

Embodiment, Trauma, and Spirituality: A Path Requiring Heart
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Good Morning...It is a pleasure to be here among so many friends. To be able to look out and see so many faces that I recognize and enjoy looking at makes it much easier to talk about the topic I would like to discuss this morning.

The English novelist, E. M. Forester, author of "A Passage to India", once made a comment that summarizes what I would like to share in this talk. He said in a moment of clarity, "**Connection is Everything**" and this morning I would like to share some of the ways I believe this to be true in Bioenergetic work, in the healing of trauma, and in our own personal and spiritual growth.

Specifically, I would like to do three things:

- (1) Make more explicit what the healing of emotional wounds looks like when it is conducted in the field of heart energy - the field in which "connection is everything";
- (2) Discuss the role of the heart in the healing process and the ways in which the energetic field of the heart interacts with the brain and deepens many of the Bioenergetic processes we work with in our therapy; and,
- (3) Talk about some of the primary characteristics of the process of connection and why it is such an important part of healing and spiritual growth....

My own personal work on the heart began about 14 years ago at my first meeting with a person that became a spiritual teacher for me. In a class with this individual, I received a personal reading - one in which I was telling him what I did - that I was a psychotherapist, that I worked with the body, and that I was interested in the energy systems of the body. In response to that, he said "that's very interesting... you must be doing that for your own healing, since, as a soul, you are not very close to your body, and your heart is only the size of a walnut". This stunned me, of course, and produced no small amount of shame, since, after all, I was a therapist helping people daily, and I had been a real Bioenergetic trainer for almost 5 years! Besides being somewhat shocked at such feedback, I was also very interested in continuing my association with this teacher. I had never received such direct feedback about myself, and could feel, with some chagrin, the truth of his words. This interaction began for me a long mentorship into what has become for me a learning about connection and embodiment. I certainly have not fully come into my body even yet, but my heart is now somewhat larger than a walnut and without so hard a shell to crack. So my own personal passion has been to establish a loving connection to the world and come out of my own lonely disconnected states in order to do that....So I come to the universe of the heart as a beginner, but I have been most satisfied with what I have experienced so far.

The field of energy that we identify as connected, heartfelt, loving, compassionate, kind, forgiving, and so on, is a powerful field, and has a host of healing properties. What I mean by the word **healing** in this discussion is any intervention or interaction with another person that helps one or both individuals move toward more wholeness and self-realization. In bioenergetic work, healing often means helping the client to move from characterological positions to more connection to the world.

We can see the important qualities of the heart field in bioenergetic work by looking at the specific centers or functions around which much of bioenergetic work is organized and looking at how those functions are expanded as the heart becomes involved. Look, for a moment, at the screen and the transparency. These are the centers or **Bioenergetic** functions I am referring to....

Bioenergetic Centers

Grounding - the EARTH Connection
(associated with the lower body)

Centering - the SELF connection
(associated with the HARA, in the belly)

Sexuality and creativity - the GENERATIVITY connection
(associated with a center below the navel, also in the belly)

Physicality - the ALIVENESS connection
(associated with the area of the solar plexus and the diaphragm)

Relationality - connection to OTHERS - **The Heart Field**

Expressivity - making your SOUND in the world
(associated with the throat)

Knowingness - the MINDFULNESS connection
(associated with the third eye and the pineal gland)

Spirituality - the GOD connection
(associated with the top of the head)

It is possible to view these as developmental functions that exist in each person at varying levels of maturity; as the components of what it is to be a whole person; and as actual energetic centers in the body - similar to the energy structures known as chakras.

Now, all of these centers are involved in the therapeutic process - not always with a spiritual focus, but in those ordinary ways that people come to develop their whole selves - to reclaim a sense of their body and its aliveness; to discover different parts of themselves that have to be integrated; to bring out their sexuality and creativity that might have been repressed; to develop more expanded ways of expressing who they are in the world; to have more insight into their condition and consciousness about themselves; and, to feel themselves as a part of something larger and far more more alive than they previously had experienced.

