

Bodywork as Poetry

by **Silke Ziehl (2005)**

I have always loved poetry. I love how a word, a phrase, a rhythm evokes a response from deep within, how it reverberates. A poem can connect to other levels of reality, to deeper meanings and concerns. It can invite to look afresh, to listen anew, to something deemed familiar. Like the light in Greece, it renders everyday objects luminous with being.

Working with the body is like poetry. Paying attention, focusing on the body here and now, in space and time, brings to the surface layers and layers of meaning and associations, opening up multiple dimensions. A gesture, a movement, a touch, evokes such old and deep responses from within. It brings up memories, connects to all the stories stored within, in our cells and tissues and fluids in the body, adding their flavour and taste and shade and sound to what is happening now.

That movement of the head – a little boy of maybe eighteen months snuggling up to mother. That tickling of the little toe – a baby self awakens and giggles with delight. That looking away not listening – and it reverberates with all the times she did not listen, he ignored me...

A bodywork session is a poetic journey, which both, practitioner and client, share in and experience – each separate, yet deeply linked in dialogue and contact. Much of this dialogue and contact is non-verbal, and happens in the moving, touching, breathing. That is, below the surface of the verbal dialogue and interweaving with it, yet often not focused on in conscious awareness, a rich and complex non-verbal dialogue goes on. What is said with words and between words, what is said with gestures and touch, and between gestures and touch, all the many layers of meanings evoked get woven into a somatic poem. In paying attention, I can listen to the poem and can allow it to touch me, and to move me.

Each gesture matters. Each gesture I make carries my intention, my story, my conscious and unconscious being. The person I am with will respond not only to the words I speak, but even more to the words my body speaks. For meaning and intention, purpose and relationship are held by non-verbal communication rather than by words alone. How somebody says something, or does something, matters profoundly. The meaning reverberates. The story continues.

For example, I can touch somebody in such a way that my touch says: "You can take your time; I am interested to meet you; where

are you? Is this Ok for you? Will you meet me here?" I can touch in such a way that each finger has eyes and ears as I make contact with the other person. When I touch in this manner, I am more likely to be receptive to who the other person is, and what they want, and what they are saying with their body at the moment. From this somatic dialogue, we get to know each other more deeply. For we can hear the non-verbal story, the somatic history as it comes across in those gestures, movements, sounds, and this helps understanding, respecting and honouring who this person is. And luminosity happens.

© Silke Ziehl 2005

First published in: Open Centre, vol 29, no.1, Jan-Aug 2005