

Presencing Issue 12 - Aspects of Fixing

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" ~Anonymous



What is the client's role in her own healing? In bodywork many clients come to us to relieve their symptoms. We know that, if we are successful, the client will be very pleased with us. We know that, if we are not successful, we probably will not see that client again. After giving many sessions we start to realize that symptomatic relief is a temporary relationship with the truth. Symptoms come and go in the span of a person's life. We have conditioned ourselves to believe that symptoms point to a pathological interruption to our otherwise cozy life. We would prefer to not have to deal with the discomfort and limitations caused by symptoms.

Other factors: Bodyworkers start to realize that other patterns in client's lifestyle exacerbate symptoms and guarantee that they will return. Perhaps the client's living situation or job is very stressful. Maybe the client has admitted that she has addictive habits that she can't control; perhaps she is depressed or suffers from panic attacks. Is there something the practitioner can do to help the client deal with these other factors; that can directly affect the symptoms in a positive way? Is there something the practitioner can do to involve the client in a richer relationship with her body and her health? Can this richer relationship give the client direct access to resources in her body and mind that create an ongoing state of health and enthusiasm for life?





A different sense of symptoms: Perhaps if we can change our understanding of symptoms, it will open new doorways to living life fully. What if we were to regard symptoms as a calling for attention? Instead of trying to get rid of the symptom, both client and practitioner could focus their attention right into the symptom, like a process of calling and response. What if the client and the practitioner were to interact with the symptom from inside and outside the body in various ways? What if the combined attention of practitioner and client is able to produce a response in the symptom? As the symptom responds they keep giving it attention. What if they become aware that they are following a healing

pathway set by the symptom? There are various ways we can follow where the symptom is taking us; palpation, tactile stimulation, felt sensing into the symptom, connecting into the symptom through presencing, verbally describing the symptom as it morphs and moves and yields new insights and new bodily awareness in both persons. Practitioner and client can test the symptoms together in various ways so that they yield a continuous flow of information without disappearing. Thus they can keep following the path towards healing without losing the trail markers.

What presencing offers: the possibility to use symptoms for the purpose of connecting with something deeper inside, something that is so compelling that we start to live our lives differently. I recently said to a cancer patient in a workshop that she was very fortunate because she had continuous signals coming from her body that could create an awakening inside. She had been presencing her own symptoms for two days. On the second day I demonstrated how to join with her in attending to the symptoms. I could accompany her in presencing with my hands and words. Despite the fact of a very large tumor on the surface of her body, she became very positive and really felt affirmed (not betrayed) by the process that was happening in her body. When she left the workshop she was radiant. Her whole body glowed, she had no pain, but more importantly, she had found new meaning and purpose for her life. The symptoms were beckoning her into her own livingness. They were calling her to awaken. A strange realization emerged from the session; her awakening to her own livingness was much more important than being symptom free. She said: "I am no longer afraid."



A calling: The above is an example of what can happen when we do not automatically take the attitude that symptoms are pathological. No matter what kind of bodywork we do we can regard client symptoms as a calling for attention. By so doing we can enlarge our understanding of relieving symptoms. By facing into the symptoms, by acknowledging their calling for attention, we can possibly bring the client into the experience of her own healing. Symptoms will relieve, but let's not be in such a hurry to completely eliminate them. Where is the trail when the guideposts are removed? This is especially important for the client who needs to make changes in her life so that she is not continually recreating her own symptoms.



Skilled fixing: Those of us who have developed and refined our bodywork skills so that we can effectively deal with most client discomforts can add the additional tool of client awareness. This tool will multiply our effectiveness and satisfaction by many times. What if we bring our clients into personal attentiveness as we work carefully with the symptoms as guides? If the client is young she may remember her involvement in her own process with symptoms for the rest of her life. Far into the future when she develops symptoms of aging or serious illness, she can retain a visceral memory of her presencing and be less fearful of her place on her journey. Perhaps she will have learned to follow symptoms as guideposts to continual healing. If the client is elderly we can support her in moving along the last stages of her journey towards healing. In working this way we can satisfy the client and at the same time teach the client to follow her own process towards healing.



Recent case: For instance I had a client recently in Japan who would go into nervous tremors down the whole left side of her body when she felt stressed. In the beginning of the session she exhibited those symptoms probably because she was nervous about the session. Through the translator I had her describe what the tremors felt like from the inside. I then put my hands on the places that she described as triggers for the tremors. I asked her to feel into the contact of my hands and the triggering sensations. When she did this I could feel the warming and softening of the muscle spasms. I then asked if she could recreate the spasms consciously. She could! When she realized that she had this ability, her whole body relaxed. Now she had a tool for experimenting directly with her own symptoms. I was informed later by the bodyworker who had referred her to me that her symptoms were significantly reduced and so had her fearful reactions to stress.

Changing perspective: Perhaps we are now reaching towards something that goes beyond the whole question of fixing vs. not fixing. By shifting our perspective about symptoms and drawing on our years of experience, we may discover together fresh approaches to our work. Three principles seem to underlay this deepening approach: The body as an instrument for bringing us to our senses about life; symptoms as a calling for attention rather than correction; clients as active powerful players in following symptoms towards healing and wholeness. Where do we go from here? If we consider these factors as worthy of consideration, perhaps we start by examining what we know about symptoms.

