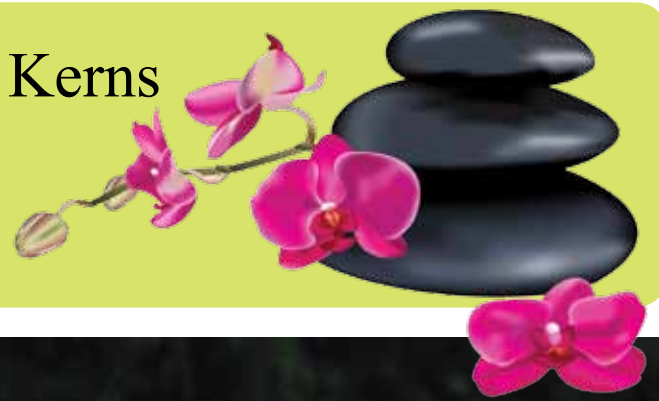


The Crazy Wisdom Interview with Karen Kerns on Healing, Polarity Therapy and Craniosacral Bodywork



Interviewed by Bill Zirinsky

(Karen Kerns, 61, is a naturally gifted local healer of considerable reknown, though most of the reknown is sotto voce (in a very soft voice). She is a “healer’s healer” --- like others we’ve occasionally interviewed over the years (Bronwen Gates and Merri Walters come easily to mind), she is not widely known by the general public and she probably would not want to be. She is trained in massage therapy, polarity therapy and craniosacral therapy. She is one of the teachers at the Polarity Center of Ann Arbor, and is involved in mentoring and training a new generation of polarity therapists and healers.

Raised in Zilwaukee, Karen currently lives in Whitmore Lake, and has an office on the West Side of Ann Arbor. Karen is serious, deep, kind, perhaps brooding, and there is a raccoon-like quality to her appearance. Trying to describe her as a bodyworker and healer, the words that come to my mind are: quietude, natural, purring, heart, depths from the unknown. Karen is also a mother and grandmother, and she talks in this interview not just about her devotion to the healing arts, but also about her family life and her spiritual life.

We met at her office, which is filled with personal artifacts and artwork, as well as photos of important people in her life. Her massage table is in the center of her room, and our interview began on that subject.)

Bill Zirinsky: You say this massage table’s been used for many things.

Karen Kerns: Yes. I made it soft enough to take a nap in the afternoon. It’s also been used as a construction table, a laundry table, and a playground for hide-and-seek.

Bill Zirinsky: Why don’t we start off with you talking about the Polarity Center having morphed into a new entity and moving to Ann Arbor. Tell me about that?

Karen Kerns: Sure. The Polarity Center was located on Chase Road in Dearborn. John Bodary, founder and instructor, held classes there for about 15 years. Renee Rutz and I were trained by John at this Center. As interest in Polarity increased, John asked Renee and me to help him teach.

BZ: My sense was that the Polarity Center for many years was *the* place in Michigan that was doing training for people interested in Polarity therapy. Is that true?

Kerns: As a center, yes. However, there were and are other Polarity instructors in Michigan. Linda Diane Feldt from Ann Arbor and Sheila Cook from Lansing are two of them. John has also sponsored annual seminars featuring other Polarity Therapy instructors from the U.S. and abroad. This gives a different perspective and/or a fresh new aspect to the practice of Polarity Therapy. I will point out here that John trained with Max Heirich.

BZ: That’s interesting. Of course, many in the holistic community know Max well. *(Editor’s Note: Max Heirich is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Michigan in Sociology, and has been instrumental in fostering the holistic health community in Ann Arbor over the last 35 years.)* Is the Polarity Center still going on in Dearborn, or is it finished?

Kerns: The building is finished. The Polarity Center, as of 2006, has become a mobile education unit.

BZ: Is John Bodary still involved with it?

Kerns: Yes, he’s an active 80-year old teacher and mentor of Polarity Therapy.

BZ: I see. It’s moved now essentially to Ann Arbor, and you and Renee have shepherded its move to Ann Arbor?

Kerns: Yes, in some sense. Renee and I live and work in Ann Arbor. The



Photo by Linda Lawson

Karen Kerns

“Polarity works with electromagnetic energy. The electromagnetic energy connects with and helps move the life force along through our body.”

mailing address is now Ann Arbor. Now, we hold classes at different locations. We have held classes in Livonia and Ann Arbor.

BZ: Can you explain to our readers what polarity therapy is?

Kerns: Polarity therapy is an energy system working with the life force of the body which maintains all of our systems - our physical systems, our emotional system, mental system and spiritual/belief system. Polarity works to reestablish and/or maintain the harmony of the whole body. The therapeutic part consists of assisting a person in balancing his/her own systems’ energy.

Dr. Randolph Stone, DO, DC, ND developed Polarity Therapy incorporating information from Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese medicine, and other elements of Eastern philosophy of health, plus information from various spiritual traditions. He observed re-occurring spinal misalignments in his osteopathic/chiropractic practice. After much study, he found, in ancient writings, the repeated use of the words ‘balancing energy’ or balancing chi, or qi, and their spiritual implications to health.

Dr. Stone realized that the energy of the body needed to be balanced before an osteopathic manipulation would hold. He then put together a collection of

energy balancing techniques, or protocols, with this accumulated information and incorporated it in his practice.

