



# Presencing

JACK BLACKBURN'S NEWSLETTER  
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## Presencing Pain – Doorways to Healing

***Most of all things on earth I hated pain till God hurt and tortured me; then it was revealed to me that pain is only a perverse and recalcitrant shape of excessive delight. - Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aphorisms***

When we presence the pain – it transforms! One of the gifts of presencing is that it transforms our relationship with experiences that we would usually avoid and brings us new insights, new energy, new feelings of love and connection. Think about those times that you wanted to avoid a painful experience only to find that by choosing the experience you were given rewards you could never have anticipated. Avoidance is an expression of fear – when we try to avoid our pain it is because we fear the consequences of the pain.

The gifts of presence, which include transformation, relaxation, and insight, emerge directly from being-with and being-curious about the experiences we're having. With no prior experience of presencing, pain would seem the least likely outcome we'd desire. But in fact, by turning toward the phenomena we usually turn away from, we find ourselves opening to deeper understandings of ourselves and our lives. Because pain is such an intense signal, it gets our attention. Presencing pain changes our relationship with pain - Presencing pain can bring us into a feeling of deep peace and purposefulness.

***I wonder if presencing our pain, because it is so different from our normal conditioning, starts to form new synapses in the brain. Being with our pain in the present moment opens up three doorways for exploration: First as a de-conditioning process. We may find that going into pain can break down our patterns of aversion. Secondly, presencing the pain signal can become a dependable way to experience our own inner reality, while noticing the thoughts that continuously take us into fear or denial. Third, because the presencing is always in application a new experience, anything including pain and aversion that is linked by the presencing arises fresh and new in every moment. Echoing Sri Aurobindo, presenced pain may become an entirely different phenomena – excessive delight.***

**\*Pain is not the source of suffering: Fear is!**

Bodyworkers can play very positive roles in reducing their clients' fear. Bodywork effects are ultimately parasympathetic in nature and can provide changed perspective and balance to our overly-stimulated society. We are being called to work in an entirely different way, directly with our clients' fears as they manifest in their bodies. Those fears exacerbate all of their physical and emotional conditions. In order to be effective in lowering our clients' fears, we need to be more knowledgeable about our own. Recognizing the futility and destructiveness of our own chronic fear, we can seek a remedy by receiving compassionate care.

Persons who suffer from chronic pain often suffer from chronic fear. Chronic fear suppresses our vitality and makes even small amounts of discomfort intolerable. In a recent study done in Holland patients were educated about the true nature of pain, its necessity as a bodily signal, and that pain itself doesn't worsen conditions. They were taught how to self-manage their pain and be more active. Their misunderstanding of pain had lead to catastrophizing about their pain, which had indeed worsened their conditions. Perhaps

one of our roles as bodyworkers is to provide information to our clients about how fear appears in the body and also assure them that pain released from fear is much more tolerable. In parasympathetic response from our sessions they often become pain-free or at least much more accepting of the role pain plays in their recovery.

The role of a bodyworker is very different when we are working with dying patients. We can no longer focus solely upon symptomatic relief. We can no longer operate under the belief that our client's healing involves a reversal of their symptoms. My friend who works with hospice patients shared that the hardest part of her job was dealing with the fear that accompanies the dying process. The demons of fear - isolation, confusion, depression, anxiety, loss of control, and utter exhaustion - all are changed when we commit ourselves to accompanying a dying patient with unconditional compassion, quality time and attention. Whether fully conscious or not, these clients have reached a point where easy answers and superficial solutions are meaningless. Loving attention and compassionate touch are the greatest gifts that we can give. And doing this work helps us address our own fears.

\*From: *Working with Fear* ©2003 Jack Blackburn

For full article [click here](#)

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## Two Case Studies from My Practice

