



# Presencing

JACK BLACKBURN'S NEWSLETTER  
Issue 5 – February 2007

## There is Nothing to Fear



### *A Koan*

The above quote has been stated and re-stated throughout human history. Whenever we hear it we are shocked because in our ordinary perceptions of things, it makes no sense. After all, isn't it the wisdom of experience that causes us to feel that our fears and mistrust are keeping us safe? We associate openness and complete trust with foolishness and immaturity and even mental illness. For me the statement: "there is nothing to fear," is a *koan*, a Zen mind puzzle that opens our thinking to new possibilities. On the level of human suffering and desire for love, it not only makes sense, but we want assurance that this is true above all others. At the level of physical reality, it seems disingenuous or self-deceiving. But perhaps that is because we are identifying a body-centered function, which move us away from immediate physical threat with a mentally generated neurosis that keeps us on edge inappropriately. We are fearful of one another; each one has learned good reasons to be fearful of the other. These fearful reactions at the level of mind, cause us to form synapses which pattern our thinking and physical behavior. For instance, if young children of different races play together, they are hardly aware of differences in appearance. They are seeing themselves reflected in the physical attributes of others. Thus later fearful synapses about differences are probably learned, not inborn.

### ***True Pathology***



The body itself is not programmed to hold onto fears. It is mental programming that maintains fear-based limitations on the physical level. From the perspective of those who work with bodies, these fear-based patterns are very difficult to eliminate. One of the reasons that bodyworkers and other body-centered caregivers burn-out is that we try to use physical pressure to overcome the patterns of resistance that are maintained by fear-based minds. We have rightly identified the symptoms as contractures and ingeniously discovered various methods, from acupressure and trigger points to deep tissue and structural integration, to release these contractures and their corresponding pains and limitations. However what we discover ultimately is that, unless there is a freeing of our clients' mental agitation, the patterns come back or are displaced to another part of the body.

### ***Body as Loyal Servant***



However, somatically based bodyworkers, by recruiting the client's conscious awareness into these areas of contracture, are discovering that there can be almost immediate relief of symptoms, with almost no physical effort on the part of the practitioner. What is happening here? My guess is that the *bond of trust* that is formed through mutual participation between practitioner and client helps both to move towards the release of fears that have created both symptoms and suffering. The body seems to be intrinsically wired this way: when the mind trusts or loves, the body responds by letting go. When the mind mistrusts or fears; the body responds by sustaining the contractures. The mind and body are reflecting one another continually and cyclically - thoughts, emotions and physical responses are feeding into one another. Fear produces sympathetic contractions in the body and mind - both shrink in their capacities.

## ***Darkening of the Light***



This is a time of year when all of the earth goes into contraction. The sun is receded; cold and darkness abound and much physical life has disappeared, or retreated under ground. It is a time when humans rely upon their stores to keep themselves alive and contented. Underneath all of our thinking and behavior is a state of fear and contraction. We have learned to assuage these fears with celebrations of light and abundance. But when humans visit their stores there is always a fear of scarcity. We try to outpace one another to obtain our share of the stores and maybe a little bit more. We are happy and friendly on the surface, but fearful and mistrusting inside.

This is a very good time to receive the quiet assurances of bodywork that move our body-minds towards parasympathetic responses. The Earth is in a state of rest and renewal... and our bodies can reflect that same state back to us. Pain is converted to joy and fear is converted to love. Plays like Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, reflect the need to move away from our fears of poverty/scarcity. True stories like the *1914 Christmas Truce* between Germans and English can move us away from fears generated by perceptions of differences. And bodywork that works directly and lovingly with fearful responses can help us all end the pathological synapses we have formed, individually and collectively. It takes tremendous effort and energy to maintain our fearful watchfires. Collectively, we have to consume endless fearful messages to maintain our false sense of alertness and safety. Individually, we lose personal freedom and creativity. But perhaps the greatest cost of maintaining our fears is the loss of love and joy.

