

THE NATURE AND EXPERIENCE OF A HEARTFELT CROSSING

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WHOLEBODY FOCUSING CROSSING WITH THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

I want to share something with you that I found very exciting when I was invited to update this piece on the Crossing that happened between the Alexander technique and Wholebody Focusing that occurred many years ago in a little book entitled, “*Dancing the Path of the Mystic, Awakening of Embodied Consciousness and One Man’s Journey into Becoming a Whole Person*,” (2002). I defined a Mystic as one who yearns to live more deeply from his or her spiritual center; one who is open to the Spirit in all aspects of life.

How has this practice evolved over the last ten years?

DIFFERENT WAYS OF CROSSING EXPLORED

I want to say something about how this kind of Crossing is very different from other forms of Crossing of Disciplines that we are more familiar with. I think of a Crossing as being associated with building a house, for example, where the many disciplines come together with a plan to build something that fits the expectations of a design. Another example is a Crossing to engage in different kinds of sports and teambuilding that develop skills training, teaching us how to function together in very skillful ways or maybe sharing ideas together, thinking along with each other on a subject of mutual interest.

The Crossing that I want to share with you is a very different kind of Crossing—with very different expectations and outcomes. This kind of Crossing is not predictable; it comes totally as a surprise, totally unexpected, totally new—with a never-before quality and could not possibly have happened unless we were open to sharing and listening to each other in this way we call *Focusing*.

THE EVOLUTION OF HEARTFELT CROSSING—AN UPDATE

Looking back, this Crossing began as I began to work in two disciplines, Focusing and the Alexander Technique. As the Crossing began to find a way to integrate, gradually over time, it emerged into the Wholebody Focusing modality that today stands on its own, adds something more, and yet contains all the essential elements of its original foundations. And it keeps evolving and keeps taking on a life of its own.

The results of such a Crossing have been amazing, for me and for others. The process has evolved naturally out of the Wholebody Listening Partnerships toward what felt matched, open, and often mutual in heartfelt relationships. We call this *Heartfelt Connection*.

The pivotal question was always, “What am I doing that is interfering with the natural functioning of myself?” At the same time what seemed to be implied further, in the Focusing modality, was an invitation, “Can we make space for what gets in the way—for that too—with an equal positive regard?”

CROSSING BEGINS WITH A PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT —A PERSONAL STORY

This question about making space was also a very personal question that came out of a fundamental need in me, a need for connection with another life, another person that felt meaningful to me—and hopefully with a feeling that was mutual for the other person. There was something I also felt was missing...something that I kept looking for and could not find...that kind of heartfelt connection with another human being that would satisfy a basic need to feel alive, find myself, to feel a sense of place, that I belong, that I have a right to be here, and that I am not alone. That search for *something more* came together in a Crossing between the essential elements in Alexander and Focusing, and ultimately emerged into what we now call *Wholebody Focusing*.

The foundation of *Wholebody Focusing* entails being in *Grounded Presence*. All else will follow naturally from what has come before. As an Alexander teacher, I was concerned with changing dysfunctional patterns of behaviour that were so embodied that they have become unconscious, and I was concerned about how to change that.

F.M Alexander observed that the body comes alive as a whole, an awakening of an “action potential” in order for change to happen in any one part. Focusing attends to the *felt sense in the body* of what is *there* and *yet unclear*, meaning that the *thing that gets in the way*, will find its way, such as dysfunctional patterns, will find its own way back *to a right way of being*.

Wholebody Focusing includes the sense of the alive-body awakened by its sense of grounding and support, usually starting from the feet upwards and connecting to the whole of its environment. We discovered that if we become well-grounded and present to that quality of the *alive body* in its own *embodied wisdom*, the rest will take care of itself!

Growing up, I wanted to be an architect, but everything seemed to get in the way of fulfilling my desire. My father wanted me to be a priest, or a life insurance salesman, and an athlete like himself. There was no space for a *Me*. That *Me* seemed to be undermined at every turn. However, unbeknownst to me, some very special skills were developing quietly, silently unnoticed in a life full of frustration, feeling alone, and unappreciated.

