

Presencing Issue 52

Palliative Passages Part I



Dear Ones, I am writing you at the end of April to let you know what is happening the rest of this year at Trillium Institute. Some of you know that I will be in Japan for the rest of the year. I intend to publish 3 books in Japan:

Practicing Presence - Sharing of Presence;
The Art of Trager - 30 Years of Gentle Touch;
The Presencing Newsletter- Uncovering this Moment. Koito and I will be working together so that these books can be published in Japanese and later in English. We are hoping to share some of these writings with you as we go along, so that we can get your feedback and ideas. Meanwhile the next three

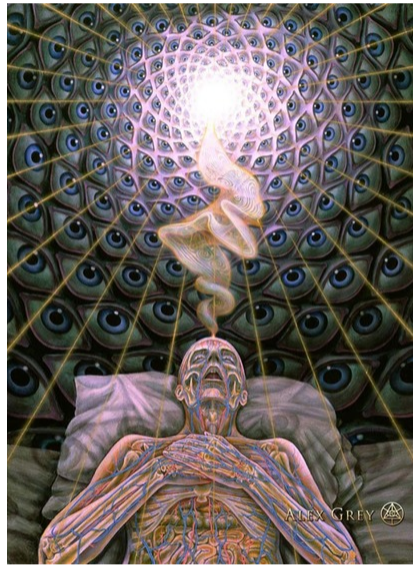
Presencing Newsletters will be about Palliative Care. Some prior newsletters focused on palliative care at Japan cancer hospitals in Tokyo and Shizuoka. We described our work on patients as well as evening classes for hospital staff. The articles in these next three issues were written in preparation for Jack's keynote presentation and classes at the Northwest Oncology Massage conference in Minneapolis 3 years ago:

Body Defenses: Do not overwhelm bodily defenses – instead use them like Aikido – tight muscles and joints are an indication of splinting or protecting an area of the body from further pain or injury. In end of life patients they can also be a signal that the patient has not moved, has not had proper positioning or bolstering to protect the three essential spinal curves to upright posture. When we are able to gently bring the client's somatic awareness into those uncomfortable body parts, the tightness and pain change considerably, without causing any tissue damage or instability in that body part.



Bodyworkers are in a very good position to accompany dying patients – role is like a midwife: Touch, especially touch that is interactive with the somatosensory system of the client, creates a deep sense of relaxation and self-awareness in the client and helps her unhinge from her fear-charged bodily reactions. In other words as the client becomes more body-now oriented, she becomes more present and less dominated by fearful past-oriented ideation.

At a certain point in our lives we become directly involved with death – through family, friends: usually when we approach our 40s and 50s, we start to become aware of persons our age or our parent's age who are becoming ill or are dying. This is a statistical fact but it is also accompanied by health factors in our own bodies and those of our parents, like headaches, myomas, greying hair, and weight gain... stress factors like sleep difficulties, high blood pressure, and menopause. All of these changes are reminders that life does not last forever and we need to start taking charge of our own health issues.



Why Fear? We are participating in a culture that makes death scary and extra-ordinary: even though we all know that everybody dies and it is a natural part of our experience of life in a body. However we live at least a third of our lives with little or no awareness or concern about death, even despite participating in or supporting the killing of others by the military. Paradoxically, when our children are young we worry considerably about their safety, and try to impress them with fears and warnings that will contribute to their safety.

Since we all die, why do we live in denial and fear – and even protect ourselves by taking lives: Once again the "why" question is very important. We pursue goals and material rewards as if they are the most important part of living life. Once they are achieved they become "permanent" acquisitions in our lives, in spite of overwhelming evidence that we will reach a point that we will have to give them up... everyone, everything we have striven for, and there is no recompense for our striving. And of course in our striving we overlook the fact that almost everything we achieve is at the cost of others in our lives. At the end of our lives we discover that there is nothing to hold on to... literally and figuratively; no bolsters, no safety.

Book of Job: Mostly we feel guilty or unjustly treated when death comes knocking: Job who is Gods most faithful and devoted servant, is challenged by his daughters deaths and loss of his personal health. Job says says: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." So even though Job is living an exemplary life, and has a reputation even in heaven for his faith and for always doing the right thing, Job realizes through his observations of how life has treated others, that he has good reason to expect the same. Like Job and his friends most of us feel that something is very wrong and unfair. when we start to perceive the likely consequences of losing all we have achieved.

