

An unclear bodily whole¹

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You all know, I assume, that in therapy it is important to pay attention to feelings. And that just to explain and just to think and just to figure out and find causes and so on does not change people. And this is now well known.

And we now have a next step from there. Because we find that if people have not been in touch with feelings, then yes it is very important to come to your feelings.

But once you have done that and many people are still doing it and that's a big discovery: "Oh, I lived without my feelings, this is very different, big step in live, yes". But once you have that, then there is a tendency to have the same feelings over and over and over, and over, and over, ... the same feelings. And then just feeling your feelings is not enough.

And now we have many methods to work with feelings. Methods where you get very intense feelings: anger, sorrow, crying, people cry and spit and scream and cough and... all that. And that is good if you have never done it. And in fact, even after you've been in touch with feelings for many years, if there is a ... any feeling that comes that is new - you haven't yet felt it - then it is still correct to say: feel that through, go through that; that is still correct; if it is new.

But once you have done it one hundred times, the same feeling, then it is not correct to say: "Well try it one more time, feel it through". Because you have already done that so often and that is not enough. And that's also true of other things. Memories. A new one, yes, sure, welcome it. But the same memory to screen that every time something happens, no. And we find in those methods that people repeat, over and over they screen the same memory. That is not ...

There is now a further step from feelings. And that's what I want to show you and talk about. I'm going to say that ..., what I want to talk about is: an unclear bodily whole. And those are three words that I will tell you more about: unclear, body, and whole. Okay, now it takes a little time to learn this and so I'm not going to be able to really show it to you, but you can find it.

What I mean by 'unclear': for example, in our research, on the tape-recordings of psychotherapy, you would hear the clients who are eventually successful; they do this. They will say something: ".....", something they think is right. Then there is a silence. And then you hear the person say: "No, that's not right. I don't know what is right, but that is wrong". And then there is more silence. And then you hear the person say: "Oh, yea. Yea, yea, yea,

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yea ... one thing is, this and this and this Is that right?" And then there is a silence. They say: "Yes, it is right".

It's just as if you were on the telephone, and you say something and then he listens [and says]: "No, that's not right". What is right? Can't tell me yet. "Don't know what is right. But I know that's not". Or it's just as if he goes downstairs. Do you know: it comes up and he says: "Well, that wasn't right. But what's right? I don't know yet". Wait. Goes back downstairs Comes up: "... one thing I can tell you, ... this and this. But wait, I go down and check it Yea, that's right".

What is such a person doing? Now you will say: "Well, he goes down to his feelings". But that is not correct, because what we mean by feelings is what we recognize: I can know when I'm angry and you know when you're angry; and we know when we're sad and we know we're glad and all those feelings we recognize.

What is it when somebody says: "I cannot tell you what I have there. I have something there. I go down and I check it". What I said: "No, that's wrong. I have something there, but I cannot tell you what it is".

So think now, have you ever had something like that? Have you ever sat with something that perhaps you can still call it a feeling but you did not know what it was. And yet it was quite clear enough to say: "Oh it is not this and it is not this and it is not this; because you can always think many things, but this is here and it is not this and not this and not this. And what is it? You don't know. But if you try to say: "It is nothing". "No, it is there". But if you try to say what it is: "No it is not right". So what can you do? Well, keep quiet. And sense it. That's what I mean by unclear.

Now, when you have something like that - and I come to my second word: bodily - when you have something like that, where do you have it? You don't have it in your thoughts, because you cannot think it. You think a lot but you cannot think 'it'. What you think is not right. So, where is it? Well, it is here somewhere; it is in your body. And so, if you don't pay attention in the middle of your body, then you can't have something like that.

Now, it could be in your throat, but somewhere in the middle of the body. I will explain later the difference: but not in your shoulders and not in your back and not in your arms; it may be there too, but the important place is in the middle of the body. And so, to illustrate that, I'm going to do something which is maybe not so nice ... (slaps suddenly and fiercely on the desk, with the aim to give the audience a fright) I'm going to do that. Now, most of you felt that. Where did you feel that? Okay. Well, that's there. That's where I mean, okay?