None of these functions can develop very far beyond the most narcissistic and narrow experiences without the heart being involved - without having connections with the outside world to foster, heal and expand the movements. Each of these functions can be thought of as developing along a continuum of emotional maturity. For example, in the beginning, grounding is often limited to the experience of consciously feeling the feet, legs, and lower body and being able to use those organs in expressing certain feelings and movements. This is the beginning of grounding - feeling only ones own body and the sensations within. As grounding matures and deepens, the larger grounding function is to acknowledge our connection to the earth and to nature - to recognize that our bodies are a part of nature and operate according to those laws and connections. Nature is a "we" just as our bodies are, and we cannot be well grounded without loving the earth and making some part of it a part of us. When this larger function is taken away or lost, just as has happened with many indigenous peoples, the heart is forever and permanently damaged and the self is much less than it was previously. As grounding develops even further, these centers become the origin of the kundalini process and they are the first centers to learn to handle this additional energetic charge.

The same is true for the centering process - parts of the self just do not emerge, get free of shame, and come out without caring attention in the form of acceptance and compassion for who we are - especially those parts formed in wounding. For example, if I am trying to claim my vulnerability or my needs for others, those aspects have to be greeted with some affirmation from someone to emerge correctly and in a form appropriate to the people in my life. Each part of me has to have some connection to the outside world - even if it means just acknowledging it to someone else. Usually, the first levels of centering are indeed self-centered - we feel the different parts of ourselves, celebrate the diversity of ourselves, and the focus is mostly inward. As centering matures, these various parts have to give up their self-centeredness and begin to relate to the needs of others. Yes, my needs are important, but not all important and not more important than yours. Eventually, all the parts must connect to the world in order to mature and become fully integrated, even the dark parts. It is sometimes too much to ask that our darker parts be **loved** by others, but when they can at least be greeted with acceptance from others and ourselves, it can greatly assist in their integration.

As we see all the time in our work, sexuality without love and the heart becomes possessive, narcissistic, and addictive. Creations can be done from many different parts of the self - I can create from my head, my loins, or my hands, but creations done without heart have difficulty sustaining themselves without taking energy from people, and usually do not bring much as much life to others as creations from the heart.

Even movements toward more physical aliveness must be established in a connective field or they can wither. Being alive requires more than just breathing deeply and being able to charge the body. Those are the beginnings. Aliveness in the body is maintained through our connection to nature and nurturing relationships. Recovery from illness requires more connections with caring others and real self-care or the body cannot sustain the new energetic levels from lack of nourishment. Receiving nourishment itself is a basic form of connection that each body needs in order to grow and create.

The same story holds for all the functions of the Bioenergetic healing process - each in its way depends on a heart centered connection process to grow and develop. Each process is affected and limited when the heart is broken, withdrawn, or undeveloped. Nothing matures in a vacuum, and most of us have seen and experienced the powerful effects of any kind of isolation on our own growth and the healing of our clients. Finally, and especially, spirituality needs the heart to be fluid and alive. Nothing is more harmful than doctrines or spiritual truths that are stagnant, when principles become more important than people, or when spiritual insights cannot change with new information and experience.

The field of the heart seems to hold these other centers in a stable way and gives them fluidity - the heart is the structure that allows change to be a part of these functions and keeps them in present time.

As you can see, these processes are not particularly related to specific characters, but related to all character structures. As we know from our studies of early development, the development and primacy of the heart field coincides with the time of the development of character - the first 7 years of life. So the dissolution of character requires reestablishing the rule of the heart, and occurs as new connections are established in the world of the client that do not require the use of defensive modes. This is the part of the self named by Daniel Stern as the "Self with Other", and the development of this part of the self occurs all throughout our lives. As therapy continually teaches us, the healing that occurs in the lives of our clients comes because they begin to connect to and nurture what is emerging in themselves. So the focus on character structure gives us the opportunity to look at what needs to be released in the client, but when we turn our attention on the healing process we begin to focus on reinstating heart function, heart intelligence, and heart connection.

The heart and its energetic field appear to have a number of characteristics that give it an important role in the healing process..

One of the qualities that describes the heart field is that it establishes a **field of transformation** - that is because it is the center that establishes and holds connection both within and without the body - it is greatly involved in personal change of any kind - and thus, the strength of the heart, both in the caregiver and the client establishes the field of healing in psychotherapy.

