



Presencing

JACK BLACKBURN'S NEWSLETTER
Issue 1 January 2006
On Presence and Presencing

Presence

There are moments that can be experienced when our bodies become instruments that seem to mysteriously connect us with all life, all times, all places, all existence. Watching the sunrise light-stream link ocean to shore, noticing raindrop rhythms while sheltering under a grandfather tree, feeling our face refresh while mirrored by a child, feeling a blanket of silence envelope our workspace, feeling touched by the resident *Being* from within the painful body we are contacting. Each of us has had moments that stand out because we've felt these connections. Abraham Maslow, in a fit of restraint, called these moments, "peak experiences." Sometimes the feelings in these moments seem like overflowing love, but that too seems like an understatement. Mystics have responded with awe and humility, fear and trembling, feeling their smallness in the presence of the *Oneness*.

Momentary experiences of presence can seem fleeting and impossible to recreate. Many of us have pursued these moments much of our lives... like searching for hidden jewels. Some have dedicated their whole lives and have journeyed far and wide to find better and better ways to recreate these moments. Jungian, Robert Johnson describes the experience that began his search:

It was pure light, gold, radiant, luminous, ecstatically happy, perfectly beautiful, purely tranquil, joy beyond bound. I wasn't the least bit interested in anything on the earthly side of the divide; I could only revel at what was before me... It was all that any mystic ever promised of heaven, and I knew then that I was in possession of the greatest treasure known to humankind...

The ecstatic experience involves escaping from the "I-ness." This requires that we break the boundaries of our separateness to experience a greater realm, a realm that taxes our finest poets and artists to convey. It is the most valuable experience any person can ever have. The beauty of the Golden World is that one sees a vastness; something so much greater than oneself that one is left speechless with awe, admiration, delight, and rapture.*

The experience of presence is so powerful that it becomes a goal in itself. Each moment of presence is a taste of its fullness. There is no moment when presence is not available to us. Once we sample the gifts of presence we can learn the many ways to renew those gifts and pass them on to others. These ways of practicing presence are included the following expressions: centering prayer, mindfulness, watching the breath, concentration on this moment, remembering *now*, scanning the body. The effects of practicing presence are secondary to the experience of presence. Moments of presence seem to occur in activities, like music and art - which we enjoy for their own sake, adding joy, harmony and feelings of timeless love.

Presencing, a change in perspective

Probably the biggest change to occur in human consciousness in the 21st century will be shifting to a different center of consciousness, *presence*. This ability exists within each one of us. Because this shift involves subtending the mind to the felt experience in the body, it also produces a shift in perspective. Once we discover the presence inside, each of us becomes responsible for our own awakening. However the movement towards transformation will create a cumulative effect, sweeping many towards the goal. Once we recognize that this center is the only real antidote to the fear and suffering we humans have created, we will choose to activate our own shift in awareness. Once we have set our intention to move beyond the chaos of our fearful minds, *all* of life becomes useful for practicing presence.

By "*presencing*" we mean the conscious *choice* to practice presence. The operative word is choice. Throughout this newsletter the main undercurrent, no matter what the subject, will be our conscious choice to practice presence individually or together. This theme is certainly not unique in human history. Whole spiritual movements, mystical paths and monastic communities have been devoted almost entirely to the practice of presence.

From this new perspective, some of the most profound spiritual and inspirational writings such as: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *Brother Lawrence*, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, *A Course in Miracles*, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, *The Fourth Way*** , have been preponderantly directed to teaching a practice based upon observation of the present moment. The difference, as we will see on these pages, is the emphasis on body-centered awareness.

Each of these practices acts like a ship's compass on a stormy sea. No matter how much the ship may be tossed and turned, the compass always indicates the ship's direction. No matter what is occurring in our lives presencing can give direction. But presencing does even more than the ship's compass because it also reflects our inner state of being in any moment, and our sense of destiny and calling, far beyond our limited understanding, and perhaps, far beyond our mortality.

The Body and Presence

Experiencing presence is only possible because we are in bodies. The body, surprisingly, is the key link to this change because it is continually offering us so many reliable ways to apprehend this moment. A friend has called the presencing role of the body the true *resurrection of the body*. Bodyworkers who recognize this new function of the body can become facilitators and advocates for this change.

As a bodyworker of many years, I have noticed that the body is an incredible communicator in that it always reveals one's state of being to its owner and to the practitioner if one learns to listen to the forms of expression unique to the body. When our bodies are perceived through the lens of presencing, our bodies can become reliable loadstones for our lives. As such the bodywork session can be seen as an opportunity for practitioner and client to establish and then share this unique form of communication.

The body, it can be argued, exists only in the present moment and is reflecting the present moment continually to its owner as sensation and awareness. In that sense "the body never lies." By design the body communicates through its various systems: mental, chemical, affective, neurological, positional, sensorial. These channels of communication produce internal sensation and thought. When thought is consciously directed towards tracking these processes, it changes from brain-centered and abstract, to body-centered and somatic. If we train our minds to pay closer attention to those communications, we establish somatic links to the body and perhaps new synapses in the brain. In Thomas Hanna's words we become a conscious *soma****. The body and mind form a unit that is capable of tracking and adjusting inner and outer phenomena reflexively.

