

The Hero's Journey in Dance/Movement Therapy:

Answering the Call by Entering Experiences Through the Doorway of Awe

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Abstract

The hero's journey tells the story of an ordinary person leaving their known life, setting out on an adventure into the unknown to fulfill a quest, and returning to their known world with some form of gift for their society. This storyline can be traced throughout myths and legends across time and cultures and is still used in current books and films to this day. The hero's journey can also be traced throughout the course of an average person's life and can be entered into at any time as the person encounters and overcomes trials to develop self-trust and resiliency in their life. Dance/movement therapy, which is a guided process of tuning into one's bodily experience, intuitively moving with images, sensations, and associations as they arise, increasing awareness of oneself and others, and working towards greater integration of the many dimensions of one's life experience follows a similar cyclical process as the hero's journey. Dance/movement therapy utilizes the expressive and symbolic qualities of movement to help participants enter, explore, and engage with their own story in a new way. This thesis explores the parallels between the hero's journey and the process of dance/movement therapy and how these processes can lead people into experiences of awe to promote self-exploration, greater capacity for connection with others, the ability to feel all of life's experiences more deeply, and to foster resilience and lasting transformation.

Keywords: hero's journey, storytelling, dance/movement therapy, existential themes, resilience, awe

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Here and now

I see it different now

I'm better lost than found

'Cause once you leave the ground, you don't look down

It's just me and the wind

Learning to breathe again

And the truth is I'm finding

The difference between falling and flying

– “Falling and Flying” by Hunter Hayes

Since the beginning of human existence, people have been seeking to understand the “ultimate concerns” of life. Yalom and Lezcz (2020) list these ultimate, or existential, concerns as death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness. To be human is to be mortal, and as much as people may try to avoid that fact, every person will eventually face death. In trying to avoid thinking about death, people may get in their own way of living in the present. Everyone must also wrestle with the experience of feeling alone or disconnected from the people around them at some point in their lives. The desire to connect with others, while fearing rejection, alienation or misunderstanding can be a difficult reality to navigate and can cause people to close themselves off to avoid feeling hurt by others. People must also navigate the responsibility of their daily choices, within the structures and contexts they live in, and consider the impact those choices have on their own life and how they may affect others. Humans also continually search for meaning from the experiences of life. The meaning of life is not given, so each person must search for or create the meaning for themselves. Though these existential concerns are ever present, oftentimes, people choose to ignore them or push them down because these concerns feel too overwhelming and can bring up pain and fear. Yalom and Lezcz (2020) share that people respond to these givens in life in two ways: ignoring and suppressing the anxiety that they can bring up or accepting them and bringing them closer into their awareness, becoming more mindful of their being – not stressing about *how* things are but inviting a sense of awe *that* things are (p. 137). According to Schneider (2015), developing a sense of awe allows people to relate differently to these existential concerns and can help them recognize choices in how they respond to life.

Awe can be defined as a sense of humility and wonder towards the adventure of existence (Schneider, 2011). Approaching life through the lens of awe allows people to feel the smallness

of their lives in the context of a vast universe, while at the same time, feeling the honor of being a part of something so much larger than themselves (Schneider, 2004). To live in awe is to embrace both sides of the seemingly contradictory extremes of life and to feel everything in between (Pearsall, 2007). According to Pearsall (2007), in modern times, there are many distractions and obligations which take people out of living with awareness and awe. People tend to stay in what is comfortable, known, and controllable, because that takes away the risk of loss or pain. Pearsall (2007) also states that opening oneself to the unknown and being willing to feel pain can bring back a sense of vibrancy to life, where it has been numbed by comfort and routine. Experiencing awe may not lead to an understanding of the meaning behind certain experiences, but it allows people to be present for and feel the depths of whatever life experiences they may encounter (Pearsall, 2007). Most people do not willingly enter painful experiences, but when a person fully embraces all of life's experiences with a sense of openness and curiosity, the pain can become beautiful, and growth can occur.

Often, people find themselves facing painful experiences at unexpected times. Perhaps they receive a diagnosis of a terminal illness, discover that a loved one was severely injured in a tragic accident, or are forced to recreate their lives after losing a job or going through a divorce. These unexpected, unavoidable events can be referred to as boundary experiences (Yalom & Lezcz, 2020). People find themselves at the edge of their known world, unable to turn back, but unsure of how to move forward. These moments can cause people to feel stuck and frozen because the idea of crossing the boundary into the unknown seems overwhelming and impossible. Existential theorists, Frankl and Bugental, refer to boundary experiences as existential crises (Denne & Thompson, 1991). These crisis moments may move people to seek therapy or support groups to receive guidance in how to navigate their fears of the unknown. The

turning point from crisis to meaningful experience comes from one's decision to take the risk of restructuring their way of being in and relating to the world without having another option planned out (Denne & Thompson, 1991). These moments hold incredible transformational power when one can approach them with humility, courage, and creativity (Schneider, 2004).

According to McConnell and Snoek (2018), people assign meaning to events and experiences in their lives through the process of self-narration. Self-narratives speak to specific connections a person has made between events to explain why things happened a certain way and offer predictability for future events (McConnell & Snoek, 2018). McConnell and Snoek (2018) also describe how these narratives are either challenged or strengthened through relationships with others. A person develops their self-concept and their beliefs about what is possible for themselves through the stories reflected to them by others. Self-narratives allow people to continually shape their identities and remember meaningful experiences (Serlin, 2020). Sometimes a person's self-narratives become limiting and unhelpful because they are told primarily from a dominant, oppressive perspective (Bastemur & Bas, 2021). When a person has heard one specific narrative over and over, it becomes reinforced and taken as fact, without considering alternative narratives. The field of narrative therapy is based on the concept of questioning the dominant narratives that a person holds and creating space for the person to take back agency and form new narratives that align more closely with their values (Bastemur & Bas, 2021). Narrative therapy attempts to empower a person by separating the person's identity from the problems in their life and helping the individual "re-story" their life with themselves as the author (Bastemur & Bas, 2021).

Storytelling is a way to bring clarity, structure, openness, and creativity to life experiences or emotions that may feel confusing, chaotic, or constricting. Historically, when told

in a communal context, stories changed with each telling based on the participation of the listeners, which brought movement into places that felt static (Tatar, 2021). Everyone present was welcome to contribute their voice and their being to the story. The act of storytelling could be an oral narration of a real or imagined experience, or the stories could be expressed through other creative forms like music, art, or dance. Serlin (2020) states that participating in some form of artmaking can help people move past and rise above their stuck places by opening space for new ideas. Storytelling through the arts allows people to begin with what is familiar to feel a sense of safety and, through curiosity, wonder, and courage, venture into the possibilities of what could be.

