

Life the Hidden Template, Life Energy the Driving Force, Grounding the Action

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Abstract

The author suggests that, in the aftermath of the proliferation of new personal change systems in the 1970s and 1980s, many practitioners concentrated on pathology and problems. This meant that some early transactional analysts missed the opportunity to explore the nature of *physis* (Berne, 1947) fully as a living force, including its origins and how to use it in everyday life. In this article, based on the author's extensive exposure to Eastern teachers and his therapeutic training and experience, the term *life energy* replaces *physis*, having *Life* as its origin and *grounding* as a powerful way to harness it in everyday living. The author claims that grounding makes daily life much easier and more fulfilling because it produces palpable physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual balance. The oneness, completion, fulfillment, and healing in these changes are so profound because they arise from Life mysteriously drawing us into itself.

Keywords

Life, life energy, *physis*, grounding, health, aliveness, fulfillment, Berne, discounting, transactional analysis, meditation, initiation, integration, digesting feelings, mindfulness

Background

The last 50-plus years have witnessed the emergence of many new and refreshingly effective therapeutic systems, including transactional analysis. These systems contributed new ways for people to find relief and to take charge of their lives.

Historically, during those times when practitioners knew little that was effective and expected little from what was known, the prevailing poverty of options prompted many talented people to develop new approaches. True trailblazers, including Eric Berne (transactional analysis), Alexander Lowen (bioenergetics), Fritz Perls (gestalt therapy), Arthur Janov (primal therapy), and Charles Kelly (Radix therapy), they accepted nothing less than success. And numerous new, effective personal change systems emerged during these exciting times. I, like many others in the early 1970s, responded to this expanding richness by integrating multiple systems into my working frame of reference (Mellor, 2008).

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Unexpected Outcomes

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, I realized that the practices of many of the new therapies were inadvertently misdirecting attention away from living healthy, happy lives to using their therapeutic processes as lifestyles. Berne's (1964, pp. 124-142) list of what he called "Consulting Room Games" included clear examples of corrupted therapeutic techniques blocking desirable outcomes.

Using a problem-solving model, I fell into the same trap. I concentrated on my clients' most troublesome problems, on practical solutions, and on persisting until each one was solved (Mellor, 1980, pp. 193-302). Once solved, and sometimes even before they were, I invited clients to present other problems. Soon, as they awoke each day, they surveyed their lives, diligently looking for other problems to solve using what I had taught them.

Regrettably, I had unintentionally also taught them that life is a problem to solve. And with the benefit of hindsight, this outcome was clearly inevitable. The medical model and problem-solving approaches still dominated thinking to a large extent at that time. Diagnosis and treatment of illness were the primary orientations of medicine, and problems were the starting point and remained the central focus in problem solving.

As a result, attention was often focused on what was not working, including illness, restriction, problems, conflict, dysfunction, and the like. Issues such as health, aliveness, freedom, creativity, joy, and fulfillment were significantly discounted. Moreover, when attention did include such factors, it tended to be secondary. This brings to mind two principles (Mellor, 2011, pp. 37-38):

- "Where we start is where we finish unless we change our goals."
- "What we concentrate on is what we get."

What I was still to learn was that I needed to begin with, and to pay attention to, aliveness, health, joy, satisfaction, and so on, including even their subtlest appearances in my daily life and the lives of my clients.

However, some practitioners (me included), by discounting the existence of life-supporting processes and capacities, inevitably disregarded better options as well (Macefield & Mellor, 2006, pp. 44-58; Mellor & Schiff, 1975, pp. 298-299). Consequently, little was discovered about life-oriented work in that era, and such techniques would remain largely unacknowledged and underused for about a decade more.

An excellent example of this bias in transactional analysis in the early 1970s relates to feelings. Many of the TA practitioners I knew at that time learned that there are four basic feelings: glad (happy), mad (angry), scared (frightened), and sad (grieving). Notice the three-to-one emphasis on discomfort-related feelings and the underrepresentation of emotions such as love, joy, contentment, peace, confidence, and so on.

In my opinion, however, had more practitioners realized back then that focusing on aliveness was preferable, the presence of the life energy that our attitudes and activities were hiding from us would have revealed itself much more quickly. In fact, with time, I and others would grapple with this and change our approaches significantly.

Physis

For his part, Berne did seem, to some extent, to have realized the emphasis just described. Midgley (2003, p. 3) wrote, "In his early book, *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*, Berne (1947/1971) . . . observed that 'there is something beyond all this—some force that drives people to grow, progress and do better' (p. 98)," which Berne called *physis*. Midgley also noted Berne's understanding of physis as something fundamental about life and living that is "the growth force of

nature which eternally strives to make things grow and to make growing things more perfect (p. 98).”

