

Touching— Holding a Space for Consciousness

by
Tom Wilson, Ph.D.

*“He felt the boy’s concerned hand on his.
This sweet touch from the world.”*

Anil’s Ghost, Michael Ondaatje

To touch another is an act of love and compassion. We need to approach touching humans and animals with respect and sensitivity. We want the quality of touch imparted by our hands to match the state of their beings in the present moment. They have come to us for “This sweet touch from the world”—our energy fields connecting with their energy fields. Touch works at levels beyond words and cognitive understanding, where it addresses not only the physical dimension but also deeper where psychic wounds and archetypes of the unconscious can be transformed. This article explores the essence of touching, from how we need to prepare ourselves for working with the energy field of another to enhancing the quality of our touching skills. The article concludes with a story from a recent Reiki for Animals workshop in which the most gentle touch of two students assisted a guide dog for the blind in going to the depths of her being where she had the direct experience of what needed to be healed.

Enhancing the quality of your touch with stillness and presence

Humans and animals need to be touched deeply to heal. Thus the quality of your touch must reflect your inner stillness and your full presence. All beings need to know that you are there for them, that you are holding a space of trust and safety in which they can have access to themselves, to come home to themselves and rediscover the original intent of their life’s journeys. If you are tense or distracted, if there is stress in your body, they can feel it.

We’ve all done this on a walk in nature. It’s a beautiful day and you have been walking through the forest on a soft trail under a canopy of trees. Perhaps there is a stream beside you. An hour into the walk you suddenly realize that you have been running random, monkey-mind thoughts over and over in your head, feeling unresolved emotions, chewing on problems, or rehearsing what you will say to someone. You realize to your chagrin that you have not seen the forest or the trees, not heard the birds, not watched the light on the water, and that your eyes had become fixed on the trail ten feet in front of you. You have the feeling that you have not, in any vital way, been consciously on this walk at all. You have not been present. You’ve missed the potentialities of this moment of experience.

Imagine taking that walk into the forest again. This time, you close your eyes and just listen. Your breath becomes slower and more rhythmic; your body begins to relax. You find a spot deep in the woods under a spreading oak tree. You close your eyes, breathe, go inward, and allow yourself to become still. With your eyes closed, you've severed that part of the connection between the eyes and the mind intent on finding the meaning of everything.

With eyes still closed, you feel something very small, delicate, and almost weightless alight on your arm. Though it is very light, you can feel its fullness, its nuances, its unique way of making contact with your skin. You open your eyes and discover that it is a butterfly. And you realize that butterflies have landed on you before, but not as you felt it this time. Now you are aware of the subtleties of the butterfly's touch because you have been fully present in the experience. Because you went inward, you brought your awareness into your body. You came into your senses. You became fully available to meet another energy field with yours. You might even begin to sense that your stillness and presence may have attracted the butterfly to you.

You continue to sit under the tree with your eyes open, but in a non-active way, just allowing your eyes to look ahead, not seeking to sharply focus on anything in particular. You're simply sitting still, feeling your breath going in and out, feeling your mind getting quieter. You're sitting there in a kind of active non-doing, just being with nature. After awhile, you notice that the sounds of the birds seem more playful and that the birds have begun to alight in the smaller trees and bushes near you. Then you notice that there are several deer browsing in a thicket not far from where you are sitting. They see you and are not frightened. In fact, they look at you while casually chewing and begin to move closer. You have become part of this tableau of nature, still and present. You are a part of their experience of the moment, part of "this sweet touch of the world."

What happened in this imaginative nature meditation is what happens in energy work when you come to it with stillness and presence. When you are simply there with another being in the attitude of "I am here for you," that being's nature begins to allow itself to be seen. It comes toward you. In our work, when we are quite and centered, we hold the sacred space in which the being feels safe to reveal its needs for healing to itself and to us.

The quality of light touch

Humans and animals do need to be touched deeply to be healed, and the light touch of energy work seems to go deepest toward that healing. There are times when active, stimulating touch is appropriate to break up resistance and get things moving in the body. But it is the harmonic resonance of light touch that seems to go deepest in addressing the higher aspirations of one's being, to the level of soul and spirit healing. When you touch with pressure, stimulating and directing energy, the person or animal may feel that you are *doing something* to them, and that the focus is on you and your doing. But when you place your hands lightly on another and wait with stillness and presence, you are able to listen, to sense, and to feel the slightest resonance coming up to meet your hands. What needs to arise into the light of consciousness of the being for

healing will be revealed. Your hands become the compassionate companion on the journey.