One commonly used story arc, the hero's journey, tells the story of an ordinary person leaving their known life and setting out on an adventure into the unknown to fulfill a quest and become the hero they are meant to be. This storyline can be traced throughout myths and legends across time and cultures and is still used in modern books and movies to this day. The hero's journey can also be traced throughout the course of an average person's life and can be entered into at any time as the person encounters and overcomes trials to develop self-trust and resiliency in their life. While variations of this story have been told across cultures for thousands of years, the hero's journey rose to popularity with the release of Joseph Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in 1949 (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2023). In developing the circular model which he named the hero's journey, Campbell researched mythology from many different cultures and studied comparative religion to find common themes, fears, and desires repeatedly expressed by humans throughout history. He was focused on finding similarities, rather than differences, and was in search of the unifying features of human stories that help people relate themselves to the mysteries of existence (Campbell, 1991). An understanding of the importance

of myth in expressing shared humanity is central to understanding the hero's journey. Campbell (2008) describes myth as a map which guides the mind and the heart to life's great mysteries and provides a glimpse into matters which normally go unseen. The hero's journey demonstrates the process of being called into the experience of life as it connects to a larger story (Noel, 1990). Campbell (2008) states, "The adventure of the hero represents the moment in his life when he achieved illumination – the nuclear moment when, while still alive, he found and opened the road to the light beyond the dark walls of our living death" (p. 222). Campbell advocates that the hero's journey is a living process and an active dialogue, which reminds people of their participation in and connection to the great mysteries of life (Noel, 1990).

The hero's journey consists of three main stages – departure, initiation, and return, and each of those stages involves a series of steps that the hero must encounter on their adventure. The entire arc of the hero's journey includes seventeen steps that follow the hero from their "Call to Adventure," through their return to their familiar world with a gift for their community and a renewed "Freedom to Live" (Campbell, 2008). The circular process reflects cycles in nature of death and rebirth and represents a spiritual transformation of leaving what is familiar, facing fears, overcoming obstacles, integrating new-found wisdom from experiences, and sharing those experiences with others for continued growth. Once the hero has returned from their transformational journey, they become "transparent to the transcendent" (Campbell, 1991). This occurs as a person begins to experience a sense of the sacred in everyday experiences and can enter the realm of awe-inspiring mystery at any moment by simply being more aware and present to life. Each step of the hero's journey brings the hero closer to a more whole, integrative understanding of themselves and their relationship to life.

Figure 1*Model of The Hero's Journey*

Note. This image depicts the cycle of the hero's journey and illustrates the three main stages, as well as the steps which occur within each stage. From Aldrich, J. (2023, April 22). Transpersonal tidbits: Joseph Campbell's the hero's journey: Summary of the steps and a large collection of monomyths. *The Running Father*.

<https://runningfather.wordpress.com/2013/03/27/transpersonal-tidbits-the-heros-journey-summary-of-the-steps/>

Departure*The Call to Adventure*

The first step of the hero's journey occurs when the hero unexpectedly encounters an opportunity to step out of their ordinary life into the unknown. This could happen by mistake, like when Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* falls down the rabbit hole. The call could also come through a messenger, like in *The Lord of the Rings*, when Gandalf appears to Frodo and instructs him to take the One Ring out of the Shire and destroy it. This could also occur after a great tragedy, moving the hero to set off on a quest to make things right, like when Theseus hears about the damage the Minotaur caused to his father's city. The hero is then faced with the choice to follow the call or ignore it and return to their normal life.

Refusal of the Call

Sometimes the call to adventure can seem overwhelming, leading the hero to turn back to what is familiar. This can be seen in the Biblical story of Jonah, when he is called to go to the city of Ninevah, but out of fear, decides to board a ship going elsewhere. A recent example of this is in the Disney movie *Frozen*, with Queen Elsa choosing to wear gloves to hide her ice powers out of fear of hurting someone. Eventually though, the journey continues, and the hero is assisted in following their call.

Supernatural Aid

At this step of the journey, a mentor or guide appears to empower the hero to follow their call. Supernatural aid could also take the form of a magical gift given to the hero for protection. An example of this step can be seen in *The Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy meets Glinda the Good Witch and is given the magic shoes before setting off on her journey. Another example can be seen in the story of *Aladdin*, when he rubs the lamp and meets the Genie, who offers him three

wishes. The encouragement from the guide or the power given to the hero through the magical gift empowers them to move forward into the unknown world.

Crossing of the First Threshold

The boundary between the known and unknown worlds is often protected by threshold guardians, so crossing this boundary involves taking a risk and willingly entering into a dangerous situation. When the hero reaches this step, they must accept the reality that they may never get to go back to their known world and trust that crossing into the unknown will be worth the risk. An example of this step can be seen in *The Hunger Games*, when Katniss volunteers as tribute in place of her sister and takes the train ride to the Capitol. In mythology, Pan is a famous example of a threshold guardian who strikes all who attempt to enter his land with severe dread and fear. However, those who remain courageous in the face of his threats are rewarded with wisdom and wealth.

Belly of the Whale

Once the hero has crossed over into the unknown land, they may find themselves lost with no sense of what to do next. This step of the journey, named after the Biblical story of “Jonah and the Whale,” represents the inward dive, where the hero is left alone in darkness with their fears and must look within themselves to find a way out. It is here that the hero must feel the depths of their inadequacies and surrender their own will to the greater call of the quest. In the Egyptian story of Osiris, Osiris was locked in a coffin and thrown into the Nile, and when he was found, he was chopped into pieces and scattered across Egypt. He was without hope until the pieces of his body were later found and buried together allowing him to take on a new life and purpose.

Once the hero is transformed in this step, they begin to face more challenges as they learn what the journey requires of them.

Initiation

Road of Trials

After the hero escapes the belly of the whale, the journey continues to intensify and test the hero's strength and dedication. The hero must overcome many obstacles and trials to prove themselves worthy of the reward of the journey. This can be seen in the Sumerian myth of Inanna's descent to the underworld. On the path to her destination, she encountered seven gates, with a guardian at each, and was told by each guardian to remove an article of clothing to pass through. This step of the journey symbolizes the process of removing defenses to move closer to the core of oneself and reveals the hero's hidden strengths (Campbell, 2008).

