

## Reverence – A Biodynamic Commentary

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“Get as far away from your physical touch as possible.” “Deep touch (impulse sensing) will lead you to the primary site.” An “otherness” appears here, his instinctual senses bloom. His reverence for a self-correcting system emerges. Reverence becomes an aspect of treatment as the Stillpoints begin to appear. He blames the whole idea, even the initial thought in 1898, on God.

- Commentary by Jim Jealous on Dr. Sutherland’s shift into biodynamics in 1948

“What I am about to say is not a religious talk, although it may appear to be.”

- Dr. Sutherland’s opening line in his final lecture, Seminar in Cranial Osteopathy, Des Moines, Iowa. April 25, 1948

### Introduction

Biodynamic practice is the study of perception and of our fluid interconnection with the natural world. It is plain and simple from our teachers and their teachers in this splendid lineage of natural bodily Health. Now, in this re-ordering of our world that is happening inside and out, it is important to name a *third* aspect of biodynamic practice. And we should make it the first and most important part of our practice: *reverence*. Biodynamics is the study and practice of complete reverence for stillness, neutral and compassionate action.

Compassion is feeling *our own* pain and suffering from mandated social distancing to the deeper states of mind that keep us locked in compulsive behaviors, emotions and unwholesome thinking. This is based on the natural fear of change process that is so deep and that we cannot control because we do not know the future. Throughout this plague time (and I am using this term metaphorically and not politically) we are navigating, impermanence is constantly in our face and mind whether it is the death of someone we know or our own reactions to social isolation and its polarizing effect on our family, friends and community. If we can recognize this awkward and painful backward step within ourselves, we can then feel what everyone else on the planet earth is feeling inside their body and mind. This is the heart of compassion and it is deeply humbling.

### The Stillpoint

So, the priority is to have reverence for the plague, the pandemic of illness in all its myriad forms, the fear, the impermanence. The plague is the teacher and we as clients are receiving a deep biodynamic treatment. Reverence further implies devotion to a spiritual practice. Dr. Sutherland was fond of saying that his cranial concept could be considered religious in nature and certainly the founder of Osteopathy A. T. Still was a deeply spiritual human being and perhaps even mystical. Reverence is the spiritual practice of discovering the stillpoint in our heart or if that is unavailable, the stillpoint in nature. We must form a personal relationship(s) with the natural environment around us until our thoughts about the past and future settle. Devotion is self-compassion for the roadblocks we all have with our mind and body in order to reach the heart of stillness in its vastness and its potency.

Our times present us now with a perfect teacher to step back and settle just as we do in a biodynamic session for another person. Why not give our self a biodynamic session? We can treat our own self as we treat our clients. We open to our heart of self-compassion in this time of “to socially distance or not socially distance” (that is the question), “to wear a mask or not wear a mask” (that is another question not unlike the first). We contemplate the daily death counts (“to be or not to be”). Reverence and devotion mean taking refuge in our heart at 70 beats per minute and lower the beats per minute when encountering a roadblock in our mind. Likewise, with nature we can take refuge in the oak tree in our back yard, the rain, or the clouds that make us pause and not think if only momentarily.

In Zen, the instruction is to *bring the mind into the Hara*. We must drop our breath down deep into our belly of not knowing. Not knowing involves not thinking, the improvisational dance between our thoughts and their cessation. Not knowing is simply a state of stillness, a stillpoint after we remove the fear. Then we can experience the healing sadness that links all human beings. It is vitally important to feel sad and

feel the warmth and tenderness that this sadness brings to our cardiovascular system and body-mind in general. It softens the mind and creates humility from the not knowing rather than chaos of anger, polarization and tribalism. This sadness is free from depression and fear.

When the state of dynamic stillness is perceived, it is because there is a gap in between our thoughts. This gap is the space of not thinking. It is both a space from an elemental point of view in Eastern cosmology and a loss of cognition and knowing at an intellectual level. That is why the dynamic stillness is so important and so valuable in the healing process because we actually experience a suspension of ordinary thinking and knowing. It may last several seconds or several minutes depending on one's aptitude and comfort with such states. Imagine how joyful it could be without so much thinking about so many emotions.

### **The Neutral**

"The therapeutic process does not begin until the will of the patient yields to the will of Primary Respiration." Rollin Becker DO.

I would add this statement as a corollary to Dr. Becker's: The therapeutic process does not ignite until the therapist becomes non-attached to the dynamic stillness and Primary Respiration.

Through this quality of bearing witness without mentally fantasizing a fixed end point or even the next moment of the treatment, the dynamic stillness and Primary Respiration are liberated from our mental focus and helping intentions yet maintaining recognition of its therapeutic potency. This freedom ignites the self-existing and self-directing Health in the client which is synchronized with our non-attachment to outcome.

Yet, the therapist is totally and completely present and aware in the state of stillness and bearing witness. The combination of one's presence, mental discipline and synchronization with the present moment is the ground of the practice. When combined with the attitude of non-attachment, the heart ignites. Then the skillful engagement of participating in the wave of Health moving through the therapist and the client becomes unimpeded by structure and function.

The therapist naturally becomes aware of their self-neutral. It is perceived through non-attachment to Primary Respiration in one's self and other. The recognition of the state of dynamic stillness and its implications in the therapeutic process co-emerges with the perception of Primary Respiration and its therapeutic potency. The implication of the dynamic stillness is the potency that builds by maintaining awareness of the stillness inherent in the state of not-knowing. This is a recognition of something benevolent (what Sutherland called the Breath of Life) that moves through everything unobstructed including the therapeutic dyad. Thus, the neutral is a state of bearing witness to the self-directing potency of Primary Respiration in both the client and therapist.