Cornell (2010) also observed that Berne suggested that physis is an essential factor “in human nature that propel[s] individuals toward growth and vitality” (p. 244). Elaborating on this further, Erskine (2013) wrote, “Physis is the source of our internal thrust to challenge acquiescence, to explore different ways of doing and being, to have aspirations, and to develop our full potential” (p. 6).

New Frame of Reference

I was unaware of physis in any form during the 1970s; however, I did become aware of other forces. The absence of meaningful purpose in my work at the time was producing a deepening sense of futility: “I don’t know what life is, and I’m supposed to be helping people to live it well.”

This ignorance prompted me to seek living exemplars of aliveness and, after finding them, to undertake more than 30 years of training with them. They were highly skilled masters of Eastern spiritual practices, in whom I found the profound embodiment of what I craved and the opportunity to open myself to and grow into the fulfillment I sought.

Life Energy in the Raw

The beautiful value of these teachers was the impact of their powerfully realized life energy (physis). It flowed into and through everything and everyone around them. These teachers were saturated with life energy, physically alive and overflowing with its powerful tingling vitality. My bodily experiences showed it to be real, not just a superstitious figment of my imagination. As it filled and coursed through me, its manifest reality saturated me (Mellor, 2010, Chapters 18, 19, 21, 36.). All my senses came to life and expanded. Just like two tuning forks in which the vibration of one sets off a vibration in the other, the resonance in these people set off a corresponding resonance in my body, feelings, thinking, and being, all of which drew me into profound alignment with them.

Perhaps surprisingly, I attended no classes in this training, for my direct experiences were my lessons (Mellor, 2010, Chapters 21-22, pp. 375-380). And life energy revealed itself to me as a powerful force, present and always flowing through me to the extent that I made myself available to it. All the time, the vibrant clarity in my teachers also opened and distilled me, dissolving imbalance, releasing new awareness, and confirming the inevitability of my personal expansion and awakening.

Other Sources

A vast literature still exists that recounts the experiences of others who have been through this kind of awakening. Sources such as the 2,400-year-old Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the even older Mahabharata include “manuals” on how to become absorbed in and transformed by the flow of life energy (also known as Qi, Chi, prana, Shakti, Reiki, vital force, Kundalini, and more). Other more recent sources include Taimni (1961), Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1973), Paramahansa Yogananda (1983), Tweedie (1986), Ramana Maharshi (2001), and Kelly (2004).

Life

I think of *Life* (which I capitalize to differentiate it from the word *life* as we usually use it) as a fifth dimension, an existential state and not an experience, for our senses cannot detect it directly. Just like gravity and magnetism, both of which are hidden from our senses while having demonstrable influences in our world, Life is hidden from our senses, although it saturates everything in manifested reality. In fact, the supreme subtlety of its presence can be known directly only through

practices and experiences that refine our systems enough to release us from the limiting density of space and time (Mellor, 2008, pp. 194-198), for example, by mastering various samadhi states (Taimni, 1961).

My understanding, also known by many people throughout history, is that the Life that underlies everything prompts union, vastness, love, joy, creativity, infinity, the void, completion, and wholeness: all saturated with a sense of presence, eternity, and transcendence. My experience is also that this fifth dimension, Life, in hidden ways saturates and powerfully influences everything in the four-dimensional physical world in which we live.

[When we perceive even hints of Life's presence:] there is no space – (up, down or across); no movement – (from one place to another); no time – (past, present or future); no duration – (everything is now); no things exist – (only the Infinite is); and there is no sense of self – (world, body, me, I or I-Am). (Mellor, 2011, p. 8)

Significantly, too, as we seek personal change and fulfillment, knowing Life is present can encourage us to open ourselves to its underlying reality. Although we only see the apple falling from a tree, not the gravity that compels the fall, gravity's influence is nonetheless real. Just so with Life. Life energy is obvious, whereas Life remains the hidden template (shape or pattern) into which we can, with full confidence, allow ourselves to dissolve—a process I will discuss later.