Meeting with the Goddess

The hero's encounter with the goddess represents coming face to face with all that can be known. The goddess is often portrayed as the opposite of the hero, a part of themselves that has not yet been discovered or integrated. If the hero has not progressed in their initiation, they will be unable to see the goddess in her full form and instead be punished by their own foolishness. An example of this is the story of the hunter, Actaeon, who encountered a goddess bathing in a hidden pool. Because he was led by his own lust, rather than a pure heart, the goddess transformed him into a stag, and he was chased and killed by his hunting dogs. However, if the hero encounters the goddess after their heart has been made pure, she will accept the hero, and the hero will know bliss. An example of this in the Irish story of Niall, who with his four brothers, encountered an old woman at a well. The brothers requested a drink of water, but the

woman refused unless they gave her a kiss. Four of the brothers refused to kiss the woman, because she was ugly, but Niall accepted her condition, and the woman transformed into the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. This step is a turning point in the hero's journey because the hero must accept the ugly parts of themselves to reach their full potential.

Woman as Temptress

This step is a continuation of the previous step, where the hero must recognize the parts of themselves that they used to project onto others and move from shifting blame to accepting responsibility. The parts of themselves that the hero used to be able to deny in order to maintain their image become repulsive, moving the hero to face those things that used to satisfy them and work to live a life more aligned with their core values. An example of this step can be seen in the *Odyssey*, when Calypso tries to hold Odysseus captive on her island with her beauty and gifts, but Odysseus is able to escape because of his deeper desire to return home to his family. At this step, the hero gains clarity into what is most important to them and can resist the temptation of temporary pleasures.

Atonement with the Father

When the hero has reached this step, they have learned to embrace fear and accept all the pain and beauty that life may bring. The hero no longer has an expectation for how life should be and is able to be present to every experience. An example of this can be found in the story of Job in the Bible. He was able to withstand the death of his family, losing his crops, and an excruciatingly painful skin disease, and not blame God like his friends told him he should. He had developed the patience, trust, and acceptance to be able to hold those experiences as part of life and not something that needed to change.

Apotheosis

At this step of the journey, the hero reaches enlightenment and experiences the transformation to their highest potential. An example of this is when Gandalf the Gray in *The Lord of the Rings* is transformed into Gandalf the White after the last battle, showing that he died to himself, fully dedicated himself to his quest, and ultimately gained the ability to move beyond his limitations. This step parallels the Buddhist state of nirvana, where a person is no longer bound by desire, hostility, or delusion (Campbell, 2008). At the apotheosis, the hero becomes a part of something larger than themselves, which allows them to break free from what previously kept them stuck.

The Ultimate Boon

The ultimate boon represents some form of everlasting reward for the hero's persistence on their journey. In the Polynesian myth of Maui, the ultimate boon is the gift of fire. Maui defeated the guardian of the flame and captured the fire to bring back to his people. In most myths, the ultimate boon grants immortality or an imperishable gift from the supernatural world directly related to the hero's strongest motivation.

Return

Refusal of the Return

After the hero receives their reward, they may be tempted to remain in the new world they have discovered because of their new-found favor, rather than going back to their familiar world. They may feel that their transformation would not be accepted or understood by their old community. An example of this can be seen in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when the Pevensie children become kings and queens of Narnia, rather than returning to their world right

away. Because the hero has found a blissful place and experienced enlightenment, the thought of returning to a world of struggle and the mundane creates resistance to going back immediately.

Magic Flight

Sometimes the hero achieves their boon by outsmarting or sneaking past the guardian, but once the guardian realizes the item is missing, the guardian or enemy pursues the hero to the threshold of the two worlds in an attempt to steal back the magic item. This can be seen in the *Indiana Jones* movies, where the hero obtains the powerful artifact from the heart of the temple but then must escape the deadly traps on the way out.

Rescue from Without

Sometimes, the hero is unable to escape the dangerous road back on their own and requires a supernatural force to aid in their return. One example of this step is seen in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, when Han Solo appears at the last moment to protect Luke Skywalker from being shot down by Darth Vader, so that he can complete his mission of destroying the Death Star. This step shows how supernatural help was ever-present to support the hero on their journey from start to finish.

Crossing the Return Threshold

When the hero arrives back in their known world, they are met with the challenging process of reintegrating into their community, while holding onto the wisdom and enlightenment they found in the supernatural world. In the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy returns home to Kansas by clicking her heels together three times, and once she arrives safely back at home, she tries to share the stories from her adventures with her family.

Master of Two Worlds

At this step, the hero has found a way to share the wisdom and healing they found in the supernatural world with their community and no longer sees the two worlds as separate. They are able to find magic in their everyday life and guide others in seeing it as well. An example of a master of two worlds can be seen in the movie *Shrek*, when the main character is given back his swamp home but has held onto his new-found openness and compassion for others. Old desires can be revived and enhanced through new wisdom and appreciation.

Freedom to Live

The final step of the hero's journey allows the hero to fully live wherever they are without fearing the future or regretting the past. Having experienced each step of the journey, the hero has integrated the powerful experiences from their adventure into their being and way of life and can now appreciate all of life. At the end of the Disney movie *Moana*, the villagers are released from the fear of Te Fiti's wrath because of Moana's heroic journey, and they can once again live as a community of sea voyagers. The hero who has reached this step often continues their journey by encouraging and guiding others in a similar journey because of the freedom they have found.

Psychotherapeutic Applications of the Hero's Journey

In developing the model of the hero's journey, Campbell integrated Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theories of active imagination, individuation, archetypes, and the collective unconscious into his theoretical framework. Campbell observed that myths often reveal common psychological themes and deeply human truths. Campbell (2008) states, "Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that... In the absence of an effective general mythology,

each of us has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dream” (p.2). He was speaking of each person’s personal connection to the collective unconscious.

