

BEING IN TOUCH WITH LIFE: COMING TO THE CENTRE OF THE WHEEL

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ABSTRACT: *Respiration and the centre of the Dragon Dreaming wheel, a new understanding*

Introduction

Dragon Dreaming proceeds through the understanding of the connection of the Individual “Self” with the “other” of the world in which they live. All “projects” of Dragon Dreaming arise from this interaction. We have a deep faulty view of the nature of intelligence. We think of intelligence as something that resides in our head, but this is based on an obsolete hierarchic theory of “power over”. Surprisingly intelligence is not a “thing” despite the definition of intelligence agree by a number of psychologists that it is “A very general mental capability that,

among other things, involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience.” Gregory Bateson, former husband of the anthropologist Margaret Mead, in his wonderful book “Steps Towards an Ecology of the Mind” suggests that true intelligence, as the “pattern behind the pattern” or “the pattern that connects”, occurs as a result of the flow of information from the “self” to the “other” of the world, and back again. This is illustrated by the definition of the American psychological association that ability to understand complex ideas through thought, or to engage in various forms of reasoning, it is the ability to adapt effectively to the environment, to learn from experience, to overcome obstacles. People are not the only thing that can illustrate intelligence. Organisations can be said to be intelligent, and even ecologies exhibit the properties of intelligence. In Dragon Dreaming, it is the project which becomes intelligent.

How does this occur? Between the individual and the world is an open interface, a membrane of communication, that is semi-permeable. This membrane is a cultural construction. Where do I end and where does the world begin. In Dragon Dreaming workshops I get people to sit quietly and consider their breathing. The breath is the most intimate way in which the world enters us and we enter the world. It is thus not by accident, that the word for breathing is the origin of our word for “spirit”. Inspiration is “to breath in”, a “conspiracy” is a group of people who “breathe together”, while we speak of death as “expired” or “breathed out. The Greek word for soul “pneuma” is a breath, and this is found in Hebrew too in “ruach”. The opening verse of Genesis speaks how “in the beginning God made heaven and earth, and the spirit or breath of God moved across the waters”. The breath is Hinduism and Buddhism, the “prana” is the origin of meditation, and in Chinese philosophy, breath is the origin of the “chi” or “Ji” energy that flows throughout the body of living things.

When does the breath stop being part of the environment and start being part of the individual? I get people to use their awareness to follow the breath, through the nostrils, throat and into the lungs. Is it only a part of you when it leaves the air and enters your body? Or is it when it leaves the lungs to enter the flow of your blood? Or perhaps when it enters the cells and tissues of your body? And when does it stop being you? Is it when it leaves your tissues and enters the blood? Or perhaps when it leaves the lung lining and passes through your throat or nose and back into the air? The boundary between self and other in this way is very indistinct. We can go 40 days without eating, 4 days without drinking, but we cannot exist more than 4 minutes without a breath. Without respiration (respiring) our food would only give us 1/18th of the amount of energy we now get from burning it with the oxygen of our breath. Fermentation produces only a little energy, and so we can say, without any exaggeration that 17/18ths of our energy is thanks to the oxygen we breath.

Each breath also has another amazing property. There are as many breaths in the Atmosphere, a thin layer about 25 kilometres thick that covers the Earth, as there are atoms in a single breath. What this means is that there is the equivalent of one atom in your breath for each breath of every living thing that has ever existed. In this way you can say every breath that Jesus, the Buddha, Mohammed and other great sages took, is represented by one atom in every breath that you take. Equally, there is one atom for every breath taken by Adolph Hitler, by Genghis Khan, and all the mass murderers of history. In this way, so we can say, may all beings ripen in us.