For example, he had techniques for working on the liver, or the circulatory system, or a sprained ankle. He called it Polarity Therapy. There are therapeutic bodywork protocols, dietary guidelines and exercises used, as well. All are used to balance or enhance the energy flow of the body. Presence, intention and active listening are an integral part, too. Polarity Therapy is holistic.

Polarity works with electromagnetic energy. The electromagnetic energy connects with and helps move the life force along through our body. This life force flow can be subdued through resistance, injury or trauma, decreasing this life force flow. This hampers optimum function. Fulcrums or balancing points form around these trauma locations, shifting our ideal state of being to a compromised state of being.

Patterns of movement, behavior and beliefs can change with this new compromised state. It takes additional energy to hold these altered compromised states. These shifted states are usually subconscious choices to keep us from further perceived harm.

Pain causes us to seek out help. Polarity therapy can help identify the fulcrums, liberate the health within them, and bring us back into a balanced state.

BZ: Is life force energy quantifiable?

Kerns: I'm sure there are people more knowledgeable in this field of measurement, but I can tell you that if you have ever had a 'burden lifted from you' --- that feeling of rejuvenation is a release of energy that used to hold a resistant pattern. This energy then goes toward physical optimum functioning, joy, gratitude and clarity of mind. This life force, I believe, is what maintains everything; that which gives life to everything. As we know from studying anatomy and energy, there is more space between molecules of bone than actual bone tissue. In that space is divine consciousness; it is particular to each one of us - the same yet uniquely ours - to manifest and create on earth. There is no other person on earth like you, nor will there be.

BZ: I have been under the impression or misimpression that polarity was, to some degree, the Westernized version of Shiatsu. Is that a misimpression or distortion of that?

Kerns: I do not know the theoretical basis of Shiatsu, but yes, pressure is sometimes used in Polarity Therapy. I believe many practices of energy work strive toward the same thing: a free flow of energy, and a focus of harmony and balance in the systems of the body. There are three kinds of therapeutic touch used in Polarity Therapy: Satvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. Tamasic is the most pressure related form, Rajasic is stimulating, and Satvic is soft. When cold/hard/condensed tissue is treated, often it is with pressure, like Shiatsu.

BZ: When someone is training as a polarity therapist, do they need to come to polarity work with an already existing background as either a massage therapist or a body worker, and do they need to know human anatomy and have related knowledge?

Kerns: Not initially. We have had students who have never touched a body therapeutically attend our classes. But if they're serious about practicing Polarity professionally, then, yes, knowledge of anatomy is essential. Some anatomy is presented with our training. We are watching the laws that govern the practices of massage and/or polarity, and in some states, massage training is required to practice polarity therapy. Many people come to class to understand energy as their first step in thinking about ways of approaching healing other than medicine; as another way of helping themselves heal. Sometimes they only need level one or two to help them with that.

BZ: And you also do cranial sacral work?

Kerns: Yes, I do. I've studied both Upledger and Biodynamic Craniosacral work.

BZ: Are they distinct from polarity?

Kerns: Craniosacral therapy is an energy specialization that incorporates some Polarity energy principles, as do many other energy disciplines. Polarity is like a great big salad bowl that holds special ingredients. Craniosacral Therapy (CS) is a special ingredient in that bowl. Dr. Stone was also a craniosacral therapist.

BZ: They are both, in a sense, parts of the ingredients of polarity?

Kerns: Yes, they are in a sense, particle and wave.

BZ: Say more about this.

Kerns: The craniosacral system is a unique fluid respiratory system. This fluid exchange involves cranial fluid. Research has proven that this fluid travels to the ends of the nerves. Craniosacral therapists and others believe that within this fluid is the 'fluid of life'; the essence of the life force. The pumping action of this system involves mainly two bones of the body: the sphenoid and coccyx.

However, all the bones of the cranium along with the connective tissue play a major role in the movement of this fluid throughout the whole body. Like Polarity, this system strives for and needs an open receptive system to operate optimally. Where the system is restricted, there is a block or fulcrum inhibiting the free flow. Within the restriction of this flow, is the solution that needs to be brought forth.

It's the same or similar philosophy in polarity therapy. So the cranial system is taking polarity principles to a very precise place and focus on a particular system in the body with the intent of freeing the cranial system's resistance.

I would definitely not say a polarity practitioner is an automatic, well-attuned cranial sacral therapist. But it certainly helps in CS training to have a polarity background.

BZ: So then Cranial Sacral work has a more specific material touch component. When you are taught cranial sacral work, you're being taught about the flow of cerebral spinal fluids. You're being taught about an actual verifiable anatomic system that may not be central to allopathic teachings, but is its own teaching?

Kerns: Yes.

BZ: If I came with a headache, what would *you* do for me?

Kerns: Certainly, I would make sure we have all the information about your medical history, accidents, and injuries that may have a role in the headaches. If your headache is moderate to severe at the time of your appointment with me, I would start at the feet, to see if I can help draw off pressure from your head.

I would then assess the flow of your energy, making sure all the 'negative poles' (areas of your body that receive energies, e.g., lower jaw, pelvis, and feet.) are open. This could also allow energetic pressure to be relieved if present in your head.

An assessment of the long-line energies -- energies that help the physiology function properly -- could be next.