Jungian psychology emphasizes the unconscious as the emotional center and the source of each person’s connection to that which provides meaning and significance to everyday life (Rowland, 2002). Jung divides the unconscious into two parts: the personal unconscious, which consists of specific familial relationships and life events within a person’s particular historical period and cultural context; and the collective unconscious, which is the inherited collection of universal archetypes which serve as potential for finding meaning. An archetype is a potential structure, which could be an image of a person, an animal, a place, or other form, that holds easily recognizable, symbolic characteristics. Some examples of archetypes include the sage, the trickster, the caregiver, the innocent, the lover, and the hero. Specific settings with potential symbolic meaning such as the far away land, the forest, the river, and the garden can also be archetypes. When any of those archetypes are mentioned, a person can usually come up with an image in their mind of someone or something who represents those qualities. Those images will likely change throughout a person’s life as they encounter new experiences, and the archetypes that come to mind often reveal that person’s needs at the time. Jung believed the function of archetypes was to help with the process of individuation through an ongoing conversation between the unconscious and the conscious, with the goal being greater knowledge of the self (Rowland, 2002). To support a person’s process of individuation, Jung developed a therapeutic technique called “active imagination” to help bring unconscious material to the surface. In active imagination, the participant would be invited to meditate on an image from a dream or external source and allow their mind to follow the creative fantasy that emerged from their unconscious

(Rowland, 2002). Jung's concept of active imagination was later adopted by other therapeutic disciplines, including the field of dance/movement therapy.

Dance/movement therapy is a guided process, within the context of a therapeutic relationship, of tuning into one's bodily experience, intuitively moving with images, sensations, and associations as they arise, increasing awareness of oneself and others, and working towards greater integration of the many dimensions of one's life experience. Dance/movement therapy utilizes the expressive and symbolic qualities of movement to help participants enter, explore, and engage with their own story in a new way. Authentic movement, or movement in depth, is a dance/movement therapy practice developed in the 1950s, which involves a mover and a witness. Authentic movement works to activate the imagination through listening and responding to one's bodily signals and can assist a person in accessing and working through unconscious material. Mary Starks Whitehouse and Janet Adler, the dance/movement therapists credited with the development of this practice, describe authentic movement as an experience of "being moved," rather than moving voluntarily. Whitehouse (1979) further describes the experience of being moved as, "a moment of unpremeditated surrender that cannot be explained, repeated exactly, sought for or tried out" (p. 67). The mover, supported by the witness, allows themselves to be moved by inner impulses and images as they arise. Deepening one's sensing experience allows the mind to make associations with those images, which can then be explored and enacted through movement. The mover and the witness can then speak to the experience and walk back through the journey together. This allows the insight to emerge from the experience, rather than through trying to interpret the images and sensations right away. As a person engages in this practice, they develop their own inner witness, which can guide them in continued self-

discovery. Other methods of dance/movement therapy work in a similar way to assist participants in the process of discovery through direct embodied experiencing.

Like in dance/movement therapy, the process of gaining insight through experiential discovery is also heavily emphasized in the practice of gestalt therapy, an adjacent field which focuses on integrating the pieces of one's life experiences into that person's whole concept of themselves. Gestalt therapy is based on the view that each individual senses parts of the environment in their everyday experiences, and through association and perception, those parts are integrated with other experiences to become wholes (Wagner-Moore, 2004). When a person experiences trauma or suppresses a need, the parts do not become integrated into the whole person and can cause anxiety. The unintegrated experiences bubble up and may block the person's ability to integrate new positive experiences. Gestalt therapy views anxiety as normal, bodily cues signaling that a part of a person's experience needs to be given attention so that it can become integrated into the whole of the person's understanding of themselves. Fritz Perls expressed his view of the value of learning through embodied experience through his quote, "Lose your mind and come to your senses." (Wagner-Moore, 2004). According to Wagner-Moore (2004), Perls worked with his clients to bring awareness to internalized needs through tuning into sensations so that the unintegrated trauma could be addressed and move from the foreground to the background of the person's experience, allowing the person to reopen themselves to new experiences.

When trauma continues unaddressed, people may turn to addictive behaviors to cope with the dysregulation they feel in their body. Over time, a person can become stuck in the cycle of addiction, because the root cause of those behaviors is continually pushed down, and the person begins to internalize the narrative of being an addict. As noted in narrative therapy, self-

narratives help people make sense of experiences in their lives and make connections between past events and present circumstances and between one's desires and values (McConnell & Snoek, 2018). The way a person narrates their life determines what they view as possible for their future. These narratives are not formed in isolation. The people in one's life contribute to these narratives by either confirming them or challenging them. According to McConnell and Snoek (2018), people struggling with addiction often view themselves as a failure, someone incapable of maintaining relationships, and a victim of the disease of addiction. This self-narrative is often reinforced by the people in their life who do not believe that recovery is possible (McConnell & Snoek, 2018). For a person struggling with addiction to begin to recover, they need opportunities to practice identifying with a new narrative of recovery within a supportive context of people who reinforce that new narrative (McConnell & Snoek, 2018).

Twelve-step recovery groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Celebrate Recovery, which are neither therapy groups nor a cure for addiction, are commonly sought out by people working through addiction, because they provide a community for people to share experiences and transform old narratives of themselves into stories of resilience and transformation (Swora, 2004; Galanter, 2014). Addictive behaviors can cause people to feel shame and isolate themselves from others. Schneider (2004) states that attempting to work through trauma or any difficult experiences alone can lead a person to make hasty decisions, to react instead of responding with discernment, miss blind spots, and overcompensate for intense feelings in unhealthy ways. Joining a fellowship, such as a twelve-step group, or working through the steps with a sponsor creates space to pause, reflect, and hear alternative responses from others who have been in similar situations. This allows the attendee to see a range of choices, rather than letting desperation drive them into the repetitive, self-destructive

pattern of addiction. Attending meetings helps people develop empathy for others as they listen to each other's stories and feel the resonance between what they hear and what they have felt in their own experiences (Galanter, 2014). The twelve steps provide a guide for members to understand the context and reasoning for their old choices, believe that healing is necessary and possible, and feel empowered to implement new ways of being in and relating to the world as they embrace recovery (Swora, 2004).

