

# The Four Foundations of Stillness

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## Introduction

It is said in Cranial Osteopathy that the patient's body and mind contain an *inherent treatment plan* (Becker, 1997). For the inherent treatment plan to manifest the following discernments are necessary in the biodynamic toolkit:

- Periodic perception of deep stillness
- Open awareness of uncertainty, not-knowing
- Independence from the noise of the moral majority
- Heart centered non-attachment
- Sensing the Tide of Primary Respiration

The longing for these qualities begins with contemplative practice. It is a contemplation of body-mind unification. The practitioner slows down her body and mind before a client arrives, turns off the cell phone and stops looking at the internet for at least 15 minutes prior to seeing a client. I will sometimes only allow 5 minutes between technology and client but not often. The client then comes in and expresses himself in terms of what his symptoms and his pain are asking in the moment. A biodynamic craniosacral practitioner remembers that the parts and functions in a client's body that lack vitality also carry or have the capacity of expressing intrinsic Health (Becker, 1994). Health is the potency of Primary Respiration (PR). It is none other than *chi* as discussed in Classical Chinese and Japanese Medicine. PR (*chi*) is doing its job. It is not in pain nor is it suffering in any way. As practitioners we contact the part in ourselves and in our clients that does not change its movement, is slow and capable of stopping and interchanging with stillness. It is the commonality of this Health that we all share. This is the union of stillness and PR. It is the prescription for Health, the inherent treatment plan.

The biodynamic treatment plan is a dialogue between my perception of mine and the patient's unique dance with stillness and PR. PR is constantly writing the script and I listen for it in stillness. I sit still and calm my mind. I open my perception to a deep place of silence and quiescence in myself. Thoughts come and go all the time like leaves floating on the wind. I spend the majority of time during a session listening with unfocused attention to the dance of PR and stillness in my body. I must also relate to stillness or its lack in my mind. A calm mind in the therapeutic process starts with the perception of space, the environment: four walls, a ceiling, roof, windows and its inhabitant, intrinsic stillness.

The stillness function involves self-reflection. Can I approach the client without needing or wanting anything from him? Can I let go of expectations and judgment and enter a still place of uncertainty and not-knowing without labeling my inner experience good or bad, right or wrong? There is no conceptual goal or purpose in this activity especially *fixing* the client. In other words, there are progressive stages to entering the felt sense of uncertainty and not-knowing of my body-mind. It is a practice of non-attachment to thoughts and outcomes like getting better and improving which interfere with the inherent treatment plan.

Stillness is often a suspect activity in any culture that places more significance on fixing the client and removing symptoms rather than discovering the altruistic intention of our hearts and integrating loving kindness and compassion into clinical practice. Even at a molecular level, cells in the body cannot function properly without a brief stillpoint. Conscious awareness of

stillness can provide a rich, intimate contact with the reality in the present moment of the atomic chart living underneath our skin and the atomic chart we derive from externally. It is not the past or future with our thoughts rather right now. "*Immediate yourself or wreck yourself.*" The present moment is the basis for total body safety and involves what I call the *four foundations of stillness*.

### **First Foundation – Body Sensation & Interoceptive Awareness**

The first foundation of perceiving stillness is *body sensation and interoceptive awareness*. I open to and take notice of personal body sensations in the extrinsic musculoskeletal system. This quality of contact allows for the intrinsic authority of my muscles, bones and fascia to speak to me directly. By paying attention to body sensations rather than ignoring them, I develop friendliness towards my own physical nature and the predicament of gravity. In this way, I share the same suffering of the client. Stillness of body is a settling into both body sensations and interoceptive awareness and at the same time curiously non-attached to the ocean of sensation in my body. We truly inhabit a fluid body and the fascia that holds us together intrinsically is like seaweed.

In this way of embodiment, I gain *moral independence* from the mainstream by trusting the felt sense of my muscles and bones. My body knows the difference between right and wrong if I listen deeply. Sensations need to be unlinked from strong emotions. Emotions need to be unlinked from compulsive thoughts. It involves noticing and appreciating all the senses as they try to average all the input coherently. Everything settles in the body including gravity pulling the mind down into the body and abdomen. It is said in Zen "bring the mind into the Hara (abdomen)." This is a breath that continues down to where the abdominal aorta bifurcates into the common iliac arteries. Our mind needs to connect to the origin of our life close to our umbilicus.

