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Feeling Connected: A Way Out of Numbness

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To begin at the beginning', we hear at the start of a well-known play (Dylan Thomas 'Under Milk Wood') or as Goethe has said: 'If you don't start with the first button you can never get buttoned up'. Where is the beginning? Where is that first button? As we search for clues to help us along in life we stumble more than we walk, we fall more often by the dominance of our own ego than stand in the security of belonging.

Healing is a mysterious process, both in people and animals. My training to become a physiotherapist many years ago consisted of following a prescribed route, which had the cause-and-effect theory as its basis. This worked surprisingly well in most cases I saw, but the failures engaged my interest most insistently. There was the question 'why did this treatment fail, when it was successful in all the other cases with the same symptoms?' Individuality came up as the answer and although that had a ring of truth about it, my gut feeling was that there was something else.

At the point in my life when my body was showing signs of disease with the daily ignorance of my gut feeling on a practical level I was asked to take part in a clinical study which was looking at the effect of manual lymphatic drainage on horses. The lymphatic system is part of the circulatory system, together with arteries and veins. Manual lymphatic drainage is a physiotherapy treatment where the lymphatic fluid is mobilised manually to help sluggish flow. Witnessing the staggeringly noticeable impact this light touch modality was having on the treated animals in the most positive way, I decided to sell my flourishing physiotherapy practice

in Wales to set up afresh in Gloucestershire in order to be central to horses and went about working with them for the next ten years. I wanted to find out why they responded so much better than people, especially as I was breaking a lot of 'rules' in the cause-and-effect book. I treated them unrestrained and without them even wearing a collar so they could be as free to move and respond to my intervention as naturally as is possible in the confined space of a box.



A few years into this I was joined by a very important working partner, Beatrice, a Doberman/Alsatian cross who had been picked up roaming the city streets of Gloucester. She was four months old when she moved in with me and did not lose any time in escalating my turn-around. She followed me everywhere including the sta-

bles where I was treating other people's horses. There I noticed that the dog's behaviour and the response of the horse somehow felt connected; the horses never minded her entering their space after they had completed a greeting ritual that I learned over the years told realms of what was to unfold during the treatment. By watching the trinity of our responses I witnessed the very subtle reaction of different body systems and again over the years it became clear that those systems were only split into categories for the convenience of verbal communication among people. Not only are our bodies a whole entity, but working as a trio with Beatrice and the animal treated, then later with the herd in a field, I became aware that our responses always followed the pattern of wholeness. At a later stage still I noticed the cows, the lamas, emus or whoever was occupying the field next to my working area were joined with us in whatever was happening. The lamas in particular were very good in picking up emotional change about to happen which was extremely useful if my working group was made up of ten or more excitable horses with Beatrice and several other dogs in tow!

Apart from the large animals helping me with my discoveries of connectedness, little ones like spiders, flies and mosquitoes were joining in the teaching process. Everyone knows that during summer flies, and in particular horse flies, are never far from where horses are. As my body reacts quite violently to the bite of a horse fly I was particularly wary of them. I discovered over the years that insects like flies settle on areas of the body where there is stasis, i.e.

inactive body fluids. If one starts to activate the fluid as in my case via craniosacral therapy or manual lymphatic drainage, the fly, be it horse or otherwise, takes flight. In southern countries like Greece it is the custom to hang up bottles with water to attract the flies and the staler the water the greater is its appeal to the insects.

On a similar line lies the appeal of certain plants to the devastating appetite of slugs who are happiest on a compost heap or faecal droppings, in other words decaying matter. It took me quite a few years to come to the conclusion (having started with the theory that slugs have their place in the interconnect-edness) that slugs only attack 'unhappy' or instable plants, e.g. forced, artificially bred, wrong place, wrong soil or even a caretaker who 'ignores' the 'emotional' needs of a plant. By accident rather than design I tested my conclusion through with five tobacco plants, which were given to me in a very healthy looking state by a friend. I, of course very eager to make sure that all five did well, gave them different sunny spots. One plant was demolished within 24 hours by the very efficient slugs that frequent my garden and I later learned that tobacco plants hate the acid soil into which I had put this unfortunate specimen. The second and third lasted a week or two, both in poor soil that needed feeding. The fourth did so well that I left it to it only to find it had gone a few weeks later. The fifth and only surviving plant was positioned just outside my office window in worse soil than two and three and not ideal conditions but it grew into a very strong and fertile plant and I put it down to that it was the only one of the five which had my daily attention... On another occasion when I had planted a treasured newly purchased plant into ideal soil and spot it got demolished by a fast advancing army of slugs, left for dead as my assessment was, but



are demonstrably inter-linked. And the links are not single chains, but a great number of criss-crossed pathways.' (Adolph E F, 1982)

The animals have no problem with Adolph's statement but their owner's perception is of 'planet mechanistic' most of the time, and as my late ex-father-in-law, who was a vet, used to say: 'in a lot of cases it would be wiser, healthier and cheaper to treat the owner rather than their animal'. This reality made me concentrate on people again and, as if to confirm my move, the foot and mouth outbreak within a year of that decision all but put an end to my horse work. By that time my body had recovered tremendously and a lot of the pain I had been in before I sold my human practice in Wales had subsided. I felt ready to face and meet the human complexity in a new way.

because my grief was so strong and long that I was not able to dig the plant out for weeks after. I remember crying uncontrollably for ages and when after weeks I felt strong enough to face the dead plant it was showing signs of life, which to my lasting joy were never again touched by my friends the slugs.

My orthodox training in medicine had taught me that as long as I followed certain rules and procedures the desired effect would be achieved; the common rule being the cause and effect theory. This turned out not to be true and what I was learning while I was working with the animals and plants was the theory of chaos changing from the point of quiet centre. In *The Turning Point Capra* (1982) describes how all of the great crises of our times - terrorism, war, pollution, crime, energy, unemployment, health care - are facets of one and the same crisis, a crisis of perception. We are applying concepts of an outdated mechanistic worldview to a reality that is not understandable in those terms. 'The mature scientist knows that cause and effect are elusive because of the presence of multiple correlations. No properties are uncorrelated, all

The decade long period of working with the animals has taught me an enormous amount about fluid dynamics within the body structure (over 75% of the body mass is water), how it is affected by the environment and the important part the Spirit plays in this 'body mobility'; the 'fluidity' the animals and plants have compared to the 'stuck-ness' of humans and the structure-bound numbness that results from it. I have learned to be guided by the 'chaos' to the 'still centre' and the joy that arises out of the moment-to-moment attentiveness. This indeed is now my work within my practice of physiotherapy: to teach people how to orientate themselves in the presence of multiple correlations; unintended correlations that lead to disease, pathology, or whatever else one cares to name it. The wonderful change from my pre-animal practice is that I am no longer in 'work' mode or 'free time' mode but rather in constant 'live' or attentive mode. Those moments when I face the potential friends in

GreenSpirit, Winter 2004

the form of green, brown, black or white flies are, however, testing ones... Oh how I wish I could have a word with Goethe about that.... or Thomas for that matter...

References

Edward Frederick Adolph. Quoted in: James Oschman. *Energy Medicine in Therapeutics and Human Performance* (Butterworth Heinemann, 2003).

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