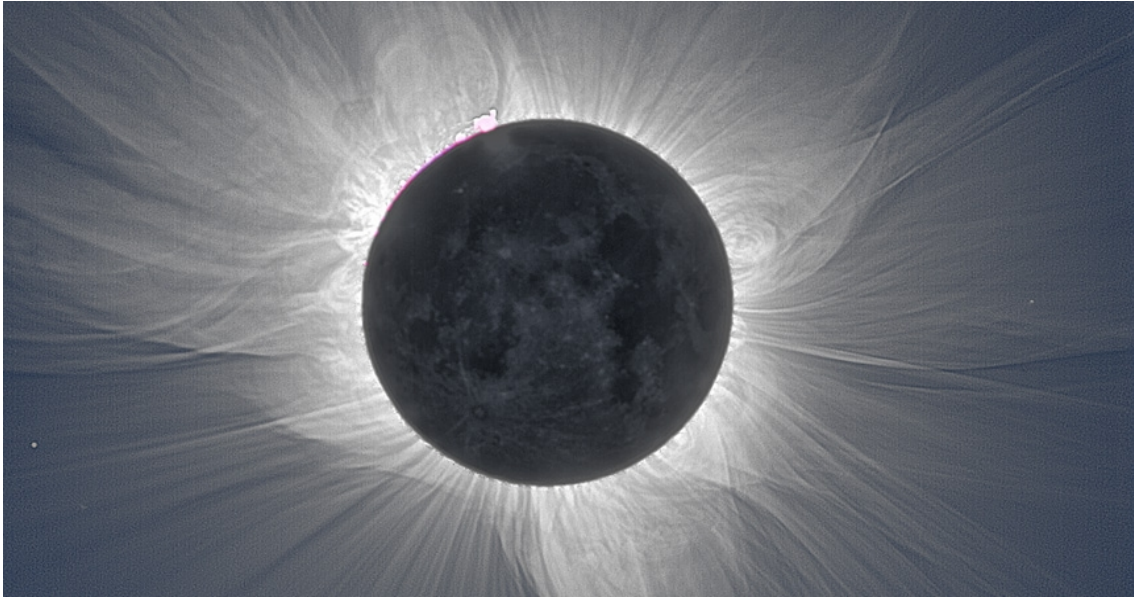


Totality

*We come from totality and totality is our destiny;
it lives within us and is all around us.*



Introduction

There is a period of a few minutes during a total solar eclipse when the moon completely covers the sun. This is referred to as the Totality. The sky turns dark, the temperature drops and the sun's outer atmosphere, the corona, becomes visible.

Though more than two hundred times hotter than the surface of the sun, the corona is delicate, even ethereal in appearance. The essence of the Totality is not so much the complete covering of the sun by the moon, but rather the transcendent beauty of the revealed corona. In this stunning phenomenon of the Totality, there is a universal principle manifesting: that reduction leads to increase, that when something is taken away or given up, something new can be added or discovered. This Totality principle gives us a way not only to account for, but to create experiences of expanded perception, and on deeper levels, states of augmented insight and being. Like a leviathan moving silently through the depths, it is the unifying idea common to many internal and external processes.

And so the urge came to write this article, to explore Totality as it modulates according to the situation at hand. Over time, in the weeks following the first drafts, it

became clear that there were higher and higher octaves of Totality encompassing experiences in the realms of identity, our place in the universe and our ultimate destiny. But let's begin at the beginning and first look at five phenomena occurring in sessions of Healing Dance.

The Wave



Traveling hydrodynamic waves are the heart of Healing Dance. Primordial and health-giving, they became the defining characteristic of the technique as it began to differentiate from WATSU in the late 1990s. In these waves, the body does not follow the logic of land-based weight bearing, but rather that of the fish suspended underwater. Yet, unlike the fish, the body does not actively undulate to create the wave. Instead, the undulation is supplied by the giver, bestowed upon his¹ receptive partner, so that the effort entailed in generating the movement herself is dispensed with and she can feel its effects more clearly. Furthermore, the wave freely travels the length of the body as could never take place on land in the dry field of gravity. It is an experience of totality, a movement sequencing repeatedly through the entire body from head to foot, integrating it and releasing blocked energy with a mesmerizing rhythm and grace. Nothing is missing and nothing could be added.

¹ In writing about aquatic bodywork the giver shall be referred to in the masculine and the receiver in the feminine. Observing this convention saves the trouble of writing the more accurate “she or he” dozens of times.

How can such an experience be accessed? With eyes closed, the receiver's focus naturally rests on the sensations of the wave and their reverberations within her psyche. She becomes effortlessly “tactile minded”, proprioceptively experiencing movement through space, the flow of water over the skin and the body's undulation. Giving up sight is not the only prerequisite for this experience; the receiver must also let go of control. Only by relaxing and surrendering may the wave travel unimpeded through the body, allowing it to become as the strand of seaweed, swaying languorously in the invisible current.