Now ... but there're always some people, maybe twenty percent or so or thirty percent, a lot of people, who will not know right why everybody is laughing. I will say: "Where did you feel that?", and they will say: "What?" But there are, right here, maybe

twenty people in this room, who are saying: “What? What? What happens?” So if you do not feel your body, then take five ten minutes later some time and practice that. It is not hard to learn and most people know it quite naturally. But if you did not feel anything, when I did this, don’t worry about it but ... (audience laughs) ... people will worry, and say “Oh, I’m not normal”. But ... nobody is normal, so you see it doesn’t matter; it’s true: you’re all crazy and I know it; so here is no secret for me - just take five minutes and practice that, just sit still and feel your toe, and feel your knee, and then feel your groin, and then come up in your stomach and see if you can feel in your stomach: fuzzy, warm in there maybe, or tight or whatever. Another way to do it is to see if you’re hungry; some people say: “Hungry?” They say: “No, it’s only three o’clock”. There is this other way where you go inside and ... be in there to see if you’re hungry. Also, it can be done with breathing (... makes sighs ...), if you go like that, you can feel it here. It is worthwhile to spend a little while working with a person to help them put their attention in the body, if they don’t have that. Because this unclear, what I’m talking about, is in the body. And so if you can’t feel your body, then you will not have this. So, it’s worth spending five ten minutes just practicing that; it will not be hard to find.

And the third word I have to describe is: it is a whole. Now that’s hard to explain. If I have a problem, for example, let us say: my love relationship is breaking up, or something. Every time I think of it, it makes me cry, okay? It is not hard for me to touch my feeling, do you know? In fact I have to work hard not to touch it every minute. The minute I think of it: “Oh, there is my feeling”.

It is something different to sense the whole. And most people don’t do that and they don’t know about it. It is the next step, after feelings. It is possible to allow your body to form the whole. Now the whole is more than you understand, it is more than you can think, it is more than what is clear. And in order to form it, in order to let it come, you have to step back a little bit. Most people, when they think of therapy, working inside, they go into the feelings or else they run away.

And in fact, these two things are opposites that go together. Because I’m afraid of being all the way in the feeling, I will run away. You see? And they say: “My relationship ... it makes me sad maybe ... okay? ... I don’t want to cry ... so I run away”. But there is a space in between. It is possible, in between, to be and not to run away and also not to go in. And in order to feel the whole, one has to find that space.

So, I would say: “Oh, yes, there it is”. And it is as if I had my fingertips on it. But I’m here and it is there: “Oh yes, it’s there. But I’m not in it. And I’m not running away. I’m right there and there it is”. And I would like to show you that. Because once you find that, you may know it of course; once you find that, then it is much easier to work on something, much easier to process something. Now again, if this is a new feeling and I have never felt it, then yes I should go in and I should feel it through. But if I had felt it many times then something

else can be done, namely I can just touch it here and I can stay at a little distance from it, and maybe even a little bit more. And then I can - and I will show you how - I can let the whole form instead of just that feeling.

So instead of just crying about that, I can ask myself the whole business: what comes in my body about the whole business? And I'll show a little bit how to do that because it is different. ***And if you don't understand what I'm talking about, then you understand me.*** Because this thing about the whole is different than what we mostly do. Now in this example, everybody has had a relationship that has broken up, so you may understand that example, and it may help me explain it. My feeling so-called is the one that will make me cry or make me very lonely or whatever. Now, the whole, that would be like saying: Okay, where is that whole thing today? Now, that whole thing is much more than the one feeling that will make me cry. It is ..., it has many many things in it, it has all my relationships in it that I ever had, and it has my parents in it and it has my fear I-will-never-find-somebody in it, and it has my dishonest ways of being in it, and it has my guilt about them in it, and in fact it has more in it than I can possibly know. It is the whole business, the whole ... and there're words that I use for that which don't have any meaning: the whole mess, the whole thing, the whole problem, the whole bunch we say in America, which doesn't mean anything, okay? The whole that.

And strangely enough it is lighter in the body when that forms. You see, that isn't usually there. What is there? My crying is there. Okay? But, when that whole thing forms, it feels a little better. Which is hard to believe. But it does. It's like ... (deep sigh) ..., it is as if the whole is now here, and I'm here. It is there and I'm here. And there's a little relief about that.

