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Cover Page Footnote

I am very grateful to Jeff Lennard for his careful attention to an early draft of this paper and his insightful comments; also to Judith Sullivan for her general encouragement and for helping me to see what I was really trying to say.

Balancing and Intention in Zero Balancing.

There are two kinds of balancing involved in the practice of Zero Balancing. The first is the balancing of energy and structure. The idea that there should be some sort of harmonious equivalence between the body's energy and its structure is really powerful, and it gives rise to all sorts of concepts and techniques. For example, it suggests the need for a kind of touch which contacts the client's energy and structure at the same time.

The word zero adds to this idea of balance. Ida Rolf, the founder of Structural Integration, spoke of the importance of balancing the pelvis to zero - by which she meant to a place of opportunity. Think of the North Pole as a zero; all directions are South and in a straight line from that one place you can end up anywhere in the world. Similarly at the very start of a football game when the score is zero, any outcome is possible.

Putting zero together with balancing gives a clear idea of the nature of Zero Balancing, which is to create a kind of potential, an openness to change towards better balance.

This doesn't sound radical or revolutionary, but it is. Watch half a dozen people walking down the street and it is extremely unlikely that any one of them puts the same amount of weight on each leg. Similarly, it is rare to see two shoulders at the same height or a head that is held level and upright. What pain and disability would be saved, especially in older age, if their bodies could be opened to change towards better balance!

And then consider mental and emotional balance. A woman is in a ten year relationship in which her partner's needs always come first and her own are sorely neglected. Because of the conditioning of those ten years, and probably much earlier conditioning too, she feels she cannot leave - even though to her family and friends the relationship seems emotionally abusive. What pain and suffering could be saved if she could be open to change - either leaving or insisting on a better balance in her relationship.

In very general terms, people come for a Zero Balancing session because they want to change. They may not think in terms of a better balance between their body energy and its structure, but they soon find out that their lives are easier when they have it. The general aim or intention of the practitioner, then, is to enable a change towards that balance.

Enabling a change is another radical idea. Fritz Smith, the founder of Zero Balancing, teaches that Zero Balancing practitioners work with attention not intention. That is in stark contrast to virtually all systems of medicine, Eastern and Western, where the doctor has expert knowledge, makes a diagnosis, prescribes a remedy, and predicts an outcome. That is working with intention. By contrast, a practitioner working with attention does not know how the client should be and does not set out to change him or her towards some pre-determined norm - chemical, structural or energetic. Instead, the practitioner pays attention to the manifold expressions of the client's imbalance and with every intervention asks, in effect, 'Would you prefer to change here? If so, I am offering an opportunity for you to do so.' That's the 'zero' again. And there is an unstated corollary, 'But if you chose not to then you know best'. The

practitioner's work, in other words, is not to direct what change should happen but to enable any change that the client chooses, consciously or unconsciously.

That is a fair description not just of the theory of Zero Balancing but also of what it feels like, both as a practitioner and as a client. The work has a kind of exploratory, enquiring quality and then, when change starts to happen, it seems to have a life and a momentum of its own. But that isn't the whole of what is going on when balancing is taking place.

The Zero Balancing logo expresses it well. It shows a line on a fulcrum, rather like that piece of playground equipment of a plank supported in the center. A child sits on each end of a plank and they bounce one another up in the air and down again. If the children decide to take a break from bouncing and try to get the plank balanced so it is exactly level, they find it difficult. Even if they are the same weight, they still have to make sure they are exactly the same distance from the center, from the fulcrum that supports the plank, and that takes some trial and error. If they are very different weights, then a good deal of experimental shuffling about will be needed.

What's more, even when they manage to get the plank level it won't stay there for long. No-one sits perfectly still; a scratch of the nose, a wriggle of the shoulders, even a laugh will be enough to upset the balance.

Now imagine that a client who comes for a Zero Balancing session is on one end of the plank and there is no-one on the other end; she will be stuck on the ground. Imagine, then, the practitioner's job is to get on the other end of the plank and, by shuffling and experimenting, find just the right place to be for the client to come to a place of balance - neither stuck on the ground nor up in the air but at 'zero', the place of change and possibility.