The Absolute Space



In Healing Dance underwater trainings we speak of submerging our partner into the absolute space, that is, completely under the water's surface. Any part of the body remaining above the surface, in contact with the air, reminds her that she is in a pool. When the body is entirely submerged, however, there is little reference to the present moment and the receiver is free to journey in her imagination, memories and feelings in a seemingly unbounded, magical space. Especially powerful are the moments when the giver completely releases the receiver, when not even his touch is there to remind her of her space-time coordinates in the pool. In this absolute space the body is fully in the embrace of the water element so that the entire surface of the skin is

registering its pressure, temperature and movement. Additionally, the receiver suspends with the same buoyancy as she did in the womb, while the caring presence of the giver is reminiscent of the love she felt from her mother enveloping her then. All of these factors can trigger strong prenatal associations to the time when awareness began to awaken as we floated in the warm amniotic fluid, the original totality that held and nurtured us.

What is the price of admission to such an experience? As with the wave, the receiver must give up sight to savor the absolute space, closing her eyes to enable an inner journey and better sense how it touches her. It is as if, by closing the physical eyes, a thousand sensory eyes open throughout the body, covering the surface of the skin and in every joint and muscle. However, any fear of water, ancestral or acquired, will short-circuit the openness required to enter this state, so it, too, must be relinquished. And finally, as with the wave, control must be handed over to the giver, in this case control over the breath. The giver's training in reading the breath enables him to submerge and surface his receiver with just the right timing. Once a receiver has adequate trust in her giver to “pass through the eye of the needle”, that is, to allow herself to be submerged, she can experience a very personal expansion into the totality of the absolute space with its echos back to the womb.

Kumbhaka

During a session, when a receiver's dive reflex develops to the point where she can remain underwater for an extended period of time, interesting things begin to happen. An exhilarating sense of freedom arises from not needing to breathe; she feels quite at home underwater. In some cases the experience goes farther than this, into a territory described as “kumbhaka”, the Sanskrit word translating literally as “breath retention”. In yogic practice, the goal of pranayama breath exercises is to reach this state of kumbhaka. It is taught that as the breath comes to a stop, so does thinking, and the quiet mind, like a still lake reflecting the stars, becomes receptive to Higher Truth. The experience of subaquatic receivers confirms this. Without ever having



practiced yoga they report a joy, an aliveness and a knowing that cannot be understood rationally. One could cautiously describe the experience as mystical, transcending normal, everyday consciousness. An experience of this order certainly meets the criteria of totality.

Just as in the previous two examples the receiver is letting go of sight, fear of water and control. More than this, though, the emphasis in kumbhaka lies in giving up breathing itself, at least temporarily. Receivers are often surprised to discover that they can effortlessly hold their breath, going beyond what seemed a fixed limit to discover something unexpected on the other side. Thus, by narrowing one sense and leaving emotional contraction behind, the way is open to emerge into a state of grace, a totality that can remain as a reference experience for the rest of one's life.

Mirroring

Mirroring is an experience of totality not only for the receiver, but for the giver, too. For a definition of mirroring from the giver's point of view, here is a quote from the article, *Mirroring in Healing Dance*:

“In the context of a Healing Dance session, mirroring is a volitional act of the practitioner in relation to the receiver. It is not the simple imitation of body signals, facial expressions and actions; we practice a more sophisticated concept of mirroring that allows the receiver to feel heard, seen and felt. Mirroring as we define it, consists of a broad set of skills designed to evoke these reactions in the receiver and to facilitate her flow of movement expression.”

Sharing aquatic bodywork in the role of the giver is indeed beautiful and rewarding, yet sessions characterized by this mirroring dynamic offer something more.

Intimately attuned to his receiver, the giver puts aside his own self-importance and



comfort, letting his needs fade into the background. He embodies selfless service as reflected in intention, focus and action in a responsive interplay with a fellow human being, no less than an alignment with the ministry of angels. Based on the experiences of Healing Dance practitioners, there is nothing to compare to it—unique, enlivening and deeply moving—hallmarks of totality.

