



READYING TO MOVE

Paul King reminds us that taking stock begins with the body – to pause, listen and centre, to ready ourselves for the next move. We are being called to a different conversation, the foundations of which lie deep in the body and spirit of life.

My tai chi teacher, who is still moving beautifully at 84, once invited us in our practice to be like an empty flute, to be a clear channel in the conversational dance where we are played as well as player: in effect to let the form move us as much as we move within the form.

The metaphor asks us to be with our uniqueness and open to a larger conversational participation that is more than us. It was and remains a challenging entreaty.

The long-standing dysfunctional and damaging dimensions of our modern living have reached a critical threshold in Westernised consciousness. Fragmentation and injustices are front and centre, and around every corner. Our psyches and bodies are being confronted, disturbed and disrupted. We are being asked many questions that challenge dominating habits and conventions. It is easy to be overwhelmed, whether we are concerned about feeding our family or the state of politics, society, the climate and the natural world.

There is no mechanistic fix, no single answer. This is no simple first-order change.

Technology has its role to play but the solutions are truly elsewhere. Complexity cannot be controlled but we can engage with it. The process forward, as many are now pointing to, is one that recognises the entwining, interconnecting, conversational dance of all life. It may sound frivolous to call it a dance but this reminds me to bring qualities like aliveness, lightness, connecting, and the practices of discovery, posture, rhythm and flow into form and into the moment. Tuning in, not tuning out.

TUNING INTO THE ECOLOGY OF CONVERSATION

My dear friend Nora Bateson talks about the ecology of communication: how the structure and lived premises of the context shape what it is possible to say and do. That context includes how we are shaping ourselves and showing up – what David Whyte calls our ‘invitational presence’. From an embodiment perspective, what is possible is founded on how we are organising and regulating our

physiology and nervous system. This is a key element in the aikido-influenced embodiment work created by Wendy Palmer, Richard Strozzi Heckler, Paul Linden and others. It is also fundamental within the philosophy and work of Moshe Feldenkrais and F.M. Alexander.

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Much of our current culture activates our autonomic nervous system to objectify and separate ourselves from others and the greater field, behaviour that is part of the system’s implicit formulae to survive and indeed thrive. In our time-pressured busyness we relate in a functional doing mode to sort and fix, too often abstracting from the systemic, relational, feeling ecology. We let problems organise us to narrow our field of attention and consideration. Consistent demands and expectations bring tension into our system, creating a stress cocktail of neurochemicals and hormones, and the shutting down of some of our executive function. We draw down hard on our internal energy budget. This is a territory many of us and our clients frequent. We have lost active contact with our somatically inherited sensuous wisdom, still embodied by some indigenous peoples today.

CENTERING IN THE ECOLOGY OF POSSIBILITY

In contrast to closing down and disconnecting within and without, we have the possibility of opening ourselves to the fully embodied conversation, even in the presence of threat. The most resourceful way of doing this that I know of is the practice of centring. By centring I mean centering not just within our own being but relationally within our context. Centring incorporates a blending of grounding, uplift,

spaciousness, softness, alert awareness and dynamic balance. Its foundations are laid on structuring and shaping the body. It applies the qualities of mindfulness to the active body.

We work with breath and posture to facilitate both uplift and grounding to create an energetic and physical alignment of head, heart and gut; plus cognition, emotion and felt sense intuition. The physical and energetic shaping of the centred state takes us out of our default patterns and opens us to a broader ecology of possibility. We are more able to align our behaviour and actions to our values and what we care about.

When we connect from centre we can skilfully move to co-creative enquiry and transformational engagement. We find the possibility to perceive without judgement or the need for control; to offer compassion to self and other without a need for approval; and to trust our flexibility, adaptability and agility to engage in the emergent conversation. Our intuitive sensing tends to increase. I find people often tune into what we might call their authentic self, discovering more of their height, breadth and depth through the practice.

