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Somatic Experiencing as Ritual: Unspoken Benefits

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In the evolving process of educating myself and my clients about Somatic Experiencing®, I've had some unexpected surprises. Based on my experience and understanding, I have come to believe that although every SE session is a refined clinical tool for the resolution of trauma, it can also be a sacred ritual. Experiencing our practice as ritual allows for the possibility of: (1) comprehending our existence in meaningful ways; (2) providing a pathway to guide our moving from one stage of our lives to the next; (3) establishing secure and satisfying relationships in our communities; and (4) fulfilling our longing to know our part in the vast wonder and mystery of the cosmos. Ritual, partnered with scientific understanding of energy fields, gives birth to a new context in which to live a fuller and richer life.

My clients and I are often bedazzled when I periodically weave teachings about ritual into an SE session. These enhancements allow for even more expansiveness than the healing of any specific trauma. The five elements of ritual are: (1) Mind Mastery, (2) Barrier Dissolution, (3) Sex-Spirit Split Healing, (4) Resiliency Building and (5) how these preceding benefits can totally shift our world view and sense of self. This experiential shift (personal, global, & evolutionary) holds a sustainable hope for our species that we may evolve our existence in a more fulfilling, holistic and thriving manner.

Suspended Thinking

During my years of practicing SE, I realized that by helping clients come into the *present* and *curiously observe* their experiences, their overall awareness evolved. This is the experiential wisdom gained during SE that allows clients to realize they have a good degree of mastery over their own minds. Our thinking systems *can* be put aside to perceive a different experience. Many people realize an exciting, new capacity. Tuning into sensory experiences while respectfully putting aside the mind helps people recognize that they are empowered to do so in everyday life.

I find great value in making this additional benefit conscious and tangible for clients. Who doesn't want to experience mastery of the mind? I invite clients to experiment with this skill in their daily lives, suggesting they take a deep breath when they *first notice activation*. Then, setting the anxious mind aside, insert a soothing resource, or sense their feet on the ground, or create

a circle with the tips of their thumb and middle finger to modulate the activation. Any of these interventions brings energy down from the cognitive head (which often amplifies the physiological and emotional activation) into the body, accessing a different intelligence.

In my work with organizations and forward-looking innovative leadership techniques, I notice *the capacity to suspend our thoughts* as articulated by cognitive scientist Francesco Varela means the same as "Suspended Thinking" as I refer to it here. This concept is highlighted in the book *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* by Peter M. Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers. They share the latest research out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on how by bringing leaders into "presence" (similar to SE in many regards) new answers to perplexing problems arise from a vast intelligence wanting to emerge.

Barrier Dissolution

I was trained to use SE for trauma resolution and was captivated by its capability. After using it for a time, I began to experiment using the same methods for clients who reported physiological "barriers" to getting their needs met. An example of this is the man who is bright and articulate, but loses his voice and ability to reason when confronted by his demanding female supervisor. Rather than set appropriate boundaries with her, the client dissociates and ingests toxic energy. This exacerbates the dynamic of non-effective communication. Another physiological barrier that appears in many clients is the lack of ability to get physically intimate with another. Whatever the barrier may be, I've discovered that we can address the physical manifestation of it, the same way we address trauma. It appears, and many sessions confirm this, that under each barrier is a trauma. However, the client may never have remembered it as such. Once we bring these unseen traumas to light and melt the binary psychological logjams that lock us out of our lives, we begin to make better choices. Better choices help bring about happier circumstances, as we more fully embody the lives we want for our selves.

I have witnessed numerous clients gradually (and sometimes quickly) dissolve such barriers and find a core strength within themselves that allowed them to set appropriate boundaries. This allowed for more fluid communication and the dropping of what seemed like steel walls, allowing greater physical intimacy.