To be mirrored in a Healing Dance session equally qualifies as an experience of totality. From the same article quoted above:

“To be mirrored is trust-inspiring and comforting, and at the same time natural and liberating. Our partner is symbolically receiving the “yes” from life that encourages her to express herself, that unlocks her personal dance. The receiver senses she is seen and can let go of vigilance, knowing someone is present with

her, keeping her safe. Particularly in phases of self-generated movement it may feel so amazing that it leaves her unable to describe her experience. When each gesture, turn of the head, arch of the back or other movement impulse is acknowledged and supported, there may be little in her life to which she can compare it. It can be that the last time anyone paid such complete attention to her was in childhood, accounting for a reminiscent quality to the joy some receivers feel when being mirrored. Mirroring has the potential to take some receivers back to the forgotten wonder days of infancy when the world was bright and fresh, and love was in every face and voice and touch. Of course, the opposite may be the case, that a receiver is reminded of how she lacked such loving attention. Becoming aware of a deep hole in the soul can trigger feelings of loss and sadness, and at the same time provide the opportunity to receive the love and nurturing that was so poignantly absent.”

To be able to have such an experience of being mirrored, what must a receiver “leave at the door”? Inhibition, certainly, as well as self-negating beliefs. And what takes her across the threshold? Trust in her giver is necessary, but trust in herself is paramount, laying the groundwork for the courage to accept her feelings, to acknowledge her self-worth, and to permit movement impulses to come into expression and be witnessed.

The Totality Principle

What these five aspects of Healing Dance have in common is a way to experience more fully and profoundly. It begins with a conscious self-limiting: closing the eyes. By shutting out the distracting external world we may focus on the strong sensory component that the water offers, as well as on our internal landscape. At this point in the process our inner readiness enables us to move forward, releasing fear and control, embracing courage and trust. Then the curtain is drawn back for an expansion into being, and totality may flood in—an experience of grace, freedom, joy, aliveness and self-worth. We have already seen how the totality principle starts to modulate as it applies to a giver who is mirroring and active, in contrast to a passive receiver focused on sensory impressions and her inner experience. Let us consider now how it can appear in other areas of experience.

Sensing

Aquatic bodywork is truly something extraordinary, yet it is by no means the only setting in which we may apply such a formula to enrich our experiences. The special senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and balancing—are indispensable in the practical side of navigating through the physical world. They may also be utilized to provide a conduit that carries us inward to experiences of pleasure, aesthetic appreciation and self-understanding. Although not leading to the striking peak experiences characterizing aquatic bodywork, meditating through the special senses can access a gradual shift in the tone of life toward more wholeness. Yes, we can alter our way of relating to the world and ourselves.

The senses work in relation to stimuli, whether they are sights, sounds, smells or tastes. Key to a more mindful way of perceiving is a quiet receptivity, allowing a stimulus to come to us. We must give up our haste, our superficiality and our resistance in order to feel and be present. For example, rather than glancing at the sky, telling ourselves it is beautiful and restlessly moving on to the next thought, we can slow down, turn a soft gaze upon it and allow impressions to register in our awareness. Then we really start to see, perhaps becoming aware of the different tints of blue, the subtle drift of the clouds and their changing shapes. We may discover ourselves reacting with a feeling or memory. The sky could evoke a philosophic insight, filled as it is with magnificent but insubstantial shapes. Or beginning to identify with the blue expanse, we understand something new about ourselves. Thus, by giving our seeing more time, we may journey inward.

So it is with smelling, too. Dipping our nose to the rose blossom, we close our eyes and take a slow, deep breath with no preconception of how it should smell. As if smelling a rose for the first time, we let it touch us, filling our awareness with its perfume, inwardly thankful for this wonder. In the same way, at our favorite Italian restaurant, we might close our eyes and breathe deeply while savoring our *pasta fresca* entrée, letting the taste expand and fill our awareness, taking us back to that

vacation in Tuscany. When we sense from a quiet mind, fully present in the moment, impressions may reach us without hindrance, and if we chose, we may feel how they resonate within us, what they stir. Sensing in this way, our intention is to be without intention, to release any intention.



Listening to the sounds of the forest offers another opportunity to connect deeply with ourselves and the natural world. Stepping away from the trail and standing still among the trees, we may close our eyes, subtracting sight, movement and thought from our contemplation. Soon we may notice the rustling of the leaves in the trees nearby and then farther away the sighing of the wind through the treetops. Birds calling to each other echo across the space around us. All of this against a backdrop of exquisite silence! Allowing the spell of the natural world to touch us, a resonance can grow from within, affirming that we are a part of Nature and need it to be complete.

Have we not all experienced awakening to the patter of rain while still cozy under the covers or allowed the hypnotic crashing of waves at the seashore to wash over us while lying in the warm sand or paused on the mountain trail to hear an icy stream tumbling over the stones in its course? When we cease to filter out such natural sounds and pay attention, they can soothe and center us. They have the power to restore us to ourselves.



Similarly to how we become touch-minded in the water when closing the eyes, sitting at home on the sofa listening to music with the eyes closed we become attuned to its superb qualities: rhythm, melody, tone color, harmony and meaning. Indeed, giving ourselves over to music is one of the most aesthetic experiences available to us in life. We are free to delight in its beauty, form and content. The soul can be moved and we are reminded of what is most important.