And then that whole has a certain quality, and it will not be the same as the crying; it has a certain quality, which will be unclear. And at first I will not know what to do with it. So, the method we have found, which is called focusing, is to name that quality. And by 'quality' I mean: heavy, tight, jumpy, fluttery... icky, nauseous, boxed in.... Do you see what I mean? Quality. It does not tell you anything about my problem. If I say 'fluttery', you don't know from that if it is a problem about this or that. The content: you don't know. So, by quality I mean: paying attention to the ... to the ... not the content, but the way this whole ..., the way this whole feels in the body, the quality of it. Let us say, it feels tight: "Grr".

Okay. Now what is important is two things I want to say. It is important that from this whole one gets different steps, different steps of change than usually come from the feelings that I know about. It makes me sad or cry or lonely, I've been there a hundred times. If I go there again, I will cry again and I'll feel lonely again and I'll say the same things again. From the whole you get different steps.

And more than one step usually. A little problem will be resolved in one step. But anything major, there are many steps; that's important. I'll try to illustrate that. So, whatever

comes as the first step, is only the first step. It is not the last word, it is not the result, it is not the end, it is just the first step.

And once you get used to that, then it is not so hard. Because whatever comes you can welcome it, even if you think it's stupid, it's terrible, it's bad; because it is only one step, you see? So if the first step is: "I want to kill this person", I'll say: "Oh, that's interesting. I see". Or if it says to me: "You're hopeless", I'll say: "Oh well, I'm glad you talked to me", you know, "I'm glad you tell me that", because if you have a feeling like that, no wonder you've trouble, you know, "I'm glad you're talking".

Very much the same way as I would react to a patient or a client, right. I mean, a client says: "I feel hopeless". "Oh", I say, "you've a hopeless feeling". I don't say: "You are hopeless". He says he's hopeless. I say: "Oh, you've a hopeless feeling there, well ...", you know, "let us welcome it. Let us hear something more about it". Because you know that after a few minutes something else will come; it is not the end; it is only a step. And so it goes with this: there're always many steps, and at each step the whole constellation changes.

And every step is a relief. Even if what it says sounds terrible – so when you write it down, somebody will ... people always say: "That was a relief? What did he find? He found that he feels hopeless. This is a relief?" But it is a relief. In the body. It feels like (... sigh ...): now I have it. Now I ... yes, yes, ... oh yea, yea ... it's a feeling of hopeless ... yea yea I see. And you already know there will be another step, so you're not too worried. But the coming of something: it comes with an opening. At first you only have the quality; you say: "Oh, ... like that..."; you don't know what that is. But when that opens there is a relief in the body. The energy comes back; or comes up. Something flows which was stuck before. It's like exhaling when you're been holding your breath. Every step feels like that. If it is not feeling like that, you're doing something else, you're not doing this kind of process.

So there're many steps. And each one feels like that. And then I have only one more thing to say - and then we have to try it a little bit - and that is: with this process of working with the whole, for each problem, for each thing, the unclear bodily whole, when you do that in therapy, almost as a byproduct, you're developing the self. And a new self. Because you see on the ordinary level of feelings, I'm my feelings. And in fact I was told for many years that I must be responsible for everyone of my feelings. And I'm those feelings.

But when I focus or when I do this what I'm describing here, and I let this whole form here, and I don't run away and I don't fall in, I stay here, then the feeling or the content or the whole is here. And I'm here. And I'm not that. And I discover that, that *it* is there and *I*'m here. And I'm not that. And I experience that. No one has to tell me that. Now, that's an ancient wisdom, but no one has to tell me that. It is just automatically there, that if you let the whole form, a self forms separately from that whole. And I'm here and it is there. And there's

a breath in between. And in that process, in working this way in therapy, the self develops and becomes stronger and different.

Whereas, if you don't do it this way, there's a tendency today to work only with the content, with the emotions. So you have a very tense person who is very insecure, like we all are, and then you take this method where you have this tremendous anger coming through ... and there's all this screaming ... Okay. That goes through, fine. Now, the person is still the same as before. It hasn't changed, the self isn't any different. So then they find in those methods that a little later, a few weeks later, the same thing has to happen all over again. And it's not supposed to, it's supposed to get it out, but ... - 'getting it out' is a metaphor, you know - actually the body produces it all over again and over again and over again. So then they have integration sessions in between where you sit quietly and you think about yesterday when you had this tremendous anger. But even that doesn't work, because they're separated then; you see. You have the same old person thinking about this new anger, and there is not a development of the person. Now I'm exaggerating, I'm exaggerating: those methods work to some extent too.