It seems to me that we have a responsibility to ourselves, to future lives and to life itself to be equal to the increasingly pressing challenges in this world. The process of centring can help us bring our full beingness to personal, organisational, social and environmental issues. It takes intentional practice to develop this internal technology. Like mindfulness, centring is simple in principle, but given the strength of our habitual learned and instinctive patterns, it takes consistent practice and repetition to get it in the muscle. As Paul Linden says, if you want to promote peace you need a peaceful body.

So, our body structure and shaping supports our stability when we energetically open. In opening, as well as extending our field and including others we can receive and allow in.

As a small practice of enquiry, I invite you to focus on a tree or plant or any object that is non-triggering and spend a moment looking at it. Now create a sense of grounding and uplift in your posture in a soft way with your breath, and extend your sense of spacious field around it. Notice what changes in your felt sense. Now also allow its energetic presence to come towards you. Notice what further changes you sense within yourself and how you are connecting now. With this small practice we are exploring shifting from separately ‘looking at’, to ‘being with’, not just projecting out but receiving in, balancing the societal masculine (yang) tendency to project with the deep feminine (yin) capacity to receive and take in. We are (re)programming our neurology on a balanced, centred, supportive physiology.

You can try this on Zoom. In my embodiment webinars I have been inviting people to not just ‘look at’ another but to extend their field around the screen and allow the energy of another to come towards them. People consistently report that their sense of the other person increases, that the space becomes more 3D, and that they have a greater sense of connectivity and somatic experience of oneself as well as other.

Opening in this way we touch and are touched. We learn to soften, which is not collapsing or a weakness but a powerful way to access ease and feel into self and other, to openly receive information, which then directs action. After action we soften and release again into listening, reflecting, restoring. Physically, this softening might be around the tongue and jaw, the rib cage, solar plexus or pelvis. We

take a breath in to uplift and slowly exhale to settle, balancing these poles, aligning our energetic capacities. When we are tight in thought, emotion or body we may feel strong to ourselves, but we have limited what is possible. In softening we are more ready for the emergent and unknown, less inclined towards anxious grabbing for the familiar.

To engage our senses, it helps to slow down (at least initially) so we can notice changes, particularly in the somatic and energy fields. To be aware inside our body and outside at the same time. Here we are developing our capacities for exteroception and interoception. Here is where the learning is, arising from attention, noticing differences. It is in this noticing that new neural pathways are created. This learning is not found within our habits. We are developing our capacity to be with not knowing, to engage with the mysterious, the complex and the ambiguous. Able to ‘be with’ instead of reactively triggered, we bring more of our potentiality to life.

At first the energy we experience can feel too much, such that we are not able to find stability within it. This is the reason for gradual evolving practice. With practice we can centre within greater and greater energetic challenges, remaining more able for the context we find ourselves in. ‘Centre’ is not, however, a place we can live all the time. Our (thankfully) quick-acting automatic nervous system will see to that, doing its job to keep us safe and protect us from threat, including the consistent low-grade daily stressors that have become part of the fabric of our world. The training is learning how to shift to centre quickly when needed; in knowing and noticing our triggered reactions; and learning how to centre in real time both elegantly and quickly.

Richard Strozzi Heckler talks of the capacity for us to centre, turn to face, extend our field, enter in and blend: that is, to be with what is there is front of us, to be with life. In the practice of centring ourselves in the relational field, becoming the clear channel of the empty flute, maybe we can better meet our challenges, small and large. We can create a new enlivening ‘con-spiracy’ with each other, the other-than-human world and the dynamic Tao of life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul King is co-founder, with Marie Faire, of The Beyond Partnership. He has been working with integral, holistic and embodiment approaches, connecting personal development to larger system change, for more than 30 years. He has delivered embodiment-based workshops and coaching across Europe and in North America and Asia. He is now transferring some of this work online. His experience includes inner-game coaching, leadership embodiment, NLP trainer training, Spiral Dynamics Feldenkrais (Movement Re Education), tai chi, qigong and polarity therapy.