Proprioception and Kinesthesia

Taken together, proprioception and kinesthesia², give us a “sixth sense”, the ability to sense the location and position of any body part, as well as the velocity of movement of our limbs and the entire body. The vestibular apparatus located in the inner ear works with thousands of neurons located in the muscles, tendons, joints and skin to provide afferent feedback that is interpreted in the brain. Dancing with our eyes closed, as in an Authentic Movement³ exercise done standing in place, strongly activates the sixth sense. This feedback paints a clear picture of the body in motion,

2 Proprioception is defined as the awareness of where our body is in space, whereas kinaesthesia is the awareness of how the body moves in space.

3 Authentic Movement is a form of dance therapy involving a dancer (patient) and the witness (therapist). In an empty dance studio the patient stands, sits or lies out on the floor while the analyst sits in the corner, witnessing but not in physical contact with the dancer. This active phase could last twenty to thirty minutes or longer. Communication before and after the active phase is essential. The dancer is free to vocalize as she moves but there is normally no direct communication with the analyst.

creating a ghost image of the movement in our mind that is delightful to perceive. Dancing in this way, we have a private and direct connection with ourselves that can aid in opening a channel for the unconscious to emerge into expression, valuable in the context of therapy and personal development.

The blind walk exercise done frequently in seminars to build trust also relies on this combination of proprioception and kinesthesia. Moreover, it can serve to foster a different relation to gravity. As we sense the body while walking with our eyes closed, the legs become heavier, softer and more grounded. Our upper body becomes lighter and freer as it releases tension and the shoulders drop. It can remind us of how the body is organized in Tai Chi, rooted into the earth with the upper body floating. Walking blind, we can feel how the upper body participates in the mechanics of



walking only insofar as it balances, not supplying any effort. When we walk with the eyes open this whole body awareness tends to be lost as we identify with the head and upper body and correspondingly use effort there to navigate through the world. Contrast this to moving grounded and from the center. Applying the Totality Principle by closing the eyes then, enables our sixth sense to help us unlearn our habitual mode of moving in the world, showing us a better relation to the earth and a more harmonious way of inhabiting the body.



Breathing

Earlier we considered how stopping the breath, and therefore thinking, too, makes possible an altered state of awareness, a state of totality. Breathing itself can also be an avenue inward. What would this look like? Again we turn to an exercise used in aquatic trainings. Sitting comfortably, begin with a full, but gentle breath, allowing the lungs to fill with air. Then waiting for the exhale to begin by itself, mindfully observe this happening. At the bottom of the breath, after exhaling, again wait for the inhale to begin on its own. The process is one of giving up control of the breath, of allowing the body to breathe as it will, neither rushing the breath consciously, nor artificially trying to slow it down. A calming effect may ensue, a natural deepening and slowing of the breath rhythm as the pauses between the inbreath and outbreath start to lengthen. One may notice that not only air is entering and leaving the body, but energy as well, and that this circulation within the body leads to a peaceful enlivening. This is another example of the Totality Principle in action; by withdrawing our attention from our surroundings and letting go of control over the breath, we are led into new awarenesses.

Speaking and Listening

If communicating could take us into an experience of totality, it would be in the practice of co-counseling. We know it in water trainings as a simple process. On land, the group divides into couples. The partners of each diade sit facing each other, removed enough from others so that they will not be overheard. One person shares while the other listens. For an agreed upon length of time the sharer speaks without interruption while the listener only listens without commenting. After the set time is reached, the roles are switched. The topic may be a predetermined one or be open, whatever the speaker wishes to talk about.



In a normal conversation there is an exchange, a give and take, but in co-counseling the one speaking is freely able to move from one thought or feeling to the next, fully expressing herself, able to make connections and understand herself better.

Figuratively speaking, she may follow her own flow upstream to discover her personal truth. Experiencing the sympathetic and undivided attention of the listener, she also has the experience of being heard, something precious and healing in our modern day life, where so many lack a true confidante.

What are the inner attitudes that make such an experience possible? In order for it to be transformational, a person must be ready to take the risk of being authentic, of exposing herself to another. She may choose to confront herself in speaking about painful or very personal topics. The practice in itself is not automatically powerful; it may be trivialized and engaged in superficially. The success of co-counseling depends on what each brings to it, the listener being just as important as the speaker.