Then, I would check the cranial sacral system for mobility, motility, freedom of cranial sutures, dura constrictions and fluid flow.

BZ: Whereas polarity is more esoteric, or not necessarily? Does it have as much specificity in terms of anatomical manipulations, alignments, and touches as Cranial Sacral work?

Kerns: I believe that both systems are esoteric. Depending on the school of thought and a practitioner's sensitivity, both can also be practiced with a light or heavy touch. In osteopathic work or another type of CS work (other than biodynamic CS), both manipulations and esoteric touches can be used.

BZ: I see. And some of those techniques and touches and alignments overlap with CS? And some of them are distinct?

Kerns: Yes, correct.

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“...A heart issue has a certain palpable feel. An anger issue will have a different palpable feel...As I mentioned earlier, one can learn to palpate different tissue layers. You can sense through your hands, what tissue layer you are working with.”

The Crazy Wisdom Interview with Karen Kerns

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BZ: So, over the years, when you've done Craniosacral work with me and when I've had it done by other practitioners, there's a lot of work done in the neck area, and other points around the body that you, as a CS therapist, have a very good understanding of. As a layman, I think of them as similar to acupressure points. They may not be; they may be a distinct mapping, but I think of them as somehow related to acupressure points and meridians. A separate kind of mapping of the body exists within the teaching of polarity, or not as much?

Kerns: Polarity recognizes that there are different energy patterns and pathways. Polarity uses different kinds of touch to work with balancing. There are no needles used, just touch. It can be the whole hand or just a finger, depending on the focus of the work. The focus can be an injury, an organ, an energy pathway or a system.

There are energy pathways or maps that are used in Polarity that are similar to Acupressure meridians and some that are not. In polarity, some pathways govern the physiology of the body, and some work with the various nervous systems of the body. How the energy of our life force comes into our personal field and is utilized by our body is also addressed in Polarity Therapy.

There are very specific states of attention, presence and intention that a practitioner has in cranial sacral therapy and polarity therapy.

BZ: Can you explain that - the different kinds of intention that a craniosacral therapist may have versus a polarity therapist?

Kerns: Yes. I want to say there is a different focus, but the intention for optimum health is the same. Cranial Sacral work focuses on a dynamic process of Intelligence that manifests within the physical form and extends outward. This Intelligence is an invisible essence that travels in the cerebrospinal fluid. "It is the divine or universal intention in action," (a quote from Franklin Sills). This Intelligence is an inherent ordering force fully aware of the dynamic functions of the body. The potency of that Intelligence generates rhythms within the fluids and tissues of the body. These rhythms are called tides. They ebb and flow like the tides of the ocean. They are palpable throughout the body. This is inherent in everyone's system.

So, a Polarity practitioner may focus on the 'long line' energy pattern (as an example), that will reveal which element/chakra needs work, and a Cranial Sacral practitioner will focus on the tides. The Registered Polarity Practitioner students learn to palpate the different tissue layers of the body with attention to density, fluidity, location and texture. Both of these disciplines require a knowledge and experience of the levels of attention and focus.

It is very important for both practices to be aware of boundaries and energy edges. This awareness and respect initiates cooperation from the client on many levels. Dynamic Stillness -- a deep sense of presence, the root of our being, and the root of creativity, is held in attention in both practices, as well.

The tides focused on by a cranial sacral therapist are: A) Fluid tide; B) Mid tide; C) Long tide. Each tide represents levels of the Intelligence and expression in and around the body.

With awareness of the space in and around the client, a practitioner can sense the different tides by expanding the spatial awareness sometimes to the horizon. Each tide can be palpated at different distances. A deep sense of aliveness yet relaxation can ensue. A polarity practitioner uses this same distance exercise to sense the optimum space required to reorient to the body's energies.

BZ: When you're working with someone and you can help them to settle into that state or that frequency, are you creating healing for that person's system because they're getting to inhabit that state, that frequency?

“Craniosacral work focuses on a dynamic process of Intelligence that manifests within the physical form and extends outward. This Intelligence is an invisible essence that travels in the cerebrospinal fluid.”

Karen Kerns on Healing



What follows are a few selected nuggets about the healing process from the Karen Kerns interview.

There is a level of resonance with someone you're working with that begins the healing process. I don't know if anyone can help anyone else unless they can do that. It's part of that presence I mentioned earlier: to somehow resonate with their humanness, in a way that the heart connects with them.

Within each person lies the knowledge of how to heal. How do you help a person find it?

I was taught that the body is the last part to come around to healing because it is too dense. The mental and emotional bodies are first. I don't know anymore. I think that a belief is as difficult to uncover and change and heal. We seem to wrap our whole selves around a belief and pattern our being. It seems to sustain us. Therein lies the place that needs to be healed the most.

From day one, we begin to teach what we call 'presence' or a state of being in which the practitioner needs to be, in order to be aware of what they're going to be holding in energetic space.

...Choice is a very powerful part of healing. Not to be frightened of people's states of being, because as a practitioner, if you're frightened, you'll do your own survival pattern. It's difficult to hear, to listen, to respond or be in a 'present' manner. You will react instead of respond. So, oftentimes, the work that a practitioner has to do for herself is with another therapist.

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Kerns: With deep relaxation in the client and proper presence, attention and intention, the life force (that is already within each of us) flows to places where it may not have been allowed to go for whatever reason.

