

Two Fundamental Concepts of PsychoEnergetic Body Process:

Contact and Presence

***Deepening Psychological Work through Attention
To Body and Energy Processes in the Present Moment***

By

Michael Mervosh

&

Irene Tobler

“This the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose one considers a mighty one, the becoming of a force of nature.”

- George Bernard Shaw

Introduction

One of the points of emphasis in our *PsychoEnergetics* work involves the capacity to experience an ‘energetic exchange’ between ourselves and our environment: Nature, animals, and fellow human beings. Through this type of ***contact*** with the environment, we exchange our own psychic energy with the life surrounding us. The quality of our vitality and our internal aliveness therefore also depends on cultivating a capacity for having a felt ***presence*** – a focused attention in the present moment. This is our second point of emphasis in *PsychoEnergetics*.

Emphasizing the Foundational Concept of Contact in PsychoEnergetic Work

One primary way of experiencing one’s felt sense of aliveness is by making ***contact*** with the environment - by either bringing one’s self to the environment, or bringing the environment to one’s self – to create safety, to be nurtured, to become excited, to push against, to hold on, to let go, etc.

Contact is defined by Gestalt theory as a meeting point with various kinds of others. “Every person is capable of some degree of effective and fulfilling contact with others and pursues ways of having contact with others. This allows us to survive and grow to maturity. Making contact is creative and dynamic and, as such, each experience unfolds as a creative adjustment of the self towards others in the environment.” (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1994).

Susan Aposhyan’s work, *Body-Mind Psychotherapy*, states that being in contact requires “the creative ability to allow the life of the universe to move through our bodies, be

colored by our unique perspective, and move back out into the world”. It is a process of letting life come to us, experiencing it fully in our bodies, allowing an assimilation of this experience to occur, noticing an impulse arising from within us, and moving that energetic flow back out of our bodies, and into the environment.

Making contact with life requires a process of connecting with one’s deeper Self. In this process, we are required to examine the depth and extent of the ways we block or inhibit our own unfolding lived experience. Our blocks and holdings are reflected in how we experience the world and how we relate to it.

Emphasizing the Foundational Concept of Presence in PsychoEnergetic Work

In *PsychoEnergetics*, we define **presence** as having a focused attention on ourselves and our environment in the here and now; as the ability to witness and to sense experience as it unfolds in present moment time. **Presence** is defined by Senge et al as “being fully conscious and aware in the present moment, a deep listening, of being open beyond one’s pre-conceptions and historical ways of making sense.” Aposhyan describes it “as a matter of degree”, and by asking the question “How present are we in this moment in this body?” It is her belief that “as therapists, the more deeply we embody ourselves and our place in the world, the more fully present we are for our clients.”

As *PsychoEnergetic* practitioners, we practice cultivating presence by:

- Giving our attention to the interior experience of our bodies.
- Giving our attention to the interior space of our minds via self-reflection.
- Focusing our attention to these experience in present moment time.
- Experiencing present moment time as it is lived in the body and mind.

The art of this type of facilitation requires the disciplined ability of the practitioner to pay attention to an emerging presence as it unfolds from the present moment, across a span of time. It is about bringing forth what is already there, as opposed to trying to make something happen. This ability to track experience as it unfolds creates an energetic coherency, a wave of momentum, that serves as a subtle kind of force that helps to move life forward for our clients.

In *PsychoEnergetic* work, we practice cultivating three types of presence: ***personal presence, interpersonal presence and transpersonal presence.***

Personal presence involves the experience of an embodied sense of self. *It requires the ability to make contact with ourselves:* to track our inner experience in the body as it occurs, and to stay with it long enough to enable it to unfold. As our inner experience unfolds, it reveals a deeper meaning and context naturally, and the experience will want to complete itself.

The ability to be present in our bodies helps us to build and sustain a greater energetic charge in our body, and gives us the ability to contain this charge. This in turn allows us to feel and bring forward excitement and aliveness into our inner daily living. It enables us to open our breathing, our bodies and our hearts to the world.

(Our early childhood experience has taught us many ways to avoid painful feelings such as abandonment or invasion. We tend to go through life looking for the fulfillment of what did not happen when we were very young. We build a body with a certain kind of armoring to prevent us from feeling the pain we once felt.)

As we attend to our body's sensations we will inevitably re-experience the traumas and lacks of our childhood. The body itself, however, provides us with a powerful tool to complete an experience once left unfulfilled through facilitating an internal shift or release within the physical structure, which in turn facilitates an emotional as well as energetic shift. This shift eventually brings about a shift in consciousness, and in the way we experience reality.

