

Sarah's journey of re-remembering the body

A case study by Robin Steele PhD

Sarah is a 42 year old woman who came to counselling after three years of suffering and nearly dying. At the age of 38 she contracted a life threatening disease which left her unable to work and living on a disability pension. Previously she had worked as a veterinary nurse. She was married twice, has no children, and for the last five years has been single and shares a house with friends.

Sarah presented with a diagnosed condition called CREST - characterized by a tendency towards contraction, stillness and coldness, which manifested as hardening (scleroderma), with the formation of calcium deposits around the skin and body resulting in a tightening and stiffness inside and outside of the body - the skin on her face appears tight and stretched-looking. Her hands appeared like arthritic hands, her fingers didn't straighten up, her wrists didn't move, and her skin appeared tight and hard as if the bone was just there (Sclerodactyly). There was a loss of muscle control of the esophagus, which caused difficulty swallowing (Raynaud's); and as her stomach didn't have any peristalsis, she was rejecting lots of food, and also there was regular faecal incontinence. She was experiencing constant, sharp, stabbing pains throughout her body, causing her muscles to cramp and walking was very difficult. Sarah presented as outgoing and very talkative with a lot of nervous energy, laughing a lot and moving quickly from one thought to another.

She came to counselling because she did not want to be a victim of this disease anymore, and wanted to heal the experience of fear and abuse that she claimed were connected with her physical dis-ease. Sarah realised that she needed to know more about herself, about her body, to know why she had spent the last 37 years being abused physically, emotionally, mentally, and sexually. She had spent much of her life excarnated with the astral body coming too far into the etheric and physical body, so much so that her whole body had become hardened. It was only in the last few years that she realised it was not okay to be abused, that the way she was brought up as a child was not right, that the way she was abused in her marriages, was not normal. Because of this unconsciousness, the 'I' or Ego activity, had not incarnated enough during her developing years or her adult years and was not in charge of the astral body.

The psychophonetics counselling work involved working with her to develop her conscious awareness and her choice to overcome the victim consciousness. From the psychosocial perspective (Steiner's lectures on psychosophy), there were meanings in her world that were *stuck* and *hardened* in her body, preventing her from developing herself and her life. She had coped by excarnating and had learnt to leave the body when she was young, when being beaten, to avoid feeling the pain, and through the sessions became more conscious of when she was excarnating and not fully present, and when she was avoiding feeling pain. When she began to think and feel differently about her life situation, her body symptoms started to change.

The focus is on working in a transformatory way with the dynamics within the psyche/soul, as a process of healing dis-ease by healing her emotional issues, and learning to stay consciously *in* (incarnating) her body. Consequently, through the therapeutic process Sarah learnt to be more present, more empowered in fearful situations, to feel the pain and nurture herself, rather than stay hard/numb and turn the pain off. Her tendency to be fearful of her own feelings, of her inner self, created a sense of being fragmented, between different parts of the self, as an inner battle between body and soul, between how she felt and what she thought. This *retreat from self* (excarnating), that was affecting the flow of her life forces, prompted her to find new ways to (re)discover the self. In the sessions, she wished to take care of her *inner child* that she had previously avoided. When she entered this process and physically embodied the position of the self that had left the body, she became more oriented, present, clear and able to describe her experience. In psychophonetics this is done through action processes, the basic one being 'enter-exit-behold' and in this case including a process called the 'excarnation' sequence, in which the client learns how to come back to the body in a safe way with the necessary inner resources, to become more present in body and soul.

A team approach was needed with Sarah, as it was important for her to not just gain perspective and understanding, but also to create and include the necessary supportive and healing resources around the therapy process, especially when the body is in dis-ease, a more holistic approach contributes in building up the etheric forces - so massage, homeopathy, naturopathy and aromatherapy baths were all part of the supportive healing work.

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Sarah's process can be seen as a journey of self discovery and healing, emotionally and energetically, that appeared to require the "calling in" of great power and strength, especially as such dramatic and embodied changes occurred, particularly in her physical body. The impressive part of her process was the difference she made to the dis-ease that was affecting her immune system and her physical body. She did not die. She did need some surgery during this time but she was able to put off the major surgery to amputate her finger as she was able to heal it enough using the tools of gesture, visualisation, and sounds which astounded the doctors.

Throughout this process, the influence of the life processes on the bodily and soul layers played an important function in her process. The life forces and the senses had been disturbed through her developing years, and if she did not decide to make the necessary inner changes then the consequence of the dis-ease without this shift would have been either death or wheelchair and the loss of the ability to swallow, and she would have to be hooked up to something to be able to be fed.

By working with the life processes, especially breathing, warming and nourishing, combined with the bodily senses and her growing sense of "I" to make better choices, this had an important influence on the development of the dis-ease. This process changed her energetically and physically. She learnt to bring in more breathing, movement and warmth, to create more rhythm in her life, so that softness began to replace hardness. After a number of sessions Sarah could get off the chair without having to get support, walk more easily and eat better.

As she integrated and learnt to trust her inner child, she was able to better understand how past experiences of abuse were affecting her life. This became a much more tangible experience as she was able to physically embody the changes, by moving the body, drawing and sculpting how she felt. With the bodily-based methods, she could sense and track the unease within, instead of just letting the internal chatter control her. A big shift occurred during the time of assimilating her experiences when she created a safe inner space for an *inner dialogue*, between herself as a compassionate adult and her inner child.