Interoceptive awareness is my connection to my inner life in the viscera and deep organs of the body. This expands *the mind in the Hara* practice. Each organ expresses an urge that becomes conscious from breathing to eating, from urinating to defecating, to a heartbeat that is falling in love. I pay attention to the inside of my body especially the potency of my heartbeat. PR is merged with the stillness in the back of the heart and together with interoceptive awareness of the heartbeat, empathy for self and other is generated. It all rests upon the breath in the Hara.

Stillness does not cause PR or vice versa. Biodynamics does not incorporate a hierarchical model of causation. They dance together in harmony in and around the body. A synchronized union of equality. Body sensations are constantly shifting and may start to settle when I maintain a balance of internal awareness and breathing into the Hara. I calm down physically, mentally and emotionally with conscious breathing into the Hara and conscious awareness of my heartbeat as a unified whole. A body and mind at rest learns that rest and arousal are cyclical and a manifestation of the whole. This is contemplative practice. As I sit in stillness with the client, I become receptive to my body first and then receptive to impressions from my client's body. A calm mind can then begin to rest in the Hara allowing the heart to rest on top of the abdomen. This is called embryonic breathing.

### **Second Foundation – Non-Attachment**

The second foundation of stillness is *non-attachment*. It is a sense of the arising and falling away of thoughts and ideas like leaves floating down from a tree in the fall. I touch the basic state of my mind and feeling tone in my body and let go of it gracefully with a slow exhalation. This is known as the *act of stillness*. I repeat this act over and over because it requires effort

to create an open space for thoughts, feelings and emotions to simply be without interfering with them. I consciously observe my inner and outer experience without bias. This is being the *non-attached witness*. I harmonize with the stillness by observing my experience without mental or cognitive expectation. Imagine sitting in a chair looking outside a window to traffic going by on the street. The traffic is the mind filled with thoughts. But I sit and observe them without contact emotionally. Just observe the traffic pattern come and go with gaps where no cars come by.

- I let go of thoughts, turning my sensory attention gently without judging them as good or bad.
- I stop cognitively naming everything that comes into my vision, my mind or my hearing.
- I return to my breath to the Hara
- I sense my heartbeat
- I attune to the space in the environment around me (four walls, a floor and a ceiling)
- I attuning to the world of nature outside the office (the window).

No thought, idea, concept, belief, perception, spiritual insight, or fearful image is too big or too small to get an exemption. All such phenomena are thoughts and are consciously treated as *equal*. Thoughts rise and fall constantly and leave no trace like the imprint of a bird in the sky. Thoughts are not the enemy and like a river they just need to flow unrestricted.

*Touch and go* is a stillness skill. I silently and briefly acknowledge being distracted or entertained by thought stream. I touch it and then I drop it - I let go simply by recognizing the thought without grasping it or if necessary, I shift attention to breathing in the Hara. I return to the midline of stillness by resting my mind on one or the other of my senses. Each sense has an object of cognition but there is too much data from all the senses, so I do not cognitively label what any sense is reporting. I return to home ground of my breathing in and out of the Hara. My breathing integrates all the senses in my body. It gives time for the senses to average the input into safety and open awareness. My body contacts the chair on which I am seated with my feet on the ground. I feel gravity compel my body to the earth as I sit like a mountain. I regularly and repeatedly touch and go because *I am the host of this inner and outer perceptual simulation rather than a guest* without awareness. To be the host of my inner perception requires effort at noticing my disconnection from self and client. It is a practice of harmonizing with the stillness that stretches from the horizon all the way to the back of my heart and through it. This is known as *resting the mind in non-attachment*. This follows after resting the mind in the Hara. The heart must stay non-attached.

Mindfulness is a metaphor for this variety of stillness. It is paying careful attention to the moment-by-moment experience of all my body's senses, the client's body and the perception of both of us together in the office space as an interconnected yet differentiated whole. I pay attention to sensations, inner tensions/pressures and mental/emotional desires for myself and what my hands perceive on the client. I learn gradually to recognize them, sense them and relax my perception into open awareness, as I connect to my different senses one by one. I might let all my thoughts go out into space as I exhale. Or if there is a mental struggle with a particular family story line that moment, I switch attention to other senses. I listen more intently to sound. I look more intently at what my eyes are seeing. Mindfulness is sometimes described as being a bus driver and all the people in the seats behind you are just thoughts. Keep your eyes (metaphorically) on the road in front of you.