Looking back over my life, I can see that this kind of frustration of blocked-growth was also exactly what was needed to develop the skills that I needed to move my own life forward, as it was meant to be. I was driven by an insatiable need for connection, especially

with another person one-on-one. It was as though I needed to feel that kind of connection to find myself, a sense of how to be me, and then how to be with others. Without that sense of connection, I felt ungrounded—I didn't know who I was or how to relate to others. I needed this sense of grounding to open up to *me*. It was like a driving force, a kind of activation out of the very thing of the not-right feeling! The suffering of it all...

These kinds of Crossings are perhaps as present to my consciousness today as when they first happened, many years ago. This is *Heartfelt Connection* that crosses with another as the very quality of connection I have been looking for all my life, and now I have it. These crossing experiences were already there; they happened unexpectedly. They were amazing and I didn't know why or what they meant. *Focusing* gave me the framework I needed to name and to own this experience and to know how to use it and share it with others.

CROSSING IN ACTION—EXAMPLES OF A HEARTFELT CONNECTION

I want to offer you two examples of how these kinds of Crossings worked—even before I knew how to use them!

The first example was an intention to share the Alexander technique in a trade with another person's discipline of Shiatsu. As I recall, we seemed to be on solid ground, comfortable with one another. It was not a first time for us and so we seemed to be willing to be open to what was there between us as we worked together. And then something remarkable happened, totally unexpectedly. And although she was working with me in Shiatsu, my body awakened to itself in a whole new experience of the Alexander Technique, as I had known it. It was like a whole paradigm shift, a dream I never thought possible—and it felt *so right*. My whole body was coming alive, with an inner directed wisdom from the inside not from the outside as I would have expected. It felt so alive; the self-activation was total, moving naturally and effortlessly with an intelligence and meaning all its own.

The transformation felt complete—my life would never be the same. My attitude towards working with others shifted. It became *inner-directed* rather than outer-directed—and with a new and very real sense of humility.

The second example seemed to follow from the first. I wanted to share a similar experience with a fellow colleague. The invitation brought an immediate resistance, an issue around control.

She said, "I can't, I don't want to!"

I listened to her, and took her seriously. I respected her need for control, the fear of letting go, and what that meant for her.

She said, "I can't let go, there would be nothing there!"

I made space (in me) for not knowing what to do here, without trying to fix it in any way, but I could certainly feel the anxiety between us. I *stayed with*...then suddenly *something* opened. I felt flooded with information about how to *be* and what to do around this very specific situation between control and letting go without any loss of self. Now I

know that there is another way to maintain control. The feeling was like a paradigm shift, moving beyond a belief system that seemed stuck—pointing to the presence of an inner intelligence—a wisdom that lies at the heart of us offering to move us through a limiting belief or stuck place to new possibilities...allowing change to happen.

THE BENEFITS OF CROSSING. WHAT DID WE LEARN? SPECIFIC QUALITIES WE CAN NAME.

In the above examples we were both willing to share something with one another in this kind of open-hearted way. The first example gave me an experience of the body coming alive to itself, the instinctive body, the body of evolution, independent of me. I would describe this bodily quality as “*spontaneous inner-directed movements that seem to have a life all their own.*”

The second example illustrates the Wholebody Focusing modality at work. Two colleagues were willing to be open to a shared experience, inviting some kind of movement in a stuck place with a Focusing attitude. The very apparent conflict that came up between us was just what I needed to explore the power of this *Inner Directed Wisdom* in action, namely a way to move beyond a limiting belief towards a *Larger Sense of Self* opening up a whole new world of possibilities...beyond what we think we know. Once again this knowing could not have come to consciousness unless we were willing to meet each other in this shared experience of Crossing. As Teilhard de Chardin has said, “*A person grows as a person in connection with another person and in no other way.*”

HOW THE LARGER WORLD OF LEARNING CAN SUPPORT OUR INNER EXPERIENCE.

