

Some Unusual Aspects of Touch – Part II

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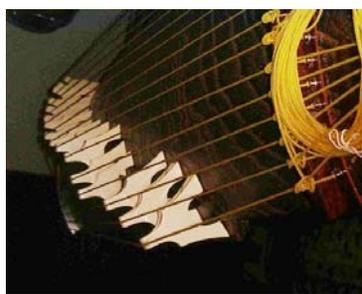
At the end of May last year I presented a seminar: The Power of Touch, in Yokohama for bodyworkers, counselors, estheticians, other caregivers, and the general public. The purpose of the seminar was to present different aspects of touch, different body conditions, and different mental conditions, problems that come from the absence of touch, and why touch is so important in our lives. I have been a professional bodyworker, healer, teacher, and counselor for many years and all of my work has centered on how touch affects a person's awareness and quality of life. The following aspects are a continuation from the first article. I will continue to discuss some unusual and surprising learnings about how body and mind are affected by touch, drawn from my experience of almost 30 years. This is the second of three articles, taken from the seminar, for my colleagues and friends in touch.

■ The body only exists in the present moment – the mind likes to wander

As we observe our thinking minds more closely, we start to realize that our thoughts are almost always about the past or the future. Our thinking mind is hardly ever focused on what is happening now, unless it is receiving some sort of stimulus, pain or pleasure, from the body. When we observe our body closely, we notice that the sensations, coming from our body, directly reflect our thinking and always occur now! If we change our minds and teach ourselves to feel continuously into our bodies, our thoughts and our lives change. With this choice to experience the present moment, our minds, our bodies, and our lives seem to become unburdened.



■ The body is a finely designed instrument – which the mind needs to learn



Many aspects of our bodies, including the design of our own minds, are so finely drawn! All our human knowledge and understanding pales besides the simplicity and fearsome complexity of our bodies, minds, and Life in general. We make scientific observations of life but we cannot become co-creative with life until we fully participate through body awareness - every moment. How can we move beyond merely describing and trying to manipulate what we have discovered. Surely the clearest way towards understanding is to join with the body; join

and learn directly from bodily communications.

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■ Most of the body's systems function without the conscious mind

It is very humbling to realize that our bodies are not controlled by our minds. We can perform an extraordinary amount of feats and acquire a tremendous number of skills. But we cannot consciously breathe our bodies for more than a few minutes. Every system in the body is designed to operate independently of the thinking mind and our emotional state. The body does reflect these states of thinking and emotions back to us. But in no way do we do the same for the body. So far we have used the body as a servant of our needs and desires. We have joined in limited ways with the bodily systems in order to explore what new information and experiences they hold for us. Yoga, meditation, and somatic awareness are all attempts to learn from the body. But mostly we are too busy using our bodies for what we can get.



■ The body is flaccid when the mind is anesthetized

This is an amazing fact... under general anesthesia all the holding patterns that we usually carry in our bodies disappear. Scar tissue softens, muscles and connective tissue soften, and joints become very free. Some have argued as a result of this occurrence



that because the anesthesia removes our conscious awareness, that bodily limitations are actually stored in the mind. There are many less extreme examples of the mind's participation in holding the limitations. When we are able to relax the mind, and remove some of the stressors being held in the mind, there can be dramatic reduction in muscle tension and pain. In bodywork, when we induce a parasympathetic response, bodily tissue usually responds by relaxing. This is one of the reasons that many forms of bodywork are given in a soothing environment with dim lighting and relaxing music. Often the client goes to sleep – one of the signs of the parasympathetic response. However it is also possible to produce a parasympathetic response by having clients develop a strong somatic awareness by teaching clients to feel what is happening in their bodies.

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■ Touch practitioners can learn to feel clients' somatic awareness

Touch practitioners know that there are many things they can learn to feel in the client's body: the heart pulse and the breath pulse in certain large parts of the body, like the chest. With sensitivity one can also feel the pulses in other body parts like fingers, toes,



and facial muscles, far away from the heart and the lungs. Practitioners can also feel temperature, moistness, hardness, softness, subtle body reflexes, and resistances to movement. Practitioners feel some of the internal bodily conditions: tonus of connective tissue, bloating, dehydration, gas, and electrical tingling. The most amazing touch skill however is the ability to feel the client's state of awareness and concentration in any part of the body. If the client is deeply involved in a body part practitioners can feel it. If the client is afraid to feel pain in a body part, practitioners

can feel the absence of awareness. If the client feels into a body part by sensing it from inside, practitioners can learn to feel that. If clients touch us or interact with us from inside their bodies we can feel that.

■ Suffering is not caused by pain but by fear

Most persons have a certain amount of fear when they feel unexpected discomforts in their body. Fear produces reactions in the sympathetic nervous system, which then exacerbate the pain. We receive familiar pain signals from our bodies continuously throughout the day. We consciously adjust our body positioning, stand and stretch, or take other actions like sleeping, eating, or eliminating that gives us relief. However if we are unable to do what our bodies require, we start to suffer. Much of that suffering happens because we cannot respond appropriately... we cannot eat or go to the bathroom right now. This can produce varying degrees of suffering. The same is true for the discomforts of illnesses and injuries when we feel fearful. Also if we are already emotionally upset about something, the pain we experience is magnified many times. By not attending to or repressing the body's signals because of fear, we may cause ourselves more suffering. One of the benefits of professional touch is that it can produce soothing effects on the fear.

