting quieter. Anya is now lying on the floor, breathing deeply followed by deep sighs, making a "ptthhmp" sound with tongue and lips. Her arms are open to her sides.

"Allow," I say. "There is no way that you are supposed to be. Allow the sensations." Anya's ability to recognize and speak to the experience of being uncomfortable marks a beginning of her being able to allow what is there. This and the movement of her arms opening from her sides are indications to me that she is ready to allow more within herself.

Anya pulls her knees up, hugging herself, while still lying on the floor and rocks back and forth. She is sniffing and brushes her face with her hands, continuing the "ptthhmp" sound with tongue and lips.

I ask her, "Is there a push there?" as the sound she is making sounds like an expelling sound.

"I feel like I am struggling with that concept," she replies.

"What concept?" I ask.

"The concept of allowing. I'm not sure what it is? It's partly just laying here," she says.

"Is that alright?" I ask.

"No. I'm supposed to be doing something," she says. Then she sighs deeply and her whole body sinks more fully into the floor. "That feels better."

"Oh. Relaxed?" I ask.

Anya hugs herself, arms across her chest, still lying on the floor. "This is more comfortable."

"Ah, so now you feel more comfortable," I reflect.

"Yes," she replies.

"So part of you feels like just laying here and you are allowing it. And something shifted?" I ask.

With a deep sigh she says, "Yeah." She takes another deep breath. I notice more breath coming in.

"Sometimes allowing is allowing ourselves to feel uncomfortable," I say.

"Allowing," Anya echoes. She is lying on her back and holding her knees and slowly rocking for several minutes.

"So, just feel that," I tell her.

"It feels small," she says.

"Allow the small."

"It's not important," she says, surprising me.

"Oh, it's not important? What is important?" I ask.

"Doing is important," she replies.

"What feels good?" I ask.

"Allowing. Allowing feels good," she says.

"And that's not doing?" I sense she has revealed this disparity to herself.

She chuckles.

“Allow yourself,” I say. Anya’s body appears so much softer and at ease, the struggle seems to have passed. I’m feeling a fullness. Anya has reached a state of more ease, openness, acceptance and I feel a sense of peace and completion in my own body and decide that this would be a good place to end this session. I invite the witnesses up and prompt them to ‘allow’ themselves with the same movement Anya is making. The power of being seen and mirrored by the witnesses provides an experience of resonance and underscores our common humanity.

What I see over and over again is that, as a person allows the experience to move through the body, the possibility of a shift is created. When people allow themselves the physical expression of what is within them, they journey to a place of inner spaciousness, ease, calm, and openness to self/other. This is what I saw in this first session with Anya.

Session 2, One Year Later:

By the second EM intensive a year later, Anya and I had done more individual and group work. What is most remarkable to me in this second case report with her, is how quickly she was able to move into a deep listening of her body and shift her experience with her own awareness and breath.

Anya’s second session feels well encapsulated by this explanation from Alan Fogel:

Evocative language can be used to enhance interoceptive and emotional self-awareness. If words ‘reach us’ they are felt as ‘true,’ ‘deep,’ and ‘powerful.’ Caution is required: words can easily take a person out of their embodied experiences and into their conceptual thoughts and judgments about themselves. Words – evocatively spoken from the practitioner’s own embodied self-awareness – can enhance and amplify feelings (Fogel, 2009, p 248).

Again Anya stands facing me. She is being witnessed by several people who have come to this EM intensive, some of whom she is now familiar with from the previous intensive and from group work.

I ask, “What is challenging you at the moment?”

“I don’t know,” she says, tearing up, and placing both hands over her chest “why there is so much sadness there.”

I hope to get her into the experience and away from labeling with words just yet, so I ask, “Is it sadness?”

Anya pulls her hands across her chest. “It’s.... something,” she says.

As she sways and is now holding her heart, I sense that she is softening, which I interpret as moving beyond the “label” of sadness and opening to meet herself. My intention is to bring her action of holding her heart to a more conscious experience and offer:

“Try saying, ‘I meet myself.’”

Anya continues to stand and sway, hands over heart. She doesn’t say the words. Then what comes in is,

"I'm not being myself. I have gone away. I am feeling really far away from myself. Then when I meet myself, I feel all these times that I am not myself."

