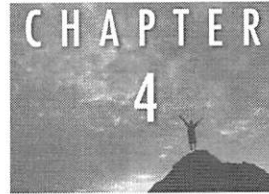


SERVAAS MES

Self Hidden in Present Time



“**W**hy do your people steal cars?” I asked Chief George. He isn’t really a chief, but everybody always calls him that. Chief George is a wise man, his face weathered by long harsh winters, his body weathered by the laws of the land, and his mind sharpened by the experience of life. He has seen it all. He doesn’t like watching TV. He prefers talking to people. During the cold winter months, he admits that he sleeps inside the house with a brand new electric blanket that keeps him warm. Westernization does have its advantages, so why not use it?

Chief George looked me in the eye and replied, “My people don’t care about cars the way you do. We come into town during the week, often hitchhiking, spend time together, and go back home the same way. Not all of us have cars. We share. Unfortunately, our children don’t have patience anymore to wait for their friends, so they take the first car they see. They drive it home and park it on the road. Somebody will bring the car back to town, you know. Maybe the next day. Or the day after. The white man calls it stealing, but it is really sharing.” Then he leaned forward and said, “My friend, cars are made out of metal. Metal comes out of the earth . . . and the earth belongs to all of us.”

He leaned back to observe my reaction. I knew exactly what he was saying but also knew that a philosophy like that has no place in Western society. That is not the point, however. The point is that a

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person can breathe vitality into a lifeless object like a car by having a dialogue with it as if it is a living entity that belongs to the ecological life cycle of planet Earth. The little girl who communicates with her dolls as if they are truly alive or whose house of blocks becomes her new home is doing the same. As children, these processes of thought and behavior are simply part of our lives, but this earthy philosophy is foreign to most adults in our commercialized Western society.

In Native American tradition, the people did not write their history in books; they transferred their stories orally to whoever was present to listen. They lived closely with and respected the creatures of land, sea, and air—the bear, the moose, the whale, the raven. They related to the weather as a living entity by dancing with the rain and singing with the wind. But times have changed. This centuries-old wisdom about how to live life in harmony with Mother Earth has been lost in the technological revolution. Our current generation is more interested in cars, iPods, and the Internet than in spending time with the elders and learning about life the way it was. Instead of learning how to communicate with nature, we communicate most often with things. A cell phone suddenly has more importance and emotional value than a cat, shooting a gun is now for pleasure instead of survival, and television has replaced the wise words of the elderly.

Emotional Materialism

Our materialism has reached the level of emotional attachment to objects. This is different from according vitality to an inanimate object; it is looking for fulfillment through possession of material goods. At the same time that we are seeking emotional satisfaction from mass-produced objects that have no uniqueness, we are engaging in its emotional reverse: the objectification of living beings. The level of aggression and violence in our society is evidence of this objectification. Individuals can only engage in senseless behavior like bullying, violence, rape, and murder if they have objectified their victims. We are not objects that are disposable. We are somatic beings, meaning we are body, mind, and spirit: organisms that can laugh and cry; sense and move; eat, digest, and defecate; think, process, and create new thoughts; and love, be loved, and make love. Objectification of living beings sabotages communication with both self and other. Our materialistic behavioral patterns—turning objects into sources of fulfillment, and living beings into objects—have distracted us from paying attention to our inner world.

Living life in this way has caught up with us. In the rapidly

advancing technological revolution, human health is showing significant signs of breaking down. Symptoms of overload are everywhere and we don't allow ourselves enough time to process and recuperate. Serious health problems directly attributable to a change in lifestyle have become the norm: cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, impotence, depression, AIDS, cancer in its many forms, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, premature aging, back pain, and other stress-related conditions. The medical establishment does not have a firm and confident philosophy or treatment plan for any of these problems. It has not evolved to address the changes in human behavior brought on by the technological revolution and approaches treatment much as before. This explains why we often don't have an answer as to how to treat the serious diseases that are now common. This explains as well the enormous interest in complementary medicine; everybody is looking for an answer.

How can we assess the situation of our world and slow down the information so that its weaknesses become visible? Is there a way we can continue to enjoy the benefits of our technological world without all the health risks and the sacrifice of our well-being? What will humans know about health and wellness fifty years from now, a hundred years from now, or two hundred years from now? How will we understand and treat physical, emotional, energetic, and somatic diseases? Some of us are slowing down now to try and answer these questions.

Present Time: The Somatic Experience

I am lying on the treatment table in the office of a somatic practitioner and his soft warm voice guides me through very gentle movements that feel wonderful. We begin with my right leg, making different moves in all directions with my foot, ankle, knee, and hip. Some with a lot of guidance and resistance, some with hardly any. My practitioner and I are both involved in this dance-like process of movement that creates a sensation of completeness in my leg.