In Chinese Medicine, the heart and its energy meridian hold a special place. The way in which this organ operates physiologically is related to why it is the center of knowing for the bodymind. It is known as the "master controller", and it only runs well if and when all is well among all the other organ systems. The energetic pulse of the heart, as felt in the wrist or the neck will reflect imbalance anywhere in the system

Another one of the physical attributes of the heart is the relative strength of the heart field in comparison with the amplitude of brain waves. The heart field in the normal adult can range from 1000 to 5000 times as strong as the EEG field emitted by the brain. Systems research in cardiology has shown that in a dyadic interaction between two people, the heart beat of one shows up in the EEG of the other. In other words, my

heart can be found in your brain (and your heart), and your heart is in my brain. These physiological interactions reflect the importance of the heart field in our responses to each other. Enormous amounts of information are communicated between bodyminds through this field and one can surmise that all kinds of contracts are made between each of us and our clients based on this subtle but powerful field, that go beyond words and even gestures.

Besides being a field of transformation, the heart field is also a **field of information** and the kind of information contained in this field far exceeds what most of us can verbally articulate. As Bob Lewis was describing yesterday, we have a statement in Bioenergetic work that says "the body doesn't lie", referring to the condition that what we have to SAY about ourselves is only a minuscule part of the information coming off the heart field and the state of the body. The language areas of the brain can encode only a partial reality. Even more, when an individual's words are not very connected to the present, what the body is communicating is a larger and more complete story.

Other cardiology research has shown that the information conveyed in the field of the heart can create strong effects in living systems and the bodies of our clients - specifically, information passed from one person to another about loving and being loved has been shown to promote healing in many different areas of medicine and psychotherapy:

The next overhead transparency illustrates the specific movements and expressions of the heart that seem to strengthen the energetic field the most and bring healing and change to the person and to those around him or her. Each of these expressions has a slightly different frequency, is a slightly different movement, and has a slightly different role in the change process, but all contribute to the overall rhythm and pulsation of the heart field. These movements have been known for centuries and have always been recognized by spiritual schools as the basic components of healthy heart functioning and the building blocks of all further human development. Buddhism has practices that build these movements, as did the Christian Essenes, Sufism, and all spiritual schools that build on these traditions. These movements are....

- Compassion (Acknowledging that pain & sorrow exist)
- Caring
- Loving-kindness
- Sympathetic Joy (Delight in the happiness of another)
- Forgiveness
- Equanimity (Learning to let go of control in life)
- Generosity

As you know there are many other blends of these basic states and many other expressions of human connection that are related to the movement of the heart. Courage comes to mind, gratitude, wholeness, and the many forms of loving and being connected to other people.. The word Passion is often used to describe the entire class of heart expressions including all the emotions, just as the languages of the heart and the ways these states have been powerfully expressed have been through the emotions, rhythm and movement, and poetry.

These particular movements seen on the overhead comprise the "higher frequency" vibrations that occur in the heart wave, as contrasted with the group of other emotional expressions like anger, fear, shame, jealousy, and so on. All of these expressions belong to the heart, but these higher vibratory waves have a different wave form and have a different effect on the body and other people.

There are large and significant changes in the physiology of your body that occur during the practice of expressing these energies - the heart quiets itself from a chaotic pattern - that is, the heart beat becomes a more coherent and orderly waveform - the heart rate variability increases, amplitude increases, and the electromagnetic field around the person expands.

There are **increases in immune responses** that occur when caring is expressed, practiced, or even received....the levels of the IgA antibody (immunoglobulin A) one of the early lines of defense against illness and infection, rise dramatically when the emotions of care and compassion are felt and fall drastically after bouts of anger and frustration.

These patterns of heart waves underlie the physiology of recovery from illness; expanded thoughts about the self; and deeper connections with others.

There are other effects as well on the brain...