In polarity, we talk about the nervous system as sympathetic, parasympathetic, social and central nervous systems.

The parasympathetic nervous system is the system that settles the system as a whole to a quiet place. In that quiet and relaxed state, our systems run very well. Actually, the parasympathetic system also runs the digestion. When this nervous system is properly operating, the long and mid-tides are able to flow well also. So, if we eat our food in a nervous, very vigilant, body/mind/emotional state, we are not be able to digest our food. The parasympathetic nervous system has been overridden by the sympathetic or "fight or flight" nervous system.

Polarity Therapy will look at it from the nervous system and balancing state. The Cranial Sacral system will look at it in terms of that state plus getting into these particular tides. It is just a different focus.

BZ: So, when you're trying to teach this to a new group of first year students of polarity, how much of what you're teaching is verbal explanation of knowledge, and how much is it actual working with people on the table and letting them experiment?

Kerns: It's both. From day one, we begin to teach what we call 'presence' or a state of being in which the practitioner needs to be, in order to be aware of what they're going to be holding in energetic space. Theory and table work are presented and practiced in the first class. When we get into levels 2, 3, and 4, we're teaching and refining that sense and state of awareness and intention,

as well as deepening the understanding of the theory that affects the techniques. The uniqueness and depth of this Polarity teaching also provides mentorship for each student. Each student, at each level, receives a one-on-one session with the presenting teacher. (There are three of us: John Bodary, Renee Rutz and me).

Here's the rundown:

Level 1: This introduces basic theory and techniques of Polarity Therapy, plus the introduction of presence -- the state of being of a practitioner is most essential to the learning. There are eight 4-hour classes in this level.

Levels 2 & 3: These are weekend classes. There are two supervisions/weekends/per student plus more in-depth study of theory, body reading/structural analysis/introduction to diet. Each student is asked to give an assigned 15-20 minute presentation of some aspect of Polarity Therapy. There are four weekends in each level.

Level 4: At this level, Modules of Professionalism are taught, documentations of sessions, plus presentations in class and in the community, and refining communication skills. Also, Modules of Treatment Options -- the use of anatomical landmark assessment techniques, sensing the different tissue layers, involution/evolution principles, assessing belief systems, trauma/resourcing assessments. Those are a few of the modules/classes taught. There are 16 weekend sessions: (two of which include a conference involving some aspect of Polarity Therapy).



Karen Kerns with Grandchildren

“Intuition is innate in everyone. Vigilance can fine-tune it.”

BZ: That gives a flavor of the training levels, Karen. Thanks! To repeat my earlier question, somebody could come into that Level 1 class and maybe not have training of any sort in bodywork?

Kerns: Right.

BZ: And do you try to screen the classes to select students you sense might become talented healers, or is it your belief that anybody with the proper intent can learn this material?

Kerns: Anybody with the proper intent can learn this material. In my own level 3 class, one student used the Polarity Principles to develop videos of educational material, one worked only on horses, and another person took the classes to understand what was happening with her daughter receiving sessions.

BZ: How does polarity, as a system working with life force, connect to, or overlap with, Reiki?

Kerns: I have studied massage therapy, cranial sacral therapy, polarity and Reiki -- all three levels of Reiki. Reiki feels, to me, more like working with primary energy. There are certain symbols in Reiki similar to some of the diagrams in polarity therapy. It's more of a higher frequency, working with the energies that begin to enter the body/system. An attunement is a brief energetic initiation from Reiki teacher to student. This initiation aligns the student energetically to the primary energy frequencies of the Reiki system of healing. The educational training of Polarity is more in depth; it is anatomically and physiologically more specific.

BZ: When did you start teaching polarity?

Kerns: I started teaching in 1997.

BZ: How did you come to begin teaching it?

Kerns: John Bodary asked me ten years ago to consider teaching Polarity. I wasn't ready and felt too shy to do so at that time. He offered me his position of teaching at Irene's Myomassology Institute in Southfield, Michigan. That was my first experience of teaching -- introductory classes. I had studied with Irene Gauthier. I felt very much at home there. I'm still teaching the introductory classes there.

BZ: When I first heard about you, before having met you, about 25 years ago, you were described to me as a 'gifted healer'. That wasn't your own self-description. What do you think that means to be a 'gifted healer'? Maybe that's a hard question.

Kerns: That's a hard question to answer. Twenty five years ago is a long time. I'm wondering if some of those comments came from my dental hygiene practice. Getting into bodywork came from my experiences as a dental hygienist. My last five years of being a dental hygienist was the chair side and research position at the Ashley Community Dental Center.

That experience taught me about fear. People from many countries, who reside or temporarily resided in Ann Arbor, often did not speak English. There was a common theme of fear of 'going to the dentist'. Communication was difficult at times. I used my eyes and a reassuring touch on the shoulder to communicate "it'll be alright".

A reassuring touch was necessary to help alleviate uncertainty. It was that experience that led me to work with massage.

There is a level of resonance with someone you're working with that begins the healing process. I don't know if anyone can help anyone else unless they can do that. It's part of that presence I mentioned earlier: to somehow resonate with their humanness, in a way that the heart connects with them.

BZ: For how many years were you working as a dental hygienist?

Kerns: 17½ years.

BZ: When, in those 17½ years, did you go and get training as a massage therapist?

