

## Compassion and Integration

By Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB

The Cartesian dictum "I think, therefore I am" has left us unbalanced, in that we know things but know little about living, about compassion, or about our needs and the needs of those around us.

... Instead of avoiding or rationalizing our feelings and sensations, we need to hear them as information that can guide and heal us. These points of discomfort are doorways that we can use to begin living in our body. Living in our body means experiencing life through our feelings, sensations, and interactions and not simply from our projections and memories. When we begin to open to and live in our body, whether through pain or joy, a whole new universe of alternatives becomes available to us.

- *Richard Strozzi Heckler*<sup>3</sup>

Seventeenth century philosopher René Descartes is often blamed for the split between mind and body within modern culture and society. Descartes argued convincingly that mind and body are separate and that mind is the primary value.<sup>7</sup> Modern philosophers seeking to give the body back its due have reflected on a number of the outcomes of this separatist perspective.<sup>7</sup> They ironically note that blind allegiance to the tenets of western science has overemphasized the visual and undervalued the vital, living aspects of people. In particular, those aspects pertaining to bodily feelings of emotion, movement, and touch are downplayed. In simple terms, what is not easily objectified by sight has not invited western scientific study and has been given low cultural priority. As a societal consequence, we have lost much of the felt-sense of the connection between body, emotions, and life itself.<sup>2</sup> We have become increasingly disconnected, both from ourselves and from our ability to feel empathy and compassion for the emotions and needs of others.<sup>3</sup> It is in helping to restore these lost links to ourselves and others that massage can extend an influence to so great a goal as planetary healing.<sup>5</sup>

In considering the healing of our split selves, I'm going to journey even further back in time than the 17th century of René Descartes - back to the 12th century that was the source of the Arthurian legends of the search for the Holy Grail (i.e., a cup or chalice). The Grail story begins with a vision of the Grail appearing before the Knights of the Round Table. The knights answer this call to adventure, not as a group together, but in the new European model of each seeking their individual way.

So the knights entered the forest at the point they had chosen, where there was no path. If there is a path, it is someone else's path, and you are not on the adventure. ... You can get clues from people who have followed paths, but then you have to carom off that and translate it into your own decision, and there is no book of rules. ... This is a wonderful story; that which we intend, that which is the journey, that which is the goal, is the fulfillment of something that never was on the earth before - namely, your own potentiality.<sup>1</sup>

*- Joseph Campbell*

One of the central themes in the Grail legends is the myth of Parsifal.<sup>1,4</sup> In this myth, there is an enchanted castle that can appear and disappear. You only find the castle by invitation. The lord of the castle, the Fisher King, is the hereditary keeper of the Holy Grail. In many aspects, this legend of the keeper of a sacred vessel predates even this specific myth, going further back into Celtic mythology.<sup>6</sup> At some previous time, a black knight, symbolic of nature, challenged the Fisher King. Although the Fisher King killed the challenging knight, he was wounded in the thigh or genitals with a painful wound that would not heal. Metaphorically, in killing the aspect of nature within him, he also destroyed his generative or creative side and could find no peace. Since the countryside itself was tied to the state of the King, it too became a barren wasteland.<sup>4,6</sup>

Parsifal, starting as a deliberately uneducated boy, acquired the status of knight, and came eventually to the Grail Castle. Because he listened to social form (a knight should not ask unnecessary questions) rather than to his own compassion, he held back his questions and initially failed in his ultimate role of healing the Fisher King. After five more years of wandering and reflecting, he is given an unprecedented second opportunity, this time asking the questions that demonstrate his compassion and magically heal the King. In the end, Parsifal himself becomes the next keeper of the Holy Grail.

There are many kinesthetic realms in which we gain proficiency through practice. Within these realms, we often cannot consciously follow our moment-to-moment responses, yet still can gauge the overall impact of our actions. Even the inputs to which we are responding are often liminal (at the threshold of perception) or subliminal. Musicianship, dancing, skiing, martial arts and massage are all at least in part within the class of such endeavors. What becomes important are our intent, our connection to others, and our learned unconscious interactions. Among these, it is by compassion and touch that we can seek to heal the splits between our minds, spirits and bodies.

"We are all bodies - sensing, moving creatures, wonderfully simple, wonderfully complex. We draw, we write, we walk, we dance. We are sound-makers and song-makers. We are creatures of habit, but also creatures of change, creativity, and curiosity. We are all these dimensions and more, potentially and actually. In the flesh, down to and into our bones, we are all bodies."

- Maxine Sheets-Johnstone<sup>7</sup>

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