In the next overhead transparency you can see a picture of the physiological changes that occur when the heart can move into these positive caring states. The heart field stabilizes and the stress indicators seen in the heart (heart rate variability, respiration, and pulse transit time) change considerably when positive loving thoughts are practiced - especially compassion. This thought and feeling pattern results in increased **coherence** in the heart wave - and has several important effects - it increases and deepens the connection between the heart and other physiological systems - especially the brain. As you can see in the graph, the different systems begin to **entrain** to each other. These patterns of heart coherence are able to phase-lock with the left and right hemispheres and create synchrony between the left and right sides of the brain in the EEG - a state characteristic of more efficient mental functioning, more expanded states of awareness, and is the same state seen after a healing integration has occurred (when an individual has processed something like traumatic material and brought it into present time)

Very briefly, I can show you a tool...a process that has been developed by the HeartMath Institute of California to use with clients to help them center themselves in their heart more and reduce their bodily levels of stress...Its called **the freeze frame technique** - If you would like to participate, just do the exercise along with me...If not, just listen to the process as I describe it. It's very simple and very short, and is one of the introductory processes used to help individuals get in contact with their heart and its intelligence.

First, if you are presently experiencing any stress or if you can bring up the stressful feeling by accessing a problem you are facing,, attune to that in your body. Feel it,

attune to it, note the thoughts or memories that accompany it. FREEZE IT....that is just take time and notice it.

Once you have that awareness, make an effort to shift your attention away from the thought, worries, or disturbing emotions and bring your focus to the area around your heart. Pretend you are breathing through your heart to focus your energy there. Do this for at least 10-20 seconds if you can.

Now, with your attention on your heart, recall a positive feeling you have had in your life. Either something that was fun for you, a feeling of gratitude or appreciation for someone, or a feeling of love for someone close to you. Notice what happens in your heart when you do.

(This part of the process teaches people to **neutralize** the negativity)

Now using your intuition, common sense, and sincerity, ask your heart...what would be a more efficient or better response to the situation you were in...some solution that would minimize future stress...

And finally, listen to what your heart says in response to this question.

(This part of the instruction asks people to learn to listen to their heart as contrasted with their head - it helps people make a distinction between the messages of the brain and the imperatives of the heart)

The Freeze Frame process is a learning process - one which people are encouraged to practice over time to shift the center of their attention from negative states into positive states and to learn to listen to their inner heart wisdom.

This tool has three important components of a number of processes utilized in the healing of trauma. It teaches people how to interrupt the stress states, develop mindfulness about what is occurring in their body, and utilizes bringing in another energy pattern to alter a repetitive stress pattern. These are processes used in all trauma work to reprocess old intrusive material.

There is one other fascinating aspect of this heart wave work that touches on the Bioenergetic process of grounding. When you explore the wave entrainment process between heart and brain and also measure the average basic frequencies coming from the earth, researchers at the HeartMath Institute have discovered that there is a three fold entrainment process that occurs when an individual is being honest with his or her feelings and in a state of compassion and caring. The brain is being entrained by the heart, and the heart is being entrained by the earth pulses. This appears to be a deeper level of the grounding process that can be measured electromagnetically in the body.

Another area of research shows **the singular importance of affiliation, intimacy, and caring on longevity and health**. There is an enormous body of research demonstrating over and over again how important the variable of caring is on recovery from illness, from surgery, shortening stays in hospitals, and lengthening life. The research seems to show that these heart-centered connections have a much greater and more consistent effect than even physical exercise.

The model of the healing process that emerges in all of this work is one in which connection is paramount. **There is no healing without connection, and the basis of connection is caring.** Healing of all kinds requires conscious attention to the wound structure and the way in which it exists in you....attunement, focus, feeling, mindfulness, acceptance, compassion, forgiveness.....are, in their essence, all only forms of connection and provide an opportunity to bring something new into the old structures of the wound. That something new is another energy, another realization, another connection - **but it has to be alive, be in present time, and exist in a field of caring.**

Therapeutically speaking, it means that the center of our work - especially if it is with the body - is always about our connection to our clients. A person and their body not connected to in caring cannot come alive. The most difficult part of the healing process is to be able to follow our clients into the depths of their woundedness and provide caring connections to what emerges.

In spiritual development the same principle applies. The most basic levels of spiritual work involve becoming conscious of not only the different parts of the ego, but of higher and more subtle parts of the self, including the deeper and more subtle flows of energies in the body that allow connection to spiritual reality. At its heart, this is a connective process, and involves connecting to a community of people that are growing with you, to teachers that can support and guide the experience, to nature, and to ones own body and emotions. The evolution of our personal consciousness is totally based on connection - it cannot grow in isolation. Spiritually speaking, consciousness is a direct outcome of the ability to connect.