Although these experiences were almost entirely new to me in the beginning, many millions of people from ancient times to today have explored the nature of underlying reality and perceived things similarly. To do this, they immersed themselves in processes of awakening and enlightenment and taught others to benefit from what they had realized. Consider the following short list of past teachers:

- The many thousands of Vedic masters in India, teaching from as far back as 5000 years ago
- Lau Tsu, the Chinese Taoist author of the *Tao Te Ching*, who lived and taught in China in the sixth century BCE (Lau Tsu, 1972)
- Gautama Buddha, born about 550 BCE, whose teachings still have millions of adherents throughout the world
- Many Taoist, Zen, Sufi, shamanic, and other masters whose influences still prevail

Flooding Insights

Once touched directly by the energy of the awakened people I met, a sense of deep knowing arose in me. With Life as the essence of everything, I realized that all differences could dissolve and that assumed separations and contentions, and the “world of ten thousand things” of Taoist teaching (Lau Tsu, 1972), were no longer the enduring reality. They stood in stark relief against the oneness of Life, revealing themselves to me as artifacts of lives anchored in and constricted by the space-time world of everyday living.

Clearly, my knowing was radically altered, as was my awareness of how to respond to people helpfully in therapeutic, educational, and other settings. Also, my insights seemed automatically to include an ease, depth, and sense of fulfillment in the results. Here are three examples:

- In couples therapy, I learned to work from the premise that couples are together because their dynamics are the same (like attracts like), which supports their efforts to change their lives with one another more directly than does concentrating on what is not working.
- When dealing with anger, fear, and sadness, the needed outcomes arise more quickly and powerfully when I focus attention on love, confidence, and happiness, respectively (Mellor, 2011, Chapters 18-19).

- Concentrating on *accounting* rather than on *discounting* as a primary focus in my therapy and organizational consultations is much more fruitful (Macefield & Mellor, 2006).

Practical Outcomes

During the 1980s and 1990s, as my heightened awareness evolved, I systematically integrated these new ways of perceiving reality with my previous learning. Life's influence and wonder through life energy were compellingly present, not insubstantial notions of no practical use. They gave immediate impetus and intuitive guidance to action. They prompted understanding and led to the evolution of new and refreshingly robust ways of living, of understanding life, and of working with people, including deep relaxation, grounding, centering, spontaneous expressiveness, intimacy, opening to and merging with others, and integrating and digesting experiences. These developments and their use are all outlined and discussed in my article "Autonomy with Integrity" (Mellor, 2008).

Life energy, the active ingredient of Life in the world, saturated these new insights with naturalness and a fulfilling sense of presence. Compared with the past, I no longer lived as if in a darkened room with a small torch, only capable of creating shadowy reflections that hinted at confined aspects of what was real. Life energy now filled the room with its profound incandescence, illuminating everything internally and externally.

The practical testing of these new insights offered further confirmation of their validity and value. Fortuitously, the central importance of grounding, which I had started to explore and develop in the mid-1970s (Mellor, 1982), was immediately apparent. As I took clients through the grounding process, they quickly resolved current emotional conflicts, learned to manage intense recurring feelings, resolved impasses, and released themselves from inhibiting script injunctions. (See later in this article for how to do this and the obvious benefits.) And in subsequent years, I taught grounding to thousands of trainees, clients, and others.

By definition, "People are grounded when they are physically aware via their five senses of the people, situations, and events around them, and simultaneously aware of the physical sensations in their bodies" (Mellor, 2008, p. 188). Grounding also informed all the techniques I created by which people could enrich their lives. These include ways to promote relaxation, bonding with babies, centering, goal setting, claiming projections, resolving conflicts, promoting physical health, and experiencing intimacy. Many people also discovered that a deeply spiritual dimension was latent in the physicality of their bodies, an outcome also observed with mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Significantly, all these processes involve harnessing life energy as the driving force of change, using grounding as the primary action taken.

Mapping Life, Life Energy, Awareness, and Grounding

In transactional analysis, we are accustomed to the three-circle stack for illustrating the inner and interpersonal dynamics between ego states. For mapping the relationships between Life, life energy, and the profound influence of awareness and grounding, however, I find Figure 1 more useful. Figure 2 illustrates the place of ego states in the new map.

Reading the New Map Is Straightforward

First, in Figure 1, think of the emptiness behind the lines as a vast field that extends to infinity in all directions. In the map, this is Life.

