

Everyday Love – Mind in the Body – Shall We Dance?

Everyday love is a ‘manner of living,’ to use Maturana’s terminology. It is an attitude and a sequence of behaviours that we perform with our mind. We didn’t create love, it seems to me, but we avail ourselves of it by using our mind. This mind is happening throughout every part of our body, not just inside our head. The brain plays a central role because of its linkages to every organ, muscle and cell. Some of these connections enter conscious awareness through sensing and movement; many of them are sub-conscious through the Autonomic Nervous System and the cascades of hormones.

This is quite hard to appreciate because we are so used to thinking that thinking is our mind when it is actually only one relatively small part of it. Jaak Panksepp (*The Archaeology of Mind*) refers to it as a ‘thinking cap’ that sits on top of our brain and thinks it is in charge. David Eagleman, who wrote *Incognito - The Secret lives of our Brain*, likens it to a stowaway on an ocean liner who takes all the credit for a great voyage even though he contributed very little of the propulsive force that got it there. Thinking can be in charge to some extent because our thoughts can influence our feelings and emotions, but it overestimates its importance by not realising that the sub-conscious is a far bigger contributor to what our mind does. This is true for our ability to love.

The expression of love involves every aspect of our mind from considerate thoughts to passionate emotions, but at its centre are what we call our **feelings**. These occur **in between** the subconscious swirl of our deep emotions and the rational ‘certainty’ of our thoughts so they are often claimed as emotions or thoughts, even though they are different from either. They are intuitive guides to our sense of meaning and they are our best indicator of the mind that operates in our body.

We keep in touch with this fundamental part of our mind through our awareness of **movement**. A book that inspires me in this regard is called *Putting Movement Into Your Life* by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, an American philosopher who used to be a ballet dancer and teacher. She also wrote *The Primacy of Movement*. Most of us are capable of dancing, but even if you’re not, the music in your mind will still move tiny muscles. Your heart is beating, your breath is flowing, your body can’t stop swaying a tiny amount.

Our **aliveness** is the movement that plays out in everything we think and do. Awareness of it is our kinaesthetic sense. When you are dying, this is what wanes. Much of it is only felt as background – it’s not unfelt, just overlooked because there is so much to achieve and no time to appreciate aliveness, no time to feel that you are dancing. Movement is not just a change of position – it’s a manner of being. Each of us has a ‘movement pulse’ and a ‘movement style’ and our deeper feelings are also alert to the inner movement of other people. The great Russian physiologist, Alexander Luria, called it our ‘kinaesthetic melody.’ It can be seen in our handwriting.

I benefitted from trying some of the exercises that Sheets-Johnstone suggests. The way we walk and sit, push things and pull things, move towards others and away from them, becomes habitual. I experimented with different movements: swinging my arms more fully when walking, leading with the other leg, lengthening stride every third step, making the bed differently, rocking and skipping, keeping my chin up or down while moving, holding my

toothbrush softly or tightly, chewing slowly or quickly. Another word for this is **play** – one of the primary emotional states of our mind.

If you want to catch a ball thrown to you from a distance you have to relax with confidence and sense its movement in relation to your own and let your hand go with it, not grab at it or stop concentrating. This could be a description of everyday love. We need the confidence to trust in our own sense of movement and the ability to read the movement within others to practice empathy and unconditional love.

Sheets-Johnstone says our sense of **agency** – which is that subjective sense of being sufficiently in control to be able to achieve some kind of outcome – is the same process we need to form **meaning**, and she says it stems from our body movement. There is a corporeal consciousness in all living things. We use it to learn. If you're a baby, moving your arms and legs is a big deal! She says that 'movement forms the I that moves before the I that moves forms movement.' It is the very nature of our subconscious mind – an invisible thread we will do well to heed as we seek happiness and satisfaction.

I find when my spirits are low and life's problems seem overwhelming that it helps to simply go for a walk, especially if I notice the breeze rustling the leaves and the little dog straining on its leash as one of my neighbours is helping it to be happy and have fun. I don't think the neighbours know this, but sometimes I put on some fairly loud music and set off dancing from one end of the house to the other.

According to Sheets-Johnstone's book, James Joyce wrote a short story called *A Painful Case* about a fellow whose relationship with his own body was in the third person style of language. He 'lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful side-long glances.' As she says, it would have been painful indeed because he was missing the 'kinetic joyride.' But it does happen to us, sometimes, that we lose touch with who we are and why we are doing what we're doing.

Being a sort of 'professional intellectual' I live in a rather top-heavy state, as if most of the blood is going to my head, and sometimes I overbalance, so I have to practice the **feeling of movement**. I think it helps with my ability to feel loved and to love and that helps to make meaning of life. The advice I try to give myself is: don't just look and listen, feel the forces flowing freely through the mind within your body.