There are some basic **Characteristics of the Connection Process** that help us know when it is occurring and when it is stopped. As I believe, and said before, a connection is basically the movement of energy, and so whenever energy is felt and seen to be moving there is the possibility of making a connection.

On the overhead transparency is one of my attempts to describe the process of connection in a little more detail...

1. **We are always changed when we make a good connection to someone.** Connection is the process of transformation - it makes us more alive, more thriving, more generative. The ability to connect and the ability to make changes in the self are one in the same process.

When the heart is involved it means there is a passage through the experience of vulnerability. You have agreed that you need the outside world to touch you in order to change - that you do not exist alone in your own world, but that you need the outside to come in and you are willing to be changed by the connection. Embracing the possibility of deepening connection means that I am willing to let go of what I think I am and be changed by my connection to you.

Perhaps the people for whom this process is the most difficult are those that have been abused and touched by evil in some way. For them, the risk is greater and the memories of vulnerability filled with the most pain. Without a caring and loving connection to themselves and to their healers, the healing process does not proceed easily. Shame cannot be released without a caring connection, and only a strong

connection can hold the pain that needs to be released. Change after trauma is difficult because it is dependent on connection.

This relationship between connection and change also helps us understand why it is so difficult to learn to love - because making a loving connection implies that the heart rules and all the emotions are in the mix - not just the ones that provide good feelings, but all the emotions of pain, hurt, loss, and anger...and when I love someone I am agreeing to be changed by them....even when something inside me screams that this is impossible, or dangerous, or inconvenient.

Connection also means that I sacrifice sameness and predictability and agree to experience life as a series of rhythms. If I say I want to connect, I have to embrace formlessness - and learn to live more both in the moment and in the more subtle aspects of energy and life. Connection only works in present time - as soon as I leave present time I am no longer connected to anything. So connection has to be a constant process of participation - it is never the same, or once made, is guaranteed for longer than an moment.

The first thing we used to learn in Bioenergetic work is to understand character - the most formed, least changing, and most solid aspects of the person - predictable, isolating, and defensive. As we mature as therapists, it is the connection with the other that gradually takes the place of the characterological pattern, both in the client if they are changing, and in the way the therapist learns to work. First we examine (and hopefully help the client to experience) what is the most solid, and then we begin the healing - we make connections with what is emerging in the client and support its expression and its transformation. Exploring the nature of the connection becomes more important than the defensive structure - the emphasis shifts from what is solid to what is more formless, from what is isolating and dissociative to what is healing.

As teachers, we try to bring that maturing process that all of us have gone through over many years into the compressed 4 or 5 years of training. The issue becomes how to help the student of this form of therapy proceed from an experience of character to an experience of connection and healing.

2. The second characteristic is that **the connection field is one of equal authority.** What is meant by that is everyone is equally important and the thoughts and feelings of all parties must be considered and be a part of the mix. This is a simultaneous event - where care for self and care for the other person co-exist at the same time. It is the biggest challenge to narcissism - to include the field and the movements of the other as being as important as our own (neither **more or less** important). All character formations are the opposite of this. In depletion and contraction, I feel I am less than you (less present, less worthy, less deserving of love, etc.) and in inflation and compensation, I am better than you (more special, stronger, more clever, etc.). When we help people move beyond character positions and move toward connection we allow both of us to have needs and expressions at the same time in the same field. Each time we stop energetic movement, we stop connection, and lose authority. This is only one of the reasons why connection is difficult from a characterological position, and why all character formations represent a loss of heart.

As we all have learned, taking good care of yourself sometimes means depending on others, and needing others means also taking their needs and wants into consideration. This describes a field of equal authority.

It seems to be somewhat of an art form to be able to stay connected to someone and still take care of ones own needs. As therapists, and perhaps, partners to someone, we struggle with this all the time. The emotional heart is the organ and function in the body that allows this capacity to grow.