Sex-Spirit Split Healing

The resources that ritualized practices, like SE, offer are not about wishful thinking or the denial of reality. In fact, they allow us to face the traumas of pain, hardship, and sexual "splits" in our selves, eyeball to eyeball, and respond to such challenges effectively in ways that are fundamentally transformational. The sexual-spiritual (love) split is a deep psychic schism within almost everyone in our culture. It prohibits loving relationships from

forming and enduring, while remaining sexually alive and growing. The schism between sex and spirit is caused by generational, cultural and religious programming that plants traumatic seeds deep in the unconscious. This can make merging the two energies after bonding virtually impossible without the specific healing that an SE ritual offers.

Many sex-spirit split dilemmas presented by clients appear like the barriers we just addressed. The way we hold and address them are similar. An example of this is a client who is married, has children, and has not had sex with his wife in four years. In the times he tried to address it with her, he did so clumsily, experienced rejection and then stopped trying. Though the couple tends to bicker and have some polarity-dynamics going on (which is often attributed to insufficient sexual connection and/or communication), they do love each other and want to stay together.

In facilitating an SE ritual with such a client, we melt one barrier at a time before getting to a place where the sexual communication necessary to reinitiate an erotic life is well established. And, yes, of course we end up healing some unresolved and often unremembered trauma(s) in the process. Often, I find this work is best enhanced by my bringing awareness to new constructs regarding fulfilling erotic connection; exp: the true purpose of pleasuring as opposed to just orgasm or performance. As they progress, I often refer clients to the Vibrant Eros section of my last book (which uses the acronym S.E.X. for Soul Energy eXchange) and give them additional resources for up-to-date sexual-spiritual education. I might also encourage them to read some about Tantra, an expansive system of all-encompassing reality that teaches the continuity between spirit and matter through our senses. Clients often discover a love energy that opens an ascending path, increasingly embracing a higher and wider identity and sense of self. Lovers who heal this sex-spirit (love) split are taken out of themselves and into a larger union with the cosmos.

Resiliency Building

We all know that all SE is about resiliency building. I make a distinction about a particular category of this art for our clients who live or work in emotionally toxic environments and are not in a position to leave, and those who are long term care-givers to the seriously ill.

In both of the above situations, the client is traumatized on a daily basis. The worker feels his/her spirit crushed daily. Care givers are traumatized by what they witness and by being forced to live in two worlds; the world of illness' fragility and the everyday material world that diminishes and undermines that same fragility.

In SE rituals directed at this type of resiliency building, resourcing becomes the most important tool. These people need to feel a sense of restoration that goes to the bones. Time and time again I find that our basic SE tools rise to the task beautifully.

Shifting World Views

By enlarging our view of trauma healing, and naming what we are doing, we can totally shift our world view and sense of ourselves into more holistic, tangible co-creators of our evolutionary process. Joseph Campbell predicted that new mythologies emerging in the 21st century would involve consciousness: "knowing oneself," and a wealth of new rituals unleashing a fresh set of energies. The knowing of the self can bring us peace and equanimity. We learn who we are in a swiftly changing spiritual, material, and scientifically manipulated reality. Trauma focused SE rituals are a doorway to this journey of knowing.

Being the eternal (big picture) realist and optimist that I am, I concur that we are living in what philosopher Buckminster Fuller called our "final evolutionary exam." The questions before us are simple: Can we move beyond limiting modes of consciousness? Can we let go of our illusions, discover who we really are, and, in that, find the wisdom we so desperately need? Every day, I find myself in the presence of those who are doing just that. Fuller also suggested that all humanity now has the option to become enduringly successful. I believe that SE, and the many ways we can use it, brings this option to our being. Ritual (and SE) as a resource, and healing as an art are bringing us the tools of the future: light, belief, self-love, and imagination.

*Dr. Michael Picucci is author of *The Journey toward Complete Recovery* (Oct. 1998) and *Ritual as Resource: Energy for Vibrant Living* (Jan. 2006), and was the recipient of the National Institutes on Health (NIH/NIDA) Outstanding Leadership in Research award for his findings. He has a private psychotherapy and consulting practice in NYC. His web site is www.michaelpicucci.net and his additional research can be found at www.theinstitute.org. Contact: michael@michaelpicucci.net or 212-242-5052 or 800-409-5713.*