



SANE Newsletter

Newsletter of the Sensory Awareness Foundation

Fall 2006

In This Issue

What is Sensory Awareness? <i>by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt</i>	1
The Delight of Breathing <i>by Ruth Denison</i>	2
SAF Co-President's Letter	3
Poem by Bill Littlewood	4
Poem by Cathy Edget	5
SAF Publications	8

All photos in this issue by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt.



Lee Klinger Lesser, working with the participants of the recent Sensory Awareness Conference.

Join us

in our effort to nurture the practice of Sensory Awareness.

The basis of this work is to support the capacity within each of us to be present and responsive to what is needed within ourselves, in our relationships with others and in our environment, and to contribute to a more connected and caring world from one moment to the next.

Please renew your membership for 2007 or become a new member of the Sensory Awareness Foundation. For a donation of \$100 or more you will receive a complimentary copy of our new book *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence*. Our work is only possible with the help of your contributions.

(For more information, see page 3.)

What is Sensory Awareness?

by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt

This article is based on the opening talk for the Sensory Awareness Conference at Mt. Madonna Center, Watsonville, CA, held last October.

What is Sensory Awareness? I am using this question as a title for my opening talk to this conference, realizing very well that I cannot really give an answer but rather I want to use it as a tool for an exploration in what I see as important about our work at this time. If you explore this question, you will find different "answers" as I am finding different answers at different times. Asking questions is a crucial tool in our work. They help us to explore life – and ourselves, which, of course, are not two separate things. You will notice that in the course of my exploration today I will often talk about one thing and then jump to its opposite. In preparing my talk, these polarities kept calling for my attention.

A curious and confusing dichotomy runs (through) our lives. I call myself an "individual", a whole that cannot be divided, even though this organism I call "I" houses countless tiny organisms, bacteria, etc., without which I would not be me. I am this whole only in the context of a web of life inside and out, in which countless "individuals" are inseparably interwoven. Life as we know it manifests in individual organ-

(continued on page 6)

Workshops offered at the Sensory Awareness Conference:

Coming to Quiet, *Penny Smith*

Nature and Our Nature, *Judyth Weaver*

Play!, *Terry Ray*

Sensing, *Virginia Veach*

Not Knowing: A Basis for Connection, *Pat Meyer-Peterson*

Discovering the Voice of Resistance, *Lee Klinger Lesser*

Drawing Your Way Into Balance, *Connie Smith Siegel*

Presence and Absence, *Seymour Carter*

Presence in Motion, *Leslie French*

Where the Wild Things Are, *Marlene Zweig*

Sensory Awareness / Political Awareness: Hello?, *Jill Harris*

Artful Practice: Integrating Sensing and Daily Life, *Richard Lowe*

The Joy of Being Aware, *Lilith Pincus*

subject to change – often without notice – and often without that change being noticed.

This is where the practice of Sensory Awareness comes in. One answer to our initial question could be that Sensory Awareness is about learning to notice and allow change – or should I say stopping to resist it? Life is change and resisting the change leads to discomfort and disease. But life is also form, stability. Let us not disregard that. We are all formed, if only temporarily, and we rightly cherish this form. Sensory Awareness is also about recognizing the form we are, impermanent as it may be.

In this work we often hear about the importance of the present moment. Now, it is crucial to live in the moment, because in a way this is all we have – but life is also history. Without a history we would not be here today, without it we wouldn't even recognize each other. We come into this present moment with a history and part of our work of Sensory Awareness is to understand and integrate it in a healthful way. When I say that, I don't mean to intellectually explore it but to recognize and understand that we have grown from something, that we come here not from nowhere but from somewhere.

The now ubiquitous word mindfulness is a modern translation of the Pali word *sati*. its original meaning was *memory*. To hear this for the first time not too long ago was a surprising revelation for me, especially because it came from a Buddhist teacher, Jason Siff, who proceeded to say: "there is no present without a past."

The practice we call Sensory Awareness has a very rich history too. It is interwoven with the history of Charlotte Selver, who was a teacher and very important person in many of our lives; it is interwoven with her teachers Elsa Gindler and Heinrich Jacoby who, influenced by their times and history, passed down to us something very precious. What they gave us is not easily described. We do not call it a method – but it *has* method. It is a very specific way of exploring life and as such is quite unique.

To me, what is so precious about this work is that we are given authority to learn in a manner that respects our own experience and builds on it, rather than being taught how things should be. I would even go so far as to say that offering space for discovery is the very foundation of this work.

We are hard pressed to find related teachings that give students as much authority to inquire and find solutions based upon their own experience.

Now, of course, as leaders we come with our own history, with our own background, with our own understanding and we will bring in our own being. But as much as possible we need to and we want to open a space for discovery.



Lilith Pincus: *The Joy of Being Aware*

(continued from page 1)

isms - from the tiniest bacteria, to redwood trees, to the elaborate organisms we call humans, all interlinked as we share this planet that gave birth to us.

We all share a strong sense of individuality – manifesting in our modern world often as isolation – and with it comes a sense of permanence. However, being part of this web, we are

Here is another interesting aspect of our work: those of you new to Sensory Awareness will soon notice that in our classes you are exposed to a never-ending stream of questions. Knowing how to ask questions is very crucial for students of Sensory Awareness (and when I say students I mean all of us who are involved with this work, especially those of us who are engaged in what we call leading). Maybe the most important thing we so-called leaders can “teach” is how to ask questions. This method has history. “Zweck-mässige Fragestellung” – let me translate this as “skillful questioning” – has from the very beginning been a central tool in our work. Those questions will ultimately not be posed by a teacher but emerge in the student.

Sensory Awareness is coming into alignment with the forces of nature. Especially, it is communion with gravity. It is opening up in each cell to what always affects us, every cell, everything that exists on earth, namely the mutual attraction of everything that has mass. Being exposed to gravity, being open to gravity, gives us direction in space. When we know up and down we can orient ourselves in all directions. Sensory Awareness is also opening up to the support of the ground – not that it isn’t there always anyway but the question is: are we responsive to it?

This brings us to another polarity, that of *motion* (the pull of gravity) and *stability, form* (that which stops us from falling down, namely the firm surface of the earth). Now, we could easily be crushed by these forces but in fact life as we know it has emerged thanks to them and is completely interwoven with these forces. Yet we feel challenged by them – in our joints, in our hips, in our shoulders. We struggle, we fight. Why? Because we are creatures of history, creatures of habit. But change is both possible and ultimately inevitable – *in the present*. That is where sensory awareness is necessary.

Without gravity – and without the supporting ground – we would not have the form we have; we wouldn’t have this marvelous muscle/skeleton system that allows us to move around on the earth; we wouldn’t have developed this brain. All of our millions of cells are affected by gravity, every single one finds its orientation in space through gravity. I believe the closing off from this pull is a main source of discomfort. When we hold on more than we need to – or let go too much, for that matter – we cannot feel the pull and we become (or parts of us become) isolated; on the other hand, when we come into balance with that pull, we find orientation and connection.

So, we come here to work with a particular practice which we call Sensory Awareness, but really it is the practice of living and of experiencing. It is not a teaching in the sense that we



Judith Weaver (top left) and participants in Jill Harris' workshop.



tell you – or ourselves – what’s right or wrong, but we find out what is called for in the moment.

To close this talk, I would like to say something about right and wrong: Very often, I hear that there is no right or wrong in this practice. I dare to disagree. There is right and wrong – but it is not the teachers’ right and wrong, our parents right or wrong or our cultures’ right or wrong. It is the right and wrong that we come to through our own experiencing as we connect again more fully with the world of which we are but a part.