As mentioned, thoughts are not the enemy. The "thought police" are not necessary to manage my mind whether alone or with the client's body especially telling me where my hands need to go next on the client. The thought police are especially fond of telling me, "what a

waste of time this biodynamic stillness is, it's time to get doing something that will really fix the client.”

Patience requires effort at this level of stillness. Effort is not totally giving into mental indulgence such as fantasies or projections or the thought police. Effort requires the potency of shifting one's attention back to one's Hara and then being non-attached. No thought is so important that I cannot let go of it. This is how I move my sensory attention within my body and my mind in order to stabilize a jumpy mind that acts like a frog. *Frog mind* is a mind that jumps around — speedy or fixated on something needing to happen or something that just happened or something that needs to happen later at home. The past and future are eliminated. Even the present moment is eliminated by resting in open awareness. Lazy mind is a daydreamer and requires effort to descend from the clouds of dissociation and return to the earth. I also call this hangover mind as the mind seems to be in a stupor unable to ground in the body.

I must sacrifice my erratic thoughts for the sake of a safe therapeutic container. I sacrifice my frog mind or my lazy mind by paying attention to my breathing and heartbeat. I attend gently, resisting my froginess of being compulsively diverted to the mundane world of desire spacing out into the clouds of confusion in my mind. I shift my attention into open elemental space inside and outside. I am able to touch however briefly, non-attachment to my mental-emotional story lines. I can see through them periodically as all the objects of senses are suspended equally in a vast field of stillness. The presence and potency of PR is then able to reveal itself as the inner garden is swept clean however briefly.

### **Third Foundation – The Neutral of the Present Moment**

The third foundation of stillness is *the neutral of the present moment*. This level of stillness is the ability to recognize how states of mind and body can enter a therapeutic harmony, a balance point for Health to manifest. The ability to consciously recognize whether I am in frog mind or lazy mind is necessary to ignite a neutral. The neutral is a properly plowed sense field ready to be planted with PR. The stress levels in me and the client transition or harmonize with the priorities of PR. One moment I'm mentally wandering and suddenly I snap back to the present moment without effort into this field of mental relaxation, potential and possibility. I call it the gentle whiplash of mindfulness. This quality, this state of perception and physiology after calming the mind is called a neutral and contains the essence, the vast potency of the present moment. The neutral happens naturally. It is the instinctual progression of a biodynamic session. It is the natural habitat of mind underneath the frog mind and lazy mind. It is non-conceptual, non-temporal and non-moving, just an empty field of rich soil and great potential. The neutral of the present moment is the stillness that expresses great potential for healing.

My body and mind are instinctually oriented to the potential of stillness, silence and open awareness. The neutral stillness in the heart is without an observer. It is the observer. It is a union, a melting together, a merging with the direct experience of being centered in the back of the heart. It is a field of intelligence. The neutral of the present moment is smart. This is part of the hard wiring of my mind to naturally recognize the neutral, being totally present for myself and the client with non-attachment. From this place of the therapeutic neutral of the present moment, PR is free to choose where to place its “unerring potency.” I forget this innate ability frequently in sessions however, so it requires repetitive attunement practice to recover it. Being patient and aware of thoughts thinning out invokes the neutral. The present moment is about relaxation without any expectation. And it will shift just as the Tide does. I evenly suspend my attention between a place deep inside my abdomen and heart and as far out into

space as possible. My umbilical cord stretches to the void. I abide in the space of this joyful moment. The neutral of the present moment brings therapeutic clarity.

#### **Fourth Foundation – Clarity & Renewal**

The fourth foundation of stillness is *clarity*. The neutral permeated with stillness brings clarity of the activity of PR. There is a deepening of the qualities of attention, mindfulness and open awareness. It means slowing down the whole life process and noticing each part of PR and its exquisite precision and unique sequence of movements in and around myself and the client as a unified two-person biology. This means creating what Jim Jealous calls a *metapause*. I notice each effect of the interchange of stillness and silence into the foreground of my perception of the neutral and the client's experience. PR eventually fades to the background when it is finished. Then background and foreground shift places again in its own tempo. The world is breathing through us and the therapeutic process. This is the Tide according to Dr. Sutherland.