3, The third quality of connection is that **it is not possible to connect to a lie**. There are two important meanings to this characteristic of connection. The first is that connections are based on honesty. Deceptions, whether intentional, cruel, protective, conscious or unconscious, are strategies to avoid connection. They are meant to detract from revealing the self and its movements and to withdraw or hide information from the field of the heart. So it follows that the more honest we become, the more ability we have to connect to the world. Of course, if feelings are expressed in the field of the heart, the other person.s ability to hear the honest expression will be considered, and the connection will be deepened because of that consideration. As therapists, we know how easy it is to be fooled - anyone who wishes to lie to themselves and to us can do so and stop change rather effectively. So we are helpless in the face of a lie and have to live with that reality until it is brought into awareness.

Another form of a lie is to be out of present time. It can be a lie to be stuck in a characterological position. This lie is from the reference point of what the entire self is capable of, not what the person might be feeling at the moment. Anyone can "forget" that they are more than their character structure, and we can live (and act) out of that character place forever unless someone comes to us, knocks loudly, and says hello. Lies in this sense are common. For example, to believe you are unworthy of love; to keep the heart closed because vulnerability is too dangerous, or to not express oneself because the world will not accept you, might all be lies. They are often beliefs and expressions of the inner child, formed early in life, and not at all true in the adult in present time. Many of these states, when we are in them, certainly **feel** very true, but unless they are identified as old truths, no longer viable, and needing to be challenged, they cannot change. In effect, states of victimization, positions of blame and guilt, strategies of control and possession, attempts to merge in relationships, all represent the **inability to connect** - mostly old patterns from a wounded childhood, or defenses meant to avoid connection. They once might have been true, but in present time are no longer adequate solutions to relationship building.

This is why it is so effortful to try to connect to someone from a character position or who is in a characterological position. The attitude itself is not in present time and does not allow connection. If your attempts are not directly attacked, they will be pushed away as a threat, or the energy lost.

Energy loss in the body is often a direct result of not being in present time and thus not able to connect to the world.

This does not mean you do not regard the person who is engaging these positions with caring and compassion - it does mean we must know something of what happens to the energy of the connection and work with it consciously.

We cannot connect to a lie because the nature of connection is energetic movement. When our energy stops moving, we have broken connection and are living out of some lie. To stay connected to life is easy to say, but very hard to do.

4. The final characteristic of connection is that **Connection is a function of identity**. What this means is that the more the self is present, the more awareness there is about

the self, the more opportunity there is for us to be able to choose to connect. Often, in the healing process, it is the therapist at first that is inviting, reaching in, or even, demanding, connection - trying to find the movements of the individual that are the most authentic and have the most depth. The therapeutic alliance and the success of psychotherapy depends on this kind of connection. This field of connection determines how fast change can occur, how deep we can go with the individual, and the degree to which the body gives up its rigid patterns.

There is always a tension between individuality and connection. In the culture at large, at least in the US, there is a strong belief that the strength of the self and real individuality come from doing things alone, being strong, and rejecting dependency. The paradox is that all individuality and identity emerges in the context of relationship and connection, and not in isolation, and that some form of acknowledged and conscious dependency on the life around you is the route to identity. This is certainly true of the body, whose health and aliveness is dependent on some connection to nature and to nourishing relationships. It is true of the larger self as well - spiritual development proceeds only in connectiveness, since it is through, and because of, connection that all parts of the self emerge. In the eloquent words of Paul Tillich, the theologian, "We can discover our souls only through the mirror of those who look at us".

Thank you for your time and attention this morning, and a special thanks to the translators. I wish you a wonderful conference and a good day.

I. Bioenergetic Centers

GROUNDING - the EARTH Connection

CENTERING - the SELF connection

SEXUALITY and CREATIVITY
the GENERATIVITY connection

PHYSICALITY
the ALIVENESS connection

RELATIONALITY
connection to OTHERS - The HEART Field

EXPRESSIVITY
making your SOUND in the world

KNOWINGNESS
the MINDFULNESS connection

SPIRITUALITY - the GOD connection

II. The Heart Field

Compassion

Caring

Loving-Kindness

Sympathetic Joy

Forgiveness

Equanimity

Generosity

IV. The Characteristics of Connection

CONNECTION means CHANGE

**CONNECTION REQUIRES THAT
EVERYONE HAS EQUAL
AUTHORITY**

YOU CANNOT CONNECT TO A LIE

CONNECTION REQUIRES IDENTITY