

Commentary on Dr. Sutherland's Spiritual Odyssey

Michael J. Shea, PhD, May 2020

“Intercessory prayer is the meditation on what is ultimately true, good, and lovely. It aligns the current reality we exist in with that higher reality through our thoughts, feelings, and words. Intercessory prayer is powerful from a distance as you can speak life into a situation and exude hope for someone or something that lacks it. However, we must not discount the power of laying on hands and interceding without thoughts, feelings, or words. The hands hold the power of compassion as we connect with another human being, assigning dignity and worth to them. This act, as well as intercessory prayer from a distance, interrupts pain and suffering with light and allows healing to take place.” - Evelyn Stetzer

It is May 2020. Plague time on the planet. My niece Evelyn wrote this for me. She is a mystic who amazes me every time I am in her presence. Thank you, Evelyn, keep singing the praises of the Divine during plague time and forever after.

I feel the discussion below is a natural extension of Dr Sutherland's life work. It is a possibility, a potency to explore. It is an offering I make to you, the reader, and to the planet. In 1948, Dr. Sutherland observed the release of a lesion by the Breath of Life and it surprised him. He declared that **reverence** must become an aspect of treatment. He felt the tide at death. He writes “get as far away from your physical touch as possible. Deep touch will lead you to the primary site.” He senses an “otherness” appearing. He then blames the whole idea even the initial thought of the Cranial Concept in 1898, on God.

It is now time to allow these germinal thoughts and initiatory experiences from him and his teacher A. T. Still, D.O. to arrive at another level of fruition. With all due respect to him and his lineage holders, I offer the following thoughts in the hopes of assisting contemporary practitioners, clients and all beings on the planet.

Let us look at what biodynamic practice could be at this time on the planet as a biodynamic spiritual glossary:

Intercessory - an Intervention

Act of interceding; mediation; interposition between the divine and human realms with a view to reconciliation; prayer, petition, entreaty in favor of compassion and healing for self and all others.

Prayer

A prayer is an earnest entreaty or supplication addressed to a higher or deeper power that is invested with authority and respect such as the living reality of the Breath of Life and dynamic stillness. It is made by someone in a state of humility. In this way, prayer is an offering of devotion, reverence, respect and gratitude to a higher or deeper power inside the body and continuous with the natural world and beyond.

Biodynamic Intention

The conscious thought that the spiritual motivation for biodynamic practice is that **laying on of hands** is a form of intercessory prayer. Furthermore, that this interaction between myself and my client is dedicated to be of benefit for each of us on the whole planet. This is the generation of the spirit of altruism and the awakening of the highest form of moral development in human beings. It is a practice of non-fright according to the Dalai Lama. It is a basic human right to generate safety for oneself and others to prevent moral injury and moral violation. The underlying pandemic in the human autonomic nervous system (ANS) is the full spectrum of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) displayed in the variety of ways described in the work of Stephen Porges and his polyvagal model. The Polyvagal model suggests a hierarchy of responses from the most primitive and oldest to the most sophisticated and newest in the ANS hierarchy of structure and function.

Safety first is the most practical exploration of this altruistic intention. Safety cannot be accomplished without kindness in our body and mind especially our hands extending from our heart.

The Practice

Biodynamics is a study, an experience and a perception of the uninterrupted rhythmic balanced exchange of the Breath of Life with the dynamic stillness. Primary Respiration is no longer a viable description of the Breath of Life. The Breath of Life starts in the heart and body then extends out to the natural world and beyond. It is more tidal than the breath of air according to Sutherland. It originates in the literal heartbeat of interoceptive awareness in a revolving protocol of breath awareness, heartbeat awareness, mental awareness (mindfulness) and the Breath of Life moving between our hearts. Through this practice we can perceive the effects of the Breath of Life and the dynamic stillness on the ANS and clinically pass through the eye of a needle otherwise known as the **neutral**. It is the neutral that deepens the prayer of biodynamic practice.

“The therapeutic process does not begin until the will of the patient (ANS) yields to the will of the Breath of Life.” - Rollin Becker D.O. This is the sacred neutral.

Compassion

Compassion is being utterly present for the moment to moment continuity of experience in the therapeutic container. At the same time of being utterly present to ourselves and our client we are completely non-attached to the outcome of the prayer that we are offering with our body, hands and mind to the client. These two aspects of compassion, presence and non-attachment require training and practice through meditation, contemplation, and joyful effort.

To be totally present for someone includes mindful listening, the capacity to bear witness. We need to notice the thoughts we are thinking when we are engaged with a client or anyone socially for that matter. The **first** stage in such a connection is noticing a preoccupation with all of our personal feelings, emotions and storylines that fill our mind and distract us from being with the other person. We are mentally completely disengaged from the client.

The **second** stage is that we try to be present and hear the other person but mentally we are feeling an urgent impatience to move on and to get away from the other person soon. It is a type of social emotional whiplash happening in our minds – I'm here, I'm not.

Third, we arrive at a sense of empathy. Our mind calms down. We are able to feel our way into what the other person is saying which includes eye contact, facial expressions and body movement. This is how we register neuroception, the feeling of safety and the giving of safety. It decreases the unconscious need for the client to feel the need to protect themselves. It is the most basic foundation for achieving a neutral in biodynamic practice. It is facilitated by turning off all electronics a half hour before a client arrives. With luck, the client arrives and you are already in the empathetic state of heart.