This awareness and statement is an indication of how much Anya has grown in her ability during the past year to recognize and articulate her inner experience.

"Let yourself move with those words and see where it takes you. Feel all the times you are not with yourself," I prompt.

"All the times I am not with myself," she repeats. Her arms are moving in a circle from shoulders. "I start to feel judgment."

"What happens in your body when you start to feel judgment?"

"When I start to feel judgment, I am not supposed to do anything," she says. Her head is bowed, her hands clasped in front of her. She stands this way... head down, holding, holding... for some time. "I am not supposed to move. That's really hard." Then Anya starts shaking and sounding. Her hands shake. "That's really restricting," she says. "I really restrict myself."

This is a big shift from the previous year when most of these feelings stayed internal and not identified.

"So, when the judgment came just then, you let yourself feel the restriction in your body," I say.

The session continued. My experience of Anya was that she was able to quickly access her internal experiences and allow them. She was more attuned to when the judgments came. She had more ability to note the judgments and have compassion for herself when they came. She was able to come back in and meet herself, in a way that, the year before, was not accessible to her. Bessel Vander Kolk expresses this eloquently:

Neuroscience research shows that the only way we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our inner experience and learning to befriend what is going on inside ourselves (Vander Kolk, 2014, p. 206).

## **Carole**

Carole is in her 60's. She has been doing EM for many years. She has experience in movement and in leadership and uses EM as an ongoing practice to keep herself in tune with her body and her sense of aliveness. On this particular day she reported being overwhelmed by her commitments and was looking for a way to get back in touch with what would give her energy.

Even though Carole is experienced in EM, I chose to use verbal dialog to help her get to a place of identifying what needed release. She described being disconnected from her heart. Tara Brach describes the source of this kind of disconnect:

All our reactions to people, situations, to thoughts in our mind are actually reactions to the kind of sensations that are arising in our body. When these sensations are unrecognized our lives are lost in the waterfall of reactivity. We disconnect from living presence, from full awareness, from our heart

(Brach, 2003, p. 100).

Once Carole had identified her disconnect, she was able to guide herself physically into a release. Her challenge in this work was to find the *inner* space she needed to connect with herself. When she did, she found a sense of self-compassion.

Carole and I are standing side by side. We are both facing the weekly EM group that I lead and that Carole attends. There are 5 people who she knows and trusts witnessing her.

I ask Carole to feel the rise and fall of her breath and to let her attention come to her heart. As I guide myself to remain open to the moment, I also guide the group to allow themselves to be openhearted witnesses to Carole's journey. I ask them to notice what resonates or touches them as they witness Carole.

Sometimes at the beginning of a session, as in the session with Henry, a person doesn't know where to start. With people who present in that way I bring their awareness into their bodies. As I turn my attention to Carole, she says that she has a lot going on and lot to express, both verbally and physically, so I begin by listening and watching.

"I feel like I am full of stories...I could go with this one or that one," she says.

Because there is so much emphasis and emotion behind the word "stories" I am curious. "When you said stories," I ask, "what happened in your body?"

"Stories I've heard, that I've taken in. Stories of the world that are intense. Stories I tell myself. Individual stories. I am interviewing all these people. It's pretty intense, each an hour long. I had really negative reactions. I really didn't want to hear anything more. I was overloaded with hearing people's stories."

Carole is expressing in her body what she is saying. I am tracking her movement with my body as she speaks and reflect back to her physically that her upper body and arms are in motion. When she says she doesn't want any more she is pushing away with her hands and following through with her body.

"I'm just feeling, 'Whoa what's going on. What is that about?'" She gestures near her belly again. "Who are these people coming to me that want something from me?" she asks.

I'm noticing a pattern to the scrambling movements she is making with her hands. Each of her movements seems to be near her diaphragm and solar plexus.

I physically reflect this back to her and say, "There is a lot going on right here." To me this feels like a transition moment in this session where the attention is shifting from the story to the body. This is similar to moments in RMB when someone drops more deeply into his or her embodied experience.