The person in the role of listening is practicing a discipline, similar to that of the giver in the water mirroring his receiver: he must let go of self-importance and his natural impulses to converse. In compensation, he has the satisfaction of facilitating his partner in fully expressing herself—he allows her to feel heard. Looking into her eyes he hears not only her words, but attunes to any feelings that may arise. He tracks the speaker's body language and may even mirror her breath. His quality of presence is identical to that of a giver in the water with his receiver; encouraging and without judgment. Thus, total listening calls forth total expression. The gulf of separation is bridged and a true connection can take place. Co-counseling in this form is worthy of being incorporated into our private lives to sustain and enhance intimacy, and at work to build more team spirit and resolve conflicts.

Emotion and Feeling

Is there such a thing as totality in the realm of feeling? To answer this question we must first distinguish between emotion and feeling. These two words are often used interchangeably, but they do not refer to the same thing. The definitions that mental health professionals have arrived at are differing and even contradictory. There is a general consensus, however. Emotions are understood to be instinctual, hard-wired in the brain and nearly alike in all of humanity, regardless of the culture, whether it be a New York City socialite or a Bushman of the Kalahari. They can be intense, but short-lived, alerting us to danger and preparing us for immediate survival by giving energy for fight or flight. Emotions may also influence favorably a social interaction, ensuring a reward. In either case they are invariably triggered by an external stimulus, real or imagined. The list of such bonafide emotions includes anger, fear, sadness,

happiness, surprise and disgust. Emotions are physical in that they are expressed through changes in facial expression and body language, and physiological insofar as they affect blood pressure and brain activity. When an emotion is set off, blood flow increases to the amygdala, two almond shaped structures forming part of the brain's limbic system, and decreases to the neo-cortex, making it hard to have rational thoughts when caught up in the emotion.



Feelings, on the other hand, are associated with increased blood flow to the neo-cortex. They arise out of the mind rather than the entire body and are generated by memories, thoughts and beliefs. They are subjective, varying from person to person, and, like emotions, can lodge in the subconscious until we become aware of them. Feelings are less intense than emotions and more easily controlled, though they tend to last longer. They may show our relation to emotions, such as feeling guilty about being angry or ashamed of being afraid. Some feelings are “homeostatic”, such as feelings of hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain and cold--all supportive of our survival. There are literally thousands of different feelings a person experiences in a lifetime. Pages could be filled listing them, but for a short selection, just to clarify what we are speaking about, we have envy, impatience, appreciation, indifference, confidence,

regret, interest, helplessness, embarrassment, pride, mistrust, boredom, optimism, loneliness and stubbornness.

With this background information in mind we might ask ourselves, “Who do I know who feels freely and fully, who is not afraid to express emotions?” The answer that comes to mind could be “young children”. They are spontaneous, live in the moment, love to play, have easy access to their joy and curiosity and experience one feeling after another. We might be tempted to see a three-year-old as embodying a kind of totality of feeling. In the course of a few minutes she may experience intense delight, spiral quickly down into frustration, sadness and rage, then just as quickly return to smiles and laughter. Parents will attest that at times the emotions are having



the child, rather than the child having the emotions. The permission to feel emotions in this unbridled form is as essential, however, for healthy development, as are the gentleness, consideration and love that take root in a child’s character as it grows into maturity. Does a young child’s connection to her feelings model a variety of totality of feeling? Let the reader decide.

Looking elsewhere for intensities of feeling, each of us could no doubt easily compile a list. I recall a few experiences from my own life. In 1970, at the age of 21, I was required to report to the Induction Center in New York City, prelude to being drafted into the army and shipped out to Vietnam. Emerging onto the street after an entire day of tests and interviews, knowing I had been rejected by the draft and would not go to Vietnam, and knowing I could pursue my dance career and fulfill my life purpose, I was engulfed in feelings of relief, freedom and gratitude as I had never felt before.

Years later, in 1985 the German dance company for which I was ballet master performed in Lyon. At the same time a Russian dance troupe was performing there and one of my boyhood idols, Maya Plisetskaya, was dancing. It was the first time I had ever seen her on the stage live. Afterwards I nervously went to her dressing room and she was gracious enough to shake my hand and autograph a photo for me. As I walked back to my hotel enraptured, I hardly touched the ground, a feeling I had never experienced before or have since.

One of the strongest emotional experiences of my life was in 1993 when I had a brush with danger. I was tenting alone up by Mr. Shasta in Northern California. At the end of the day I swam out to a raft platform in the middle of a deserted lake. The sun was going down and I was unable to get warm. I wasn't sure if I could swim back, as I was alone in the lake and already shivering. It was getting worse by the minute. Gathering my resolve, I dove in and swam for shore, not knowing what would happen. After some minutes I waded ashore and was overcome with a feeling of exhilaration and aliveness that lasted unabated for several hours.