Dance/movement therapy, twelve-step recovery groups, and the hero's journey follow a similar circular structure and utilize the transformational elements of storytelling for exploring one's unconscious, both personal and collective, and moving towards healing, integration, and fostering resilience. The hero's journey moves through three main stages: the departure, the initiation, and the return. A dance/movement therapy session often follows a similar pattern of *preparing* to let go of consciously thinking and entering deeply into the body, *exploring* themes through spontaneous movement, and closing with a process of *integrating* the new insight through interpretation (Leventhal, 2008). Swora (2004) describes how twelve-step groups follow the three-stage healing process of the hero's journey through *predisposing* members to believe in the healing process, *empowering* them to make changes by working through the steps and sharing experiences with the sponsor and their group, and *transforming* them to live differently because of the shared experiences and new-found meaning in their lives. Each of these three-stage processes follows a person's excursion from a known reality into an unknown world resulting in new wisdom and insight. These three main stages can be broken down into smaller steps of the journey to further describe the processes which occur at each stage and their significance in the journey towards healing.

Departure/Preparation/Predisposition

The departure stage of the hero's journey, the preparation stage in dance/movement therapy, and the predisposition stage of the twelve steps involve the person's setting off toward a new, unknown world. The call to adventure could happen through a tragedy in the person's life, an accidental stumbling upon it, or an encounter with a divine or otherworldly being. People who begin attending twelve-step recovery programs often join because of a feeling of being out of control with the addiction or through the encouragement of a loved one to make a change in their life. The beginning of working the steps focuses on admitting one's powerlessness to change without the help of others and making the choice to try something new. In dance/movement therapy, the call to adventure is often facilitated by the dance/movement therapist's invitation to the participant to tune into their body, which can feel like a venture into a distant land for someone who typically operates from a place of disconnection between their mind and body. The process of tuning in to one's felt experience could be facilitated through a guided meditation, breathwork, a body scan, or by walking around the room and noticing one's internal and external sensations.

The hero will often hesitate to follow the calling right away; this is the refusal step. Leaving behind what is familiar is difficult and requires trust and surrender. Fear, discomfort, and distrust are often reasons for the refusal. In dance/movement therapy, the facilitator might notice some hesitation from participants to offer movement or follow prompts immediately. Establishing trust within the therapeutic relationship is an important step at this stage of the journey. Yalom and Lezcz (2020) normalize the uncertainty around the beginning stage of participating in any form of group therapy by saying, "This anxiety is a natural consequence of being in a group situation in which one's expected behavior, the group goals, and their relevance to one's personal goals are exceedingly unclear" (pp. 374-375). The facilitator can help relieve

some of this hesitation to engage by talking briefly about the process of dance/movement therapy, discussing expectations, working with participants to establish group rules and goals, and reminding participants that even the smallest movements, like breathing, are valid and significant. For someone entering a twelve-step program, this step could be seen in an initial refusal to share during meetings or by denying the shared identity of a recovering addict.

In the next step of the hero's journey, a supernatural guide might appear to help the hero begin their journey, or the hero might be gifted a magical item to help them on their way. A dance/movement therapist might facilitate this step of the journey by introducing a prop to spark the participants' creativity and to add some tangibility to create a sense of safety within the new and unknown. In twelve-step programs, the "higher power" provides the supernatural aid and external assistance needed for the person to find the courage to continue moving forward in their recovery journey. The attendee begins to accept the idea that a power greater than themselves could help them in recovering from addiction. The focus of this step is on continuing to develop trust in the healing process, reminding participants that fear is normal, and they will be supported through each step of the journey.

The crossing of the first threshold is the person's arrival into the unknown. Crossing this threshold means committing to the healing process and jumping into the unknown world, whatever it may bring. In a dance/movement therapy session, this occurs when participants suspend judgment and old self-narratives, choosing to open themselves up to new experiences. This can be facilitated by inviting participants to tune into any sensations they notice and to begin to respond to any impulses through movement, no matter how strange the movements might look or feel. This deepening of awareness, dropping into the realm of imagery, associations, and body memories, allows previously untapped resources to begin to surface and

new narratives to begin to form through emerging movement phrases (Caldwell, 2016). In twelve-step programs, the decision to turn one's life over to the care of a higher power is like taking the first step into an unknown world and allowing something new to begin without knowing how this decision will unfold and effect change in their lives. This step takes courage and commitment.

Diving into this unknown world is a deep, sensitive experiential process, and could throw participants into a place of overwhelm or dissociation. In the hero's journey, this place of feeling lost with seemingly no direction or hope of escape is the belly of the whale. In dance/movement therapy, participants could find themselves at this place if the new movement brought up intense feelings or painful memories that they did not yet feel prepared to encounter. A facilitator of dance/movement therapy can support participants in navigating this space by helping them maintain balance in what Caldwell refers to as the "therapeutic triangle," which consists of continuous awareness of one's breath, one's body and movements in space, and any associated feelings and sensations (Caldwell, 2016). Reminding participants to breathe and pause to ground themselves when they start to feel overwhelmed is essential. This dark place on the hero's journey often happens as a person working through the twelve steps begins to conduct their personal inventory. Taking such an honest look at one's past could become overwhelming and cause someone to give up or turn back. This is a difficult part of the process, but it is necessary before a person can move deeper into their journey of self-discovery and healing during the initiation stage.

Initiation/Exploration/Empowerment

The initiation stage of the hero's journey includes the following steps: the road of trials, the meeting with the goddess, woman as temptress, atonement with the father, apotheosis, and

the ultimate boon. The road of trials occurs as the hero discovers that mountains, chasms, dragons, or other obstacles stand in the way of the completion of their quest. For a person working through the twelve steps, this is represented by the person admitting the pain caused by their addiction to their higher power, to themselves, and to another person they trust, which could feel like climbing mountains and battling dragons because of the intensity of the involved in working to understand the root of their addiction. In dance/movement therapy, these trials might be self-consciousness, flashbacks from traumatic experiences, frustration with the time that healing takes, conflict with other group members or the therapist, encountering triggers, along with any other thoughts, feelings, or situations that might cause overwhelm or make the person want to turn back. However, if the person pushes through the pain from the road of trials, they will gain greater understanding, strength, and confidence as their heart is tested for the rest of the journey.

The “meeting with the goddess” captures the moment of transcendence through the experience of awe – that first glimpse of the vastness of possibility. This step of the journey offers hope and reminds the adventurer why they began the journey. In dance/movement therapy, this could occur when a participant experiences “being moved,” rather than consciously thinking about how they are moving. Experiences of awe are often felt through the body by sensations of tightness or warmth that begin in one’s chest or digestive organs and spread outward, before being named by the mind (Pearsall, 2007). By participating in dance/movement therapy, participants re-sensitize their awareness of these bodily cues and can respond to them with awe and curiosity, rather than numbing or ignoring them. Experiencing awe creates a readiness to continue moving forward, which could be seen in a person working through step six of the

twelve steps as they move from uncertainty and fear of change to a readiness to reconstruct a new narrative for themselves.

