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## The Case of the Organismic Kick or How to Move a Mountain

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I have chosen to present my work with Sam, a man of 43, an actor by profession. To date (June, 1989), I have been working with Sam for about six months, approximately once a week. The therapy (our process) is very much in progress, with new things happening all the time. Sam's story seemed apt for Al's Festschrift, perhaps for the way it illustrates how our bioenergetic work can restore a person to the healing force of his body.

Sam came to therapy with a sense that his life looked much better on paper than it felt. He was depressed, increasingly troubled at how little real pleasure he found in himself or others, and aware that he could no longer trust his excessively cerebral perceptions of himself and the world around him. In fact, Sam's chief complaint was that he never lived in the moment, feeling whole; rather he constantly edited his existence from his head. For many years Sam had ritualistically used pornography, marijuana and masturbation in order to get out of his head sufficiently to be able to experience his sexuality. The times when he felt most real, whole and able to live totally in the moment were when he was practicing his craft — portraying someone other than himself. Sam had come to therapy with the hope that he might experience such moments in his own life.

Sam was a big man. His body was heavy, with much compression and collapse around the waist. Both his head and his pelvis were held rigidly. Over the stool, and in general, it was

hard for him to move his pelvis. He was aware that he held onto his head with a sense that it might snap his neck and break off. He was "thrilled" when he read an article that I had given him on cephalic shock, feeling deeply understood and hopeful. Nonetheless, the going was slow. When I did some supportive work with his upper body, his eyes glazed over in an expression of terror with which he was completely out of touch.

Sam's eyes usually showed a deep sadness. Standing with bent knees, he felt worthless: "I'm a schlump." He was aware that he had risen above this sense of himself with a rigid attitude of pride in his upper body. As he put it, "I've constructed myself on my spine." The general sense that Sam and I both shared in the work was that we were trying to move a mountain which had some frighteningly brittle interior spaces.

Nonetheless, the mountain began to move. Sam asked me for some homework. I suggested, since I noticed he held his breath whenever something difficult came up in the session, that he should pay attention to his breathing and see if he was indeed doing this during the week. Indeed he was, and by being more aware of his breathing and concretely reminding himself to breathe, he spent more of his day in touch with his energetic and emotional process.

During a visit with his family of origin, Sam, feeling more grounded in himself, confronted his sister and mother on the family atmosphere of secrets and unreality. They in turn responded by revealing two family secrets which left Sam so stunned and outraged that for several days his sense of himself and his world was turned upside down. First, his mother revealed to him that his father had cheated on her almost from the day they married to the day he died. Second, his sister revealed the nightly fondling and molesting she had experienced at their father's hands for several years during her adolescence.

Trembling with rage, Sam now remembered getting up to urinate in the middle of the night and meeting his father in the hallway. He remembered the feeling of his father's tremendously tense body and his blazing eyes—eyes which had projected and

burnt into Sam a sense that he, not his father, was sexually perverted. Sam was now flooded with a powerful mix of both outrage and relief by these revelations. The outrage was for his young body which had become a repository of shame, anxiety and helpless guilt, "I did it, but it's not my fault." The outrage was for his sister and what she had been through, and for the abiding sense that both he and she had of themselves as being sexually polluted, monstrous creatures. The relief came from knowing more of the truth of his past. It was painful but grounding to know that he had grown up in a home where sexual insanity prevailed. (His relationship with his mother in this regard has not been explored at this point in the treatment.)

Sam had been able to identify and confront the unreality and insanity in his family because our bioenergetic work had brought him more strongly in contact with his body and its feelings. He was less identified with the secretive and perverse which had felt intolerable on his recent visit home. These revelations had reduced the dissonance between what his body had always sensed and what his mind could grasp. He could now make more sense of things, and insanity was less with him. He could therefore let his head go in a new way.

But Sam was ready to let more than his head go. After seeing what his family confrontation had led to, he vowed that nothing was going to make him hold in any more "shit." What he did in our next session convinced me that these words were spoken not only from the bottom of his heart, but also from the floor of his pelvis. I suggested that Sam try some kicking on the bed. Lying on his back, he brought his knees back against his chest as though drawing an arrow back on a bow. As he breathed out, his legs shot forward and up explosively, mobilizing his pelvis and initiating a wave of motion which lifted his large body in a unified arc several feet above the mattress. His head had no choice but to bring up the rear of this arc, as it was snapped or wagged like the tail which wags the dog in Lowen's description of orgasmic movements (1962). Sam repeated this movement many times, perhaps for 10 or 15 minutes. Amazingly, he did



not feel tired when he stopped — all 200 pounds of him. His own words (as best I can remember them) stated clearly what he did feel:

I'm trying to remember a time when I've felt comfortable in my body like this. The amazing thing is that it didn't cost me anything . . . I wasn't doing any work. I'm a little light-headed, dizzy. It feels like the motor was in my pelvis, not in my head . . . my whole center of gravity moved down there. The kicking opened that collapsed feeling in my waist . . . it freed my pelvis . . . I feel taller, longer. Everything relaxed . . . a buzz is moving all the way through my body. I love the moment. The only work is pulling my legs back in a cocking motion. I don't remember an exertion that didn't have a price . . . this was pleasant, exhilarating. It's the bounce that's fun . . . my head and neck let go . . . I feel like a paramecium.

Sam's pleasure in totally abandoning himself to an expression of protest became an organismic movement which unified his body in an effortless arc. The energetic wave motion centered him in his pelvis, and gave him a bodily experience of grace (Lowen 1970, cf. ch. 6). As his body arced, it breathed out spontaneously, and one might even say that the spirit (or pneuma) moved him. Sam clearly needs to ground this experience in his stance, his daily sense of himself. Some weeks later, he continues to draw on my faith in the therapy. But he now has a nascent faith of his own in the healing power of his body and its rhythms — which will be our ally in the deeper work that lies ahead.

## References

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