The stillness inherent in the neutral involves being patient for non-conceptual clarity to arise in longer pauses between thoughts. Clarity is knowing *what to accept and what to reject* in managing the therapeutic container with the client. It is instinctual. There can be one or more neutrals expressed in a single session. Many sensory impressions come to us through our hands, hearts and mind. Some are therapeutically relevant, and others are not. Our flight simulator for helping others always seems to throw in a few side distractions to test us. Biodynamic perception of the Tide clarifies the direction of the inherent treatment plan of PR. Is the therapeutic process being advanced with PR following the neutral? Is the Tide expanding into your being or away from your being? Clarity is spacious, open and sharp almost to the point of being irritating or even boring at times because of the desire to fix the client.

There is no doubt however, about where to go next with my hands and my perceptual process if I am patient. They are always guided by the constant interchange of stillness and PR. But I must be patient and wait in the neutral of the present moment for as long as possible for such clarity to arrive. I practice sitting in stillness with my client as a specific biodynamic skill so I can begin to clearly recognize the interchange of stillness and PR naturally. There are moments when giving a session to a client that the fog of mind lifts and I am able to freely observe how my mind and body, the client, the office and the natural world are suspended in a vast web of interconnectedness that extends to eternity. This is clarity. It is simple direct perception and it happens frequently during a session and everyday life if the practitioner can calm her mind and rest evenly in the neutral into the heart and/or out to the horizon. And sometimes I move my hands to an inert body location which I recognize quickly and move on without self-reflection on being wrong. The Tide does not make mistakes when it moves my hands.

The hormone oxytocin promotes processes of multisensory integration, the so called 'glue of the senses' – the way the world typically presents itself to us as a coherent picture, rather than as multiple distinct streams of sense data. Multisensory integration, in turn, is at the root of our sense of body ownership, the feeling that most take for granted, that our body is ours. Being still and practicing mindfully promotes our senses being glued together. The brain is like a flight simulator that pilots must practice in to maintain their license to fly. The brain is making a simulation from all the sensory input. It is attempting to average all the senses together which requires good sleep, stillness practice and mental calm. It also requires well bounded physical touch from loved ones and professional manual therapists. It has been well known for years that safe manual therapy releases oxytocin in clients.

I breathe in and then I breathe out and rest momentarily in the pause between exhalation and inhalation. There is a *gap* right at the end of exhalation and it is connected to the gap in between thoughts. This is the gap where I place my attention for a second before the force and potency of inhalation moves under the control of PR. From that place of letting go of mind and body, if even for a second with each breath, I drop into a void of non-thought and non-self. The void is the center (fulcrum) of stillness in the back of the heart extending out to the edge of the universe. The void is the place of *renewal* in biodynamic practice. The client may appear to be asleep but may actually be accessing their original state of embryonic wholeness. For the practitioner, the result is clarity of perception if only momentarily. For the client, accessing their original state of wholeness is at the very least refreshing and at most transformative. Undoubtedly, this is why Dr. Sutherland said that reverence must be a part of every session. Renewal is not about feeling refreshed at the end of a session. Rather renewal is the sense of having been suspended in a non-fearful black void and completely rebuilt from stem to stern in my body. It is a breeze of delight freely given by the Tide. It is what makes biodynamic practice so precious to me.

Finally, renewal is the present moment of eternity. Eternity is in the present moment of stillness. The present moment is the supreme spiritual teacher as is said. The neutral slows down the mental process of jumping all over the place in my body and out of my body until inside and outside melt together. Wholeness is the smallest subdivision of life. I invite the possibility of renewal into my life and that of the client without any expectation or attachment to outcome.

### **Conclusion - Altruism**

I wait for stillness to move into the foreground of my inner bodily and mental life once PR fades to the background. This is a constant rhythmic balanced interchange of the Tide moving back and forth. There is a settling, as I deepen into a clear witness. This is very personal, unique to the moment and direct. Stillness begets stillness, the effort of being patient with open awareness, and mindfulness. Mindfulness is both the act and the experience of returning and resting in the present moment from wandering thoughtlessly and recreationally. Mindfulness requires effort. I do this practice with the intention to be of service to myself and all others. This is altruism and moral engagement in these times of moral distress. By doing so I develop compassion, the basis of which is non-attachment to an outcome for self and other. Yet compassion at the same time, involves my total being. I am totally present, lucidly still in body, mind and heart for myself and the client. I recognize thoughts but am not swept away by them.