Carole shifts out of her more verbal exchange and continues the movement of scrambling her hands in front of her belly. She takes a deep breath and starts exploring her movements without my having to guide her. Carole's EM experience is apparent at this point as she begins to intuitively engage her own embodied awareness.

When the breath comes, I am curious and ask, "What's there? Any sound? Words?"

Carole makes a deep sigh like “ugh.” Her head and neck begin to bend over. She holds her belly and sighs again and again. “There’s a lot” she says.

“Yes,” I say. “Yes.” I feel a heaviness in my body as I witness her bend over, her chest caving in as if she is actually feeling the impact of the story in her body.

“There’s just a lot,” she says again. “And it just seems endless. I get a little bit of relief and there it is again. One day I feel relaxed and the next day it is back. There’s not a lot of room.” She contracts as if she is exploring the sensation of ‘not a lot of room.’

Carole goes into a contraction. “This is the room,” she indicates by holding her arms tightly across her belly. “There is a little bit of room in here...its small, but there’s a little bit of room.”

“When you are like this,” I say, reflecting her contraction with my body, “it feels like there’s a little bit of room.” By actually experiencing not having a lot of room, rather than just describing it, Carole’s body has taken her to another possibility where she is beginning to experience a little bit of space for herself.

“It’s hard to breathe when you are all scrunched up,” she says.

Carole starts to bounce and sigh. Her contraction has become more of a holding of herself. And now the tears come.

“See where that takes you. Let the tears come,” I say, feeling empathy for Carole in this moment.

Carole is sighing and crying. Then she stands more upright and stretches her neck. A breath comes, which, to me, is an indication of a shift.

“What just came in there?” I ask.

“It was too hot and hard to stay bent over,” she says.

“Yeah,” I agree, “I noticed that when the tears came, your body wanted more space.”

The breath she just took seems to have seeded her ability to create a space for herself standing upright with her eyes closed.

Carole lets out a deep sigh and strokes her heart and sways. I take a breath and notice how touched I am by Carole’s self-care in this moment. Then she releases her arms to her sides.

“You released your shoulders too,” I observe. “What are you noticing right now in your body?”

“I’m noticing my legs. My legs feel like they are really holding me up. They are pretty rooted. There’s flexibility,” she says. “I want to keep my eyes closed. I don’t want to be out,” she says.

“You don’t want to be out and you want to keep your eyes closed,” I reflect and say with empathy, “You’ve had to be out a lot in the last few months.”

"A lot of times there is so much I feel I am failing at or not doing a very good job of taking care of people the way I want to," she says.

"It's overwhelming. You are on overwhelm," I say. "What about Carole? You don't have to answer that. But what comes to you. Is there some part, way inside, that is asking for something?"

Carole nods, hands to heart, and sighs.

"What was that?" I ask, referring to the sigh. "So, just check in with your body right now."

"I want to shake it out," she says.

"Let yourself shake." Carole's shoulders release and she shakes and sounds loudly and vigorously and then comes eventually to a calmer place.

"Yes," I say. She has stopped 'doing' so much and her breath is starting to come with more ease. I sense she has dropped into her body.

"Something feels different now," she says.

Then Carole's body starts leading her. Her shoulders, waist, legs and arms are all engaged.

I feel a strong sense of compassion and wonder aloud, "What would you say to a friend who was experiencing what you are experiencing?"

Carole becomes thoughtful and then in a burst of energy she shouts, "Oh baby, you need a break." She becomes very animated, exclaiming this again and again with her whole body engaged.

"Yes!! That is true. Can you feel the truth of that? I don't think it's an option for you NOT to take a break," I say. "You need a break."

"Yes," she agrees. "Just for a little while I want to stay with me."

"Yes," I reflect her energy enthusiastically. "Just for a little while you want to stay with you. Let's see how the words 'I'm taking a break' land."

Carole laughs and says, "You've got to be kidding. I'm taking a break. Ha ha. OK world I'm taking a break," she claims, a little ironically. She gestures generously out to all the witnesses.

"Yes! OK World I'm taking a break," I say with conviction, while reflecting her movement.

"I'm taking a break now," she says. "You got that?" she says as she turns a bit away from the witnesses and me.