Our bodies and body structures reflect also the way we perceive ourselves as well as others. Attending to our inner holdings in a noninvasive way through deepening our awareness of our body sensations brings about a shift in our consciousness. In this way, our body sensations provide us with a direct access to our energy system.

Interpersonal presence requires an ability to track ourselves in the present moment (as described above) while we *also make contact with a specific 'other'*, and with the world in general. We sense into the presence of the other, while maintaining our own presence.

One primary way of experiencing one's connection to life is by making **contact** with other people - by either bringing one's self to others, or bringing others to one's self – in order to create safety, to be nurtured, to become excited, to push against, to hold on, to let go, to express longing, to be satisfied, etc.

Contact is defined by Gestalt theory as *a meeting point* with various kinds of others. Every person is capable of some degree of effective and fulfilling contact with others and pursues ways of having contact with others. This allows us to survive and grow to maturity. Making contact is creative and dynamic and, as such, each experience unfolds as a creative adjustment of the self towards others in the environment (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1994).

Susan Aposhyan's work, *Body-Mind Psychotherapy*, states that being in contact requires "the creative ability to allow the life of the universe to move through our bodies, be colored by our unique perspective, and move back out into the world." It is a process of letting life come to us, experiencing it fully in our bodies, allowing an assimilation of this experience to occur, noticing an impulse arising from within us, and moving that energetic flow back out of our bodies, and into the environment.

As we sustain and cultivate interpersonal presence, a relatedness develops, along with a felt sense that something is larger than each individual in the interaction. It is a felt sense of "we" that emerges, and it begins to sustain and nourish both individuated persons at their meeting point. At this point, the sense of "we" that comes from an interpersonal presence becomes a source of life, a place that can bring forth life and move life forward for each person.

Transpersonal presence comes from an experience beyond the boundaries of self definition, without a religious connotation. It is a nonverbal experience of recognizing an inner core of knowing and being, which is greater than and beyond the self. It is often experienced as a connection to a universal source of consciousness, which can be described as Beingness, Tao or God. The transpersonal experience opens us to the greater knowing of who we are and enables us to experience life from larger perspective. It connects us with a sense of purpose and a desire to be of service to something larger than the ordinary sense of self.

For a transpersonal presence to be truly transformative, a sense of surrendering needs to be experienced *in the body*, and also be integrated into the psycho-energetic makeup of the mind. The transpersonal process challenges the limits of our individual self-identity. It requires us to let go into the unknown - in order to let the mystery unfold in and through us.

The ability to feel deeply into the moment, in a mindful state of awareness, and a grounded, embodied physical experience, and to do this with others, allows a transpersonal experience to unfold itself naturally. Wordless feelings of awe, of heightened mental focus and clarity, of connectedness to all living things – reflect what a transpersonal experience is like.

Emphasizing the Role of the Practitioner in PsychoEnergetic Work

In PsychoEnergetic work, we emphasize the use of the practitioner's whole self in relationship to the client's process. The *PsychoEnergetic* therapist must be highly trained in tracking and experiencing his own inner mind and body processes, as well as his interpersonal and transpersonal processes, while interacting with another. In this way, *one's own body becomes an instrument* when tracking the inner experience of his client.

One utilizes their own presence and engages with the client in such a way that the client experiences a shift in energy and consciousness as it unfolds in the moment. At any given moment, a spontaneous energetic shift happens cognitively, emotionally and energetically all at once. The practitioner is trained to observe this occurrence, and feel the shift in the client as it occurs. This style of working is very different from a counseling perspective, whereby the practitioner gives advice, assigns task to do outside of the session, and sends the trouble 'elsewhere'. In *PsychoEnergetics*, we want to make the work alive, manageable and do-able in the present moment, in and with the presence of the practitioner.

The *PsychoEnergetic* perspective focuses on what is happening in the present moment for the client, and looks to get to the client's impasse or issue as it presents itself naturally in the session. This is called "*getting the trouble in the room*", and it is an important aspect of the practitioner's approach. It necessitates being able to look at what is troubling someone *together* – by naming it, witnessing it without solving or fixing it, without trying to get rid of it, without judging it, and without reacting to it. It is essential to allow the client's suffering to live for a while in the presence of both people, while it is held in the minds of both people. The client's suffering will present

itself in some form of energetic distortion – an imbalance of sensation and feeling in the body, a confusion or contradiction in the thinking process, or a distortion in their fundamental belief systems about how life works.