Kerns: During my last five years of practicing dental hygiene at the Community Dental Center. I started massage training in 1981, training with Irene Gauthier. I finished the massage training in 1982. A five year gradual transition from dentistry to massage ensued.

BZ: Pretty soon you must have begun doing massage work which was in the somewhat more esoteric realm... If that's not the right way to say it, in the realm of healing; not just in the realm of massage.

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The Crazy Wisdom Interview with Karen Kerns

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Kerns: Yes:

BZ: What do you think it was in you that was...

Kerns: Well, it's a funny story actually. I was very blessed (still am) to have some wonderful friends that I've known now for over 30 years, on whom I practiced my massage techniques. They threatened to bronze my elbows and place them on my tombstone. That was my first hint that maybe there's another way to help release muscle tension, and not just using deep intense pressure.

BZ: They were going to bronze your elbows because you were such a natural?

Kerns: No, because it was sometimes a bit painful for me to release muscle tension in that way.

BZ: It hurt you so much?

Kerns: No, it was sometimes a bit painful *for them*. They'd say, "Do you have to do that?" I'd say, "It's the only way I know how to do this". I received a Polarity flyer one day in the mail. I just kept looking at it. The whole week I had it on my desk and I'd gravitate toward it. Finally, I said, "Alright! I'll call". So, I went for an introductory class and knew it was something that would help answer that question. There'd be another way to work with muscle tension.

BZ: You're referring to the question of: why does it have to hurt so much to help someone release that tension?

Kerns: Right, and are there other ways of not actually causing physical pain. Also, the understanding of what pain is, came to me: resistance to the energy flow, to the electromagnetic flow. With that understanding, you could find other ways of working with it.

Your question about gifted healers... is a difficult one to answer for me. The desire to help is certainly a prerequisite. Respect for the circumstance, and for *yourself*, is important. Within each person lies the knowledge of how to heal. How do you help a person find it?

BZ: In the interviews I did with up-and-coming, younger massage therapists and bodyworkers (in the Winter 2009 issue of *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*), one of the questions I asked each of them was: "Do you consider yourself a "healer" and what does that mean? If not, why not, and do you aspire to that?" When people I know talk about your work, people generally regard you, in conversations I've had, as a "healer". I want to talk about that in terms of what it is that you're doing that's not just bodywork, not just massage, but it's about healing. Something you just said speaks to that. You said...

Kerns: People know within themselves what they need to heal. They may not be conscious of it. You can help them find it.

BZ: My sense of you is that you have a gift for sensing layers beneath the conscious level, and that's something you bring into your sessions with people. As you work with people's bodies and with their souls, your work is at a level that is much more than meets the eye.

Kerns: Yes. When I am with someone in a therapeutic sense I sometimes get pictures in my head or sensing in my body that mirror what is going on with them. I place that information in a possibility category in my head and come back to being present with them. I may or may not mention this information to them. If I feel prompted to mention it, I do so. I respond to the information with what I know as a practitioner.

Intuition is innate in everyone. Vigilance can fine-tune it. I think one can learn, if you want to, different sensations that people have, that emit from them. Different sensations that they will share without necessarily speaking about them. For example, a heart issue has a certain palpable feel. An anger issue will have a different palpable feel.

As I mentioned earlier, one can learn to palpate different tissue layers. You can sense through your hands, what tissue layer you are working with. Also, one of the things that is strongly recommended, is that people (students) work on their own issues. To begin to understand what's expected, what can happen to



Karen Kerns

“There are energy pathways or maps that are used in Polarity that are similar to Acupressure meridians and some that are not.”

the person you're working with. It is a journey for themselves as well as an introduction to a field of practice. It's very humbling.

Students are witnessed going through their own psychological/emotional processes. A witness is very much like an externalization of your own inner soul's work witness. They're witnessed and helped by teachers and classmates. As they come out the other side of that, they understand a little bit more about what happens in healing. It's not necessarily an easy journey.

I was taught that the body is the last part to come around to healing because it is too dense. The mental and emotional bodies are first. I don't know anymore. I think that a belief is as difficult to uncover and change and heal. We seem to wrap our whole selves around a belief and pattern our being. It seems to sustain us. Therein lies the place that needs to be healed the most.

For example, if I experience something that is so frightening that I change my life, my way of thinking and being, I will contract on all those levels. I will narrow my consciousness, my feelings and my physical body. I will hold on tight to not re-experience that fear again. A particular physical posture results in hip pain. So, it's not your hip that's the problem. It's the belief system that holds there.

Survival is paramount. What do people do or feel they need to do to survive? One of the things that helps, that I find in my practice, is to say, "You know, you don't ever have to give up a survival behavior or posture. But you could have a choice in that posture or another one. You could have a choice. You can always go back to this one."

So, choice is a very powerful part of healing. Not to be frightened of people's states of being, because as a practitioner, if you're frightened, you'll do your own survival pattern. It's difficult to hear, to listen, to respond or be in a 'present' manner. You will react instead of respond. So, oftentimes, the work that a practitioner has to do for herself is with another therapist: an energy therapist or psychological therapist: "How come I reacted in this particular manner?" It is the practitioner's job, to take care of herself.

“Probably the most difficult thing you can do is face your fear; to intend a commitment to face your fear. Whatever that is. The more you do that, the more your life force, your soul, is a part of you and the less energy you are using to keep it at bay. You’re looking for more energy availability.”

