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# What is the Use of Becoming Aware if it Doesn't Have Any Consequences?

by Peggy Zeitler

*A few years ago we changed the format for the yearly program of our non profit organization, "Wege der Entfaltung" for Sensory Awareness and the Work of Emmi Pikler (see SAF Newsletter Winter 1999/2000). Instead of being xeroxed, it was professionally put together and printed with a touch of color on the cover. Our appearance took on an official look. This new way of presenting our program demanded more than just the schedule of lectures, classes, workshops, and publications. It wanted a statement. But who was going to write one? We decided that if anyone was going to make a statement, it was going to be me - a privilege granted the oldest in the group. The next decision was that this would take place in the form of an "editorial". So what you will be reading below is the first "editorial", which appeared in the Wege der Entfaltung program for the 2004/2005 season.*

*When it comes to making statements, Charlotte and Charles immediately come to mind: Charles who found words for things and wrote them so beautifully and Charlotte whose words flowed during classes. I have little trouble anymore finding words in class but writing does not come easily. Choosing a topic for an editorial turned out to be quite simple, though. Some ordinary situation around the time when an editorial is necessary offers itself for elaboration. Somehow there is always a connection between these situations and the work.*

These are Charlotte Selver's words. The first time she spoke them in my presence was one afternoon in front of several hundred people. They had come to experience and work with Charlotte, who was then over 90 years old. She was very excited. The responsibility of passing on the work she had learned from Elsa Gindler and Heinrich Jacoby - faithfully - to all of these people was weighing heavily on her. After she had conveyed the essence of the work in a few precise sentences, there came this question.

What is the use of becoming aware, if it doesn't have any consequences? Everyone who has ever worked with Charlotte for a longer period of time knows how she wanted all of us to go out and do something to alleviate the suffering and injustice in the world. How she would have liked to send all of us to South America or Africa to help the underprivileged. This was the meaning of her words. She was appealing to our sense of responsibility for mankind. The intention of the work was not to encourage our being wrapped up in our own well-being. As far as I know it was also the first time that Charlotte addressed the responsibility of each individual here in Germany, the land of her birth, which she had had to leave half a century earlier. It was an uncommonly political moment.

In the years that followed she repeated these words often. Now I find myself saying them - however, in very different situations. How is it, for instance, during an experiment - which is the name we give to what we do in Sensory Awareness classes or groups - when something catches out attention? Something in our relationship to the floor, in the way we are standing, in what our eyes are doing or in our breathing, which doesn't feel quite right. Or even something that is painful? What consequences does it have to be feeling these things? What difference does it make in everyday life to become aware of such phenomena? For something to be hurting? To notice that we are making far too much effort? Or, on the contrary, that we are heavy and cumbersome like a sack of potatoes? How difficult it is not to burst into action, trying to change whatever we are feeling to fit some idea we harbor of how things should be. Not to start doing things, like exercises, to make whatever we are feeling disappear. Not to run to specialists - one after the other -, subjecting oneself to all kinds of treatments. How much strength it takes, how much trust it

demands, to remain peaceful, instead of undertaking something. Staying with the present in a way that gives us a chance of finding new balance and clarity; clarity which could go far beyond this moment and this place. Allowing the consequences of perception to become evident and make a difference.

And what consequences does perception have in an educational context, another area in which we are inclined to do too much. Full of the idea that we are going to help someone learn something, we easily lose any sense of this other person. We don't see, hear or perceive the other anymore. There is no contact in a situation like this, which is fertile ground for the growth of insecurity and in turn leads to an even greater lack of contact. Where there is no contact to the other, no interaction, what we do becomes arbitrary. We overlook the fact that what another person learns is not up to us. We cannot make anyone learn.

Whenever I catch myself in this frame of mind, I feel how presumptuous it is. This is usually enough to bring me back to my senses and seems to make it possible for the other to become more active. This other person begins to take what I have to offer. And what is more, this other person leads me places, where I might never have gone alone. When we take what we perceive seriously, we find our way to the consequences.

*For more information on WE and editorials in German, visit [www.we-ev.de](http://www.we-ev.de).*



*Peggy Zeitler about herself: I was born and bred in Washington, D.C., studied in Philadelphia, and moved to Munich, Germany, with my husband Hans in 1967. We have two adult children. After studying Sensory Awareness with and translating classes for Seymour Carter for some years, I started to offer the work in the late 1970s. I met Charlotte when she first came to teach in Europe again in 1983 and Charles when he came over a year or two later.*