

PRACTICE FOLLOWS PASSION

By Barbara Brewster

"Know Thyself"--the Oracle at Delphi

I didn't set out to be a practitioner. I've been more of a seeker--of the truth--about myself and about my relationship to the divine. I have thirsted for, pursued and attracted circumstances, experiences and opportunities that nudge me toward Self/God discovery. The strange, wondrous and challenging territories into which this has thrust me have been fertile grounds for feeding awarenesses of who I am, how I want to be, what I long to bring forth. From this has arisen an evolving stream of practices—very few of which I actually planned.

Every passion that I've embarked upon has spun off organically into a practice--in the form of books, workshops, teaching, hands-on-healing, singing, speaking, counselling, Patch Adams clowning, mentoring, awareness coaching. Most of these therapies or practices spilled forth from the desire to heal and grow myself and, through expression, to deepen, expand and share my current learnings and passions. This has brought immense satisfaction in that I get to practice what I love with those who are attracted to whatever I'm loving practicing.

An emphatic, not-to-be-argued-with crises initiated my entry onto what has become an ongoing, accelerated pathway of full-blown self-examination, exploration, change and "practice". I was diagnosed, at age 38, with multiple sclerosis. During the MS period I wrote in my journals, not to produce a book, but to process my confusions, terrors and pain. Eventually I realized that here was a universal story of challenge, pain and growth, and there arose within me a desire to share it. As a result I learned how to write and publish a book (*Journey to Wholeness*). This led to unplanned "practices"--public speaking, workshop presentations, interviews. Having no previous experience in these areas, I wondered, can I do this? How will I do this? What in me can I discover and bring forth in this endeavour? The passion to grow and know myself through these unfamiliar areas motivated me.

Likewise, throughout the six years of the illness, as I encountered anything useful, it became something that spun off into a form of practice. In learning the value of receiving massages, I learned to give them. As I learned about allergies, candida, MS and macrobiotic diets, I learned to teach them. As I learned about and practiced the power of crystals, words, music, meditation, prayer, rest, visualization, and received skilled counselling, I found myself teaching these forms to others. Obviously, one way I anchor something important into myself is by sharing it.

With the recovery from the MS, I returned from the US to Australia, the country of my heart, and wound up with an unplanned book (*Down Under All Over*)! I next desired to discover who I am in my recovered health, strength, and post-50 year old maturity—and expressed that in another book, *Love or Growth: Why Not Both?* and found myself dialoguing with others about the challenges of love and growth within a primary relationship.

Willingness, Trust, Letting Go, Honesty

Focusing first on my personal explorations, understanding and growth--as opposed to having my goal being to establish myself in a specific modality, has demanded--and expanded--certain qualities. It's demanded that I have the willingness to follow something that beckoned even though there was not a whit of indication that it might become a practice. I certainly didn't see myself making a career move when, wanting to reclaim my lost lightness, I

enrolled in comedy classes at the local university and said YES to clowning in Russia with Patch Adams. I simply followed the threads of desire where they took me—waaaaay out of my previous experience and comfort zone!—never expecting or dreaming that these passions would lead to teaching Caring Clowning, silly singing, and adult spontaneity workshops.

This approach has also required willingness to let go of the desire to get myself “out there.” To notice and (usually agonizingly) let go of the belief that I’m not valuable or useful unless I am visibly achieving, producing or offering something. I must allow time--often in solitude--to percolate, assimilate, germinate the seeds of whatever is emerging. This can be the greatest point of creativity, but no one, not even me, knows or sees what is being created.

Likewise, I’ve had to be willing to recognize when a passion or practice (or a relationship!) had fulfilled its purpose, or when I’d changed. Because I might invest hours, money, energy into an endeavour doesn’t mean that I should stay with it. For example, teaching and doing hospital clowning offered a sure-fire, creative, on-going endeavour in which I could make a nice niche for myself. There came a point, though, when much as I’d have loved to feel that I had achieved a successful identity, I had to be willing to admit that my heart was no longer in it, and to be willing to let it go and move on. The truth is I’m a growing, evolving entity. I change. My interests change. I must be honest about my motives and goals and revise them as required. Not to do so is to stagnate.

Following new threads can be exciting, and it can be scary. How could I know whether practicing my present personal passion would result in an outer practice/career/identity? The greater result has been, although not to the degree I would wish, a deepening of self-trust, honesty and a deeper willingness and capacity to live--at least to some degree--in not knowing what exactly is or should be evolving,

Pitfalls

A pitfall of my approach is that I’ve not become really expert in a particular practice. I’ve missed the satisfaction of being deeply, expansively, the master of something that I know without doubt is my treasure, my offering. (Hmm. I suppose it’s fair to say that I’m really an expert at being a student of life and self-discovery.) At times I’ve thought, “If only I could be content to focus all my attention on and be recognized for a specific modality—as a massage therapist, a caring clown, an author, something—then I’d not doubt my role in the scheme of things, I’d have an identity, recognition, on-going clients, work and income.”