Breath is the most intimate way the Earth touches us. Each breath is a biological product of the living earth, recycled and purified by plants and the oceans, so that we may breathe in its life-giving energy, stored as a living battery in the oxygen it contains. In fact all of our senses that connect us to the world are fundamentally a result of the sense of touch. Sight is the result of photons of light, coming ultimately from the sun, or from distant stars, that touch the cones and rods of the retinal cells of our eyes, and through a photoelectrical effect, stimulating our optic nerve that runs into the brain. Hearing is compressions and rarefactions of air touching the tympanum, or ear-drum, and causing the vibration of the hairs growing in the shell-like cochlea of ear. These moving hairs stimulate the auditory nerves and begin the journey of interpretation that is hearing. Smell is the recognition by our olfactory nerves of specific chemical shapes touching in the sinuses of our noses. Taste is a similar touch between salt, sweet, tart and bitter shapes on our tongue. Touch too is obviously touch. Our skin is in this way no boundary, but is instead an organ of communication, able to recognize shape and temperature, proprioception (body position), and nociception (pain). Nerves of touch also are also found in our muscles, and joints, on our bones and in organs and bloodvessels of our body.

Thus in Dragon Dreaming that moving boundary between self and other is an organ of communication, not a separation. In this way touch is what lies at the heart of the Dragon Dreaming wheel.

We humans do not touch enough. It has been shown, for instance, that a baby that is not touched will die. We need touch as it is touch that creates for us a sense of trust, and people deprived of a caring touch will be eternally mistrustful of the world. As we isolate ourselves in our airconditioned fortresses, out of touch with the natural breaths of the living winds of the world, so we come to mistrust the world in which we live. It has been shown that people who share their care of looking after the environment are people who in their infancy were deeply in touch with the living natural world, outside that made and controlled by humans. Those that do not care were deeply alienated from their natural environment as children, growing up in an artificial world of TV far from nature. Touch is therefore essential not just for the healing of the self, but also for the healing of the other, of the care for the living environment of which we are a true part.

Our hands, the organ of touch par excellence, has an amazing proportion of the sensory and motor cortex of our brains devoted to interpreting its messages. These hands, with their abilities to grasp and hold, so different from the hooves of running animals, or the claws of predators, evolved their wonderful dexterity through nearly 65 million years of living in trees. Our hands have the ability to hold our weight suspended in the air, an amazing gift of our evolutionary ancestry. Looking at our ape cousins shows us how important touch is. A child when afraid runs back to the touch of its mother, and there, comforted, can return to engage once again with its world. Friends groom each other, as through the touch they show that they deeply care, in a world that Koko, the female Gorilla that uses American Sign Language to communicate, calls "love". Deprived of touch we store muscular tensions in our bodies as a result of the pains and sufferings that are also part of this world. Different people have been taught to store these suffering tensions in different parts of the body. Holding muscles permanently under the contracted tension in this way sends signals to the body that the ability to relax is not needed, and so the muscle fibre gets replaced by cartilage and fibrin, a strong white substance that cannot ever now relax. Continuous tension of this kind also consumes an

enormous amount of living energy, and even acts in certain ways, through the adrenal hormones, to turn off our immune system, making us susceptible to different diseases. In this way our bodies get sculpted over time. As those who have worked with a good masseur know, touch has the ability to lead to a deep relaxation of these tensions.

Touch also releases old skin flakes, and is a subconscious sharing of pheromones, body odours that signal between us and the world in a very ancient fashion. Part of the enormous family of neuropeptides that are found not just in the synapses between brain cells, but in the signaling systems between our hormones and our bodies, between individual animals of all species, from ants to human beings and from the animals in coral reefs to the root hairs of all plants. This ancient chemical language signals attraction and repulsion, those substances that may do us good and those that could do us harm. Through the scents there is a living language by which plants communicate with the animal world, attracting pollinators and repelling pests.

So for the healing of our world, “get in touch”, immerse yourself in your living environment, “be touched” by others, and allow yourself to touch others as well. Seek to touch the earth, put your hands into living soil, and touch life itself. It is no accident that the prevention of touch is a way in which “Big Brother” in the novel, 1984, sought to prevent any possible “subversion”. So reach out to the others in your world. Create opportunities for touch, as you will find that touch lies at the heart of the Celebration that exists in the heart of Dragon Dreaming.