



Presencing

JACK BLACKBURN'S NEWSLETTER

Presencing Issue 19



Long-term Client Relationships: The Issue of Service

Bodywork as a Profession: Though bodywork is very old it is only in the last 30 years that it actually has required professional training. Many of us got involved in bodywork because we have always laid our hands on others to help them feel better. Anyone can massage others and in cultures where there is much touching there is also much tissue manipulation. In defining ourselves as professionals there are issues under the surface that affect our approach to our work.

One of the key issues we deal with is the issue of service: service that is freely given versus service that earns a living. Often elderly persons get confused when we charge them for touching their bodies. Some of us come from cultural backgrounds where we are expected to give service to all of our family members for free. When it comes to getting paid, we are

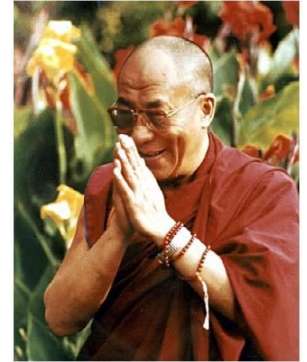
often in conflict with our own sense of service to others.



Bodywork as a Service: Because our profession is confused with touching to help others feel better we know that no matter what we do our clients they will generally benefit because touching, rubbing, manipulating is a natural way that almost all living species interact. Part of the reason we love our work so much is because we know how much it benefits others... as a sign of caring. And though we can use professional tools like techniques, tables, oils, creams, bolsters, and drapes. None of them are necessary in giving compassionate loving touch to others. The issue of service lay beneath all of our work, no matter how much we want to define ourselves as professionals. Because much lay bodywork is freely

given, these forms of caring will always impact the way our work is seen.

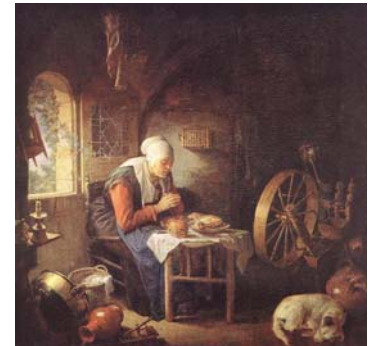
Similarity to Zen Buddhism: I have asked Genjo to present this seminar in part because, as a Buddhist monk he recognizes the path of service to others. While the monk or nun may not necessarily touch the body, in service there is a conveyance of deep respect and appreciation of all forms of life. The monk is taught to gasho with prayerful bowing to celebrate the suchness or present existence underneath all forms, even inanimate forms. So every task becomes an expression of the heart... with the intention of developing heart-centered awareness and compassion. In our work, we can approach bodies with suchness and appreciation for the living being in residence. This is quite a different spirit from feeling that we have to fix our clients. There is deep respect and trust for the person we are working with, while at the same time offering every opportunity to enhance the gift of life.



Doing something positive... no harm to environment, client: There is concept in Buddhism called "right livelihood." It means earning one's living without causing harm to any sentient being, without harming the environment, without creating conditions that are disturbing to the patterns that exist in living ecologies. Thus the practitioner is doing everything in order to support and prosper living systems. How do these values translate into our work? Perhaps the example of the parenting instinct comes close to the sense of giving service to life as it is developing and maturing. The concept of right livelihood also involves "caring." We are very fortunate that our profession involves caring for others and "doing no harm" at least consciously. Also our profession is not driven by money. Every bodywork professional has the ability and the choice to give services to others, whenever and however..



The difference between service and servitude: But there is a difference between service and servitude. While our profession has service and caring at the core, it is important to make a distinction between wanting to support others and others' expectations that we are there to serve their needs. This is most clearly seen in the difference between bodywork and prostitution... which in our case is a very apt and ironic comparison. Clients, insurance companies, and other caregiving professionals, often see our services as a form of servitude. Part of this comes from the fact that the largest percentage of bodywork is performed by women. Just as traditional wives do not get paid to perform the tasks that keep the family going, bodyworkers are the least paid, and often the least respected of caregiving professionals.



In 1981 Ivan Illich, an Austrian philosopher published a book called "Shadow Work." The purport of the term is that those persons, mostly women, who perform the most supportive work, either don't get paid at all or get paid very little. In my experience most bodyworkers do not make enough to live on... especially if they have children. They could not afford health coverage or vacations if they weren't being subsidized by a partner's income. Women's work:

NOLA

NOLA NEVER EARNED A CENT
AND NOLA NEVER PAID THE RENT
AND NOLA HARDLY EVER WENT
VERY FAR FROM HOME

FOR NOLA FIRST OF ALL A WIFE
GAVE HER BABIES BREATH AND LIFE
CLEANED THE HOUSE AND SPREAD THE FEAST
NOLA FELT HERSELF THE LEAST...

