

## Some Unusual Aspects of Touch - Part III by Jack Blackburn

For Part I and Part II please go to the [Articles](#) page of our website

*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 and second articles. I will continue to discuss some unusual observations about touch that come from my experience of almost 30 years. This is the third of three articles, drawn from the seminar, for my colleagues and friends in touch.*



### **Symptoms are the body's way of calling for attention**

Our bodies are continually communicating to us even in sleep. Dreams are accompanied by bodily sensations and that is what makes them seem real. As we watch a movie or a play or listen to music, our bodies are continually feeding back information that makes the experience memorable. Even remembering such an event brings sensations from our bodies. Symptoms are generally those bodily signals that call for change... perhaps they are producing enough discomfort that we shift our body position, get something to eat, scratch ourselves, or blow our nose. Those symptoms are generally innocuous unless we can't respond to them... in which case they can cause real suffering.

Our habit is to try to get rid of symptoms that we can't mollify. We do not want to keep feeling them so we go on a search to get some relief.

### **We become present and aware by attending to sensations in the body**

By attending more and more to the sensations arising within our bodies, something starts to change us from within. We start to experience *presence*, the arising of each moment in a state of eternal awareness. Everything, past and present, is a part of this eternal moment. This growing awareness of *now* seems to put many things, especially fearful ones, into a different perspective. We start to realize that our chronic problems are self-created ways of avoiding *now*. In this eternal moment there is only continuity, no discontinuity. The body has become our vehicle on the journey of *awakening*. The body has a temporal existence, as long as we have need of gathering more data of *now*. If we pay close attention we realize that the body only exists *now*. So that which is implicitly temporal leads us to that which is explicitly eternal.



### **When we erase the symptoms - we erase the body's messages**

There are many touch modalities, including esthetics, that can go a long way in relieving and even eliminating the symptoms we don't want. For instance: the esthetician may be able to eliminate a nervous twitch of the eye that is embarrassing to the client. For the most part the great benefit of bodywork is that there are little or no side effects produced, other than tiredness or sometimes achiness.

The somatics practitioner has another question to ask. Are the symptoms there merely to indicate bodily pathology or are the symptoms there to take us deeper into our own internal processes. The nervous twitch may be occurring

because of worry or doubt. If we follow the symptoms with somatic awareness (feeling into the body), we find that we are opened to new insights and understandings about ourselves, and how we are leading our lives. Perhaps by looking for quick solutions for symptoms we find discomforting, we are missing the opportunity to participate more fully in our lives.

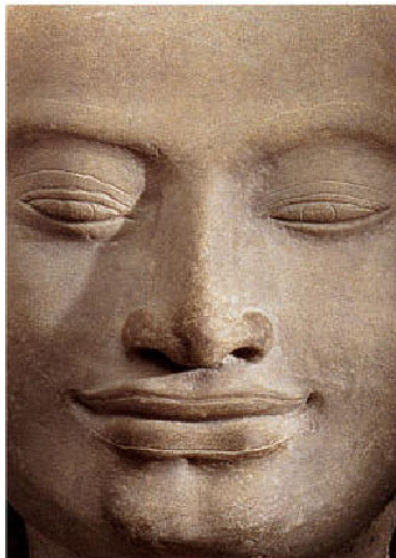
### **Following symptoms, mind becomes more open and aware**

In some kinds of meditation and some forms of bodywork and psychotherapy, we learn to follow the symptoms *into* the body... to see what they reveal. We patiently stay with these sensory messages, and don't try to find quick answers for why the symptoms are there. The esthetician may just lightly touch or gently tap the site of nervous twitching. When an experienced somatics practitioner accompanies us into realm of the senses, we may learn that symptoms give direction to our inner journey. Some believe that by so doing we are moving towards wholeness and self-completion.



### **Trail Markers**

We are shifting our evaluation of what the symptoms mean. Anyone who has hiked in nature over unfamiliar terrain knows the value of trail markers. By monitoring the nervous twitch instead of eliminating it, the esthetician is allowing the symptom to lead to insight for the client. The symptom often disappears when the insight comes. Persons, who do not understand the value of trail markers, sometimes erase or destroy them. They do not understand the value of the markers in keeping us on the path. And there have been plenty of times in our lives when we have done the same for others or ourselves. Once we realize the potential of reframing our attitudes towards symptoms, we can more easily accompany others on their journeys of self-discovery.



### **Symptoms can take us directly into our unconscious mind**

When we learn to pay close attention to the sensations emanating from our bodies, we find that places where there are symptoms are actually producing more diverse kinds of sensations than we initially recognized. In fact the longer we stay with the symptoms the more we start to feel connections with emotional material, past memories and fears, visions, dreams, etc. The esthetician, working with the nervous twitch, may start to notice tearing at the corners of the eyes and involuntary shaking in the client's body.

The sensations that accompany the symptoms may become a passageway into various unresolved issues from the past. By staying with the sensations, those past experiences and future fears can seem to be like the movies. By staying with that process, unconscious material seems to keep emerging... it's as if something within is propelling this movement. The symptoms seem to become less and less charged with fear and other emotional material. Sometimes this process leads to an experience of pure presence in which all thinking and emotionality drops away. This very pleasurable experience of presence is what

meditators call *satori*.

### **When we become present our external and internal realities change**

The experience of presence can only happen through the body, because it is a felt experience. Thinking, by itself cannot produce presence. Many great thinkers, like Descartes, have tried over the years to divorce themselves from the body, and to attempt to construct a universe out of



pure thought. In this age of modern physics and brain research, we now recognize that the body and only the body can give us a felt sense of inner knowing that links directly with all of creation. Our life experiences then become more and more reflective of the inner knowing that is arising from within. We start to recognize, with overwhelming awe, our own roles as participants in creation and eternal becoming.

**When we become present we feel our own livingness (life force)**

One of the side effects of living in this eternal moment, is that we become more and more aware of our own, and others' livingness. This livingness is eternally unfolding as we feel it in our bodies. And what we feel comes with awareness that the livingness never leaves... so we can start to feel and interact with the aliveness of creation. This interaction gives us the assurance of continuity. And the body, which is life recycled, over and over, gives us the evidence, and draws us inward toward the hush of the unfolding of ever changing, eternally present *now*.



**When the client and practitioner interact somatically - they are both transformed**

The sharing of touch, the sharing of awareness, the *sharing of now*, brings both persons, client and practitioner, into a state of awakening. Therapy no longer involves working on the problems that we, not creation, have authored. Now it has become a shared journey of awakening. The sharing of presence creates more presence exponentially. Both persons are changed by this interaction, and both persons move towards healing, which can never happen alone. And this sharing produces experiences that are truly transformative. We have lived our lives as separated selves, looking for other separated selves to share our loneliness. Now there is no need to create

alliances of defensiveness, and safety through separation.