Second, I think of I-Am as the core self of the worldly being that has emerged from Life. It is the first arising of consciousness out of the unfathomable infinity that Life is. In the map, the central place of I-Am is shown as our core and as the spring or source through which life energy flows into

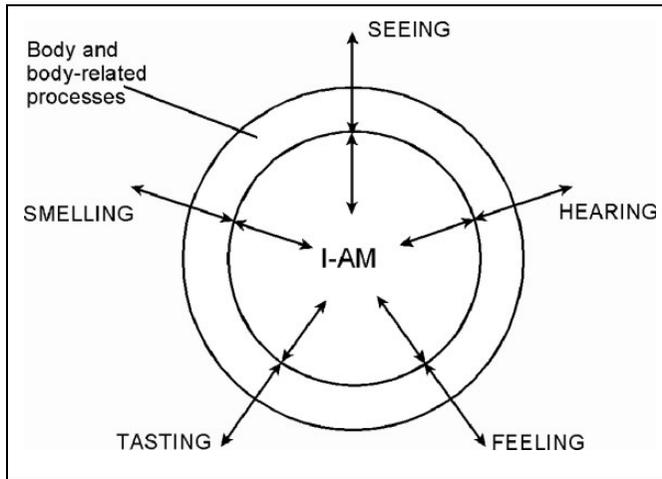


Figure 1. Mapping Life, Life Energy, Awareness, and Grounding.

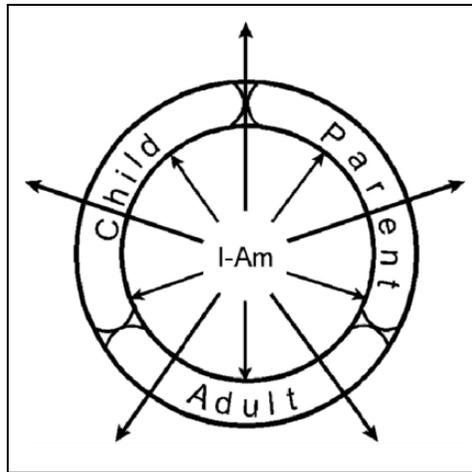


Figure 2. The Ego States in the Map.

our systems. It is the beginning of its journey through increasingly dense layers of our awareness that unfold as it approaches, then enters the body's density in the four-dimensional world shown between the two circles. Chandran's (2007) article "The Guru Within," in my view, artfully touches on the timelessness/spacelessness quality from Life that I-Am carries into consciousness, which highlights aspects of Life's oneness:

The guru within is at the center of consciousness . . . where polarities—self and other, the past and future—meet, merge, and "cancel out" . . . [thereby losing] their individual identities and characteristics and synthesiz[ing] into a new entity that is more than the sum of the polarities. (p. 221)

My intention here, based on my direct experience, is to highlight the intense, continuous availability in us all of life energy and to provide a diagrammatic way of drawing attention to and emphasizing its healing capacity, its role in expanding consciousness, its imperative contribution to keeping us alive and well, and how to harness it in our everyday lives. Relating this to Berne,

Mellacqua (2016) wrote, “[Mellor (2008, 2010)] expanded Berne’s idea of autonomy by linking it to integrity and by placing the *infinite core* at the center of human personality as reflected in the I-Am state process in contrast to ego state processes” (p. 151).

Third, the outer circle represents the skin and is a permeable threshold between our insides and the outside world. The inner circle is the layer of consciousness that enables our sensate awareness. The space between the two circles in Figure 1 represents our bodies and all our body-related processes. The arrows starting at the inner circle and extending out beyond the outer one depict the flow of life energy passing through every cell in our bodies and out into the surrounding physical world. The continuity of the two arrows from I-Am to the world outside depicts life energy’s complete passage through our systems.

Fourth, the area contained by the two circles keeps I-Am in the space-time world (like the ego). It includes ego states as shown in Figure 2 and physical processes such as breathing, eating, digesting, moving, and so on. It also includes thinking, feeling, memory, fantasy, impulses, desires, hopes, dreams, language, personal history, patterns of behavior, and culture.

Fifth, everything we experience is accompanied by bodily sensations, including the flow of life energy through the body. And with a little practice, most people can learn to identify both the nature and location of their sensations. This capacity is essential because it is our awareness of the physical dimension of our experiences that opens us directly to life energy and promotes its flow.

Sixth, examples of sensations include hot-cold, tight-loose, sensitive- numb, pain-pleasure, congested-flowing, tingling-soothed, hard-soft, vibrant-relaxed, loud-quiet, discordant-harmonious, pleasing-irritating, nothing-something, moving-still, empty-full, salty-poisonous, liquid-solid, foul-nectar, and sour-sweet.

Seventh, the direct experience of the sensations that people have is the most important because the conscious internal awareness of their sensations is what connects them to their inner world. Even so, we can profitably use the other words they use to indicate aspects of their current experiences. Words and phrases such as “anxious,” “depressed,” “thinking about the past,” and so on are not sensations. However, they can fruitfully prompt us to say, for example, “Tell me where that is in your body,” “I’m curious to know what sensations you have right now,” “Point to where that is in your body,” and “Notice those sensations, they are important.”