BZ: So just as a good psychologist or psychotherapist might need to clinic about the work they’re doing with a client -- to stay conscious of their own reactivity -- a bodywork healer needs to be working on his or her own reactivity so that he or she can be better able to be with a client without being afraid of the client’s issues, or feeling fear in the face of their clients.

Kerns: Right. And if you’ve been through your own work and come out the other side, and you understand many aspects of something that’s happened to you, you will wear the resolution in your aura: your external energy field. People will come to see you and say, “You know, I know you know, but I don’t know how I know. But I know that you know.” That’s very helpful. You don’t have to talk about it; it’s just there.

You can do polarity with people in conversation. A good listener, a mirror so to speak, will inquire, for example: “Tell me about your horrible day.” Then: “Where do you feel that in your body?” They’ll get into the physical aspect of that, and their sensations in the body, as the discussion of the day unfolds. Bringing consciousness to sensations helps dissipate the intensity of the sensation. If a person is a healer, I believe it’s an attitude with commitment to the heart, a commitment to help them find their own divine connection with their problem.

Probably the most difficult thing you can do is face your fear; to intend a commitment to face your fear. Whatever that is. The more you do that, the more your life force, your soul, is a part of you and the less energy you are using to keep it at bay. You’re looking for more energy availability.

Intention can also be in the form of prayer. You can hold someone in prayer - - whatever or whomever that prayer is -- to whatever your God or divine being. You can hold another person in the light of the Divine energy within. I think often about if we can pray for someone, we can also think ill of them and does that do the same thing in the opposite way? Does it hurt whomever we are intending harmful thought to? I assume so. We are responsible for our thoughts as well as what we say and what we do.

If someone’s really bugging me or I’m having a problem with someone, I try to remember what my spiritual teacher says: a) hesitate before speaking or doing; b) count back from 1,000 so your ego doesn’t have control of your mind; c) if that doesn’t work, imagine them receiving an award for ‘the most compassionate heart’. That’s helpful. It changes my imaging. I hurt myself, as well, with ill thoughts of others.

BZ: Doing healing work, and being highly sensitive to the energy you’re dealing with, have you found it a challenge at times to be protective of your own boundaries, and what you let in?

Kerns: Yes. In one way, it says to me how we all struggle in some way. In another way, if it bugs me so much, there must be something in me that I need to work on. If I’m not careful, I’ll take it home. It’s my reactions that I’m looking for. Reactions have a physiological, mental and emotional quality to them. Again, just being very observant of myself about whether I shut the door or do I slam the door? Do I grab my coat off the rack, or do I take it off the rack? Do I say “hello” or do I say “hi”. I’m observing my own behavior.

BZ: You mentioned something about your own spiritual teaching. Do you want to say any more about that?

Kerns: I met Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati in 1993 at the Parliament of World Religions. It was the 100th year celebrating a gathering of spiritual teachers from all over the world. I actually met her on the day my mother unexpectedly died. It was also shortly after I had had surgery that revealed stage I cancer. There was something captivating about Ma. She was very real, very human, very funny and very powerful.

I went to Ma’s ashram a couple of months later. I was afraid of the cancer and afraid to go on with life. I went with Ma on what she would call the AIDS Walk Rounds, where she would visit people with AIDS and hand out food. She would hug them. She would talk to them and bless them and make them laugh.

Members of the ashram went as well. It took 8 hours to visit all these people in clinics and hospitals, in near Sebastian, Florida.

After that visit my fear subsided. Seeing people with AIDS helped me realize I could survive. I became very grateful to be alive.

Ma Jaya teaches about service. Being of service to others as a way to enlightenment. If I have a client who may be stuck in their process of healing, I might suggest they find one person to help. Take a meal or help someone in some way because it helps create motion.

You get off your own cycle of fear in helping someone else. As you do that, your own soul, your own spirit can come into places it’s not been allowed, because you’re so cycled in fear. In that way, you help yourself and you become a member of others who suffer. It’s a very humbling place to be, and in humility, we open up a little more.

BZ: Please tell our readers more about her.

Kerns: Ma Jaya was born in Brooklyn. She has a Brooklyn accent. Her heritage is Russian/Jewish. She said Christ appeared to her and taught her how to serve. She says if you’re kind, you can come to my ashram. Any religion is welcome if it preaches and teaches kindness.

BZ: And where does she live now?

Kerns: She lives in Sebastian, Florida. Her Ashram is called Kashi Ashram.

BZ: Are there other ashrams around the country, or is she mostly in that one place?

Kerns: She’s mostly in that one place. She does have ashrams in Atlanta and Los Angeles. Live audio and sometimes video darshans have been presented by the ashram. People from all over the world are listening to her at the same time. It’s a wonderful way of connecting, if you can’t get to the ashram.

BZ: Approximately how old is she?

Kerns: She is 69.

BZ: Does she have a website?

Kerns: Yes. www.kashi.org.

Jon Ellis is my spiritual advisor here in Ann Arbor. He helps me distinguish between psychological and spiritual issues. It is so helpful to have someone here, locally, with whom I can be in frequent contact. I am learning a lot, and am enjoying this method of spiritual work as well.

BZ: I noticed a whole list of programs being offered by the Polarity Center. Who is teaching those?

