

Just Being there: Presence and Stillness from Vol 8 No 1

From Shobi: In the workshop that I did at the beginning of the trip, I introduced the clowns to a technique for sitting with dying or very ill patients. I learned this technique in a workshop at the Zen Hospice in San Francisco and have been teaching it since in every workshop I give. I have found that it gives caring clowns a way to be still. Stillness is the basis of listening. If we can quiet ourselves, we can open up and listen not only to the person in front of us, but to any universal power that may influence our stillness. Intention and attention or maybe we should say attention to intention is a very important caring practice and the basis for many healing practices. This exercise is designed for the care giver to give complete attention and therefore their Presence to a patient.

Sit heart to heart, i.e., sit with your left side on the left side of the patient. Think “soft belly”— relax and take a deep breath allowing your breath to massage your belly. This will still your mind and bring you into you heart. Allow the patient’s hand to rest palm down on top of yours. Gently support their hand. Now watch their chest as their breath goes in and out. Match your breath to their breath so you are completely synchronized. You may need to slow down or speed up depending on the patient. If their breath is stressed and uneven yours will be also, but it will slowly quiet down. After some minutes take you right hand and gently place it over their forehead - not touching the forehead. (The patient will feel the energy and heat from your hand) All the time matching the breath. After a while take you right hand and put it gently on top of the patient’s hand again keep the breath matching.

There is a profound peace that comes from having someone sit with you like this. I always have everyone in my workshops try this as the care giver and patient. I even taught this to the boys on our Russian boat trip. I thought we were going into a nursing home and I wanted the boys (12-18) to be comfortable being with someone who is very old and frail. As it turned out we went to a children’s hospital. So much for communication. But I will never forget watching one young clown, Colya, as he sat very quietly with a frightened 3-year-old just watching her breath. The child stuck to his side like glue the rest of the time we were there. He showed me that it is not just for dying or frail people, but young children also respond to this technique.

I have been told by other members of my workshop that they even tried it on staff members who were upset. They would breathe with them and then get them to slow down - just standing next to them. Breath is that important, and so is your *presence*.

From Larry Jubal Davis of Selah, Washington

At a Guadalajara hospital in a ward with six beds, I approached an elderly woman. Her daughter was on her right-hand side. She was in quite a bit of stress. You could tell by the circumstances that her time was coming to an end. She was mumbling and her eyes were opening and closing. A nurse was at the other side of the bed. I was at the foot of the bed and I asked permission to hold her hand and went around to the left side of the bed and picked up her hand and placed it on top of mine. I leaned over so if she were able to see, she could see my face. Her daughter was telling her that I was a clown, but she did not respond in any way verbally.

With her hand on mine, I placed my fingers on her wrist (pulse) and began to just look at her, took in her breath and watched her breathe. I watched her gestures and synchronized my breath with hers. As soon as I got my breath to synchronize with hers, she began to relax and after about two minutes of her relaxing, I placed my other hand over her forehead without touching it. I kept watching her breath. Her eyes closed and she relaxed and started to breathe very freely.

It kind of surprised me that this had really happened and I lost concentration on her breath so my breath became out of sync with hers. She immediately tensed up and started mumbling again. I concentrated again on synchronizing our breaths and she immediately relaxed. I removed my left hand from her forehead and placed it gently on top of her hand. It was amazing how she relaxed. Her daughter even relaxed. I stayed in breath with her for another few minutes. I then stroked the top of her hand and put it down. As I left her bedside, it seemed like her stress was relieved.

What really happened was I connected with more than just with breath. It was like I was able to feel the stress and anxiety that was within her. I took some of that on into me, and when I entered into the hallway I was overwhelmed from the experience and had to get some assistance from some of the other clowns with hugs. I was able to deal with the experience. It was an experience that I will not forget.