Frequently I’ve failed to be purely focused. It’s been very tempting, once I’ve caught a glimpse of where my passion might take me in terms of practice, to gallop off on tangents creating promotions, texts, flyers, schedules—losing sight of my own lessons--organizing, for example, to present a workshops about “Taking Time and Space” and then being too busy scrambling around promoting the workshop to “take time and space” for me!

Current Passion

As I learned and grew through many areas and experiences, there came a point—at about age 60—when I felt that I still wasn’t experiencing the main thing I was perpetually seeking—a sense of meaning that was not manufactured, meaning that no modality, relationship or practice, much as I might enjoy and be passionate about them, ever completely filled. No matter how enthusiastically I experimented, explored, risked, and discovered, something indescribable remained missing. I followed passion, yes, but only now do I recognize that pieces of my passion-following were coloured by an undercurrent of wanting and avoiding.

Wanting to fill up the cracks in the façade, the loneliness under the busyness, wanting to feel visible, acknowledged, recognized, valuable, lovable, wanting to feel some deeper, greater meaning. Avoiding feeling the uncomfortable emotions underlying those wantings.

Throughout my spiritual seeking, healing and journeying, I'd not realized that even as my soul longed to receive and feel the inflow and presence of divine love I couldn't arrive at it through my intellect. Divine love is felt. The divine "hears" my longings and feelings, not my words. Nor could those feelings harmonious with divine love enter me while I was clogged with a stew of unloving emotions such as anger, frustration, pain, guilt, shame, fear, grief, unworthiness, blame, judgement--the emotions little Barbara learned never to EXpress but to SUPpress. Only now, at age 65 am I aware that these emotions, still within me, have been affecting my choices and the fullness or lack of fullness of my experiences in every area of my life.

Here's an example of the difference between approaching something intellectually and through feeling. A few years back I was involved in an ashram, and we focused very much on truth-telling. As I interacted with other ashram members I sometimes mentioned my books. One day a lady said, "You know, Barbara, when you talk about your books I get a sucky feeling from you." I immediately thought, "Yuk! How awful!" She was right. However, neither one of us knew to ask "Why? What's the emotion underlying the needy behaviour?" Instead, I picked up my life-long sledge hammer and judged myself harshly and decided to—with my will—stop such embarrassing behaviour. The result was not healing but a worsening within my being. Not only did I add another layer to the already immense inner pile of self-judgment and unworthiness, but I became almost petrified of letting people know about my books, hiding something that was very much a part of me.

My life these days is processing emotions. I'm continually growing in my ability to notice a twinge of emotion. What is it? Anger? Fear? And follow the threads, breathing, feeling, thrashing, wailing, allowing to be expressed, belatedly, all that Little Barbara felt but so masterfully learned to bury. The key is to actually FEEL, as the child felt, the emotion. Only then can the emotion completely dissolve and cease acting as a hidden influence upon what I avoid, seek, desire or attract to myself. I know when I've cleared a causal emotion because instantly whatever I've been attracting in the way of body stuff, relationships, and situations changes. This is gritty, knuckle down, hard-core, courageous work. The enticement is that as more suppressed emotions are allowed to be felt, expressed, dissolved and released I am indeed experiencing ever-increasing feelings of loving connection with my body, my soul, with others, and with the divine.

I enter and pursue this path with my only goal being relevant to ME. My growth, expansion, freedom, and restoration of my soul. Certainly the patterns of the past indicate that when I follow a passion, the result grows into something I share. And I am so passionate about this course, I already, even as a beginner, long to share what I'm learning. So, I suspect that as I evolve, without even trying or planning, I'll discover that I'm developing ways in which this passion, too, will become yet another avenue for teaching, presenting, offering, practicing.

In Summary

The most satisfying part of being a practitioner, for me, is that I LOVE transformation! I LOVE seeing people drop out of their social masks and inner editors into their authentic

selves; LOVE when we participate equally in bringing forth our too-often hidden creative energy, joy, fun, lightness, profundity, hearts and truth. It's connective and liberating.

A major lesson I've learned is that I'm being untrue to myself when I'm offering something primarily to make money, have security, feel useful, create an identity for myself, or avoid fear-based emotions. My enthusiasm must be there. Otherwise I'm serving neither the client nor myself.

A principle I follow is: Keep growing in, learning and following what I love—even if it changes--and have the humility to never stop being a beginner.