Kerns: John Bodary, Renee Rutz, me. Sometimes students or other members of the Polarity Community teach, as well. I might add here that volunteers from the Polarity community work at Holy Rosary Parish in Detroit, every other Thursday, giving free polarity sessions to Parish members or people who cannot afford to pay for treatment. John Bodary established this practice twelve years ago. It’s still going strong today.

BZ: How is it going since you moved its base of operations to Ann Arbor?

Kerns: It’s going well. That doesn’t necessarily mean that we have a lot of students, but the students that we have are very committed to their own life’s process, as well as helping other people in their own unique way. I’m very proud to be a member of the Polarity community as well as being an instructor/practitioner.

BZ: Do you have a family, kids?

Kerns: Yes, I have a daughter, Shelly Kerns Benitah. She and her husband, Cyril, and their five children live in West Bloomfield. My youngest daughter,

Continued on page 38

“She came home and said to me: ‘Mom, I know that when I’m 34, I’m going to die. I just want you to know’. I asked her how she knew this? She said, ‘I just know’. So, here we are.”

The Crazy Wisdom Interview with Karen Kerns

Continued from page 37

Jackie Kerns, passed away in August of 2008.

BZ: Oh, I'm so sorry. How old was she?

Kerns: 34.

BZ: I'm so sorry for your loss. My mother lost two daughters -- my two sisters.

Kerns: Oh, my...

BZ: It was very hard for her... And very hard for my wife to lose two of our children.

Kerns: So sorry, Bill, for your loss.

BZ: Thanks.

Kerns: Jack was a prophetic kid. She would know in the morning, or the night before, what someone would say in class, or what they would wear. She predicted 9-11. She had dreams for three weeks before it happened. She was upset and agitated with dreams of planes crashing into buildings, feeling helpless to stop it. One day when she was 19, she went out driving in very slippery conditions, and hit a guard rail on an exit ramp. She came home and said to me: "Mom, I know that when I'm 34, I'm going to die. I just want you to know." I asked her how she knew this. She said, "I just know". So, here we are.

BZ: So, she was 'a sensitive'.

Kerns: Oh, yes.

BZ: And you are 'a sensitive'.

Kerns: Yes, I am. I could have willed Jackie my practice. But she wasn't interested. She worked for the HIV division of Pfizer, as one of six U.S. representatives speaking at clinics on how to manage their medication regimens.

BZ: Do you think there was a long line? Do you think your mother, your grandmother, your aunts, also lived with sensitive gifts?

Kerns: I don't know honestly. Although my mother would tell me a story of her grandfather. People would come from all over and ask him to help them. He would hold his hand over a wound, especially burns, say 'something' and the wounds would be gone instantly. She'd say: "Maybe you have some of that, Karen".

BZ: She'd tell you that?

Kerns: Yeah.

BZ: Maybe you do. And then some.

Kerns: Perhaps.

BZ: She had that, too?

Kerns: Well, you know, when you're a kid and you'd get caught doing something you thought you had perfectly hidden from view, you wonder. If she did, she did not share it.

One more thing about my daughter, Jack. I remember her calling me from Chicago where she lived: "Mom, I'm at a restaurant and I notice this woman that's sitting over at that table. I know if she leaves before 2:00 she'll get hit by a car when she crosses a street. What do I do?!" I said, "Well, number one, if you tell her that, she's going to think you're nuts. And number two, what can you live with?" She said, "Got it mom!" Poof, I never heard what the outcome was. I'm assuming she did speak to her.

BZ: I'm sorry for your loss, Karen.

Kerns: Thank you. I am, too. I am, too. You know about that. I actually have a picture behind Chetana Florida (Karen points to some framed photos on a windowsill) of Juliana (the interviewer's deceased daughter). I keep her in my corner.

BZ: There's a lot in that photo of Juliana -- those eyes. And I recognize that photo of Chetana. I first started hearing about Chetana Florida soon after we purchased Crazy Wisdom, in 1989. At that time, we had a young store manager named Debbie Szporluk, who used to go see Chetana, and used to rave about her.

Kerns: I was part of the Lighthouse Center for quite a while. I'm very inner directed. Sometimes it's been very difficult to be that way. For instance, I was in California visiting a friend and I was in a restaurant waiting for her to get out of a meeting. I came out of the restaurant and opened the door and something said very loudly to me: "You will be moving to Ann Arbor within a year". I was living in Saginaw at the time. I said "What?!" There was no one

“Bringing consciousness to sensations helps dissipate the intensity of the sensation.”

near, and within a year I was here.

BZ: Is this a picture of Ma Jaya?

Kerns: Yes. If you turn that picture over, that's what she looked like when I met her. She was being interviewed in Chicago at the World Parliament of Religions.

BZ: What's that? (pointing to a framed picture on Karen's office wall)

Kerns: Oh. It's a Batik of the fire phoenix and seven women. I purchased it at the Women's Music Festival. I was the first person to give massage at the WMF as an art form.

BZ: Massages as an art form?

Kerns: Yes. I was in a tent with all these artisans. I presented massage not just as a healing form but also as an art form. This picture follows me wherever I go.

BZ: It's a wonderful piece! Is that a fire in the background?

Kerns: A phoenix fire, yeah.



Photo by Linda Lawson

“It is a journey for themselves as well as an introduction to a field of practice. It's very humbling.”