Body Stages: Our bodies are perfectly designed to take us through all the stages of life: Every stage of our lives has its gains and losses. When we are young we champ at the bit to gain our own control over the factors in our lives. As we age we gain some control at the cost of some of our vitality and enthusiasm. Ageing further we start to wonder if the cost-benefit of striving is working out in our favor. We try to insure ourselves against losses and failures, so we can feel a sense of safety. But alas as we get older our insurers demand more sacrifice on our part... and then we start to realize that there is no insurance against the foibles and predictable adverse consequences of living our lives.



Why does presencing become more and more important as we grow older? As we age we become more and more absorbed in our stories from the past. Rather than letting go of the past we use the past to override what is actually happening around us and our sense of reality becomes more and more distant. Is it any wonder that we start to lose our bearings and run off track. As we age we must notice that carrying past grievances, anxieties, and ambitions becomes more and more tiring, and take us further and further from reality. The body offers all of us and especially the elderly opportunities to appreciate what is occurring now because we can then start to find our way back into an appreciation for life now. This opens us up to giving and receiving love, because now is the only time love really exists.

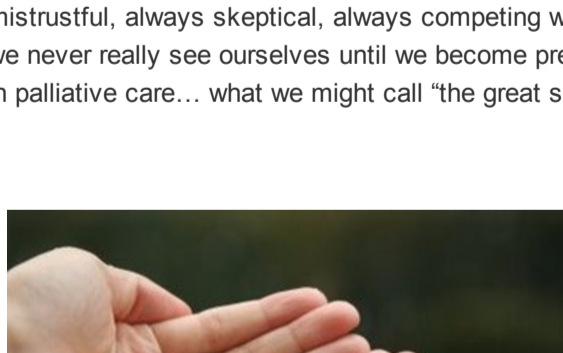
The body itself exists only in the present moment! This is obvious and carries great implications: When we realize that our body only exists now and that the body is our vehicle in this life we can start to fully appreciate the unique occurrences of this moment! Life eternal exists in this moment because to the body it is always this moment. To the mind on the other hand, life proceeds from past to future... so we are always proceeding, never being. The losses we seem to face in time, are never a consequence of time. In fact when we realize NOW we cannot label anything as gains or losses. In fact our belief in birth, ageing, and death are the only reasons that we have a concept of time. The fact is that we all of us live in a continuous ocean of now. Everything has already happened, so there is no loss and nothing to fear. Perhaps that is why the animal kingdom which lives in the NOW does not carry the fearful curse of death.



Being Time: Every function the body carries out is contemporaneous with NOW! We have so much to learn from our bodies. They are instruments of our awakening because if our bodies were wired to time the ways our minds are, the functions our bodies perform would wander and not be dependable, as our minds do often getting lost in daydreaming and forgetfulness. We can follow the Buddha's example by training our minds to attend the continuous sensations arising in our bodies that accompany our every moment of existence. When we think about the functions that keep our bodies alive, like breathing in and out, digesting food, fighting illness; there is no way that our thinking minds can keep track of even one of those functions. While each of those functions is critical to our survival, what is even more amazing, is that our somatosensory system gives us a continuous reflection of what is occurring overall, including the impact of our thoughts, emotions and actions in relation to those critical functions. It is all now.

Our brains also exist and function now! Where do thought and awareness reside? It is very questionable that our thoughts and awareness and even our consciousness reside in the brain. It has been argued that thoughts, awareness, and consciousness take up no space and so require no brain space. So while we could say that the brain is a multi-organ receiver and processor and transmitter for thought, awareness, and consciousness, we could also say that brain death in no way is inhibitory of those creations. In fact when we consider how difficult a concept unitary mind seems to be, it probably exists around us all of the time. It is our choice to train our minds to presence, what Buddhists call mind purification and become absorbed in the ocean of consciousness.

Cloud of Unknowning: However our minds and thoughts are habitually dwelling in the past: As I have been stating throughout this paper, our minds and five senses are clouded by the past. We continually train each generation to aim their thoughts and actions backwardly so that we never see one another as we truly are. We are always overlaying our perceptions with past-centered expectations and projections. The upshot of this worldview is that we experience ourselves as self-centered, self-absorbed, self-achieving egos, always mistrustful, always skeptical, always competing with one another. We are reflections of one another because we never really see ourselves until we become present to one another... another reason for using presence in palliative care... what we might call "the great send-off."



- Open hands
- Open mind
- Open face
- Open heart

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