I would like to put the above experiences in a larger context—the way I learn best. First, I need to have my own inner experience—then I want to have my experience reflected and supported by another, whose experiences are somewhat similar. For over a century of experimentation, Quantum Physics has pointed to a very significant observation that has fascinated me. Namely, that when a neutral kind of human consciousness is present it causes a random and disordered fluctuation of electrons to reorganize themselves in meaningful and non-random ways. This meaningful reorganization is something that occurs in human consciousness, and gives rise to a certain quality of Presence.

In the very same way, the quality of my observer Wholebody Presence facilitates a reorganization process at a bodily level which touches all layers and levels of the human being, from the sub-molecular to the firing of cellular tissue processes which impact physical, psychological, and energetic function. When I allow myself to touch the world and be touched by it, my experience of self is enlivened and expanded. (Whalen & McEvenue, 2009, p. 6.)

The discoveries of Quantum Physics point to the importance of our evolving human consciousness and shows that our consciousness can change that which is random and

unchangeable—if we are able to be conscious with a sense of *neutral*—connecting to the ground of the wisdom’s own environment working through a person. Then something can awaken in a more orderly and perhaps meaningful way. This is the power of Consciousness connecting to the power of a *Larger Wisdom*.

A HEARTFELT CROSSING—GROUNDED PRESENCE, THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS APPLIED

Here is the next step in a Crossing (that, of course, keeps evolving), emerging out of the qualities of *Heartfelt Listening*—the *Wholebody Focusing Listening Modality*. The essential quality is about connecting with *Grounded Presence*: Me Here, separate from you—and yet wanting to make space for the *sense of You*—and what is alive in you—and—it is the kind of Crossing seems to come as a surprise—not of our own making, and yet just right. We make room for both, because *Grounded Presence* opens to a Larger Sense of Self—the nature that makes Crossing that is so satisfying for each of us. A “Me” naturally opens up to a sense of “We” in *Heartfelt Connection* and Communication.

The Power of Heartfelt Connection in Action

The following illustrates the potential power of *Heartfelt Connection* in between two colleagues skilled in *Wholebody Focusing*. Something critical had happened just before we began. My colleague, Barb, appeared to be in some kind of shock. She mentioned that she had a reoccurring meniscus (musculoskeletal condition) that had suddenly flared up again. Her right leg, without warning, locked tight and she couldn’t straighten it out. When this happens, her leg freezes, and she can’t stand or walk on it for months at a time.

This seemed like a wonderful opportunity to explore our skills of *Wholebody Focusing* and *heart-to-heart listening* to see what *it* might want to tell us...what *it* needs...and remarkably the situation was resolved in one session!

We started with grounding and connecting to the *Larger Self* between us, *felt sense-to-felt sense listening*. We didn’t go to the issue of her locked right leg first. Instead we looked for a *safe place* where Barb could be more comfortable i.e., to a place where part of her was functioning normally—so she could find something that she could hold on to. We invited the knee pain to be there just the way it was, the way it needed to be, and made room for both, the part that felt alive and grounded and the part that wanted our attention just the way it was, and holding both with equal positive regard.

Together, I helped Barb to *hold both*...the felt sense of the *whole body*, alive in its consciousness, next to the *part* that seem to be in shock. We invited the *in-shock place* (with locked knee)—to feel the life support of the OK place (holding the felt sense of both) so that *something* could awaken between them, in their own right time and wisdom. *Holding both with equal positive regard* is one of the essential qualities of this modality.

Something started to move, first in the part that felt normal, and then gradually some subtle movements began to appear in the part that was feeling the shock. At first we didn’t

know what was happening, but it was clear that something had awakened, as though the various parts were beginning to reorganize themselves and we just gave them space to do so. Out of the blue, as it became more aware of itself, the shocked knee asked, “*What’s happening?*” At the same time, the shocked part seemed to be flooded with information, images, memories, words, and physical shifting as it began to unwind itself. We just stayed, in attention, with the *not-knowing*—holding the space and just making room for what seemed to be wanted. Our attention and presence was vital to what wanted to unfold.