Then I rest and integrate. My brain had to concentrate on my movements and now, looking back, I am surprised by what occurred. The bodywork invited me to return to my innate intelligence of movement and behavior. The unique movements we did bypassed all my unconscious patterns of guarding and fear and opened up the true organic intelligence of my physical movements. By moving consciously in present time, the deep unwanted tightness in my body was immediately addressed and I could feel it melt.

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The soft warm voice starts speaking again and invites me now to spend a moment sensing, feeling, and experiencing my legs. Do they feel the same at this moment? If not, what is different?

I turn within, and experience sensations I have never felt before. Even though on my life path I have practiced yoga, energy work, and meditation, this is a much deeper experience that truly blends my consciousness with my body. My left leg feels dead and heavy, lifeless, without any incentive to move. It feels lethargic, stagnant, and numb. This sensation is so strong and awkward that I feel my mind wandering to my other leg. Even the mind wants to take the path of least resistance! I resist and have to concentrate to keep my focus from drifting to my right leg. Strange, my right leg is the one that should feel useless, weak, and heavy because that is how it has felt since an injury many years ago. Here in present time, however, the sensations I feel in my right and left leg are different and totally intriguing. This must be what present time feels like when you experience your body from within, I tell myself. And how is it that my legs feel so different from each other? Which one is truly me? Am I the one that feels lifeless or am I the one that feels light, strong, grounded, and happy? Here I am in present time, not only observing the ridiculous irony of the mind-body split, but at the same moment, I am witnessing clearly the almost confusing sensation of a split between the left and right sides of my body.

The body doesn't lie. The warm voice explains that the type of inner awareness I am experiencing is called "somatic." Credit for the term and the process goes to the late Thomas Hanna, a philosopher from California and author of the groundbreaking *Bodies in Revolt*, published in 1969. In this book, Hanna defined the soma, the living body, as "the body experienced from within." Everything that is you can be seen as the soma. It is the full integration of mind and body; the full integration of left and right; the full integration of past, present, and future; and the full integration of function and structure. Spirit and soul are part of the soma, too. The soma can sense and move, breathe and think, and is designed to grow and evolve. The further we travel in time, the further we can evolve our internal and external capacities of being human and live up to our somatic potential.

The Hidden First Person

The soft voice speaks of somatics and integral somatology, the field that studies the human body from all perspectives: a subjective (first-person) perspective, an intersubjective (second-person) perspective, and an objective (third-person) perspective. The focus

on the first-person experience led to the realization of a relatively unexplored dimension of human consciousness: the somatic “hidden first-person” experience. Accessing this realm of consciousness often creates an immediate change in perception of how one moves through the world. True understanding of this hidden first-person perspective adds a pulse, a heartbeat, to any philosophical model of human existence. The field of somatology can be used to explain many aspects of life—health, fitness, behavior, philosophy, politics, relationships, religion, sex—through its model of perspective, that is, how we relate to people, events, and things in a first-, second-, or third-person perspective and decide our motions and our emotions accordingly. Balance of perspective promotes good health, communication, leadership, creativity, and compassion, whereas dysfunction in perspective can result in health issues, arguments and conflicts, a sense of numbness, and difficulty in adopting self-responsibility.

The somatic model counteracts the negative energetic and behavioral components that the technological revolution has introduced into our lives by returning attention to the self, to first-person experience. The somatic model is also far more complete than our current medical model because it studies the human body from more than just the objective (third-person) perspective. Adding the information from the first-person, the hidden first-person, and the second-person experience, this new model can confidently predict, prevent, treat, and resolve many health issues that are plaguing our society. Taught in one-on-one sessions or group classes, it educates people *somatically* about the presence of their soma in time, healing many physical ailments while also setting a new motivation and intention for living life in the future.

Somatic therapy moves you into present time, the time zone where it becomes easy to be mindful and creative, to move forward, and to let go of any attachments to the past. This often results in a more independent and self-regulating being who is able to communicate more organically with the self and others.

Not many people have actually studied this characteristic of the human being, the soma, the warm voice of the practitioner continues. Due to its subjectivity, it is not something you can learn from a book. Like life, you have to experience it.

I check in with myself again. My left side still has no desire to move. It feels like there is just nothing there. No life force, no prana, no chi, no vitality. The more I concentrate on this bizarre sensation of nothingness, the more I am fascinated by its emotional character. Maybe I should refer to it as “non-emotional” character because it

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feels so lifeless. Besides the physical sensations of my left leg feeling shorter, tighter, heavier, and denser than my other leg, I can now also clearly sense a change in its behavior. My left leg used to be my leading leg, my dominant leg, the one that could do everything better than my other leg, and here it is, telling me the opposite. There is no sensation of warmth. My leg feels cold and frozen in time. What happened to the inner fire? Even though I am breathing, my leg isn't. How can I be living up to my potential if parts of me are not contributing to my fullness? What about our purpose on this planet? Is the purpose for my right leg different than for my left leg? Does my mind have a different purpose from my body?