### *Intolerable Pain and Transformation - case study 1*

*A client, we'll call her Virginia, was a successful artist. When she first came to see me she was in such pain from surgical trauma that she said: "I feel suicidal." Thinking that there was no direct way for me to contact her pain which was mostly internal, I said: "I cannot take you out of your pain, but I will teach you how to relate to the pain in a different way." I taught Virginia how to feel into her pain, to feel the shape of the painful area, to feel the qualities of the pain, to feel any connections between the painful area and any other parts of her body, and to notice any pattern or rhythm to the pain. I then taught her to use her breath to interact with the pain. This she was readily able to do... first intensifying and then diminishing the pain. I then asked her to describe the pain to me. She described the pain as hot and sharp like a red-hot poker. I encouraged her to practice this approach on her own. As she used these tools on her own she started to experience a sense of relief and direct involvement in healing the traumatized area of her body. She came to realize that the pain was in part an indication that her body was healing. She used various ways of describing the pain including art and poetry. After four or five sessions with Virginia it became clear that the pain was opening her up to much deeper awarenesses and experiences that seemed to emerge directly through the doorway of pain. Like Rumi dictating poetry while whirling in ecstasy Virginia started to write poetry that seemed to come spontaneously from a place inside she had never contacted before. The more she practiced going into her pain the more new creative faculties became available. She has become a well-known spiritual writer. Her book contains her poetry and her art and has opened many persons up to their own inner resources. In short, her whole life was changed by her willingness to turn towards her discomfort rather than away from it. She has become accepting rather than denying of the pain she experiences in her body and her life. Pain has become her "compass" signaling the direction of personal expression and transformation.*

*From Virginia herself: "It really did lead me into a new way of creative expression, one that I can share with more people, than the few who walked into an art gallery. My book has reached many more people than that, and has been recognized by people who ordinarily would not have got what I was doing."*

Watch for a review of her book in the next issue of *Presencing*

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**God's presence is there in front of me, a fire on the left,  
a lovely stream on the right.  
One group walks toward the fire, into the fire, another  
toward the sweet flowing water.  
No one knows which are blessed and which not.  
Whoever walks into the fire appears suddenly in the stream.  
A head goes under on the water surface, that head  
pokes out of the fire.  
Most people guard against going into the fire,  
and so end up in it.  
Those who love the water of pleasure and make it their devotion  
are cheated with this reversal.  
The trickery goes further.  
The voice of the fire tells the truth, saying I am not fire.  
I am fountainhead. Come into me and don't mind the sparks.  
- From "the Question," Rumi**

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Presencing Pain: Getting to Yes - case study 2

*"When we feel the pain rather than trying to get rid of the pain, we open to the mystery of healing." Paul Brand M.D. who wrote: The Gift of Pain. From interview with the author.*

*In a recent session I asked a client, let's call her Elizabeth, to feel into her body parts wherever she could feel my hands. I also asked her to describe what she was feeling to the best of her ability. She was willing to do this. So as I felt the tissue tone and movement restrictions, Elizabeth was telling me what she was feeling from inside. In the beginning, she would flip back and forth between the sensations in her body and what she was feeling emotionally. I found it best to stay with her responses by mirroring back what she was reporting and helping her to translate emotions into bodily sensations. As she came into her solar plexus she said: "I'm feeling a lot of stuff... it feels like anger." I could feel the muscle tension in her solar plexus with my hands and said: "So Elizabeth, you're feeling anger here under my hands... notice how the anger is showing up and give me a sense of what it feels like." She responded by saying: "It feels like a burning pain, as if I have hot coals in my stomach... and the heat and the pain are radiating out to the rest of my body." As she said this I observed that there was a palpable softening under my hands. I also noticed that Elizabeth was taking deeper breaths into her chest. I echoed: "The burning pain feels like hot coals, right here under my hands..." She said: "Yes and it's cooling down now."*

*We continued this same process for another 20 minutes, moving from place to place in her body. Elizabeth became more used to reporting sensations, sometimes adding emotional content. All of a sudden she announced: "I've been saying 'No!' to everything in my life ever since my divorce!" As she made this statement, I was working on her right shoulder, which had been extremely painful to her for a long time. I was palpating the levator scapula attachment with my left hand while decompressing her rhomboids with my right hand. "So, you've been saying 'No!' to everything... come in right here Elizabeth, and notice what 'No!' feels like..." As I said this, I paused, removed my hands, and stepped back so she could feel without associating what she was feeling with my hands. I observed as she did so that she was taking very deep breaths. I found myself saying to her: "What would it be like if you were to say 'Yes!' to everything?" I then brought my hands back in and we continued what we'd been doing except that as she would report her sensations she would also say: "Yes!" I began to notice that each time she said "Yes!" there would be a definite softening in the tissue. I could tell that her attention was right where my hands were because I could feel some tingling sensations and a palpable breath pulse in the tissue. It didn't seem to matter whether Elizabeth was reporting her experience or silently saying: "Yes." Under my hands everything felt freer, softer, and warmer. After about ten minutes of this she started to laugh, gently, quietly at first and then louder and fuller. Finally she said: "This is impossible... I feel no pain in my body! I feel like I'm bubbling over with energy! I can't believe this is happening!"*