Eighth, sensory awareness of the outside world is depicted by the arrows starting at the inner circle and passing through the outer one into the world. Our five senses supply this physical awareness through seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling.

Ninth (note this), physical awareness in perceiving the outside world and knowing our bodily sensations is fundamental. Combined knowledge and integration of both keeps life energy flowing from I-Am through our systems into the outside world. This grounds life energy.

Further discussion ahead highlights the practical value of these different ways of describing the dynamic connections between Life, life energy, awareness, and grounding.

Living Requirements

Living well depends on two fundamental elements:

- The first is the steady flow of life energy from I-Am into the world and back from the world to I-Am (notice the bidirectional arrows in Figure 1). Not surprisingly, a diminished flow interferes with our health and well-being (Mellor, 2008, 2011).
- The second is grounding (Mellor, 1982; 2008, pp. 188-190; 2011, pp. 51-62), which actively maintains and powerfully promotes an abundant flow of life energy. Grounding is also the means by which we maintain states of balance, equilibrium, strength, and expanded consciousness.

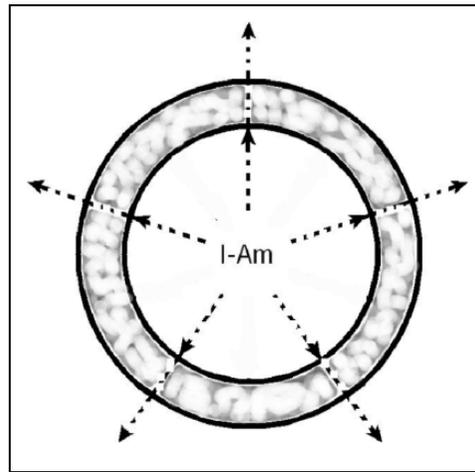


Figure 3. Reduced Energy Flow With Bodily Congestion.

Ungrounded Ways of Managing

My experience has shown that when the intensity of daily life seems too much for us, we have three main ways of managing the energy involved. We block or inhibit our awareness of (1) the sensations in our bodies (life energy), (2) the world around us (our perceptions), or (3) we do both. Each of these responses lessens how grounded we are. These three responses do reduce the intensity of our experiences, but this is usually only temporarily helpful because they bind the energy of our reactions inside or around our bodies. This leads to congestion and clogging and is not useful. This energy could be:

- Physical (e.g., pain, pleasure, tension, sexual feelings, etc.)
- Related to feelings or emotions (e.g., joy, love, confidence, sadness, anger, fear, etc.)
- From thoughts (e.g., ideas, insights, criticism, self-doubts, etc.)
- From perceptions (e.g., acute understanding, confusion, challenging ideas, etc.)
- From the flooding of expanded consciousness (e.g., ecstasy, existential despair, wonder, love, etc.)

In Figure 3, the congestion is shown by the dappled area between the two circles. In this example, the clogging is well advanced. The dotted lines on the arrows indicate reduced energy flow. Compare these states with the clarity between the circles and the continuity of the arrows in Figure 1.

There are two important issues here. First, restricting our awareness congests the body and the field around it with the energy that was fluid and free before becoming held. Second, it takes energy to keep restricting this collected energy. So, the energies, both of the experiences and of what holds them in, are held and unavailable. This holding reduces our overall vitality and capacity to function well (see Figure 4).

Second, when we remain open and available, we allow ourselves to stay aware and experience whatever is active in our bodies. Life energy keeps clearing our systems of both free and partially held energy, and the extra energy made available by this contributes to our health and fulfillment. Figure 4 illustrates a small example. To get a visual idea of the consequences of binding energy for years, imagine all of the areas inside and outside the body filled with deposits like the ones shown in Figure 4.

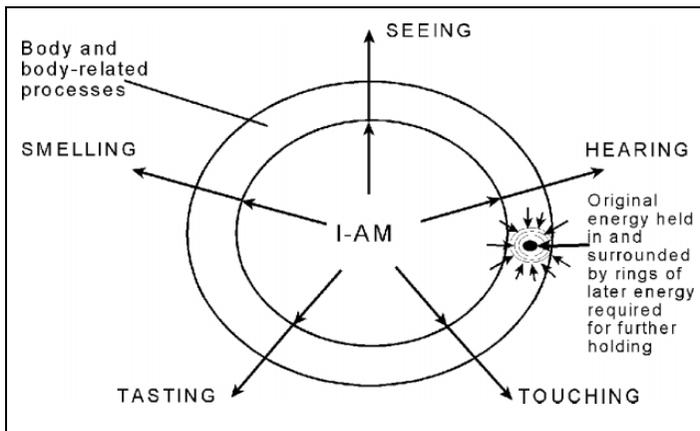


Figure 4. Held Life Energy In and Around the Body.

