

Abstract No. 3.8

Wednesday 6th September 2017 at 11:00-11:45

Title: 'Life in resonance', a personal exploration of communication through touch as a deafblind shiatsu therapist

Presenter: Femke Krijger, own practice of shiatsu/Tao yoga therapy
'levensvonk', The Netherlands

Main focus: Mainly practice, Both congenital and acquired deafblindness

Abstract: Being deafblind I have to find my way in life dealing with this chronic, progressive process of loss. This is a difficult and often painful process of adjustment. Long ago I realised I should not focus on adapting to the good sighted good hearing world alone. I should find my own ways of expressing myself by staying in contact with the surrounding world.

The sense of touch, I discovered, developed also without any conscious effort on my behalf. When I realised this I started to observe the sensory input of my sense of touch more closely and by doing so I trained it more rapidly. After a few years I decided to develop it further and started a four year training as a shiatsu (massage) therapist. During this training I learned so much about the powers of this sense of touch. I mention one here:

I observed a subtle interplay between the outer and inner dimension of senses. My outer sight is diminishing, while my inner sight is developing. I call it 'sight-feeling', because those two senses offer me sensory information I can no longer separate. It is a different way of seeing, and I know I am not the only one. But most people still find this a strange way of receiving information, they tend to think it's the delusional power of a deteriorating system. For quite a while I thought so myself. But in my shiatsu practice I found my sight-feeling observations true all too often and learned to trust it as I trust my other eyes, not completely, but still offering valuable information.

Also the inner hearing became a very useful instrument, lacking so much of visual body language input. A voice can tell so much, a word can sound different, like a stone in a river, it's this different resonance in a word that tells me something is going on. It's, like the stone in the river, an obstruction maybe but also a point of possible change. With the deterioration of my sight and hearing I lost a lot, but I gained the power of focus. I see and hear what easily can be missed, because of my trained focus and concentration.

The benefit on the long term and short term of developing and exploring the sense of touch in the rehabilitation of db people:

- broadens range of communication
- strengthens self-esteem because it is something you can offer to others when in many situations you have to ask for help. In that sense it is an important help in keeping social relations healthy

- it can be applied in many ways, small (family/friends) or professional (working as massage therapist, volunteer in hospice, etc.). It's very valuable in every situation.
- it is bridging, because it is not only the deafblind person who is in need of being in touch with the surrounding world. Being touched is a general human need which for so many of us is often neglected. I notice this in my practice. The enormous power of simple touch, in tune with what is going on (inside), is moving. This is 'life in resonance'. Therefore, let us not only focus on adjustments of db to the good sighted good hearing world, let us in turn develop a powerful instrument which will turn out to be a useful daily strength

I am in no way suggesting db is not a terribly difficult reality. I myself am often still devastated trying to deal with it. But this , which I try to share here today is also part of that reality.

It helps me to find my way, literally and metaphorically. It helps me to communicate with others in ways beyond my imagination and it gave me a sense of purpose again. In short, it helps me balancing loss.