Suddenly something came in me (*The Listener*). I could feel a something new awakening...a something fresh happening...and it seemed to be awakening in Barb, too (*The Focuser*), and so I offered this possibility to her to see if she was ready to receive it.

She recognized that something was trying to unwind and/or perhaps even straighten out, but there was also some resistance to letting go. And then something told Barb, “*It doesn’t want Barb to throw herself off the cliff.*” That message made total sense to her: This knee was trying to hold her back to keep her safe. It was as though this injured part was there to protect her, and *it* needed to be seen and heard in its role here. With this new awareness she was able to acknowledge and appreciate why this whole situation was happening. *It* did what it did to keep her safe from harm!

With this appreciation and acceptance from Barb, the body movements heated up even more intensely, as though the body as a whole just wanted to shake itself free and rebuild itself in a whole new way. Very specific movements began to come in her right foot, creeping up the leg, right into the knee itself. The whole leg seemed to want to straighten, but it didn’t know how to—yet. The moving, the reorganizing, seemed to be looking for a ‘how’ but needed time and space to rethink itself.

Many steps follow, one after the other, too many to describe here. Suddenly, out of the blue, something truly remarkable happened. First the knee and leg were flooded with a warm loved feeling. Then Barb was filled with a self-doubt that was familiar—like a kick-back reaction for feeling so much joy. She made room for both. Suddenly the knee unlocked itself, the leg straightened up and she found herself standing on her own two feet again! The movement continued. It didn’t stop there. It was as though the entire right side of her body wanted to find its rightful place—the whole of itself—once again, as though *it knew* how it was meant to be. Barb felt a return to that spontaneous child she always was, now with adult consciousness.

This session, lasting just over an hour, opened up many doors, connecting with many threads in her life and needs, allowing fresh patterns to emerge, some connecting to risk-taking, but to other issues as well.

We knew this would take time. But the chronic condition has not returned these past three years—just the warnings—when she is beginning to jump off that edge again. The warnings have become her companions. The reorganizing itself, the shaking up of the whole body seemed to affect the basic molecular structure itself, re-patterning itself into a whole new way of functioning—a way that she could have never thought possible before. And yet it brought back the embodied experience of a spontaneous child she always was—and still is!

UPDATE OF A CROSSING; AN EVOLUTION TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN—HOW IT BEGAN

So where do I want to take this story? What do I want to mark to update where it all began?

It started simply with just me, a young man that was curious and very needy, looking for something and not knowing what he was looking for. And yet he was driven to keep looking, keep searching, knowing that something wasn't right inside, but he didn't know what that was.

Fortunately my unhappy fellow came face-to-face with a series of crises that seemed to change my life. I had been diagnosed with a degenerating disc condition that I took to be a life sentence. Life was over. I felt so depressed and yet there was so much anger there too! "*I am not going to take this!*" There was a kind of determination that I didn't know I had. I knew that I had to find my own answers in order to cure myself.

Shortly thereafter, the Alexander technique presented itself; it was an important step, but didn't completely satisfy—I felt there must be *something more*... Then something unexpected happened. I discovered something new and totally physically and emotionally transforming. In the course of working with one of my clients, she unexpectedly said, "You must meet Gene Gendlin; you seem to be speaking the same language."

I attended a workshop on *Focusing* where I'd had a pivotal moment that changed my life—once again. "*This is what I have been looking for. Now I know what that is!*" Everything shifted and yet it was the same. It was like I knew something, but I didn't know what it was that I knew—and then I suddenly did—It was *always there*. *Focusing* felt like a whole new language. The sense of it was all-inclusive, containing all that had come before, and yet so much more that was still unknown. I was being introduced to the *Focusing attitude!*

At some point I realized something *different* was happening here; I didn't have a word for it yet—"The Crossing Function"—but it was taking on a life of its own—Bigger than Me, and I knew it. The new shape was *Wholebody Focusing*, and a new piece called *Grounded Presence* in the *Focusing Attitude*.