At this moment, my right leg feels full of energy, like a battery that is fully charged, ready to move forward. I can also sense a deep level of relaxation in my right leg that I have never sensed before. All the usual tension that has been protecting my leg since its injury has now spontaneously disappeared and been replaced by a sensation of confidence. My right leg feels brave and has the urge to move forward into the future, which is such a contrast to how it has been, holding on to traumatic memories and attachments of the past. My mind suddenly remembers the hard scar that is so numb that it doesn't like to be touched. I touch the scar and find that it no longer resists me. My leg is breathing again and ready to evolve into even deeper sensations of completeness.

Doesn't everybody's pain-body crave to become alive again? Deep inside, I have been longing for this moment, but I never knew how to get there. I concentrate on the positive messages of love and generosity within me and realize that I am fulfilling my long-awaited dream of completeness, of being One. Truly being in present time is more profound than anything I have ever experienced. With all my studies in mindfulness, I thought I was living my life consciously, but this is a different level of experiencing myself. This moment of internal perception is an experience of total bliss, a deep integral connection with myself. My thoughts and observations have become very clear and are without judgment. My inquiry into my own Being is effortless, my wandering mind playfully scanning the internal landscape of living cells inside my body. It feels exceptionally good. This moment of self-experience, this moment of experiencing the "hidden first person," is the somatic moment.

The somatic moment is observing the self in a positive way, without any self-destructive thoughts. Why is it that we mostly talk about our bodies when they are hurting, when they are in fear, pain, or numbness? Why do we hardly ever talk about the beautiful sensations that bring us more into present time, such as warmth,

love, compassion, generosity, and creativity? I think of what it would be like if my whole body felt like my right leg feels, of how it would be to live in a body that truly experiences present time. Would I still complain? Would I still travel through life at a speed I can barely manage? What would happen to my stress level? I can see that somatic therapy, this educational bodywork I am doing, offers a way to reverse unconscious habituated patterns of holding that most of us don't even sense or feel. The therapy turns *somatic amnesia* into *somatic freedom*.

By moving into the landscape of internal perception, I found endless information about myself. We can all access this deeper realm of consciousness, which is different from just sensing ourselves from a first-person perspective. In many of us, this hidden first person is the one who lives an invisible and undetectable life behind the fog of neural overload. It is a consciousness hidden behind our subjective first-person perspective and it only becomes visible with focused intention. It is a deeper layer of awareness that creates a much more profound experience than just a sensation we feel and take note of. With this awareness, we sense and move in present time while creating a fascinating internal awakening. The awareness is different from that experienced in meditation, yoga, Pilates, tai chi, qigong, or any other mindful experience. It is a specific type of awareness that grows and evolves when put into practice, and it empowers and completes our Being.

The Missing Component

"Consciousness is contagious," the soft warm voice continues. "Having gone through this (ongoing) process myself, I can only encourage you to do the same. You will learn to direct your awareness into places where you never thought you'd be and you will travel to places you never knew existed. All within yourself—physically, mentally, emotionally, and somatically! This inquiry into the Self unfolds through dedicated practice of your own movement potential. You have to create the time and the environment to experience your own inner landscape. The stronger your internal consciousness becomes, the stronger your whole body will feel. It will make it easier to understand yourself and to understand others. You will begin to live your potential as well as guide others toward theirs."

We live in a time of change and are at the beginning of a new era, one founded on an integral model of medicine, philosophy, bodywork, health and wellness, and fitness. This new model is

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organized around our hidden somatic consciousness, which directs our subjective, intersubjective, and objective perspectives on life. This model provides us with significant information about the functioning of the human body and guides us immediately toward better decisions about our health and health problems. It is powerful because it creates a new language that can be understood globally.

Being Green

The current technological revolution is rapidly changing into a green technological revolution in which we are invited to question our external choices. What is still missing is the somatic component, the component that not only thinks green about our environment, but also thinks green about our own Being. This first-person consciousness, developed by exploration of the hidden first person, will help us in every move we take, every decision we make, and every thought we create.

The only thing you need is *the will to improve*, the warm soft voice explains, referring to the awakening of the first-person responsibility. Our session continues and we work my left leg, my arms, my shoulder blades, my head and neck, and my torso. My whole body is waking up, leaving behind the compensatory holding patterns of my previous injuries. A stream of consciousness is starting to flow throughout my entire body. It feels really good. At the end, we do a few moves that integrate several full body movement patterns. It feels like coming home within my own body. When I check in again, I can feel that my ability to perceive myself as well as the world has increased tremendously. The future can come to me now, moment after moment, truth after truth, all in present time.

Maybe *that* is what Chief George meant...