The hero's journey continues with the encounter of woman as temptress, which occurs when the hero begins to recognize the dark sides of what used to satisfy them. A person who has engaged in dance/movement therapy for a length of time will have awakened a new awareness and will be more sensitive to how their environment affects them. They may be more aware of how feelings of anxiety or other emotions show up on a body level such as tightness in the chest, shallow breathing, cold hands, physical pain or through any other bodily sensations. However, a participant needs to continue to explore these sensations, so they do not develop a false sense of security and stop themselves from truly accepting the new narrative they have begun constructing. The new awareness at this step can either pull someone back into familiar, unhelpful patterns to numb the more intense feelings, or it could be the push that the person needs to set boundaries and form new habits.

Atonement with the father is one of the most transformational processes of a hero's initiation. At this moment in the journey, the hero comes face to face with their limitations and transcends those limitations to experience a radical sense of peace despite circumstances.

Campbell (2008) writes of the atonement process:

The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being. The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to the glimpse of the source. (Campbell, 2008, p. 125)

In dance/movement therapy, a person who has moved through the process of atonement has developed self-trust and trust in the healing process to the extent that they can see past any feelings of self-consciousness or judgments that may arise and truly allow their body and spirit to guide them in movement. This person may still be terrified by the unknown, however, the fear becomes part of the experience of awe and is no longer something to be avoided. They have learned to listen to their body's impulses, allowing the body to speak from a place of deep experiential wisdom. They have begun to take authorship of their life story and form new narratives about their identity based on experiential discoveries, rather than past labels or narratives placed on them by other people or systems. This is also seen in step seven of the twelve steps when a person humbles themselves and expresses their desire for their higher power to help them remove the parts of themselves that limited them in the past, so they can continue to grow into their new identity.

After the atonement is the apotheosis. This is the climax of the hero's journey. The hero has learned the secrets of the unknown world and experienced the release of their full potential. In dance/movement therapy, this occurs when the participant feels closest to their inner witness and can hold in their experience anything that the soul may speak through the body. The participant has increased their tolerance of holding and moving with uncomfortable emotions and relies less on the facilitator as an external witness to hold or guide the movement experiences. In twelve-step programs, this happens as the member chooses to let go of their previous identity of an addict and embraces their full potential through identifying with recovery.

The ultimate boon is the final step of the initiation. Once the hero has proven themselves worthy, through overcoming trials and developing the ability to face any challenge with curiosity and discernment, they typically receive a reward for their deeds. The hero owns and celebrates

their victory and takes hold of the treasure they sought from the beginning of their adventure. In dance/movement therapy, the ultimate boon is often the healing or insight that the participant was searching for when they started therapy. This is gained through the processing and integration of the novel movement experiences with past life experiences to help the participants reflect on all they have learned and to take ownership of their newly formed identity as the hero in their own story.

Return/Integration/Transformation

The final stage of the hero's journey is the return, which includes the refusal of the return, the magic flight, rescue from without, crossing of the return threshold, master of the two worlds, and the freedom to live. Once the hero has received their boon, the reality of needing to go back to their previous world sets in. With their new understanding, the hero often wonders whether their previous world would find any value in their new-found gifts. The temptation becomes the desire to stay in the new world and indulge in the bliss they found there. Campbell (2008) speaks of this step, "And yet, in so far as one is alive, life will call. Society is jealous of those who remain away from it and will come knocking at the door." (p. 178). A person cannot remain in the therapy setting forever and must transition back to a life with people and situations who have not gone through the same transformation they have. This step parallels the termination stage in dance/movement therapy. The participant has gained new skills and a greater understanding of themselves and now feels safe in the sheltered therapeutic environment, but eventually they will need to go back to their everyday life and carry what they learned back to their community. Making the commitment to intentionally maintain connection between mind, body, and spirit in a fast-paced environment that tends to overvalue cognitive processes and ignore bodily cues, is a major challenge. This stage might come with anxiety about going back to old patterns and ways

of coping with life, as well as self-doubt in their ability to continue to live out the embodied wisdom they have discovered outside of the dance/movement therapy setting. A person in a twelve-step recovery group encounters this stage as they begin to consider sharing their story with others. They must transition from reaching inward with support from their sponsor, to reaching out to their community.

The magic flight happens when the hero is forced to leave the new world – either due to opposition or being called to a new mission in their previous world. Sometimes the hero cannot leave the world on their own and must be rescued by a supernatural force to be able to return to their previous world. In whatever way the hero comes to leave this new world, they find themselves at the return threshold. The hero's task becomes finding a way to hold onto the transcendence and new-found wisdom they discovered in the new world as they go back to a world full of people who have not experienced this transformation. "The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life." (Campbell, 2008, p. 189). A person leaving dance/movement therapy moves through this step of the journey when they have reached the termination date in their treatment and must begin to reintegrate into life outside of the therapy setting. For a person working through the twelve steps, this stage represents reaching out to the larger community through making amends with people they have harmed in the past, and making the commitment to admit future wrongs as soon as they realize them, before they lead to greater harm. This step often involves having difficult conversations and facing opposition from people who have not been on the same journey.

Once the hero has returned to their previous reality, their calling is to continue to integrate the lessons they learned from the newly explored world into what seems ordinary and

known. The hero is now a master of the two worlds and can venture between them with ease. This person can infuse the spiritual into the mundane and live changed in an unchanged world. They have adopted a personal practice of connecting to something larger than themselves and have become more concerned with their higher purpose than the trivial things that they used to dwell on and try to control through addictive patterns. A person in twelve-step programs reaches this step as they commit to continually re-work the steps and integrate them into their new lifestyle. Remaining open to awe and spiritual transformation is the key to living in both worlds. Continually engaging in the practice of dance/movement therapy allows awe to emerge and can create fluidity and connection between what seem like two contradictory settings.

The freedom to live is the final step of the return stage of the hero's journey. The freedom to live represents a lifestyle of resilience – no matter what happens, the hero can find the strength, the tools, or the help that they need to move past any obstacle. Hayes (2013) speaks of this end of the hero's journey:

On an archetypal journey, a transformation from head thinking to heart feeling is experienced. The protagonist learns to hold his feelings in uncertainty, trusting in his entire organism to be able to meet, engage with and respond to the unpredictability of life. (p. 180)

The person who has ventured on the hero's journey and has returned with new wisdom and insight is no longer bound by fear or personal limitations because they have connected to something eternal and unshakable (Campbell, 2008). Fostering this unshakable resilience is the heart of the hero's journey.

