

**Presencing Newsletter Issue 15**  
**Bodywork and Meditation – Opening the Heart**  
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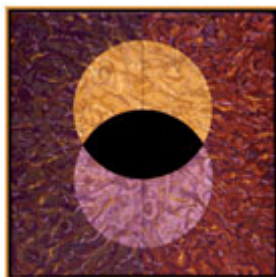
**A profession suited to the growth of compassion:** Of all caregiving professions bodywork puts us closest to the client's reality. Practitioners, who have more of a feeling response, find their hearts sharing some of the discomforts of their clients. Bodywork courses and texts dedicated to fixing often brush aside such reactions... and provide solutions for *counter-transference*: "you are picking it up from the client; you need to protect yourself; you are projecting; you need to do your own psychotherapy".

However the feeling of shared suffering can be the beginning of heart opening and compassion. If the practitioner is able to work on her own conditioned suffering, by some sort of inner practice, like body centered meditation or presencing, she will start to feel true heart-felt compassion which shares in the suffering of others in order to transmute the suffering. In the active practice of compassion we transmute by joining with rather than

taking on or taking over others' suffering.

**Knowing suffering - transforming personal suffering into compassion**

**for others:** In our personal practice of body-centered meditation we experience many episodes of previous suffering. We start to realize that our ego-trained minds are repositories of old memories, regrets, fears, shames, guilt and resentments. We are continually subjected to these sufferings because we identify with our thoughts and emotions. As we practice presencing we start to discern the difference between thoughts and emotions conditioned by the past... and those feeling awarenesses that arise in the moment. If we make a regular practice of presencing we start to feel the shift from mental ruminations to heart centered feeling. Our emotions are transformed from self-centered episodes into altruistic embracings. Transmuting our own sufferings prepares us for sharing and transforming the sufferings of others.



**Our work time can be meditation time - sharing the *Presence*:** When we learn to practice body-centered meditation on a regular basis, we begin to transform ourselves from the inside out. As our own transformation progresses our work becomes an expression of that transformation. As we work with our clients bodies we are passing on our presenced awareness through our hands, through our words, and through our empathy. We are creating a space of *gathering* in the Quaker sense: "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I (inner Christ) am." We are sharing the potential of transformation. We are sharing the presence of the eternal moment. The signs and gifts of presence (*Presencing* Issue 10, Part 1 and Part 2) start to become part of the

environment of the session, creating a sacred space. We are benefited by this experience as we and the client move into a mutual experience of healing.

**The fixing mindset:** Most of our clients come to us for some sort of relief from pain or stress. We are rest stops in their life routines. If our sessions become routine, we are working mostly from a thought-centered approach, what is called *conditioned mind*. Many bodywork textbooks and trainings teach routines, "fixing" protocols for various client symptoms. Like protocols for medical emergencies, these approaches encourage bodyworkers to focus mainly upon symptomatic relief. Many clients are purely interested in that form of therapy. These thought-centered approaches mostly regard the body as an object that poses a problem to be solved. The client usually thinks that way as well... hence repairing the problem that is in

the body becomes the main goal. Notice that this goal derives from a pre-conditioned mindset in both persons: fixing the body equals fixing the client.

**Forced Heart Opening:** Below are three examples of spiritual teachings about heart centered awareness. Notice the emphasis on punishing the body with pain and suffering to open the heart and the similarity to the bodywork mindset of fixing symptoms. As we move from the egoic mind-centered awareness to heart-centered awareness, the ego hangs on desperately to our thoughts and emotions.



The ego rests in the center of our conditioned mind, protected by our memories of the past, and our forebodings about the future. Where you find fear and suffering inside know that the ego has investments there. The old ways of moving beyond ego included great physical and mental suffering... calling for austerities and punishment as atonement for sin and purification of the body:

**St Gregory of Sinai (1265-1346AD):** "... compel your intellect to descend from your head into your heart, and retain it there. Keeping your head forcibly bent downwards, and suffering acute pain in your chest, shoulders and neck... For the kingdom of God is entered forcibly, and those who force themselves, take possession of it."

