

Entering the Doorway of Presence: Towards a New Hands-on Therapy Paradigm

There is a condition that most of us are trying to create without really knowing it, a condition that takes us out of tension, confusion, and doubt, a condition that is so common, that there is no time and no place when it is not available to us. The condition I'm referring to is "presence". And yet, we spend less time being consciously present than any other activity we perform, mentally or physically.

The doorway of *presence* opens when we listen to or observe our own body's signals in the moment without trying to change or understand them. One might call this *one who listens* the conscious integrator. This integrative aspect has also been called: *witness, no-mind, presencer*. It is that part of our body-mind that has the capacity to monitor many signals of the body and mind at the same time and reference them to one another rather than to past conditioning. A sense of unitary/holistic awareness accompanies this integrative focus. We become aware that thoughts and feelings that arise out our body-centered attention are rather different from our usual *me-oriented* thinking. When we switch mental channels to listener, observer, feeler, rather than director, commander, controller, there is a corresponding healing effect in our bodily systems. There is a shedding of fearful thoughts, associations, and reactive patterns. In a process similar to defragmentation on computers, memory files and patterns become more closely integrated, allowing for new synapses, new clarity, new creativity, and more efficient thought, movement and action. We begin to become aware of the correspondence between this new inner state and outer clarity and focus.

As hands-on therapists/bodyworkers, we are in a unique position to teach ourselves and our clients to become aware of the state of *presence*, to learn how to become present for longer and longer periods of time, and to reap the benefits of fully clear conscious awareness moment after moment.

Bodies are designed with multiple systems that insure that they will keep giving us service for many years. These systems, like the autonomic nervous system, digestive, respiratory, and immune systems operate continuously without our conscious involvement. And yet, we, as bodyworkers, also know how each of these systems is affected by our own and our client's *state of being*. If we feel open and enthusiastic about our lives, all systems seem to function highly efficiently. If we feel sad and depressed, all of our bodily systems become depressed in their functioning. As our bodies age, systems become less resilient and responsive to challenge. Worry and cynicism can produce signs of premature ageing in our bodily systems.

Amongst caregivers, we as bodyworkers are uniquely positioned to interact with all of the bodily systems through our touch and our focus. We know that there are many effects created as we work with bodies. We can feel positive changes through our hands often before the client becomes aware of those changes. If we are focused enough in our work, we not only feel those changes that are occurring for our clients, we can experience many of the same changes in our own bodies. As a profession we may be ready to consider new roles in our work with clients; roles that help clients to open up to continuous states of presence; new roles that promise to entirely change the basis of therapy from external support and fixing to body centered, client centered transformation of consciousness and true healing.

Also as bodyworkers we are also uniquely positioned to learn the language of the body in extraordinary ways. Medical teams constantly monitor different systems in patients' bodies by using mechanical devices because the procedures they do require that their hands and minds be free to concentrate on the intervention they are making in the bodily systems. We, on the other hand, get to monitor those systems qualitatively by interacting with them using our *hands* and our *minds*. We get the opportunity to enter a place of continuous awareness of our clients' bodily systems and responses: breath, blood circulation, reflexive reactions, tissue tonus and connectivity, degrees of aliveness and vitality, peristalsis, palpation of deep organs, and relaxation effects.

As we become more and more skilled in our field of practice, we are able to work with these bodily responses consciously to help change the client's state of being no matter what reasons brought the client to us in the first place. The way that we develop this sensitivity most effectively is by becoming fully present to what we are experiencing as we interact with our clients through the medium of the body. Our bodies and those of our clients only exist in the present moment. The body's existence is inextricably interwoven with the systems we call vital and is also highly influenced by the systems that are more clearly linked to our emotions and thoughts. While we are highly familiar with the systems we focus on in our work, we are less familiar with how our state of awareness

and that of our client, affects those systems and vice versa. If we make it a conscious choice to link our knowledge of the body with *presence* we will take our work and our profession further than we can imagine. Here are the basic building blocks for a new paradigm in bodywork.

First of all, systems in the body are linked to the present moment; the sensations we feel in our bodies are also linked to the present moment, meaning that they only occur NOW. If we pay attention to the sensations that our bodies give us, we will find that every thought, every emotion, every action, and every body-regulated system produces sensation in the body. And, when we consciously choose to monitor those sensations in our own bodies, as well as those of our clients, we open incredible new doors of perception and effectiveness in our work.

Almost every spiritual tradition teaches some form of *presence* or mindfulness. Every type of bodywork, whether mechanically or somatically based, gives us conceptual tools for connecting with and influencing the various systems of the body and mind. When we add the power of *presence* to those concepts and understandings, our work with clients becomes deeper and more meaningful.

There are a variety of ways of entering the doors of *presence* in our work and of bringing our clients through the same doorways. There are also various tools for maintaining *presence* as we work.¹ I will save these for another article. For now, just consider the distinct advantages that we have as bodyworkers because sensations in the body are so reliable and continuous. One of those advantages is clarity of thought. Another is more integrity between body and mind. As the mind learns to listen and respond more sensitively to bodily cues, practitioners and clients alike develop a kind of 6th sense, what some call a “felt sense,” that helps, guides and informs them in all that they do.

Finally, here are a few **principles** that also can help us realize the advantages of working with the body from a place of *presence*:

The body, although certainly a product of the past, exists only in the present moment.

The body is a two-way communication medium between its owner and the environment.

In presence, we become truly aware that the body never lies.

The body is a living revelation of where our inner and outer lives intersect.

There is a footprint of every step we have ever taken mentally and physically, recorded in the body/mind.

Presence allows us direct access to those footprints.

The body is the key to transforming our conscious awareness – this implies a greater role for bodyworkers and manual therapists.

The more we as practitioners *presence* ourselves the more facility we have for our work.

The body is the meeting place between practitioner and client – when *both* are somatically aware transformation happens.

Bodyworkers and manual therapists are uniquely qualified to offer the gifts of presence.

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