But I'm exaggerating to make this point, that it is important to work with the self and the anger, not just the anger; or the self and the sorrow, not just the sorrow. There has to be the discovery in the person that: "Oh, *I* and it. Oh, *I* have that. Oh, *I* can stand here, I don't have to run away. Oh, I'm getting stronger. Oh, I will go in there, when I want to. And I'll not go in there, when I don't want to. Oh, *I* see how it feels. Oh, I will let this whole thing form". And that *I* is a different *I* than the one we're used to. It is the *I* which is not anything. And that's very important.

So I said five things and now I can stop. I said that this level of working that I want to show you is with something unclear, and it is in the middle of the body, and it is the whole of some problem, any problem, or some concern, any concern; it is the whole; you let the whole form. And it has steps, not just one step; and so you always know it will keep changing. And it develops a self, which is a different self from the one we're mostly used to, an unidentified self, if you like that name.

Okay. Now, it takes quite a lot of practice to do this and people are really very different in how much practice it takes. Some people know this already, that's how I found it. Usually we found it takes considerable practice. And I used to do this with big groups, but now I don't anymore because mostly I have to get with each person individually to find exactly how to help them have that. And yet I want to do something with you. So what I would like to do is this.

First of all, I want to explain something. There're many ways to let this whole form. And, I have in fact a whole book about that. But the fastest way is ironic, is an ironic way. It's a way where you say to your body: "I feel all right about this, don't I?". And you know what

usually happens when you do that about something that you don't feel all right about. If you say: "I feel all right", what usually happens? "Grr"! So we use that fact now. We use it to allow the body to talk back; and give you the whole feeling. Now, here, any problem you have ..., here you will say in your head: "Of course, I don't feel all right. I mean, I don't have to do this, because I already know I don't feel all right". But it's ..., the purpose of it is to allow the body to form the quality or the sense of how the body is carrying that problem, you see.

So, I have a problem, I feel bad about it, I feel sad or what now ... my relationship, let us say, the one that's breaking up and I'm about to cry and all this ... and it's stupid, it seems, to say: "I feel all right about it". I know I don't. But if I say to my ..., if I step back from it a little and I say to my body - just like my body were a client or a friend of mine or another person, you know - I say: "Hello, body, we can feel all right about that, can't we. Just really fine, right. It's all okay". And then it takes about ten seconds, maybe twenty seconds, as I'm waiting, and then it says 'grr'. "Oh, I say, there it is".

Now, what is the quality of that? And I stay there if I can and I try to feel that: "Oh, grr". And maybe it takes me a minute to find a word for that quality or maybe I find an image, a picture for that quality; or maybe I just call it 'grr'. But I give it some name, some handle, some symbol; it could be a picture. That helps me hang on the whole down to it. And then, I stay with it, and I try to allow it to open. It is my client, you see. What I now do, is: now I'm ... I'm not a therapist ... is not true; I'm going to exaggerate, okay? I'm not a therapist anymore now, I'm a consultant. The client becomes the therapist. And the client's body is the client, you see. So I will be the consultant and say to my client: "Would you please ask the body what this whole quality is?"

And so, I would like you to use that, when I come to it, to use that ironic way, because it is the fastest. That ironic way, where you stand back a little and you say ... : "We", you know, "body and me, we can feel all right about this? Just fine. Everything is all right, right? This problem. No problem, right?" "Grr": You will find it there right away that way. And then see what that is. First get the quality of it: is it this way or is it this way, or is it heavy, what's the quality of it? And then, when you have that, then ask it: okay, what is that? And we will do something easy; so then perhaps it will work.

What I would like you to do, now I have to have you divide in two people. So if there is an odd number of people in a row, somebody will get out, so then maybe you turn around to the back, to the row in the back. I would like you to find a partner, somebody who's sitting next to you. Okay? So, can you arrange that?

(...)