As the hero's journey story structure has become more well-known and utilized more as a therapeutic tool, self-help books such as *The Hero's Journey: A Voyage of Self-Discovery* by Stephen Gilligan and Robert Dilts, *The Hero's Journey Workbook* by Julia Nguyen, and *Be the Hero of Your Life* by J. Scott MacMillan have been published to guide readers in mapping their own life stories and learning to see themselves as the hero. While these books can provide a helpful starting point for a person to begin forming new self-narratives, they do not provide opportunities to practice and enact them in the presence of others, so those new narratives may not become integrated into the person's self-concept, leaving no lasting transformation. However, when a person enters those narratives through the practice of dance/movement therapy, with a focus on communal storytelling, the transformational process demonstrated in the arc of the hero's journey can be expanded into a collective exploration of possibility and the co-creation of a shared identity. Dance/movement therapy offers an opportunity for groups of individuals to re-sensitize and re-story their perception of themselves and the world around them through embodied experiences of awe. These shared experiences can move the group towards collective resilience and healing.

Resilience has often been defined as the ability to bounce back after facing adversity (Serlin, 2020). This way of thinking about resilience comes from a natural sciences perspective and is usually described using the metaphor of a metal spring bouncing back to its original form after being bent out of shape (Elbers, 2021). When defining resilience as it relates to how humans recover from various life experiences, the definition becomes more complex and multi-layered. Elbers (2021) suggests a systemic and relational approach to defining resilience as a bodily-experienced dynamic process between a person and their environment, which determines the capacity to bounce forward or recover from significant challenges. The term "bouncing

forward,” rather than bouncing back is used to emphasize that healing does not mean going back to the way things were before the experience occurred (Elbers, 2021).

Serlin (2020) explores four domains of resilience: physical, psychological, social, and existential; and how each domain contributes to the resilience of a whole person. The physical domain includes a person’s overall health, their ability to listen to their bodily cues, their awareness of personal physical boundaries, and their awareness of nonverbal cues they give to and receive from others. The psychological domain involves knowledge of oneself and one’s values, the ability to self-regulate, and the ability to express one’s feelings. The social domain has to do with one’s support system and the ability to form and maintain meaningful relationships with others. The existential domain involves finding personal meaning, confronting mortality, and feeling connected to something larger than oneself (Serlin, 2020). The process of dance/movement therapy addresses all four of these domains and can help restore a person’s felt sense of equilibrium when life circumstances throw them off balance.

Elbers (2021) describes a three-stage process of developing embodied resilience through *sensing*, *connecting*, and *responding*. These three stages parallel the stages of departure, initiation, and return in the hero’s journey. *Sensing* involves tuning into bodily cues such as a tight chest, shaky hands, a change in breath, temperature changes in parts of the body, or any other sensation that may arise. Turning inward to notice bodily sensations and how the body naturally opens or closes in response to different situations moves the person from the mode of cognitively thinking into the world of feeling and intuition. The next stage, *connecting*, occurs as a person begins to follow bodily impulses. Following these impulses can direct a person towards their own inner resources and external resources that could be helpful in restoring the felt sense of balance. This parallels the initiation of the hero’s journey, where the hero discovers their own

strength through overcoming trials and interacting with powerful beings. The person then moves into the *responding* stage, opening themselves back up to their environment and reaching out to others, just as the hero must return to their familiar world to share the reward of their journey with their community.

Because resilience is a bodily experienced dynamic response to one's environment and life circumstances, resilience can be fostered on a body level by attuning to and processing through the body using dance/movement therapy. Existential themes of death and rebirth, connection and isolation, meaning and absurdity, and freedom and constriction can move from being abstract concepts to concrete bodily experiences by exploring polarities of movement qualities (Serlin, 2020). These polarities could include rising and sinking, opening and closing, and moving between contained and free-flowing movements. Working with polarities of movement qualities can expand a person's perception of possible responses to life events and strengthen the ability to hold paradoxes.

Paradox refers to two seemingly contradictory concepts existing at one time (Schneider, 2004). Dance/movement therapy utilizes this element of paradox by allowing participants to try on the full range of emotional expression through movement within the container of the dance/movement therapy setting. Participants can explore different personas and archetypes in their own body without being defined by any one of them, which can free them up to try new ways of moving and responding. Unlocking emotions and body memories through new ways of moving can be both terrifying and wonderful. This paradoxical experience is the emotion of awe.

The emotion of awe arises in response to one's experience of something vast that cannot fit inside one's existing understanding of the world, thus leading the person to expand their worldview to integrate new ideas (Shiota, et al., 2007). Historically, the emotion of awe has been

studied in relation to religion, art, and philosophy (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Awe has only recently become a popular topic in the field of psychology, with the publication of Keltner and Haidt's (2003) article, which highlights two necessary elements of awe – the perception of a stimulus as vast and the need to expand one's current schema to accommodate the new experience. Since then, articles and books have been published discussing the benefits of experiencing awe and how to cultivate awe within everyday life (Schneider, 2017). However, most of the research studies of awe have used a quantitative approach attempting to measure the awe response by lab-created experiments and questionnaires, which reduce the richness of the transformational experience of awe (Schneider, 2017). Keltner and Haidt (2003) express that awe-evoking events could be the quickest method for bringing about personal growth, because of the brain's need to accommodate the new experience. However, Schneider (2009, 2017) argues against this consumerist desire for quick results and profitable information and suggests that experiencing awe in its fullness must increase one's capacity to tolerate the depths of emotion and must be studied through lived experiences, without the need to find answers or solutions to life circumstances. Embracing awe means leaning into uncertainty and leaving the experience with more questions than answers. Awe takes people away from what they know to be true and moves them towards a place of curiosity for the mystery of what they may never know (Pearsall, 2007).