**Light on the Path (Anonymous 1890):** "Seek in the heart the source of evil and expunge it. It lives fruitfully in the heart of the devoted disciple as well as in the heart of the man of desire. Only the strong can kill it out. The weak must wait for its growth, its fruition, its death. And it is a plant that lives and increases throughout the ages. It flowers when the man has accumulated unto himself innumerable existences. He who will enter upon the path of power must tear this thing out of his heart. And then the heart will bleed, and the whole life of the man seems to be utterly dissolved."



**Creation Spirituality (Mathew Fox 1990):** "It is when the heart is broken open that compassion can begin... Compassion is often born of a broken heart, and all persons who live fully have their hearts broken - the dark night of the soul is common to us all... we take on the sufferings of others in the process of mutual liberation."

**Gentle heart opening:** When we practice entering the present body experience with ourselves and with clients, we undo the conditioning that is imposed by the ego. The ego sees spiritual conversion in the context of its own judgments and therefore expects to receive and dole out some sort of punishment. Presencing bodywork loosens the egos grasp on the body and gently opens the heart. We move from controlling symptoms to joining with them with compassion.

**Tea and rice-tending woman:** Cold damp and windy day - our car took many windings through steep mountain gorges; fast running streams; rice paddy terraces and valleys. We came for tea ceremony... the epitome of Japanese gracefulness and culture... in a 16<sup>th</sup> century samurai tea house, reconstructed within our hosts' home. The woodwork and paintings were refined and tasteful.



Tea master hostesses in kimonos performed the ceremony samurai style. The tea water heated in iron kettle over charcoal fire pit in the floor. Their student in a peach colored kimono served tea and peach colored sweets. Scents of incense, tatami mats, bitter matcha tea, and acrid heated iron... As we had our tea and sweets, our friend Susan sang, then a young man played

traditional Zen style flute. Everything cohered: nature sounds, wind-blown foliage, sweets, colors, smells, warming and stimulating bitter matcha tea.



**All of our senses freshly opened**, we piled into the car traversing the narrow steep mountain road in search of the 800 year old spring-source of the tea water. Crossing a one-lane bridge, the car halted. Just ahead of us, a stooped old woman, was pushing a wheelbarrow. She was bundled in layers of clothing against cold and wind, scarf-shrouded hat, long muddy rubber boots and gloves. She moved slowly forward about 10 steps and rested. Courteously, we moved and paused at her pace. After about 10 such cycles we were able to pass her and continue up the mountain. I looked back. She had crossed the bridge and was resting, lying in her wheelbarrow.

When our car finally parked off-road and others debarked in search of the tea water spring; Koito and I went searching for the woman. We felt strangely drawn towards her... like pilgrims to teacher... drawn by heart pangs to visit her and her wheelbarrow. As we walked down towards her, I realized that she was probably over 80 and was as oblivious to us as she had been to the car. Koito asked her courteously if I could take her picture.



She seemed pleased by the request and smiled through her bundled clothing. When I pointed out that she had a little mud on her face, she pulled back her hat and scarf, wiped her face and smiled for the second picture. She told Koito that she had been working in the wet rice field, now shaded by the mountain. She said: "It's too cold and windy... I don't want to work today."

We walked back uphill to our friends and she resumed her homeward trek. We drank the cold spring water, heard a little of its history, and then headed back to the car. When we got there I saw the old woman again briefly, highlighted by the sun. She was a little up the steep hill from us... ten steps and then stopping to rest. Her back was so bent over that she was little higher than the wheelbarrow. Once again I felt the strong pangs in my heart... I desperately wanted to rush up to her and push the cart to her home... I wanted to break into her daily cycle of hard work and suffering... I realized how dignified she was and how much she represented the dignity of the human spirit! My heart pangs turned to warmth, appreciation, and fullness. I felt a full flowering of compassion... opened by the graciousness of tea and the dignity of this woman.



**Opening the heart translated into *kokoro***: Our work naturally moves us into an opening of the heart... what the Japanese call *kokoro*, which means that the center of our awareness has moved from the thinking mind to the feeling heart. The major evidence of this movement is a growing emotion of compassion. Compassion literally means *shared suffering*. By some sense we can feel others' pain in our own heart... we can feel their life experiences... we can feel their potential for transformation from a suffering life into a flowering life. When we presence what is taking place in our hearts we are gently holding the suffering of others and bringing it into healing through our own willingness to join with them. This joining does not diminish us or our clients in any way.