The union of stillness with PR is the core perception in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy. This is nothing other than the Tide that our teachers have pointed to. I am on the scent of the sacred with these four foundations of stillness. They are the harmonies of health and healing. The focus is on watching the arising process of body sensations and mental thoughts, seeing through them clearly and letting them go as a kind of sacrifice or purification of our intention to help others and be of service to humanity. The neutral of the present moment is entered like the mystery it is. You cannot solve a mystery, but you can enter it This is what ignites the healing process. The heart naturally becomes centered in its inherent kindness and awakens the subtle emotions of compassion and love. The Tide of PR and stillness is not given in a session of biodynamic work like turning on a light switch. PR and its healing priorities are gradually uncovered by the quality of the practitioner's stillness.

I am carefully observing my own internal experience like a Swiss watchmaker. I witness my senses including my mind sense as a constantly changing process (automatic shifting) and

impermanent process. This creates a heart centered harmony between the client and me. The right hemispheres of our brains become synchronized with one another. We share a common umbilical cord. The client's inherent treatment plan is invoked by the skills in the four foundations of stillness, by respect and reverence, by prayer and a contemplative attitude. This sets the stage for the delicious Tide to manifest its unerring potency and for change to take place outside of my control. It is the movement of Health that has no beginning and no end. It is the movement of wholeness that is in direct proportion to stillness. Thus, stillness and PR are merged and in harmony all the time because the "Health is never lost."

### **Stillness Meditation**

1. Sit up straight on the forward half of your chair or on a meditation cushion. Allow some curvature in your lumbar spine and a little lift in the sternum and shoulder girdle. This is the posture of stillness.
2. Relax your legs or cross the legs comfortably. Your knees must be below the plane of your hips for the pelvic and respiratory diaphragms to synchronize.
3. Find the balance in your pelvis on the chair from left to right and front to back.
4. Place your hands palms down on the legs.
5. Eyes are open resting on the floor six feet in front of you. Avoid mentally naming objects in your visual field.
6. The jaw is relaxed with the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth just slightly in back of the front teeth.
7. Move your ears back slightly to soften the upper neck and align the ears with the shoulders.
8. Bring 75% of your awareness to your exhale and 25% to your inhale through your nose or mouth. Take a few minutes to settle into this level of attention on the exhale of diaphragmatic breathing. It is not a breathing "technique" rather it is a slight shift in focus. Just witness the exhalation. I often will count twenty-one exhalations to settle into this awareness.
9. If you experience any distracting thoughts, feelings, emotions, or anything that pulls you from the awareness of the exhale, say to yourself: "thinking" and come back to your exhale.
10. *Not too tight, not too loose* means do not hold your body or your mind rigidly nor should you give in to being mentally lazy or daydreaming. When you notice yourself becoming over focused or efforting, slumping or closing your eyes a lot, start over at the beginning with your body alignment, etc. Let the thoughts in your mind drain out of you as you exhale. Continually resettle back into your own body posture and breathing.
11. *Touch and go* means to experience the flavor of your thoughts, then mentally say *thinking*, and then let go of them resting your attention on your exhale. No particular thought is better than another, whether it's spiritual one or a mean one.
12. Occasionally scan your body—starting at your feet, then pelvis, then trunk, arms, head and neck, jaw and respiratory diaphragm. Use micromovement to make adjustments in your body alignment.
13. As you settle into the exhalation begin to notice a slight pause at the end of your exhalation just before you inhale. You do not have to think about the inhalation. Do not hold your breath. Your body will inhale naturally for you. The point is to continually rest your attention in the pause or stillpoint at the end of the exhalation without holding your breath. All of your attention and awareness comes down into that slight pause.

14. As you draw attention to the end point of your exhale, imagine that your body is dissolving out into space three dimensionally, that all the molecules and atoms that make up your body are gracefully floating apart and away from your body as you exhale. Then on the inhale just notice the solidness of your body as the lungs fill with air.

This is the practice I do at the beginning of each cranial session and during a session. I have found that with some clients who hold a lot of shock and trauma that I will do this practice for much of the session. Even when I feel movement in the client's body, I move my attention away from it into the stillness inside or outside my body and the therapeutic container. Eventually your attention will rest in your heartbeat as you contemplate the pain and suffering of the client. PR will reveal itself, but you have to be patient. In the meantime, this meditation when applied to the client is the deepest stillness practice I know. This is how you begin to bear witness to the client in their totality and engage in compassionate action. The four foundations of stillness ignite the therapeutic container and hold the therapeutic relationship with loving kindness.

### **References**

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