Happily, awareness is all that is necessary for life energy to keep flowing or to start it again if it is inhibited. So, to clear ourselves, all we need to do is to cultivate ongoing physical awareness by grounding ourselves. Importantly, physical movement frequently helps clear things more quickly. Moving loosens the body's grip on the energy and increases grounding. Furthermore, the results of this whole process are cumulative.

The Digestive Process

An exciting outcome of grounding is the way it triggers what I call a *natural digestive process* (Mellor, 2008, pp. 194-196). This treats all of our available energies. Activated when life energy flows, the process deals with both the origins of our responses and the associated held energy clogging our systems. The energies released by this digestive process then nourish our consciousness with strength, resolution, and relief: All of it is life energy that nourishes our lives. "The process [also] often brings us understanding and wisdom, clarity about past incidents, what to do now, and confidence in going ahead. . . . [It] enriches us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually" (p. 195). It also taps into Life's presence as the template of what is possible in life.

When grounded, it is as if a highly trained and powerful healer-therapist takes over. Whatever this enlivening process is in us, it clearly draws on the wisdom of years of human evolution and acts with breathtaking acuity. It deeply connects us to I-Am, and, with Life's presence as the template for wholeness, it unerringly draws us into complete resolution. A similar resolution also occurs with mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Both involve bodily awareness, and what arises from that, and promote spiritual unfolding.

With grounding, we actively harness Life's hidden healing and digestive capacities when we fully embrace sensate experience (no matter how intense) and ensure our acute sensory awareness of the immediate environment. This also increases life energy's cleansing and digestive flow through the body and into the physical world. Interestingly, both grounding and mindfulness have significant roots in Eastern spiritual practices: grounding in Yogic and Samadhic orientations and mindfulness in Buddhism.

The results speak for themselves. Sometimes they seem minor, and other times they are so far beyond our usual expectations that they seem miraculous. For example, after an operation in 2004, I hemorrhaged for a week while daily also enduring an agonizing procedure. I concentrated on grounding the entire time to support my healing. Eventually, I was exhausted and deeply pessimistic about my capacity to recover. In that state, I dragged myself into a chair, all the while repeating

“grounding, grounding, grounding . . .” until I could actively embrace the sensations of my dejection and pain. Twenty minutes later, my awareness suddenly and dramatically cleared and became what I knew was cellular consciousness. I also knew this was giving me the option to cure my body simply through my intent. I was healed at that moment. The bleeding stopped. What then followed was a cascading series of realizations about my birth as the second of twins, what in that birth had prompted me into psychotherapy, and why I was a workaholic (Mellor, 2010, pp. 440-447). More insights kept unfolding for another 6 years.

Even when used with more mundane issues, many of my clients and I have experienced the outcomes as profound. After an argument with a friend, for example, people can experience a new depth of understanding and a release accompanied by a sense of closure. These common outcomes makes grounding a powerful therapeutic process and personal self-management practice.

Common Benefits

Every event in our lives gives us the opportunity to ground ourselves and to experience the benefits of doing so. In fact, the experience of many hundreds of people shows that grounding ourselves regularly throughout the day makes a huge difference to our ongoing health and well-being. In my experience, grounding observably:

- Promotes general life balance in the form of physical ease, contentment, happiness, clarity, and harmony at the same time that it relieves, dissolves, digests, and removes discomfort
- Deeply resolves unfinished business
- Supports physical and emotional healing
- Empowers confidence when dealing with anticipated difficulties
- Establishes or restores emotional balance when people are upset
- Promotes clear thinking and clarifies confusion and other difficulties
- Digests all feelings, including strong feelings such as joy, love, excitement, rage, terror, grief, and panic and anxiety attacks

Uses of Grounding

To deal with the myriad possibilities for using grounding, the next part of this article is divided into three sections: routine, challenging, and life-course uses. Each section includes its primary orientation, a plan, the action to take, hints, and specific suggestions on related grounding processes.

Routine Use

Primary Orientation. This use deals with the everyday events in life when all is smooth and easy. Everything is familiar, expected, and offers little challenge. When significant crises that shift people out of their natural balance arise, use the approach described in the next section on “Challenging Use.”

The Plan. Make grounding routine, that is, a moment-by-moment part of life. Doing so helps us to consolidate ease in our lives and prepares us to deal more straightforwardly and thoroughly with times of challenge when they do occur.