As the sessions progressed, Sarah was making clearer choices and practicing her new learning and skills, such as, overcoming the inner chatter

that used to control how she thought, felt and acted in the world for much of her life. She was becoming more of her adult self, by integrating the suffering, frightened inner child, changing this imprint of an early experience of herself, through a process of self-parenting, which led to improved inner safety, nurturing, expression and choices. Through this attitude of inner openness and listening, there was an honesty developing, which meant more trust and kindness was developing, and a growing awareness of who she is.

As Sarah practiced listening more deeply, she discovered that there was unexpressed anger towards her family. In the sessions she came to understand that expressing negative energy was not the same as being negative. On this basis, she could then express these emotions, release inner negativity and learn to transform this energy in a more constructive way. This was an important realisation and was one of the reasons that she had not been able to fully return to her body, as an adult.

In psychophonetics, we work with the principle that it is the vibrating resonating life body in which the memory of all our life experiences, good and bad are stored, and life experiences of a similar nature can trigger these memories and affect the resonance of the life body, impacting the soul life. That is, the activity of the life body, as well as the stored experiences, influence the soul functions of thinking, feeling and willing (action). This means that the soul activities of thinking, feeling and willing, especially as evident throughout Sarah's process were affected, as they were closely related to the body, and physical illness arises when soul forces are too deeply embedded into the body. The healthy sense of self, spirit or "I am" of the person must be addressed, to clear the way for more of oneself to penetrate with more consciousness, into the soul and body.

The anger Sarah felt needed to be expressed as part of the process of healing deeper layers in need of care. She did this through clay and sound work, whereas before she couldn't do that because it felt like she was hurting her mother, but now realised that if negative energy was still kept in her body she would remain sick. After releasing the anger she found the underlying need and nurturing sounds which was a new experience for her to develop - '*hummm*' like a lullaby, '*mm - mm - mm*'

By actively participating in her own process and practising the skills learnt in therapy, she was able feel more empowered to embrace and integrate these aspects. This desire to become whole, to integrate the parts of her self meant

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returning to the body and being present in her body, in order to express her true being. As she faced & acknowledged her shadows and negative energies and became more conscious she could start to imagine a world of new possibilities and choices, and her ability to think and reflect developed further and new actions were exercised.

The biggest area of change for Sarah was with confrontation and the reaction of 'blocked speaking' - that is, to be able to say what she wants to say like 'no' or 'I don't want to' or 'please stop' - and through the safety of the therapeutic space, she was learning how to express her true Self, and be able to meet her parents on equal terms. A new sense of wholeness unfolded and evolved as she became clearer in her thinking, more connected within her feeling life and more empowered in her actions, with her subtle bodies coming more into balance, ie. the physical, etheric, emotional and spiritual dynamics. This was evident in how she was becoming more fully herself, with a new capacity to speak and express herself more truly and peacefully. It became clear that she was becoming more in charge of her life and exercising more freedom to choose her direction

The essence of the difference in Sarah was visible in her breathing which became more relaxed, self-accepting and confident, more trusting of herself to be herself. The way she walked became freer, not so tight and she learnt to watch her breathing, to breathe deeply, and to make sure it's not just being held tightly in the chest. Since coming to counselling Sarah has been free of pain for the first time in many years and when I checked with her six months later she was/is still pain free.

In addition to the supportive therapies already mentioned, other activities encouraged included keeping a personal journal and as she had not seen her family for three years, it was an important part of her healing process to visit them. The key change needed as preparation toward this visit, was practicing in her daily life the ability to make *choices*. For example, she no longer felt that she had to endure negative situations, but could now choose to physically take herself away, to leave as a choice, not as a reaction. In the past she behaved as a victim, would leave the body, split off, disappear, run away and generally not be functional. When she saw the family situation happening again, she was able to stay calm, say what she needed to say and not be reactive. By developing these new capacities of inner strength and acceptance

of herself and of her own needs, to speak her truth calmly, she then discovered that a new and more equal relationship, of being friends with her parents, could be established.

As Sarah made the inner and outer changes needed in her life, the question arose for her: *If I am not a person with an illness, then who am I?* Sarah is 42 years old, the age of consciousness soul and on the threshold of the next phase, of spirit-self. The forties can be a crucial time in many cases, as a time for a fresh start, with new horizons opening up, but it can also be a time of difficulty as we move into middle age. From the biographical perspective, it can be a time (42-49) in our development when we feel we have to change, in order to fulfil our potential, to live a more meaningful life. As she began to let go of her body symptoms there was some initial anxiety, but this eventually subsided, as she developed her capacity to reflect and create meaning, to stay present and not allow fear to control her life.

Sarah says: *...it's in the different bodies, it's sort of like we are walking together side by side after all the healing, whereas before I had no idea. I feel more of me has joined together, I feel that part of me that wasn't known to the 'I am' is now not only known but also willingly become a participant in the wholeness of me...and thereby is developing more equally based friendly relationships with her family and others, and has recently taken up further study to become a healthcare practitioner.*