Finally, we are able to rest our attention in the back of our heart, breathing into our belly and waiting for the Breath of Life to move between our two hearts. We become more comfortable in sensing the still points that occur in the relationship without having to react to their emptiness and just let the stillness be the stillness. We must also be non-attached to the stillness. We let go of our senses out to the horizon and back allowing the stillness to permeate the atmosphere.

Ignition

The retrieval and remembrance of the **lost midline** of peace, serenity, grace, and love. Those are the inhabitants of the precious biodynamic midline. They are missing in the context of PTSD and contemporary society in general. The embodiment of empathy and compassion is a growing and deepening process rather than a single immutable state. Compassion is an instinct as strong as the survival instinct. It is facilitated when the mind and body decrease their polarization and finally synchronize following the neutral. This requires the noble virtue of patience as we do not know the client's inner spiritual timing. Thus, non-attachment is critical.

Ignition in this context means **initiation**. It is the experience of passing through a portal whose roots are in the ANS of the body. The portal mimics the experience of death, but we remain alive. The vagus nerve transforms its sensory and motor messaging to one of spirituality on the other side of this portal. This is sometimes called the kundalini, but it is the movement of spiritual energy in the biodynamic midline. The Breath of Life and the stillness rehabilitate and reinhabit the midline. Where is the middle of your body from this viewpoint?

Embodiment

We know that biodynamic practice has physiological benefits. The work in general is very relaxing and a case is being made within our biodynamic community that it increases vagal tone, boosts immune system function favorably and increases self-regulatory capacity. Embodiment, however, is the main side effect of biodynamic practice. It is the ability to consciously recognize the felt sense and **intrinsic value of the neutral** when ANS hierarchical activity recalibrates and becomes more resilient. The background of serenity and equanimity comes to the foreground of our mind and body. But we cannot rely solely upon the vagus nerve, new or old, to complete the healing.

It is the decision of the Breath of Life as Sutherland's metaphor for divine intervention came to be known and perceived. It is a lifelong process.

Our Hands

Our hands are a prayer unto themselves. They are afferent. They are a **bridge to wholeness**. They are a mudra of non-fright. They can kill (think flies and mosquitos please). They can heal. They interconnect us intimately.

How do we do all of this? With an equal amount of attention on our hands, heart and perception. The message of the Breath of Life and the dynamic stillness is very simple and very clear. It is the message of slowing down and stopping. How could anything this simple be effective? We center our attention on our heartbeat. It is because it is imbued with a sense of the spiritual, a light in the heart and an interconnection with all the natural world and beyond. This flows through our hands as an extension of the heart and mind.

When we are compassionate in the treatment room and outside of the treatment room at the grocery store, we must recognize **not-knowing**. This is an important aspect of the initiatory portal. As Dr. Jealous said in his article on The Other Pair of Hands in 1998, helplessness is a fundamental part of the practice that generates empathy and mindfulness throughout our mind and body. When we are not attached to the outcome, the not-knowing mind is a fountain of creativity. Our hands are an invitation for a spiritual dimension to open from the shamanic to the mundane. What do **hands as prayer** feel like?

Take a Vow

Vow to yourself - to deeply care for yourself and your safety. We all know this, and we have all learned many practices to fulfill this vow already. Spiritual practice is about maintaining and keeping a vow, a candle lit for our own safety first to be of service and benefit to one's self and the world. **Be devoted to safety**. And safety has many meanings. At this time, we must learn to take refuge in our very heartbeat (literally) and the depth of our breath in our belly. We must make the inside of our body a safe refuge first.

We can see all thoughts as equal and notice that thoughts dissolve by themselves. To become mindful of the simple natural cycle of thoughts arising and dissolving brings relief albeit temporary! So, the vow, to **take refuge in our heart**, requires a little bit of effort to nurture and allow thoughts to dissolve before behaviors arise that make the thoughts seem solid and permanent. We must practice mindfulness to our distracted recreational mind frequently. Compulsive thinking is the real enemy of tranquility and the main driver of karma for those that traffic in that term. Then we generate a sense of conscious gratitude that opens the brain in the heart. Gratitude is a portal to the heart in its deeper dimensions spiritually.

Spiritual Tools

The Breath of Life and the dynamic stillness are spiritual tools for the biodynamic practitioner. They always have been according to Dr. Sutherland's teachings and the original lineage holders. If we only sense anatomy and physiology changing while we work, we might miss another deeper

dimension of our clinical practice that can integrate anatomy and physiological change process across the entire spectrum of human experience in ourselves and others. This is especially in the domain of the sacred, the spiritual. When we touch the sacrum, we all know it as the sacred bone. Isn't every other contact we make with a client's body during a session with something sacred as well?

This is the antidote of our times. Our ministry is one of **laying on of hands**. It is an intercessory prayer guided by the Breath of Life and the dynamic stillness. Our hands are an extension of our heart as we know from embryology. And our mind can rest in our heart to nurture the compassion reflex. The biodynamic therapist becomes the ultimate spiritual tool. Thank you, Dr. Sutherland, for your inspiration! Thank you, Evelyn Stetzer, for your inspiration! May the whole world be free of pain and suffering.