The Action. Start a regular program to ground yourself for five to ten seconds at a time throughout the day. Choose the frequency that suits you: every hour or half hour or more frequently. When deciding, remember that the process only takes a few seconds at a time. Also, the longer you keep to the plan, the more routine each pause becomes. This program quickly expands awareness and balance, and after staying grounded becomes routine, we start to notice when we are ungrounded.

This change signals that grounding, rather than discomfort, has become our prompt to seek equilibrium.

Hints. Others will barely notice the pause in what you are doing. You can choose several ways to remind yourself to become grounded, for example, just before telephoning someone or answering a call, while your car is stationary in traffic, before starting to drink or eat, or when talking to your children. Use your ingenuity. Using a timer is also helpful as a reminder: Smartphones, computers, and watches have timers.

The Grounding. Whether sitting, standing, or moving, do a quick body scan, seeking any noticeable sensations. If nothing seems to be there, then experience the nothingness, because nothing is a sensation. Check inside your belly, chest, neck, mouth, head, back, arms, legs, feet—everywhere. Whatever is there, practice accepting its presence. You relax into it by softening your body.

Then notice the outside, too: the pressure of what is supporting you; the clothing against your body; the people, physical things, colors, shapes, illumination; the near or distant sounds, music, talking; any tastes in your mouth and any smells. Reach out and touch things too.

Do all of this quickly. Notice that your awareness is instantaneous and automatic the moment you pay attention to anything. Avoid trying hard. Practice makes the noticing easier. Remember you are practicing awareness, so actively and sequentially feel what you are touching, see what you are looking at, hear what you are listening to, and taste and smell what you are tasting and smelling. Do all of this quickly.

Then blend your external and internal awareness: Maybe choose one sensation inside of you and something you can sense outside of you. Keep it physical, and keep them together in your awareness just for a few moments.

It will take you a lot longer to read what I have just written here about grounding than to do it. So, to get you started, do it now for about a minute.

Also, take the 9-month challenge. Many people have been astounded at how different, clearer, easier, and more balanced they and their lives have become at the end of 9 months. A recording (Mellor, 1982) is a useful way of anchoring the steps.

Challenging Use

Primary Orientation. This use is for people who face intense challenges intermittently or regularly. These events are not routine and may involve feeling overwhelmed. They may end with a lack of resolution, a repetitious mulling over of each incident, or worrying about when the next one will occur. Such incidents can involve people, events, inner conflicts, physical conditions, strong feelings, outbursts of anxiety or passion, or recurring crisis situations.

The Plan. Learn to stay grounded and receptive as you deal specifically with the emotions, people, situations, and events that challenge you. Also, as you remember such incidents, learn to accept your responses and to ground yourself so you digest and release the remnants of the events.

The Action. Practice facing and accepting perceptions and experiences that you prefer not to have. By doing this, we learn to stay grounded when under extreme pressure. We commit ourselves to the physical: the sensations inside our bodies and the physical things and events around us.

Hints. When times are easy, practice the plan given for routine use. Doing so helps significantly because it deepens your experience, expands your repertoire when you are not under pressure, and builds your resilience for when you are. Also, find someone willing to help you to stay open and grounded when you are in the middle of challenging incidents. Think of using the telephone, text messages, emails, or personal contact.

Remember, when discomfort is high, grounding will still digest it and leave remarkable ease and balance in its wake. So persist. The recording mentioned earlier (Mellor, 1982) is a powerful aid before, during, and after such incidents. Also, while learning, find ways to limit your exposure to the events so you give yourself time to consolidate your learning.

The Grounding. The key to doing the grounding when in highly charged situations is to match the internal and external physical intensity. As you learn to stay available to the intensity of your experiences, practice staying engaged with them, and maintaining your groundedness, you will manage such situations with increasing confidence.

When your feelings or sensations are stronger than what is going on around you, you will need to increase the intensity of your connection to the outside. Our five senses give us five ways to do this. Grasp something close to you or make tight fists. Make your grip at least as strong as the intensity you experience inside. Squeeze harder until it is. Also, look fiercely at the things around you and visually draw them into you with a force equal to what is inside you. Open your hearing to make the intensity of the sounds match your feelings. Do the same with taste and smell: sniff actively and suck your tongue. You can also put on bright lights or loud music, smell something pungent, or cook something succulent or strongly seasoned.