In each of these three examples I couldn't have felt more. I was full to the brim, maxed out. The feeling state came to me unsought. Each was triggered by an event starting from a baseline of trepidation, followed by the exhilaration of escaping the draft, meeting an idolized ballerina and surviving a near death experience. Seen in the light of the totality principle, an initial state of contraction was transformed into expansion through taking action.

Such experiences are by no means the only type of emotional peak that life offers. Strong feeling states are routinely evoked by the performing arts in dance, music and theater, as well as by film, literature, sculpture and painting. This phenomenon goes under the name *catharsis*, meaning a purging of emotion. Who among us has not been moved to tears by art in witnessing Beauty, understanding Truth or catching a glimpse of Goodness? We can be grateful for the arts, that they touch us so deeply. This is indeed one of their main roles—to evoke a purifying catharsis that restores us

to ourselves. Surely, catharsis belongs to the range of experiences we would include in the totality of feeling.

We have been looking at instances of feelings that simply come, so long as we dare to surrender to them. To access other feelings requires not only courage, but work, as well. If our feeling nature was shut down in childhood, it is indeed an adventure to rediscover this part of ourselves with the help of different forms of therapy. In my life, Primal Therapy served this purpose. Its main premise is that the disease of feeling in our present day lives can be traced backward to earlier traumas, so that descending layer by layer through the teen years, to childhood and even to prenatal impressions, all in a single therapy session, we can arrive at the source of our disturbances and heal them through feeling them completely. The therapy setting is a padded, soundproof room in which any movement or sound we wish to make can safely take place without holding back. Whatever has been repressed has a space to be remembered and come out in whole body expression, accompanied by self-understandings and healing. Buried fears, needs and wounds can be felt and integrated in a process that is sometimes cathartic and sometimes gentle. This leads me to propose a partial definition for the totality of feeling: the capacity to fully feel all of ones emotions, including those traumatic ones we have protectively sealed off from awareness.

The desired result of doing such emotional work is an unlocked and enhanced capacity to feel, in which feelings take their appropriate place. We can be mindfully aware of them moving through us, allowing them to flow and expand, and expressing them when it makes sense. Feelings can be integrated into a way of being in which daily occurrences and encounters can be responded to from inner attitudes of soul, such as compassion, humor, sincerity and friendliness. We are not dominated by emotion, tethered to the past and projecting it onto our present. We are able to learn and adapt to change, uncertainty and challenge. We are able to relate from a place of peace and centeredness in right relation to self, others and life. This implies we can

(on a clear day) look upon everyone and everything in a warmer light with more acceptance and a readiness to forgive.

This leads us to the feeling of love, the most sublime of all feelings. The word “love” is used to describe various feeling states, from selfless, altruistic love to what could be better termed obsessive infatuation. In its highest sense, love can appropriately be used to describe the commitment and devotion one has to one’s partner, family, cause, country and Creator. It is the deep affection we have for a friend or a pet animal. If we were born into fortunate circumstances we were loved as children and learned love from being loved. Such love can encompass patience, kindness, sacrifice, faith, and honesty. No feeling is more important to cultivate, to remember and to practice. It is the key to harmonious living, even the meaning of life. The inescapable conclusion to be drawn is that the totality of feeling may have many different expressions, but love is most certainly among them.

In these Corona pandemic times we are made aware of how precious our work in the water truly is. Aquatic trainings are safe havens for feeling. In the exchanges in the pool and the sharings on land in the circle we enter a space where participants can feel supported, heard and felt. This is necessary as it can be extremely challenging to be brought face to face with certain themes. The stress of learning can give rise to frustration, anger and feelings of diminished self-worth. Tensions within the group often trigger unresolved family themes. Other personal issues, such as loneliness, relationship troubles, existential concerns over money or loss of a loved one will often come up during trainings. Fortunately, to balance the energy, there will also be participants who have a relatively uncomplicated experience of contentment and excitement to be learning.

Earlier we looked at how the experience of mirroring and being mirrored serve to evoke a multitude of feelings. In a training, in which the participants are learning and practicing techniques in the water with each other, the effect is similar to that in

sessions, but not as strong, as participants tend to stay in “student mind” when receiving and analyze the moves. Likewise, while giving, they are usually more focused on mastering the techniques than being fully present. On land, one on one conversations with fellow participants, sharings, meditations and bodywork provide a counterbalance, a setting for feelings to be brought into awareness and processed. In the circle meetings there is a powerful dynamic of amplification: meditations are deeper than when alone, feelings are more easily accessed, and in the presence of a receptive group one can feel heard and seen to a greater degree than in private life. These factors create an environment in which self-awareness flourishes and feelings can flow and be integrated.