The essence of listening touch is like another experience we've all had. A child playing outside has been hurt physically or emotionally by other children. The traumatic experience is lodging itself in the body. The child comes into the house crying and you take her into your arms and hold her. Then you say—from this embrace of safety—“Tell me what happened.” The child is now able to relive the trauma from this safe place of being held. The trauma is able to be seen, processed, and released. The essence of healing touch seems to say, if you hold me I don't have to hold it inside me anymore. The sweet touch from the world is our interconnectedness. We need each other. And it goes deeper still. At the next level, the essence of healing touch seems to say, if you hold me and see me, I can reveal myself to you and to myself. In other words, trauma that has been driven down into the cells of the body and is stuck there can be released when you feel the compassionate touch of another, like the old artist in Ondaatje's story who felt “the boy's concerned hand on his.”

In active touch, there is usually an intention on the part of the practitioner to achieve a result, to fix something. With light touch, we address the being with our attention and wait for what is revealed deep within that being. By staying out of intention and doing, we allow the being to have access to its deepest nature, to allow what is buried to arise into consciousness. Spirit and soul healing happen as a revelation of what's here in the moment that is standing between that being and his or her sense of wholeness and harmony.

Pacifica, guide dog for the blind

A truly mystical illustration of how light touch allows a being to bring its wounds into the healing light of consciousness happened in a Reiki for Animals class I recently taught for the Acupressure Institute at the East Bay Center for the Blind in Berkeley, California. One of the members of the Center, Connie, volunteered her guide dog, Pacifica, for us to work on in class. In the Reiki class, we focused on the way Reiki's life force energy comes through the practitioner the way light comes through a prism. In other words, we're not doers. Instead, we're little prisms for the healing light. Accordingly, I emphasized light touch to allow what wants to arise into consciousness to be unimpeded by any attitude of doing or fixing.

At one point on Saturday afternoon, the class was spread out around the main room as we worked on dogs in pairs and threesomes. As teacher, I was moving around the room observing the students in their Reiki sessions with the dogs. Very suddenly I became aware that something was different in the room. I felt an immense presence of energy. The two students with me were also feeling it. We all shared the same sense of “what is happening?” I stood up to get a better look at the room and noticed that of the five groups working, most of the students were looking around the room with that same question in their eyes.

Then my attention was drawn to Pacifica and the two students working with her, Sydney and Ian. It was coming from them, and it was palpable everywhere in the room. I went

over to them and got down on the floor with them. Sydney and Ian were clearly in a place of deep stillness and presence, with their hands lying lightly on Pacifica. This had become a sacred healing space. Pacifica was in a deep place within herself. Whispering, I asked what they were experiencing, and they said something—not these exact words—to the effect that they were feeling what Pacifica was experiencing. Sydney said that her own eyes began to water as if she had hay fever. Ian said that he could smell hay. Earlier in the day, Connie had asked me about what might be the cause of Pacifica’s allergies. I said that allergies are commonly related to food, to which Connie replied, “No, it’s not food. It’s seasonal with Pacifica.” Sydney and Ian hadn’t heard that earlier conversation. Then Sydney said she could feel a deep sadness from Pacifica, and Ian confirmed that too.

With the lightest of touch, and giving Pacifica their full presence and stillness, Sydney and Ian were witnessing Pacifica’s being revealing itself to them and to herself. In fact, the whole room was filled with Pacifica’s energy transformation. Sydney and Ian’s energies were completely entrained with Pacifica’s. The rest of us were clearly feeling ourselves in the field. Here are Rumi’s famous lines on the larger field of consciousness that holds all of us in it: “Out there beyond ideas of right doing and wrongdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.” We all were beautifully given the direct experience of the field through Pacifica’s healing process.

The beauty of light touch in energy work is that it acts as an invitation for old wounds to be unafraid to come into the light. Those old wound and traumas will come to the surface of consciousness to be seen and be resolved. If you give your full presence and listen deeply, your client’s being will guide you where to touch. When you are doing a flow pattern to address a specific condition, be sensitive to the resonance of each place you touch, seeing what arises and staying there as long as your hands sense the need of your presence there. Allow your hands to deviate from a flow pattern if the client’s body draws you to another place.

Keep your hand on a given place on the body until you sense that you are deeply in, until you sense that the being has been given access to a deeper level of consciousness. You will know when they are in that zone. Stay until the resonance from the body tells you it is complete. When in doubt, wait and breathe. You will enter a wonderful world of not knowing, of simply loving the mystery of healing. Just be there for the human or animal under your hands. What needs to be healed will come to you. Be the sweet touch from the world.

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