*As I reflected her words back to her, I realized that her body felt totally different and I shared this with her. "Maybe saying 'Yes!' to your body is like saying 'Yes!' to your life."*

*Background: Elizabeth is a 42 y/o professional caregiver, working with extremely difficult patients. She is also a single parent with two adolescent children. She had experienced a very painful divorce 15 years before and still felt unworthy. She reported that she has fibromyalgia, chronic joint pain, and stiffness after sleep or prolonged sitting.*

*Respectfully submitted.*

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*From Elizabeth herself: "... about the case study. Honestly, I had to read it a couple of times to remember. I know I was in a very deep place in our session... and so it is that I don't remember so much of the specifics as I do that felt-sense of "yes" that I experienced. I'll never forget that. The case study is just a wonderful reminder for me."*

### **Practical Exercise – Presencing Pain**

What if instead of moving away from the pain as our first reaction might dictate, we instead used the pain as a random signal to ask ourselves: "What is happening right now"? So we presence the pain; feeling into it, qualifying, quantifying, assessing, exploring it. We can use our curiosity for this exploration. We can also observe the mind's attempts to come to conclusions about: the cause of the pain, the probable diagnosis and prognosis, and/or apportioning blame for the pain. We can observe those mind-reactions and the accompanying fear messages and resist going with any conclusions. These conclusions can be seen as attempts to distance ourselves from the pain and form it into an abstraction. With this exercise, as with Rumi's teaching, we can start to approach our pain by breathing into it, tasting it, listening to it, touching it from the inside of our body, sinking into it with our awareness.

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### **The theme of next month's issue of *Presencing* will be: Bodywork Focusing**

"Bodyworkers use touch in a variety of ways - least of those is as a probe to challenge the client's defenses for evoking emotional releases. While we may use specific types of touch to trigger releases of stored energy, the hands and the fingers of the practitioner are directing information as well as monitoring effects. The Focusing Therapist is watching physical expressions that accompany the client's words; the Focusing Bodyworker is, in addition, feeling the physical and energetic responses in the client's body. The language of touch is more than stimulus and response... it is truly another form of dialogue between practitioner and client." - From *Touching at the Edge; A Pre-Conference Symposium* © Jack Blackburn 2005

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**Jack Blackburn, LMP, Master's in Theological Studies, Certified Spiritual Director, Registered Counselor, specializes in body centered spiritual growth and healing. He has been a Trager® practitioner since 1986. He has been a Trager tutor since 1993, has taught Trager electives classes since 1996, and teaches a variety of classes to care giving professionals. He is an NCBTMB "Class A" instructor and AMTA National Presenter. Jack is also a Reiki Master and teaches levels I, II, III and Advanced Reiki for Bodyworkers.**

**UPCOMING CLASSES in JAPAN**

**Side-Lying Somatics, Level II A**

Tokyo: April 20-21

**Side-Lying Somatics, Level I**

Tokyo: April 24-26

**Side-Lying Somatics, Level II B**

Tokyo: April 28-29

**UPCOMING CLASSES in the UNITED STATES**

**Reiki I for Bodyworkers**

Seattle, WA

March 11-12, 9-6PM

May 23/30, 9-6PM

**Reiki II for Bodyworkers**

Seattle, WA: June 24-25, -6PM

**Reiki III (Master) for Bodyworkers**

Orcas Island, WA: June 8-11 (mid-day to mid-day)

**Side-Lying Somatics, Level I: Basic Repertoire**

Seattle, WA

March 17-19, 9-6PM

May 26-28, 9-6PM

**Side-Lying Somatics, Level II:**

Seattle, WA: September 15-17, 9-6PM

**Side-Lying Somatics, Level III:**

Seattle, WA: December 1-3, 9-6PM

**Side-Lying Somatics, Review Day:**

Red Bank, NJ: June 2, 9-6PM

**Introduction to Trager**

Peninsula College, Port Angeles, WA: April 1-2, 9-6PM

Brenneke School of Massage, Seattle, WA: May 20-21, 9-6PM

**Ethical Dilemmas**

Peninsula College, Port Angeles, WA: March 31, Noon-6PM

Bellingham, WA: May 24, 9-3PM

**Introduction to Table-Talking: Verbal Interaction, The Missing Piece in Bodywork**

Red Bank, NJ: June 3-4, 9-6PM:

**Beyond Caretaking: Caring Beyond Fixing**

Seattle, WA: June 16-18, 9-6PM