This immersion in feelings is not limited to the participants; the instructor is also quite involved in this aspect of a course. He cultivates a personal connection to each participant, gauging how best to relate, turning as the situation calls for to humor, respect, sensitivity, directness and allowing space. He stays alert to his own projections and those participants may develop toward him. He tracks the moods of participants and must be ready to address discordances and ensure that boundaries are respected. He oversees a culture of socialization in which circle sharings are relevant and time-appropriate, feedbacks are objective though sensitive, and a culture of mutual respect is observed. A teacher may pass through anxiety about completing the entire course material by the end of the week, confusion about how to handle a problematic situation and feeling off balance on account of attractions and judgments. Yet, there is little to compare to the feeling of satisfaction that completing a successful course gives, having met the personal and professional challenges it presented. Positively impacting the lives of the participants, facilitating learning in multiple dimensions and being part of a chain that will improve the quality of life for others is the fulfillment of a teacher’s life purpose. The depth and intensity of feeling for participants and instructors in this extended interaction confirm indisputably that aquatic trainings foster a space for the totality of feeling.

Contact with Nature



We have already considered a few examples of sensory experiences in nature that create a feeling of totality, such as listening to the sounds of the forest or allowing the beauty of the sky to touch us. There are still others that would be worthwhile to reflect on. Harbin Hot Springs is the clothing optional resort that was the birthplace of WATSU and Healing Dance. With its warm pool, hot pool and cold plunge, it is still a mecca for aquaphiles seeking relaxation and inner balance. Soaking naked in the pools feels quite different than when wearing a bathing suit. There is a sense of freedom from restriction, full contact with the water and a bit of vulnerability, too. The body is fully embraced by the water with nothing interposed. Socializing, meditating or receiving an aquatic session in the silky mineral water is an experience that has drawn tens of thousands over the years. The warm pool has always been the heart of Harbin, offering something to be found nowhere else: a place where one can truly meet the water, giving oneself to its “magic” in an atmosphere of safety and wholeness.

Another example of sensory contact with nature that comes to mind is simply walking barefoot in sand. On the German North Sea island of Amrum, between the beach and the forest, there is an intermediate zone occupied by dunes with marram grass. The sand is white and very fine, ideal for walking in as it allows the body

weight to sink into it. Every muscle in the foot and lower leg is engaged as they conform to the shape of the sand and work against its resistance. It is as if the legs are doing what they were designed for, free of the restriction imposed by shoes and the hard cement and asphalt surfaces of cities. There are places where the dunes are high enough to conceal the beach on one side and the forest on the other. Walking barefoot through the sand and fully surrounded by the dunes one can have an experience of totality, embraced completely by nature.



The mountains of Norway offer an experience that has become rare in our modern world: the chance to encounter wilderness. There is a system of cabins hours distant from each other, connected by hiking trails that allow individuals and groups to traverse this landscape. Much of this wilderness is above the tree line in the *ffjell*, a rugged mountainous zone known for its lakes, scree and verdant fields of moss. One can walk the entire day and not meet another soul or see any sign of civilization in a region undisturbed for millennia. This is qualitatively different from the tamer experience of nature in Germany, for instance, with its farmlands and managed forests. Although hard to describe, there is a sensation in the body that is palpable, perhaps what was normal in times past, before technology had evolved to become the omnipresent network that it is today. At the risk of venturing into the esoteric, the

vibration of the earth can be felt and one becomes aware of a sense of belongingness, of unity. A subtle stress drops away and being is somehow simpler, more vital. The totality of the wilderness is a return to physiological health, free of the negative impact of technology and a reminder that we are at home in nature and need it to survive.



And what can be said of the rare experience of awe? Pausing in the countryside during a hike or bicycle tour, looking up to see a magnificent white cloud glowing in the sunlight, one is transfixed, struck with the realization of beholding the Creation, that the natural world is sacred, that it is a blessing to be here, our tiny existence a part of the whole. This kind of awe, perceiving the spiritual in nature, is one of the most powerful and beautiful feelings one may ever have and thus another way in which the totality of feeling can appear.⁴ The inspiration for this article, the total eclipse of the sun, is just such an awe-inspiring event, hardly requiring anything in exchange for its gift of humility and reverence.

4 For an excellent and easy to read research article on awe, have a look at https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Awe_FINAL.pdf



The vastness of this earth is both comforting and awe inducing—looking out across the California desert stretching to the mountains on the horizon, standing at the seashore and enjoying the sun set over the limitless expanse of the ocean, or lying on one’s back and beholding the wonder of a starry night. Such images in a person’s treasure chest of memories bring reassurance that nature is enduring, and that this space and beauty are meant to nourish us, as surely as we are meant to preserve it.