WE MUST REMEMBER, NOT FORGET
WHAT NOLA'S LIFE REALLY MEANT
AND THO' SHE NEVER EARNED A CENT
SHE PAID HER LIFE FOR ME

© 2000 Susan Osborn ReUnion album: tribute to her grandmother

Jack - Caretaking vs. Caregiving: Caretaking is taking over treatment or care of persons who cannot care of themselves. In bodywork the terms of clients insurance policies place practitioners in caretaking roles. The emphasis upon fixing or symptomatic relief remove many choices of treatment from practitioners and clients. These sessions, though limited, can be very helpful for clients in distress. Practitioners may also assume a caretaking role at times when clients do not feel up to making their own choices. As caretaker the practitioner takes on the responsibility for the goals and outcome of treatment. Caretaking is inappropriate when practitioners foster client dependency.

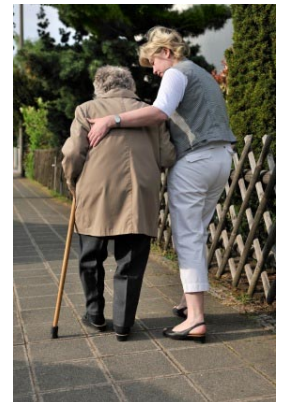


Caregiving is giving care, aid, help, assistance, treatment, attention, to a client. There is no obligation on the part of the caregiver to produce certain results. Our chief obligation is to be as present to our clients and the therapeutic process as possible. The receiver of care remains fully responsible for his/her own care process, including the choice of practitioner and goals of care.

At the heart of our work with our clients is our perception of what we are there to do... our role. Are we there as servants who have to work in order to earn wages? Are we there because we get great joy from giving comfort and support to others? Sometimes it is quite confusing because we derive so much joy from our work.

Boundaries Within the Session: Ours is a caregiving profession and as such we struggle with a dilemma all caregivers must deal with: how to balance the quantity and quality of care with the client's ability to care for herself. How do we know when we've given enough? When are we taking on too much of the client's burden? I believe that the issue of service affects our unconscious and unnecessary caretaking. Service is central to how our profession defines itself. It is a complicated issue because taking care of others, easing their suffering, is a natural and commendable human trait. The issue of service is also an ethical issue because taking on the burden of care for another is fraught with the possibilities of control and manipulation in both directions, client and practitioner.

Questions of Gifts and Barter: One thing I want to emphasize is that service is an attitude that cannot be forced. To really be "service" it must be freely given. There is a big difference between doing a job and giving service. Service is enjoyable for both giver and receiver. It is possible that when we give from a place of service that our clients will pass the same spirit of service on to others in their lives. There is a saying in certain native American cultures: "the gift must keep moving." A true gift cannot be compelled. As such perhaps when we have conflicts about receiving gifts and or barter from our clients we need to approach the giving process from a deeper perspective. Perhaps the clients are looking for way to match the "service" they feel that is an honoring of their being.



Loving the "service" of our work: Because of the focus upon symptomatic relief it is easy to forget that we came to this work because of our intention to provide caring and support. Just like the Zen practice of giving care and attention (sometimes called "hands together") to all sentient beings. It is possible to approach every client, every session in that way. Often when we or the client is entirely focused upon symptoms the real joy of giving is lost. Service is heartfelt and treatment can also be heartfelt. But often we forget that "service" itself is a choice whereas servitude is not. It is important to remember that we are not servants of our clients or insurance companies. Perhaps the greatest gift we bestow on our clients is our full undivided caring attention. In the deep past much of what would be called "shadow work," was done by slaves. Sometimes in responding to the demands of clients we may still feel like wage slaves.



We can give it away... our choice: In our professional literature there seems to be an amnesia about the comforting and support that is communicated through our touch. In her "End of Life" classes Meg Robsahm speaks about providing care and compassion by "being with" our clients. Service in that sense can never be compelled. We actually can make the choice to "give it away," meaning that in giving our attention or our treatment we are making an offering to the life itself. There is a difference between "freely given" and given for free. If we think about the sessions we love the most, there is a quality of freedom there for both client and practitioner. Often in long term relationships, there is less attention to the form of giving and more attention to the "freedom of giving." This shift allows both persons to feel the integrity of service.

Proposed Seminars in the Series - Long Term Client Relationships:

- Development of the Therapeutic Relationship over Time
- Client Involvement in Treatment
- [Peer Supervision, Personal Supervision and Clinical Supervision](#)
- Three Axes of Psychological Disorders- Mood, Personality, Medical
- Spiritual Issues in Bodywork
- Psychological Trauma
- Bodyworkers Recognition of Fear Symptoms in the Body
- Understanding Fear (how it blocks moving forward in our lives)
- Redefining Bodywork (in relation to mind and spiritual healing through the body)
- Transference and Counter-transference - Pros and Cons

