Gita Umesh and Umesh Rao edited the book “Sai Counselling” (2021) to celebrate the 20the Anniversary of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, India. The hospitals run by Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust provide free medical care for everyone. They selected Person Centred and Existential well Being Counselling to support the patients and to offer training to their counsellors. They invited me to write a Foreword for their book. I choose to give it the title “Presence”.

PRESENCE. Mia Leijssen (2021)

Human beings need ‘presence’ to develop, recover and heal. In the Counselling Department of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, Bangalore, India, the counsellors offer a special kind of care. The way they are present with themselves and in their interactions with patients, reflects a deeper connection to the living forward energy inherent in every being.

Of course they are well trained in evidence based counselling skills. They practice empathic attunement, unconditional positive regard, authentic communication. But even more they are in touch with the deeper inner layer that is the resource and the soil for helping presence.

The connection with the inner essence, the life force that flows through the external earthly forms, is not evident in a culture that focuses mainly on sensory expressions. Scientists too often have a hard time relating to anything that is beyond the scope of what they can measure with their limited instruments available.

The most successful scientists have learned to rely on ‘more’ than what rationally can be demonstrated. Important breakthroughs and twists in problems sometimes emerge after picking up an intuition or a hunch, paying attention to synchronicity, following an inexplicable felt lead.

Counsellors can sharpen their sensitivity to inwardly felt guidance. Therein lies an added value that expands the human potential into an area of healing that transcends one’s personal limitations. It is about the awareness of the inner light always present in oneself and equally present in others; it is about the recognition of the true nature of human beings. That eternal essence has a good chance to step forward in the presence of love.

Even those lacking a spiritual tradition or who do not feel at home in a specific religion, can consciously connect with the inner felt true nature or the life force. That presupposes an open attitude, without judgments or expectations, and a hearty welcome to the more silent inner voice that can be felt in subtle sensations. One can learn to cultivate a friendly attitude of being present to everything and every situation one has to cope with in human life. That friendly way of being present to oneself opens the door to the inner essence. It invites the life energy to move forward.

The inner felt essence is sometimes buried under many patterns of thinking, feeling and behavior which are learned throughout the lifetime; the life stream sometimes gets stuck in blockages that the person finds difficult to get through. Then the presence of others is necessary to regain that vital connection with one’s own core of being or inner guide. In this context, counsellors who know how to find the way inward with themselves and then with others are of vital importance. Their common secret is paying attention to what the present moment is offering. The potential for healing is in this moment. Without thinking – just by being present. True seeing and true sensing reveals the hidden harmony in the universe, in nature, in every being.

Restoring connection to the inner presence is the key event. The contact with that inwardly felt source of life leads automatically to the greater source: the experience of being part of the infinite potential for which words and language are inadequate to express the extraordinary scope. That

infinite potential that we sometimes call ‘divine’ is incomprehensible to the human mind, but human beings can feel completely connected to it and fully welcome and embrace it in themselves.

Presence in which that infinite potential is respected and expressed, is of a different order from ordinary worldly presence. We feel that special quality of presence and sometimes we recognize that things are happening that we don’t think possible from a human viewpoint. It is the special invitation to every human being to notice that presence within him- or herself and to give it the space for development.

In the Counselling Department of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, the staff – professionals and volunteers – express their presence with qualities that transcend the limitation of the ego. Inspiring models also illuminate others with their special light. In addition, many have had the immense fortune of encountering an exceptional model of ‘Divine Light’; incarnated in the form named ‘Sri Sathya Sai Baba’. It is an added blessing to experience such a divine incarnation close by as living Presence. It reinforces the confidence that ‘Presence’ is not limited by time or space or transitory physical forms. The name by which people notice and call near to the Divine Presence is not essential. It is essential, however, to actualise that loving vital presence with oneself, with others, with everything, and thus contribute to development, recovery and healing at the deepest level.

Hereby I send many congratulations and abundant blessings to all counsellors who served humanity in a meaningful way over the past twenty years, offering their special skills and the highest form of love and presence.

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