For all that is problematic with technology, it has also given us great benefits. One of them is a sense of the scale of our planet. Looking out the window of a transcontinental flight the earth far below begins to reveal its true size. On a clear day, at an elevation of 39,000 feet, the horizon is over 200 miles distant in all directions, meaning that an area of over 100,000 square miles is visible. As breathtaking as this view is, it hardly compares to the one from the International Space Station (ISS). At an elevation of 400 kilometers the spherical shape and enormous expanse of the earth is plain to see. Astronauts report feeling a cognitive shift termed the “overview effect”, an awe mixed with a clear understanding that the earth is a single ecosystem and that there is a unity to life.



This shift in perception actually began thirty years before the construction of the ISS and it started with a single photo. In 1968 the Apollo 8 Mission to the moon took place. As the module was completing its fourth lunar orbit, astronaut Bill Anders saw the earth appear above the moon's horizon and photographed it. "Earthrise" is considered the most influential environmental photo ever taken. Never before had the totality of the earth been witnessed by a human being. The astronauts said later that this moment, this perception of the earth, was perhaps the most significant aspect of the entire mission for them. Mankind was led to a new understanding of its relation to the earth. This vision of our planet, unspeakably beautiful and fragile, "hanging in the void", gave tremendous impetus to the environmental movement, awakening a new sense of stewardship for our world.



The last examples of totality in this article move into areas of uncertainty and controversy: God and the afterlife. As far as I know, the existence of a Creator cannot be proven and no one can speak with authority on what happens after death—both are matters of belief. I wouldn't presume to convince anyone of my viewpoints; I will only share my thoughts for the reader to consider and perhaps know his or her own with greater clarity.

This paper began by describing the principle inspired by the Totality, that phase of a solar eclipse when the moon completely covers the sun. There is also a lesson in totality to be learned from the unobstructed light of the sun. It radiates in all directions, but wherever we may be it shines directly to us. At the seashore as the sun rises or sets over the water, its reflection leads straight to us, regardless of where we stand. Even in the night, its rays reflect off the moon onto the earth, finding each individual. If we were to interpret these scientific facts poetically, they could tell us that that which is the source of life reaches out to the minuscule creature, warming and illuminating. Though millions of miles distant, it sends its light out across the emptiness to touch each, showing the way home. It accompanies us even through times of darkness.



There is a fact of genetics that is interesting to place next to this symbolism of the sun. The nucleus of every cell in our body⁵ contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, inherited from both parents. Each chromosome is a long molecule of DNA made up of hundreds to thousands of genes, which are responsible for every trait of our physical appearance and how our bodies function. In other words, the entire blueprint for our structure, physiology and growth is in every cell. Just as in a hologram⁶, the whole is embedded in every part.

Taken together, the symbolism of sunlight and the cellular distribution of our genetic design suggest a comparison to how the Higher Self is understood in various systems of belief. In Hinduism it is known as the Atman, the eternal self, the spirit.

Christianity teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven is within, “...the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world.” In New Age spirituality, the Higher Self is a universal consciousness that is the source of intuition, an inner teacher that guides and inspires. A source I am familiar with⁷, The Urantia Book, goes so far as to describe it as a fragment of God bestowed upon us to share in each experience as a parent with its child; that it is an infallible compass pointing us toward Source. If we

5 All cells contain DNA except mature red blood cells and cells that have undergone cornification and died to become skin, hair and nail cells.

6 An easy to read description of what holograms are and how they function:
<https://www.explainthatstuff.com/holograms.html>

7 The Urantia Revelation.

accept the premise that a human being is as a cell in the body of God, then we may draw a parallel between the Higher Self residing in the mind and the DNA in the human cell, both representing the whole in the part, perfection in the most humble unit. Then totality would not be merely an idea, but something alive within us on both the biological and the spiritual level.

As much as it has been speculated on, no one can really speak with authority about what transpires after death. It is an area where each has his or her own beliefs according to their particular religion or personal spirituality. Some believe it is final, marking the end of existence; some look forward to a reincarnation back to the earth plane. Some are convinced there is an afterlife, a Heaven; others fear there is a Hell. I propose that birth may give us a better way to understand death. Is birth not an experience of totality? It fits the pattern of contraction into expansion in giving up the outgrown confines of the womb to discover a fuller existence in the world. Like birth, death could also be a prelude to a beginning, enabling us to leave behind an outworn body, a completed life, and continue on in spirit. Birth and death are the two bookends to a life, each a sacred rite of passage, as those who have been present at them confirm. Given their similarities could not death also be an experience of totality, closing the eyes and letting go of life to awaken into an expanded new reality?

From where we stand now there is only speculation; these questions must remain unanswered. My belief is that we live in a benevolent universe and that whosoever is good and true in this life does not perish in death, but lives on eternally.

What are your thoughts?

Thanks to Ashaman Gray and Kathrin George for their editorial feedback and encouragement.