Bearing witness is characterized by a choiceless awareness. Even if thoughts arise there is a distance between the perceiver and the thought that does not solidify the thoughts and ramp them up into a storyline but allows them to simply dissipate as they naturally do anyway. So, there is no need to choose between one thought or another, a good thought or a bad thought, a therapeutic thought or a selfish thought. Such awareness is panoramic in that there is a felt sense of all phenomena being interconnected and suspended evenly out to the horizon without one object being more important than another. In such a panoramic choiceless awareness the subject, the *perceiver*, is already merged or melted together with the *perceived* object. This type of a neutral, associated with bearing witness (*perceiving*) can be cultivated by simply waiting and relaxing rather than reacting and responding to thoughts, impulses and motions. Our thinking, seeing, perceiving hands and mind when in contact with the client are also bearing witness. Dr. Jealous exhorts us to "wait, watch and wonder."

Two years ago, I spoke at a biodynamic craniosacral therapy conference in Spain. I was asked what I thought was the most important part of biodynamic practice. I answered that the practitioner should periodically simply bow their head when they have their hands on the client. It is the gesture of reverence and humility. It is a gesture of recognizing our mutual sanity, wisdom and generosity intrinsic to each human being. In this gesture of bowing there is a recognition of that sameness with the client. What better way to make a client feel safe than to bow in reverence of their own Health and well-being that is

inside of them already operating under the metaphors that we use of Primary Respiration and dynamic stillness. This *bow of reverence* is a prayer in which we offer our own helplessness and state of not knowing as a gift of generosity. Such a generous truth will set us free emotionally and perceptually. This is called *bearing witness*. It is the biodynamic neutral where the forces of disorder come to a balance point are free to be moved by the Health of Primary Respiration. It is a state of openness without attachment for any particular outcome.

When we bear witness to our own pain and suffering with reverence and devotion, a powerful neutral emerges from which the whole world can be held in the palms of our hands. The perceiver, the perceiving and the perceived become a single state of open awareness. It can greatly decrease the amount of wasted time, energy and technique to try to fix ourselves and others. It is an invitation to wholeness. It gives more potency to the spiritual aspects of Primary Respiration and dynamic stillness such as the felt sense of love and grace. There is complete freedom to transform what needs to be transformed in one's body and mind without a fixed diagnosis and prognosis but rather synchronizing with the ever present force of becoming something new rather than retrieving something old. This is the gesture of reverence and humility that radiates an aura of a compassionate neutral. The neutral is about non-attachment to the forces of Health and their unique self-direction that we as biodynamic practitioners are blessed to observe. Bearing witness is a profound act of self-compassion without which there can be no compassion for others. It is simply a neutral bow of the head held until the Health lifts us up.

Since many of us may not be currently treating clients, when we read the latest piece of bad plague news, we can simply bow our head in the space of not knowing (stillness) and bearing witness (neutral). This act deeply engages the potency of the Health intrinsic within Primary Respiration and dynamic stillness. We must understand the dynamic stillness is a metaphor for not knowing and bearing witness is a metaphor for a neutral. Dr. Sutherland said "Trust the Tide." Now we must cultivate reverence for the dynamic stillness in its deeper transformational state, the simplicity of not knowing while being totally present for ourselves and others with non-attachment as we bear witness.

### **Heart Ignition**

"The underlying intention is that the action that arises be a caring action, which serves everyone and everything, including yourself, in the whole situation." -Wendy Egyoku Nakao Roshi

Devotion to the stillpoint and the neutral ignites the heart of compassion. It gives us freedom from the compulsive thinking of trying to accomplish something more or better. They ignite the heart from which we can engage the therapeutic process in ourselves and others with self-compassion first. This is heart ignition. We have reverence for our struggles to accomplish less, to have less compulsive thinking, to have less conceptualizing and less polarizing emotions that are unwholesome. To revere this state while not rejecting its opposite, is to feel our heartbeat and feel our breath deep down into our belly.

Keep it simple by periodically bowing your head in reverence for the totality of life as it exists inside and outside our body. Gaze at the sky in wonder. Bear witness with your literal heart. That is the center. The movement we sense in the heart is the front of the heart, the stillness is the back of the heart. The mind in the Hara is the pillow upon which the heart rests normally. This is the right placement of our attention. Do not move until the Health of the client requests your attention. This is knowing the potency of heart ignition. It is the activity of compassionate action in which our hands and mind are moved by a force more powerful than us, the "other pair of hands."

What a gift we have been given by the masters whose shoulders we all stand upon! I have profound reverence for all my teachers, the Osteopaths, the healers, my mother and father, the shamans who initiated me and all those trying to help me including the cashier in the grocery store. Everyone I meet on the road is now my teacher. It cannot be otherwise in these holy times. Andrew Taylor Still, the founder of Osteopathy said: "I love my fellow man, because I see God in his face and in his form."

The Buddha said, "Be a light unto yourself." Sutherland called that light the Breath of Life. That light is in your heart and it will attract and draw forth your kindness in treating yourself with self-compassion and then extending that skillfully towards your clients. It is a simple radiance. Bow in reverence to turn on that light. Then radiate in all directions. Reverence is the switch of heart ignition. It releases the bright light of the Breath of Life, the very breath of compassionate action for self and others.

“Training with [these three tenets] is a matter of taking a backward step again and again and continually discerning your internal processes in the midst of acknowledging what is happening around you.” - Wendy Egyoku Nakao Roshi