Schneider's (2009) phenomenological research study of awe, which was conducted through participant interviews about the role of awe in their personal recovery stories, presented six themes of the experience of awe that speak to how awe can be cultivated in one's everyday life. The six themes he gathered from the study were: a heightened awareness of the passing nature of time, attunement to wonder and surprise, recognition of the cosmic context of everyday

experiences, perception of life's subtleties, the experience of being deeply moved, and the appreciation for solitude (Schneider, 2009, 2017). Bonner and Friedman (2011) used Schneider's (2009) study as the basis for their study on the conceptualization of awe and suggested ten themes found in awe-filled experiences. Those themes included: profoundness, connectedness, numinous, fear, vastness, existential awareness, openness and acceptance, ineffable wonder, presence, and heightened perceptions (Bonner & Friedman, 2011). Through their study, they highlighted the experiential aspects of awe, as a complement to the cognitive definition of awe as a response to a vast stimulus requiring accommodation, provided by Keltner and Haidt (2003). Bonner and Friedman (2011) described awe as the "most human of phenomena," demonstrating the significance of recognizing and cultivating this emotion to connect more deeply with oneself, with others, and with the spiritual forces larger than oneself. Bonner and Friedman (2011) also discussed how practical therapeutic applications of awe experiences could help people increase their tolerance for all emotional experiences, reducing the felt need to numb emotions through substances and distractions, so they can more fully enjoy and participate in the depth and richness of life.

Schneider quoted Gibson's comment on the absence of awe in the field of psychology which states, "Psychology or at least American psychology is a second-rate discipline. The main reason is that it does not stand in awe of its subject matter" (Schneider, 2017, p. 107). Traditional approaches to psychotherapy tend to focus on what needs to change for an individual to "feel better" and live a life in closer alignment with their values (Schneider, 2009). These approaches involve processes of assimilation, because the individual in therapy likely knows what they "should" do to improve their life, but without a lived experience that forces their current worldview to expand to accommodate the new awareness, the changes will not last or be

integrated into the person's lifestyle. Someone experiencing the awe response becomes less focused on themselves and the concerns of their everyday life and becomes increasingly focused on the present moment and their connection to the larger world. By identifying with a larger, more universal whole, rather than looking inward and comparing parts of oneself to others around them, a person can begin to identify with a new narrative that might feel impossible to accept when focusing solely on what they feel they need to change about themselves. Keltner and Haidt (2003) state that experiencing awe brings amazement and bewilderment, and once the feelings of confusion are processed, the person is compelled to engage with life differently, responding to a higher calling.

Dance/movement therapy calls participants into an encounter with the experiential aspects of awe, which have been shown to promote lasting healing and change (Bonner & Friedman, 2011). A dance/movement therapist works with the whole person by guiding them to enter experiences through the body to explore thoughts, feelings, images, and sensations that arise through physical enactment and reflection. Beginning with the body brings a person into the present moment by tuning into the senses and noticing the subtleties of their inner experience and outer environment that are often ignored. As participants notice sensations that they were not previously aware of, an openness and curiosity begin to develop. Becoming more aware of one's felt sensations could bring feelings of fear, because new experiences come with unpredictability. However, pushing through the fear and yielding into this new openness creates space for unexpected and unexplainable experiences to emerge both within oneself and among group members. When participants feel those novel experiences in their body that do not fit within their current self-narrative, they can try out new narratives and reorganize pieces of their self-concept to integrate those new experiences into their view of themselves. The dance/movement therapist

views all movements, from simply breathing to full-bodied, expressive phrases, as valid and significant to the individual and the group. Reflecting this to participants leads them to become more aware of the resources they carry with them every day and directs their attention to existential themes of meaning, connection, mortality, and choices. Dance/movement therapy leads people to regain a sense of awe towards existence as they encounter surprises of the wisdom held in the body through moving and being moved. Experiencing awe can open new curiosities for each participant and empower them, as Joseph Campbell expresses in *Pathways to Bliss*, to “walk bodily through the door,” into the mystery of their own hero’s journey (Campbell & Kudler, 2004, p. 114).

Finding oneself at a door offers an opportunity to make a choice. One could turn around and go back on the familiar path or take a risk by opening the door to whatever may lie on the other side. Entering through the symbol of the “active door” in mythology represents facing fears and moving past judgments held by oneself or others about what is possible into a place of expanding horizons (Campbell & Kudler, 2004). Oftentimes, in stories, these doors are concealed from the familiar world, because they open to a sacred space revealed only when the hero figure accepts the call to the journey into the unknown. Campbell (1991) describes sacred space as an environment, separate from everyday experiences, where everything contained within that space can become a metaphor and a bridge to the eternal. Dance/movement therapy offers a door to sacred space and potential transformation through tuning into one’s own body and allowing movement to become metaphor. As participants of dance/movement therapy take the risk of opening this door, moving past judgment and fear, and encountering their bodies from a place of wonder, they open themselves to the experience of awe.

Dance/movement therapy, through embodied experiences of awe, invites people to respond to the call of being human – to feel the full range of emotions, to increase one’s capacity for connection, and to live in the present moment. The hero’s journey represents the process of a person responding to the call to be human. All six themes that Schneider (2009) gathered from his interviews with people who reported transformational experiences of awe can be seen in the process of the hero’s journey. The hero is typically introduced in their ordinary life, with feelings of boredom, complacency, or lack of purpose, sensing that time is slipping away and that they could be doing more with their life. The hero then receives their call, which often comes as a surprise encounter, disrupting the person’s normal routine. When the hero accepts their calling, they are removed from their community in their familiar world and transported to an unknown world, which they must explore for themselves. The experience of solitude allows the hero to listen to their intuition and recognize their inner strengths. The initiation stage of the hero’s journey, which culminates in apotheosis and obtaining the ultimate reward, demonstrates the process of being deeply moved by fully immersing oneself in the experience of life, with all its ups and downs. When the hero returns from their journey, they see their familiar world in a new way and, through the recognition of the cosmic context to their day-to-day life, become more aware of the sacredness of living even in seemingly mundane activities.

The hero’s journey provides a lens for those in the field of psychology to reignite a sense of awe for their subject matter – humanity. “Quick fixes” of overreliance on psychiatric medications and scripted therapeutic interventions could be replaced with the higher calling of guiding people towards recognizing their own inner resources and potential for transformation through experiences of awe. Through the invitation to tune into one’s bodily awareness, a dance/movement therapist leads participants to the first threshold in their hero’s journey. The

invitation to quiet the mind and follow the leading of the body is a call to an unknown world, a vast stimulus which requires accommodation, for many people. Answering this call opens the doorway to awe and the potential for lasting transformation.

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