Conversely, when outer experiences are stronger than inner sensations, you need to redress this balance. People born prematurely, some autistic people, and others who are hypersensitive experience such imbalances. In the extreme, they are unable to function in the world, which perpetually overloads them. Delacato (1984) highlighted this severe imbalance for autistic children and developed programs for managing the external intensity by supporting the person's capacity to deal with it by changing the environment. For example, use dark glasses and dully lit venues for hypersensitive eyes; ear plugs and quiet locations for ears; soft, soothing clothes for skin; and carefully selected food and physical settings for smell and taste.

After people establish the balance between inside and outside, relief follows quickly because they can then ground themselves in these challenging situations and manage life's demands. A panic or anxiety attack will evaporate as the necessary balance occurs.

Life Course Use

Primary Orientation. This use applies to people seeking advanced personal integration, heightened awareness, or the deep fulfillment possible from fruitful spiritual practices. Two qualities are usually strong with these people: Their objective is a very high priority, and they are committed to using everyday life as their classroom and teacher.

The Plan. Learn to accept every event in life as a reflection of the self, to claim and digest all experiences routinely, and to use every person and situation as the next step in your unfolding toward expanded consciousness.

The Action. The aim is to take back into ourselves those attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and so on that we have projected outside of ourselves. We do this by imagining we are identical in every way to what we perceive in other people or situations. The challenge in this is the need to identify with other individuals or situations as if we are the same, especially when we do not like what we face. Remember to ground yourself strongly enough to digest what you are claiming back into yourself.

Hints. Everything that happens outside of us is life energy prompting us to pay attention to another aspect of ourselves. If we do not accept this, my experience is that it will keep returning, often in more escalated ways, until we get the message and fully claim what we are noticing as our own. Think about repetitive experiences in your life. Also, think of people you know who keep acting in problematic ways. In these terms, they are doing so because the unfinished business in their systems keeps attracting people and events that carry similar issues. And

interestingly, when they finally claim, accept, and digest these people and events, the repetition usually stops.

The Grounding. The grounding approaches described for routine and challenging circumstances are relevant here, although in this case, the primary goal of the grounding is to cultivate our capacity for intimacy: a complete alignment of consciousness, behavior, thinking, feeling, appearance, and so on with the other people and environments in which we are both located. Elsewhere I have described this process in detail (Mellor, 2008, pp. 192-194).

When conflicts, polarization, or impasses are present (Mellor, 2011, pp. 128-139), I recommend that you systematically identify with each aspect of the conflict, how it interacts with the others, and what your ideal outcome would be. It helps to have a step-by-step process by which to own all aspects of polarized situations (Mellor, 1988). Grounding is essential at every step because each one stirs held energy into action, freeing it so it is available for digesting. For example, when faced with someone we do not like, identifying with her or him and imagining all is resolved stirs up our reluctance, dislikes, and so on. Grounding can then digest all of that because the energy is mobilized and available for processing. Interestingly, as this approach unfolds, every aspect unrelated to the here and now is transformed into clear life energy that is as close to Life's template as possible.

Conclusion

Life energy (physis) is more than just a force of nature impacting us as we live. It is our very aliveness at work in our systems. The nature of its prompting, as the ancients knew, comes from a source beyond the reach of everyday consciousness, from Life, a fifth dimension that gives existence to and sustains everything captured by space and time. Although beyond sensory experience and description, Life's oneness, wholeness, completion, and so on perpetually impact us, drawing us into alignment with it, the hidden template of our fulfillment. Our participation is crucial, and grounding gives us the means to do that by starting with our bodies and living the resulting bodily awareness. Grounding promotes the clearing and opening of our systems and the heightened flow of life energy through us, which leads to deep fulfillment. Thousands of people have practiced grounding since its introduction, and, as with mindfulness meditation, there are great opportunities for researching grounding's claimed effectiveness in thousands of settings similar to those in which research on mindfulness has already been done.

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Ken Mellor, Dip. Soc. Studs., BA, trained with Bob and Mary Goulding and Jacqui Schiff as his cosponsors. Awarded his TSTA (psychotherapy) in 1975, he has continued developing TA since then. His emphasis is on integrating elements of theory and practice, within and outside of TA. A regular contributor to the *Transactional Analysis Journal* and an Eric Berne Award corecipient in 1980, he trained for 35 years with four Eastern masters and is now empowered to initiate others. He has also presented this learning to TA teachers, practitioners, and trainees. A member of the ITAA since 1970, he still teaches internationally. He is a prize-winning author published in more than 30 languages. In 2016 he was awarded the Muriel James Living Principles Award. Ken and his wife, Elizabeth, lead The Awakening Network, which is based in Victoria, Australia. He can be reached at PO Box 271, Seymour, Victoria 3661, Australia; email: contact@awakenw.net.