

takes on a question that everyone must face: how can we make the last days of those we love (and ourselves) more comfortable, more meaningful, and affordable?

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### **Unlearning, relearning**

**Heartfulness**, by Robert Sardello, Dallas, TX, Goldenstone, 2015, 298 pp., £15.03 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-9967988-0-8

Having worked with Robert and his late wife Cheryl some years ago at their School of Spiritual Psychology in Benson, North Carolina, I found my way in quite readily. The course I had been enrolled upon was called 'Heart Initiation' and this book may well be the fruit of this course that ran over a number of years.

Sardello introduces us to a number of practices leading to heartfulness, a pathway to wholeness and to overcome the seeming separation and division between the spiritual and the sense world as experienced in our soul. He writes:

No simpler 'way' or 'path' exists. We are not confronted with the challenge of finding heartfulness or developing it, or changing our lives in some radical manner. We are asked only to shift our center of attention, moving awareness from head to heart, from abstract cognition to being within practical contemplation, as a way of creative living. (p. 4)

'Creative living': a simple shift of awareness that allows creativity to show up – it lives in us all the time; we need only to pay attention to it. Sacredness can become part of all we do.

Despite this simplicity there are many hurdles, obstacles and illusions to traverse. We are asked to take a good look at our commonly held concepts and perceptions as well as ingrained habits of being. No easy task, particularly as we are not promised any glorious outcome or result. Robert distinguishes between method and technique:

Technique consists of knowing what steps to take and in what order, to bring about a sequence of actions leading to a desired result. Method consists of an intensification of the Whole in such a way that the Wholeness reveals itself within a resonant instance of itself. We begin with the Whole, stay with Wholeness, and elaborating it into moments of intensity. (p. 7)

Here is a simple exercise we did on the course. Take an object that fits nicely into your hands, nothing special of itself, perhaps a stone or a pebble, a clod of earth or a lump of clay. Close your eyes and go right into your sense of touch, feeling the boundary of yourself and the object, and have the awareness that you are touching this object. Shift the attention to the object itself and feel how it touches you. You have made no outer change, you have only shifted your awareness from the centre of your being to the object. I have done this exercise many times in my group work sessions

and been deeply touched by the profound responses to this seemingly simple shift from our habitual sensing of ‘me’ and ‘it’. It requires an opening in our soul to value such an experience sufficiently – it’s no big revelation, no message from another world, easily dismissed – and yet, judging by the responses, a momentary healing of the pain of our separation.

The author invites us to intensify our sensing and relearn it, as we all knew how to do it when we were very little. We are asked to stay in our sensing for as long as possible and to shift our attention away from needing to know for long enough to make it into a totally new experience. As soon as we ‘know’, we tend to stop sensing. Bit by bit, the world loses colour and magic as we fill it with ever more knowing, something that shows itself tragically in many long-term relationships where we delude ourselves into thinking we know the other and therefore no longer recognize the journey the other is on.

The pathway of sensing and shifting awareness is now brought to our own bodily awareness. One of the fundamental practices in the book is placing the awareness at the periphery of our body long enough to feel a gentle touching all over. This practice is different to the body scan used in some exercises in that it is not *about* the body, not how my heart or solar plexus feels to me at this moment, but instead *with* the body – bringing the sensing right back to where it belongs. The practice then moves on to placing attention at the centre of the heart. We need to go beyond a mere physical perception of the organ of the heart in order to be present with heart:

Placing attention at the center of the heart dissolves dualistic awareness into heart awareness rather than ‘awareness of the heart’ ... a complex unity between attention and its completely united filling of the ‘empty form’ of attention of heart awareness. (p. 11)

In the author’s approach the body is not separate from spirit, or earth from heaven. The space of the soul is where we can decide to be in unity or in duality. I remember Robert saying that we don’t live *on* the earth but *in* the earth – again asking us to take the concept of earth beyond the mere physical.

In mythic imagery, Earth belongs to the feminine principle and Spirit to the masculine. This also translates into Earth as the principle of darkness, Spirit that of light. We see this, for example, in the word ‘matter’ that comes from *mater*, meaning mother. Our present-day dualistic experience of the world often assigns good to light and evil to dark, thereby building an unbridgeable gap between the two. Through this we forget that these two archetypes of dark and light can only manifest through one another. We have a wonderful example through the observation of colour arising out of a dynamic interaction of light and dark, and not, as Newton would have it, a splitting of the light alone. Colours are directly related to our feelings and emotions. They are our inner colours and are intensified when we allow our darkness and our light to enter into a creative relationship with one another, rather than wanting forever to suppress our shadows, our darkness and ‘be good’.

As already mentioned, a very important aspect of Sardello’s Path of Heart Awareness is also the letting go of any expectations of results. We have numerous offers today of meditation or mindfulness classes to combat stress, enhance well-being and gain benefit for our mental and physical health. There is no such promise here. The inner work is done for the sake of the work itself: ‘A choice must be made to do something

that has no apparent consequence, doing something without trying to get something from doing it, doing something for the sake of the doing' (p. 19).

This may be a difficult notion to live with, perhaps particularly within the healing professions, where we might be tempted to ask, how can I use these practices to help my clients? I have found the answer through the practices themselves, at times offering them to people I work with. The choice to do so arose out of the practice of 'sensing the other through heart awareness' as described in the book under the heading of 'Heartfulness with Others' and 'Contemplative Heart Listening' (p. 101). In this way there is no conceptual knowing as to when it may be right to do so, but a clear and unmistakable 'heart knowing'. In this way it has been possible to integrate this work into my therapeutic practice and it has greatly enriched it. It has helped to fundamentally change my perception of what therapy truly is, moving beyond the traditional stance of the therapist–patient relationship as excellently described in another book, authored by Richard House (2010), in which he makes a convincing case through meticulous research and academic enquiry. Robert Sardello offers the tools with which we can walk a new path of being with the other.

### Reference

House, R. (2010). *In, against, and beyond therapy: Critical essays towards a 'post-professional' era*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.

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