

Presencing Issue 17

My vision for a different role for bodyworkers - presencing at the core

"Which creature in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening upon three, and the more legs it has, the weaker it be?"

~Riddle of the Sphinx

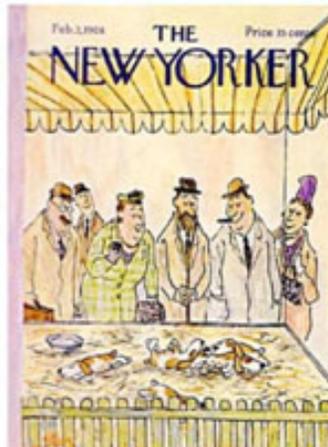


Please forgive my words in this next section if they offend your sense of what bodywork is all about. For some reason I can't really explain, I have started to assemble a more concrete vision of what I hope the profession could be. Ever since I became a bodyworker in 1986, I have thought of bodywork as a healing profession. But my sense of healing includes the fact that, like the Riddle of the Sphinx, everyone's body gets ill, everyone's body deteriorates with age, and everyone's body dies. The same is often true with our minds; they become less functional with age. So healing, if it exists, has to include these other contradictory factors. Thus healing seems to be a great riddle.

The stem of the word healing is "hale," which has two meanings: whole and healthy. We say that someone is healthy when he/she is in a good relationship with life: bodily, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The word "whole" can be used in a similar way, meaning that the person has a full relationship with life. My sense of illness is that in some way the person has become separated from life. If I think about what we normally refer to as illness, each form involves some kind of withdrawal from a full relationship to life: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. In that sense illness involves any kind of separation, including feelings like distrust, alienation, prejudice,

judgment, and any other espousal of separation.

All caregiving professions are dedicated to aiding the ill person to recover some or all of his/her relationship with life. If we regard illness as some condition of separation, then we could say that all humans suffer illness; and all illnesses stem from or are made worse by the belief in separation. It is not original to say this: That the primary cause of chronic illness is that we maintain attitude of separation from one another. The New Yorker cover from 1968 shows people smiling as they look at the puppies cuddling... but they are not smiling at one another. The primary function of healing is to reverse the withdrawal from life and from one another.



The act of separation starts with the breaking of childhood bonds and the beginnings of individuation. At that time of life in most developed cultures, there is a withdrawal of touch. Part of the withdrawal of touch involves making touch, or other forms of communication unsafe and in need of restriction. Touch becomes confusing for children and especially for adolescents who are becoming hormonal. That confusion becomes even more confusing as we mature physically.

But if we look at animals and cultures that are not so differentiated, touch is an ongoing and very necessary part of a healthy life. I think that most bodyworkers would agree that touch is necessary for good health, but we are in the minority in the developed world. I believe that, of all the caregiving professions, bodyworkers can play the most important role in ending the false sense of separation that underlies most forms of illness. In that way we can have a great influence towards personal healing and perhaps even healing humanity as a whole.



If bodyworkers are able to solve the riddle of healing by working with bodies at all stages of life, perhaps we will play a great role in the reunification and awakening of our collective species. A Course in Miracles (ACIM) and ancient spiritual texts like the Vedas state that humans are asleep and dreaming a dream of separation. Our minds are absorbed by memories of the past, which is a part of the dream state. In our past-centered dream state we hold on to perceptions based on past experiences. The past does not exist but we give it far more attention than what is occurring right now. Our

absorption with the past makes it impossible to have a full relationship with life.

I believe that becoming present to this moment now solves the riddle of healing.

ACIM says we use our memories to hold onto the past; but the real use of memory is to remember NOW! We remember "now" by feeling this moment in our bodies. Thus by teaching our clients to "member" their bodies (become somatically aware) we are giving them tools for awakening from the dream and the illness of separation.



Below are two examples of what can happen when we pay attention to the

signals that are occurring in our bodies now:



Emotional shift: Notice an emotion you are feeling inside, in this moment. You may have a name for the emotion; perhaps you are worried, angry or sad. Instead of trying to understand the emotion or where it comes from, simply feel the physical effects of the emotion. Perhaps you feel some tightness and burning, or perhaps you feel a weakness and numbness accompanying the emotion. Locate the feeling of the emotion and start to describe the physical attributes of the emotion: intensity, shape, rhythm, etc. As you do this notice

anything that surfaces as an image, a memory, a name and test it for validity against what you are feeling. Your body is informing you, re-forming you. Stay with this process as things come up. You will find that your body is taking you on a journey into the emotion, and you will find the emotion and the feeling state is shifting. This exercise is derived from Eugene Gendlin's counseling process called Focusing.

The body only exists now, all the body's signals are now, all of the body's functions happen now, the body takes in what it needs now, the body absorbs what it needs now, the body lets go of what it doesn't need now, and the body has a whole interactive signal system for keeping track of all of these living systems. If we can attend to any of these phenomena we are opening the doorway of presence and awakening from

our absorption with the past. The whole body is involved in life as it exists now... can we say the same for our minds?

Pain Shift: The next example of attending to the body in the moment is about pain. Go inside. Find a pain that you are experiencing in your body. Locate the pain and feel the shape and qualities of the pain. Perhaps it is a sharp pain that is shaped like a cone. Notice where the feeling of sharpness is the most intense. Notice any qualities that accompany the sharpness like temperature, color, irritation, or continuity. Notice what happens when you interact with the pain: breathe the into it, expand it, touch it from inside your body, describe it verbally, feel inside it, feel around it, contact and or tap the area with your fingers (like sonar) and notice how deeply you can feel the pulses.



As you practice these interactions notice what is happening to the discomfort. When the pain is presented in this way you should find that you are having a different relationship with your body. You are using the pain itself as a tool for presencing and thus releasing your past associations with the pain.

If we as bodyworkers attend to our own bodies' signals of aliveness, then we can impart the same sort of focused attention to our clients. As we practice body centered-awareness more and more, our facility with presence will grow and grow. We start to feel the awakening potential in each person; awakening from the dream that we are separate selves. Our environment becomes fresh and new; our relationships become more open and loving; our inner lives become more active; our sense of self broadens; and our appreciation of life fills our hearts. In my experience all forms of healing involve joining with life and ending thoughts and expressions of separation.



So my vision involves healer-practitioners who intentionally develop their own inner senses and becoming full-on students of life. These are the ones who are becoming living expressions of healing, the ones who by choice and practice are becoming agents of awakening. All forms of bodywork can be used this way, because they all involve touch and they can all be used to assist clients in becoming somatically aware. By becoming somatically aware we find it easier to be present. By becoming more present we are able to reach a state of forgiveness (forgetting) of the past. By forgetting the past we become more conversant with eternal beingness inside of us.

Our bodies can thus become transformed from beasts of our burdens to bearers of our return home in presence. This awakening is the end of separation. All of life is cooperating to bring us into eternal Being. In that sense we are all prodigal sons being welcomed home.