THE LARGER SELF IS THE ALIVE BODY CONSCIOUSNESS IN GROUNDED PRESENCE!

That shift was pivotal once again, connecting to the earth, to nature, in a simple way. It awakened a Presence to what I can only describe as the body alive to itself. My body was able to come alive to itself and connect with the whole of me with a sense of its own wholeness and wisdom. It was all there, I could feel it, I could observe it moving through me, independent of me, but it took some time to name it.

Now I realize it was the sense of the *Larger Self*, something in Me and More than Me. The body alive as the *Larger Self!* I felt I was part of something, a kind of Presence, a larger presence that was wise, intelligent, and there for me. I felt loved—a quiet loving that

not only made room for me, but space in me to be able to make room for others to be just the way they are too.

This sense of the *Larger Self* seemed to awaken a bodily aliveness that seems connected to our bodily evolution, connected to our instinctive body, and to so much more. It is within this *Larger Self* that human consciousness is able to find a way to connect with this instinctive body and to work together.

I want to say that the instinctive body, the consciousness of evolution, working together with human consciousness *IS* the consciousness of the *Larger Self* inside us. I am only just beginning to realize the resourcefulness that this *Larger Self* makes available to us when we can turn to it. This is the edge of what excites me now: the bodily aliveness, as experienced inside, as a consciousness all its own. This, the presence of the *Larger Self* that is me and so much more than me when I invite it to function along with me.

I call this *Participatory Spirituality*, which is yet a new form of this ever-evolving *Heartfelt Crossing* that began so many years ago.

A SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF THE LARGER SELF IN EVERY DAY LIVING

I would like to give you a very simple example of this *Larger Self* in an everyday situation that happened just recently.

It was early morning; I like to sit first thing and reflect on the day and perhaps what came during the night, a kind of meditative moment. I was deep in concentration when suddenly I heard the garbage truck approaching. My body reacted in panic. "*I forgot to put out the garbage. It's garbage day!*" My body got all uptight as I moved awkwardly in a kind of blind, all-arms-and-legs-akimbo, not knowing what to do next.

But then a friendly voice appeared inside me that said; "Kevin, you've got lots of time." In spite of the panic, I heard that voice, and I knew it was speaking truth. The panic state relaxed and I began to become more aware that, in fact, the garbage truck was at the top of the street, and it would be some time before it got to my door. I had lots of time. I breathed. I felt spacious. I took my time and, with a light heart, I put out the garbage in plenty of time for the pickup.

This was the *Presence of the Larger Self*, aware of the larger picture. It had been there all the time, wanting to remind me of its sense of it. For a moment I had forgotten until I was able to hear the gentle voice that just wanted to keep me informed in what was actually happening.

How easy it is get distracted and lost in fear and panic, and to forget the presence of the *Larger Self*. How easy it is to forget that the Larger Presence is always there. But this time I laughed, and I felt it was a very good example of how my little self can take over, panicking as usual, and then how sometimes the *Larger Self* reminds me of the bigger picture, as it did here. The *Larger Self* holds the larger picture, but too often I get triggered and try to function without it!

SOME CONCLUSIONS IN THE BIGGER PICTURE

As I come full circle, I realize this story of Crossing awakens my evolution, my own history of struggle and where I am now. At the beginning, the question inside of me kept asking, “*What am I doing that is interfering with the natural functioning of myself?*”

Now the answer seems self-evident. I see the changes in everyday situations. Today, I seem to be more in sync with myself and what is out there. I’m not responding as defensively as I used to. There is a kind of pacing in my life that I love now. Life feels more comfortable to me. Finally I have come to the conclusion that maybe, “*Life is easier than I think it is!*” The sense of self is becoming more me, not less! This is the Power of Crossing that has taken on a life of its own, and this is what is happening as it continues to update itself and promises more...

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