## ***Teachings of the Birds***



A few days ago we had a tremendous wind and rainstorm in Seattle. Prior to the storm's fury there was a buildup of dark, low-lying clouds, cold and horizontal rain. I was standing outside, waiting for an appointment. I was noticing how much nature was pulled-in... almost no green to be seen. I had heard reports of the possible damage the

storm could bring and radio warnings to make sure each home had ample stores of light, warmth and food. Then I noticed quite a lot of movement happening in a tree in front of me that still had some thin green leaves hanging down vertically as if they'd lost their life-force. There were birds, finches, flitting from branch to branch, fluffing and fluttering their feathers, whisking and chasing one another and eating little tidbits off the bark and leaves. They seemed to be in no hurry, not seeking shelter from the storm, assuredly playing and cavorting like children who do not want to come in out of the rain. I realized that we have projected our fears onto animals, but, left to their own devices, they can become teachers of trust, love, and joyfulness to us.

In that moment I thought about how far we have wandered from the real joys of being alive in bodies by surrendering to our own fearful propaganda. We were the only ones not having fun; the only ones in creation who had forgotten to appreciate the gift of life. So absorbed have we become with physical safety, we have presumed upon our own bodies a lack of perfection and sufficiency.

### *Philosopher's Stone*



“ There is nothing to fear.” What if it were so? I want to come back to my major theme for these Newsletters: Presencing. We who have the privilege of working directly with bodies can help reverse the contagion of fear that pervades our humanity. Three basic assumptions can help: The body always tells the truth; the body only exists in the present moment; the body is designed to take-in, absorb, and let-go. When we work from these basic perspectives, we can recruit our clients, like the birds, into the experience they are having right now, which helps them grow a sense of trust and love rather than fear and isolation. We can help them listen to their bodies, by doing the same ourselves, rather than trying to fix what's wrong. By doing so, they and we, will start to feel the joy of effortlessness, perfection, and appreciation that infuses each moment. Finally, by listening to the body we learn to listen to life, which is always renewing itself in every moment. By so doing we can accomplish the same, and the edges of fear we have learned to call boundaries can melt into mutual understanding and forgiveness. As body-centered therapists and students we can start to learn and pass on the true alchemy of life: converting cold, gray, contracted, heavy lead of fear-based safety, into the golden lovingness and joy-based abundance that are our true birthright. One last principle to end this discourse: fear and presence cannot coexist.

## Finding our Place by Presencing



*"It was only later that I began to understand another, deeper aspect of commitment. This kind of commitment begins not with will, but with willingness. We begin to listen to the inner voice that helps guide us as our journey unfolds. The underlying component of this kind of commitment is our trust in the playing out of our destiny. We have the integrity to stand in a 'state of surrender... knowing that whatever we need at the moment to meet our destiny will be available to us. It is at this point that we alter our relationship with the future. When we operate in this state of commitment, we see ourselves as an essential part of the unfolding of the universe." Martin Buber I and Thou*

### Practical Presencing – Exercise 18: Now... Now... Now...



Every moment is a *now*. Moments are instants in time, but *now* is eternal. You are called into the present each time you hear or speak the word *now*. This exercise is preliminary to a day spent *Nowing* (knowing?) – a day of awakening. Close your eyes in meditation – start with an inner body scan. Each time you come into a part of your body say: “Now.” Every sensation you feel is a *now* because sensations only exist now. After you have completed your scan, you may focus into a particular part of your body. You can combine your breath with *now* as you focus into that body part. Breathe into the body part while saying the word “now.” Every time you say “now,” let your self feel the effects of the word. These effects can feel like a misting of water on a hot day, or the gentle waking of a kiss on your forehead. The experience will speak for itself; each *now* is a doorway into the eternal. The experience is cumulative; the more you practice, the less you become aware of time as a mediator and the more you become aware of *flow*, the more you become aware of the *signs of presence*: silence, stillness, peace, and overwhelming love. Your deepest *Friend* is approaching you – even as you are

approaching your *Friend*. Spend this day *Nowing*. Bring the eternal into each moment with your *Friend*.

Respectfully submitted to my friends, students, colleagues, and clients.  
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