Practical Presencing

Exercise 1

Pausing for presence

While going through the workday there are lots of opportunities to pause for a few moments to reconnect with the present moment. You can set a timer if you can't remember to pause. The best kind of timer would be a random alarm... or perhaps remembering to be present every time you use the bathroom or get up from your desk, or finish a phone call. The more times you *pause for presence* the more you will remember to pause. Does this mean that you will accomplish less in your day? No, quite the opposite, the more you pause the more efficient you become because your mind becomes clear of needless thought, especially thoughts about the past or the future. How do you *pause for presence*? Simply stop what you are doing, close your eyes or soften your gaze, and ask yourself: "What am I thinking right now? What am I feeling inside my body right now?" You will notice that different thoughts produce different sensations in the body. If you have just experienced a stressful ! encounter notice how the stress shows up in your

body. You can practice breathing into those different body parts and where the sensations are. As you let your breath come in and out of that body part notice how the sensations of stress or pain change. You will feel happy and your body will feel refreshed. This may take only a minute or so. Now you are ready to go back to work.

*Johnson, R. *Balancing Heaven and Earth: A Memoir* Harper Collins, San Francisco 1998. For other stories of searching see, Hesse, H *Journey to the East*, Gurdjeif, G. *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

***The Cloud of Unknowing*, *Brother Lawrence*, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, *A Course in Miracles*, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, *The Fourth Way*. All of these books can be purchased on my website. [click here](#)

***“Somatics is the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception. When a human being is observed from the outside -- i.e., from a third-person viewpoint--the phenomenon of a human body is perceived. But, when this same human being is observed from the first-person viewpoint of his own proprioceptive senses, a categorically different phenomenon is perceived: the human soma.” From: Hanna, T. *What is Somatics?* SOMATICS, Volume V, No. 4, Spring-Summer 1986.

The theme of next month's issue of *Presencing* will be:

Presencing Pain: Getting to Yes – A Case Study

"She responded by saying: "It feels like a burning pain, as if I have hot coals in my stomach... and the heat and the pain are radiating out to the rest of my body." As she said this I observed that there was a palpable softening under my hands. I also noticed that Elizabeth was taking deeper breaths into her chest. I echoed: "The burning pain feels like hot coals, right here under my hands..." She said: "Yes and it's cooling down now."

- *Presencing Pain: Getting to Yes – A Case Study*, Jack Blackburn

"When we feel the pain rather than trying to get rid of the pain, we open to the mystery of healing."- Paul Brand M.D. who wrote: *The Gift of Pain*. From interview with the author.

Jack Blackburn, LMP, Master's in Theological Studies, Certified Spiritual Director, Registered Counselor, specializes in body centered spiritual growth and healing. He has been a Trager® practitioner since 1986. He has been a Trager tutor since 1993, has taught Trager electives classes since 1996, and teaches a variety of classes to care giving professionals. He is an NCBTMB "Class A" instructor and AMTA National Presenter. Jack is also a Reiki Master and teaches levels I, II, III and Advanced Reiki for Bodyworkers.

UPCOMING CLASSES in JAPAN

Side-Lying Somatics, Level I

Tokyo: February 20-22

Foot Decompression Somatics

Yokohama: February 28

Side-Lying Somatics, Level II A

Tokyo: April 20-21

Side-Lying Somatics, Level I

Tokyo: April 24-26

Side-Lying Somatics, Level II B

Tokyo: April 28-29

UPCOMING CLASSES in the UNITED STATES

Reiki I for Bodyworkers

Seattle, WA

March 11-12, 9-6PM

May 23/30, 9-6PM

Reiki II for Bodyworkers

Seattle, WA: June 24-25, 9-6PM

Reiki III (Master) for Bodyworkers

Orcas Island, WA: June 8-11 (mid-day to mid-day)

Side-Lying Somatics, Level I: Basic Repertoire

Seattle, WA

March 17-19, 9-6PM

May 26-28, 9-6PM

Side-Lying Somatics, Level II:

Seattle, WA: September 15-17, 9-6PM

Side-Lying Somatics, Level III:

Seattle, WA: December 1-3, 9-6PM

Side-Lying Somatics, Review Day:

Red Bank, NJ: June 2, 9-6PM

Introduction to Trager

Peninsula College, Port Angeles, WA: April 1-2, 9-6PM

Brenneke School of Massage, Seattle, WA: May 20-21, 9-6PM

Ethical Dilemmas

Peninsula College, Port Angeles, WA: March 31, Noon-6PM

Introduction to Table-Talking: Verbal Interaction, The Missing Piece in Bodywork

Red Bank, NJ: June 3-4, 9-6PM:

Beyond Caretaking: Caring Beyond Fixing

Seattle, WA: June 16-18, 9-6PM