I notice that as she says, "OK I'm taking a break," she begins to make a turn but then comes back and speaks to "the world" (i.e., me and the witnesses) as if she is still asking permission rather than just really taking

a break.

I reflect Carole's movements with my own body and turn as she turns. I begin to imagine where Carole's movement might be able to take her. By tracking her breath and remaining available to possibility in my own body, I can feel in myself where the release of tension might come, where the opening/expansion could be. This is an example of something in EM that I call "sourcing myself."

"What would happen if you turned all the way around?" I'm inspired to ask her.

Carole turns so that her back is to the witnesses and me. "I want to take off," she shouts. She starts to run around the room. "This is what it feels like to take a break. I can do whatever I want right now in this minute. Woo Hoo. Yes!! Yes!!" Carole runs around the room, arms outspread, taking up the whole space with a lot of movement and laughter and playfulness. I am very energized in my body and support her by playing, laughing and moving with her.

After several minutes, when she comes to a natural stopping place she is breathing deeply and makes a deep sigh.

"Notice your body, now. I say. "And WOW you look different!" I tell her.

Carole takes another deep sigh. "I feel different."

"So it's important to really be with 'I'm taking a break.'" I say.

She smiles and puts her hand to her heart. Her chest is open and her shoulders are relaxed.

"Taking a break is mostly just being. Just give that to yourself," I say to her.

"Yeah. Yeah," she says hand still to her heart.

"So that is your homework," I say. "When you start to feel too full and that there is too much, hear those words: 'Oh baby I need a break' and then *take* that break. Now that you've taken a break, how do you feel about doing the interviews?"

After a pause, Carole says, "The word that came to my mind was welcoming."

My heart leaps. "That's incredible!" I say.

"Yes that is totally what I want to do," she nods, with tears.

"You had to welcome you first," I say. "Feel that energy that you gave yourself."

We ended there and the group reflected back to her various parts of her journey.

The progression that Carole experienced is one that I experience frequently in EM and is especially visible in this case report. Carole was pushing everything away mentally without feeling what that meant to her. Then having the chance to feel the pushing and moving it all away with her body, she was able to come

to a place where she could be welcoming again, with her heart open, which is what she truly desired. My sense is there was a lot of processing going on, just as there is in moments like this in an RMB session.

## Summary

Although we each know ourselves better than anyone else, it often takes us a long time or regular reminders to realize and act on that knowledge. Simply put, EM opens a dialog with our bodies through which we can re-discover and experience ourselves in a space of safety that encourages trust, openness and possibility. EM brings many of the learnings of RMB to a new vertical awareness, by following our *moving* bodies. Like the methods described by Vander Kolk and others, the experiences that EM offers involving the moving body can change patterns in the brain, the neuromuscular system and the nervous system. These changes can then create new reference points in the body that allow us to move beyond unconscious holdings and constraining beliefs.

As demonstrated in each of the case reports above, those who engage in EM can learn to trust their bodies as a reference and guide for the purposes of greater well-being.

By accepting his aversion to his resistance, Henry was able to be more tenderhearted with himself and become more fully present to himself and in relation to others.

Anya learned to access her internal experience and to allow what she discovered there to simply be, without judgment. She was able to have compassion for herself and, with compassion, meet herself anew.

Carole discovered that, by allowing herself the space she needed, she was able to come to a place where her heart was open and she could be welcoming to others again.

## CONCLUSION

For many of us, our dialog is primarily in our heads. What I discovered in developing EM is that it is possible to guide people towards an inner dialog with the body. As we listen deeply to that dialog, we learn to recognize signals from our bodies and balance the “body-mind” mix of information within. By following, through movement, what we discover in those signals, we can cultivate a capacity to tune into our bodies and create new references for what is possible for us. From there we can move into the world from our whole hearts, minds, and bodies.

When I am engaged with others in the work of EM, I am guided by a deep faith in the wisdom inherent in each of us to transform ourselves. I always feel very honored and extremely touched to be able to meet people at this intimate level when a moment of truth rings out through their bodies in an expression of aliveness, connection and heart.

In this moment I invite you to return to your own alive and wise body.

Sense your feet.....Soften your tongue.....Allow your breath.

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