That will certainly require careful and persistent attention from the Zero Balancing practitioner. But it also requires a rather particular kind of intention. Rather like getting onto one end of the plank, the practitioner intends to offer the opposite of where the client is, the opposite of whatever is keeping her stuck. This is the second kind of balancing in Zero Balancing: a balancing intention. To be clear, it is not an intention to change the client in any particular way, still less towards some kind of norm; rather it is an intention to provide a well-crafted opportunity for balance - and hence an opportunity for change. This kind of intention is really the practitioner's instinctive and intuitive response to the client.

When the practitioner's hands are on her client's upper back, for example, her attention registers that there is a feeling of stress in his ribcage and that there are specific places where his energy is not flowing easily through the ribs. As soon as she notices these things then her instant and natural response is to think that he might breathe more easily, might be able to let go of some of his tension, if she can help the ribs soften and relax. And then, as ever, energy follows thought. No sooner has she had the idea than the feeling of her hands conveys that message to the client's body and provides it with a clear opportunity for change.

Here are three brief examples of Zero Balancing sessions which illustrate the idea.

A surgeon's back hurts from long hours bending on one side only. As soon as the practitioner starts to work, she sees, and then feels, that one side of his body is stretched and tight while the other has collapsed a little and is weak. She will tend to work on the side that is stretched and tight. In the language of Zero Balancing her touch will provide fulcrums - rather like the fulcrum in the center of the plank - around which the client's energy and structure can re-organise. It may simply be that she feels attracted to work on the side that is tight, and finds that fulcrums on the other side seem to have little effect, but it would be surprising if the thought did not cross her mind as she works that it is by relaxing the tight side that the other one may be able to breathe more fully and to start to fill out. In other words, it would be surprising if she does not have that kind of balancing intention as she works.

A more complex example is of a man who has recently been shocked to discover that the woman who brought him up, and who he was always told was his mother, is not in fact his mother; that he was abandoned by his birth mother soon after he was born. This news has unsettled him profoundly. It has led him to wonder who he really is and to doubt so much of what he had always believed to be true about his life.

The practitioner finds that his energy is scattered, incoherent and shaky. She does the usual fulcrums as set out in the Zero Balancing protocol but she may give them a really clear direction and hold them for a little longer than normal in order to give the client's body, mind and spirit time to come together and re-organise. She might concentrate on fulcrums which have the effect of containing energy and she probably makes sure that she does plenty of fulcrums which integrate the work done in specific areas of the body. Although she is working with attention, as always, she will also have the instinctive intention of bringing the client's fragmented energy into one whole.

One last example, which is more complex still. The client is a woman whose husband of sixty years has died suddenly and unexpectedly. She is overwhelmed with grief and cannot imagine how she can continue to live. How can the practitioner find the place to sit on the plank, so to speak, to help the widow find a new kind of balance - one without her partner?

Over the course of a year the widow goes through many different stages of grieving. At first the practitioner finds that her energy is very light, almost as if it is floating free of her body, and the practitioner finds herself doing fulcrums which have a grounding quality and effect. At a later stage of grief, the widow reports she has given up on life and the practitioner finds that her energy feels floppy, even a little helpless; accordingly, the fulcrums will tend to have a firm, tightening quality to them. As the stages continue to unfold the practitioner adjusts how she works in order to help the client come to a new place of balance.

What is happening in all these examples is that the practitioner is making what is called a 'donkey connection' with the client. The notion comes from seeing how two donkeys, walking side by side along a narrow mountain path, will lean against each other so that the one on the outside of the path, with a sheer drop to the valley below, feels more secure, is more secure. By leaning in opposite directions, one to the left and the other to the right, the donkeys arrive at a safe place of balance.

In a Zero Balancing session the client and practitioner meet in exactly this way. The practitioner must pay the closest possible attention to the client in order to read the relationship between his or her energy and structure, but, like the donkeys, will also try to provide some kind of balance to where the client is. That requires intention. It's not an intention to bring about a particular outcome, as an osteopath might do in straightening the spine or an acupuncturist might do in dispersing stagnation; rather it is an intention to oppose the client's existing imbalance. So many clients have lost any sense of balance in themselves and in their lives that it takes a challenge of this kind in order to awaken and stimulate an appropriate response in the body.

Many clients report that Zero Balancing feels different from other kinds of bodywork they have experienced. They say that the results are surprisingly powerful after a session in which, 'not much seems to have happened'. It may be that it is this combination of focused attention and balancing intention that is so subtle, so compelling and so effective.

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