It is here that the practitioner must demonstrate the ability to be deeply embodied, and stay focused in mind. This capacity allows the practitioner to tolerate any deadness or intensity in the client's inner experience, and not ignore it, or react to it. From this place a process can naturally begin to emerge, and spontaneously move the client's experience into and through their body.

***Illustrating the Unfolding Process of PsychoEnergetic Work:
Utilizing the Practitioner's Contact and Presence in a Session.***

David comes to therapy with a presenting complaint of feelings of emptiness and depression, which have followed him all his life. The therapist notices a sense of collapse in his chest and asks David “what are you feeling in your body when you talk about how unlucky you feel in this world, and how threatening it feels for you to be here?”

David reports feeling a pressure in his chest. The therapist asks David to bring his awareness to his chest, and to place his hand where he feels the pressure. She then encourages him to begin breathing to his chest and hand, as well as his attention. She also brings her attention to both her chest, and his, and they stay a while here. This allows David's awareness to sink deeper inside.

The therapist then asks him “What do you feel now in your chest?” David says that he feels like he is suffocating, as if his chest were crushed. His therapist feels into this with him, and then gently encourages him to surrender more into the feelings that come from the sensation of being crushed. Then she asks him to bring some more breath to his chest, as she deepens her own breathing. She asks him, “What comes to mind as you surrender into this crushed feeling?”

David begins to remember how as a young child, he experienced his mother as invasive, and his father being absent. Now his therapist encourages him to continue to surrender into the emotions that she senses is connected to this memory, and David's chest spontaneously begins to heave, and he starts to sob. As he goes deeper into his experience, his therapist becomes aware of tension in David's jaw and asks him, “Is there any other emotion present? What are you feeling in your jaw?” David then feels into this jaw. He becomes aware of his strong tension in his jaw, and immediately associates this sensation with an anger he is holding down inside of him.

His therapist now says, “Give yourself space to experience the anger in your body.” At this moment, the therapist notices that David's energy begins to fade, and his eyes have less focus. She is aware that he is beginning to dissociate from his body. She senses that his anger may be threatening for him to experience in his body, so she asks him how it might feel to have his anger as his own. As David reflects on this question, he becomes aware how afraid he is of his anger, and how unacceptable it has been for him to have the force of his anger express itself through his body. He suddenly has an insight, and starts

to understand how he has projected his own hostility onto the outer world. He was now beginning to understand why he always felt threatened by the strong presence of others.

This understanding helps him to reconnect to his dis-owned life force, and give him permission to have a wider range of feelings come alive in his body. He starts to feel how important a sense of aliveness is for an experience of fulfillment in life.

In Conclusion

In order to walk this type of unfolding inner territory with a client, the *PsychoEnergetic* practitioner needs to be comfortable in being in the transitional phase of the unknown, just before any new experience begins to reveal itself to either the client or the practitioner. In order to tolerate this kind of uncertainty, the practitioner's felt sense of self through an embodied experience is essential.

Otto Scharmer says that successful interventions depend more than anything on "the inner condition of the intervener". It is our belief that a meaningful experience that emerges from an unfolding process will depend a great deal on the inner condition of the practitioner – their ability to be fully embodied, mindfully focused and aware of the present moment, with no attachment to a specific outcome.

Through the practitioner's presence and attention to the client's process, and by allowing the client's innate wisdom to gradually reveal itself in and through the client's body and energy field, a liberating feeling of empowerment and energetic re-invigoration can emerge from within the client. This enables the client over time to seek out and trust his own inner wisdom, as well as the personal authority of his own lived experience.

By cultivating their own personal presence, a *PsychoEnergetics* practitioner can grow an ever-increasing ability to make contact with the most glorious and most painful aspects of their client's lived experiences. This capacity for contact will inevitably:

1. nourish the life-giving nature of our client's abilities and inner essence,
2. will allow encounters with life's challenges to become more tolerable, and
3. perhaps in some moment, begin to transform a client's darkest moments into a meaningful and worthwhile experience.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gestalt Therapy Integrated; Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. (1951, 1994)

Body-Mind Psychotherapy; Susan Aposhyan. (2004)

Presence; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers. (2004)

The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life; Daniel Stern. (2004)

Theory U; Otto Scharmer. (2007)