For more information about Karen Kerns' upcoming Polarity workshops, see the Polarity Center's ad on page 6, or their Listing in the Polarity Section of the Crazy Wisdom Calendar on page 59.

BZ: And this painting? Does it have a name? How would you describe it? Is it a woman and two wolves?

Kerns: Yes. The saying underneath it is: 'Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing so gentle as real strength'.

BZ: It's a great quote.

Kerns: I admire people the most who walk their talk. Like Chetana, Dr. Stone,

“Also, one of the things that is strongly recommended, is that people (students) work on their own issues. To begin to understand... what can happen to the person you're working with.”

Dr. Roland Becker, Ma Jaya and Forest Shaklee.

BZ: I know of all the other ones. Who was the last one?

Kerns: Forrest Shaklee developed the Shaklee line of vitamins, gosh, some fifty years ago now. What I like most about him, is he figured out how to cure himself of cancer with food. He then worked with that knowledge to help others. The Shaklee Center is the first building to be totally emissions free. They continue to take care of the Earth's business. Forest Shaklee and Dr. Stone were born in the same era.

Part of polarity is also equating certain foods with certain chakras. The earth chakra will resonate with earth foods: potatoes, turnips, beets, carrots. Water chakra will resonate with water foods, like watermelon, cucumbers, melons, foods that grow 'on' the earth, etc. If you become conscious and think about that, it allows you to come outside yourself and feel the earth. We all need to do more of that. To feel what it's like to be out here. To feel what the earth is like.

When people are just beginning that journey of consciousness, I sometimes suggest something like a cleaning product to not harm the earth, to begin to be aware about their relationship to this planet that gives them life. That can begin a sacred process of being able to honor life within themselves.

BZ: What are you looking forward to in the next year?

K: I'm looking forward to a resurgence of passion for, I think, the spiritual aspect of polarity. Dr. Stone wrote a wonderful book called the *Mystic Bible*. You know how you can read something one time and it means one thing, and you go back and read it again and it's something deeper. He talked about stories of personal travel in the Bible as personal, internal spiritual journeys. Wonderful metaphors!

The death of my youngest daughter has really catapulted me into a spiritual dimension. I'd love to see her, to really strongly believe that she's right here somewhere and I can see her. I want to know as best I can, to hold that belief of *yes!* There is so much more to life. I'd like to be able to see beyond this realm, while I'm still physically alive.

BZ: On the day that my 9-year old daughter, Juliana, died, I had a very strong... (She died at home in our arms and it was deeply moving and beautiful)... I had such a strong confirmation intuitively of something I had read in a hospice book, that seemed simple enough, but really spoke to me, it relates to what you just said. On that day, I really did sense, or rather I really did have a *knowing*, that she had simply gone over the horizon, like a boat off in the distance going over the horizon -- you can see the boat far off into the distance, and then it's beyond the horizon, like the sun setting over the sea. The boat is still there, you just can't see it anymore.

The distance from Juliana being in this world, to wherever she was just a few hours later, was not really such a great distance. She was still nearby, but she had moved over the horizon beyond what I could see. On that day, it seemed clear and true. I found that very comforting and it seemed to make complete sense -- even though the mind can't know, it still made complete sense.

Kerns: Right. I think my heart knows. Something in me knows, and I believe it's my heart that knows that. I see her in my grandchildren, one in particular. My daughters are/were very different from one another. Shelly is quite an accomplished mother, but she also has a degree in mechanical engineering and a masters in business. She's very, very talented in many, many ways. One common thread was/is their humor.

BZ: Anything else you'd like to mention, Karen?

Kerns: Yes. First, to say a deep, heartfelt thank you to all the people who supported my daughter, Shelly, and me in many ways after Jackie's death.

Second, one of the goals that I had as a practitioner was to be part of a healing team - members of different healing disciplines getting together discussing a case. I'm very fortunate in having Marcia Haarer, who is a psychotherapist, and Christi Bemister, who is a Hands of Light therapist, work with me with clients. It's a wonderful way of getting people to move rapidly through a process and to cover all areas of their being. Each of us has a very special part in all of that.

BZ: You meet a client together or individually?

Kerns: We meet them individually, initially.

BZ: Then you talk about them with each other?

Kerns: Yes, with the consent of the client. Each of us has a sense of how the other two work. Having that information, the decision is made as to who will see the client, and when. With our varied strengths and abilities, the client gets a taste of different parts of him or herself. I find that very exciting and it seems to work very well.

BZ: You began that recently?

Kerns: A couple of years ago. There are times when I go to Marcia Haarer's office and work with her with a client there, hands-on, as she's helping them with therapy or EMDR. It's very helpful.

BZ: Sometimes you'll do bodywork while she's doing therapy work?

Kerns: Yes.

BZ: That's really interesting.

Kerns: Yeah, it is. If there's very, very specific primary energy lines that need to be connected or healing, Christi does that. She also has a powerful overview. It's very exciting. I enjoy it very much.

BZ: Are you enjoying teaching, too?

Kerns: I am! Again, facing my fears is a promise I made to myself, and being in front of people is not easy for me. It's becoming more and more natural and exciting. I'm welcoming that feeling of comfort; that I can offer something for people in that way.

BZ: Thank you, Karen.

Kerns: Thank you, Bill.

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