

Finishing the Watsu

Preparing the Finish

Unless we tell them in advance, first time clients won't be certain when the session is over or what to do then. A good time to give this information is in the pool, just before starting, as they lean back against the wall. *"When you feel the wall against your back again, you'll know the session is ending. You can have your eyes closed or open then. Take your time; feel no pressure to relate to me. I'll be nearby and as I see you coming out, I'll be there."*

As a Watsu winds down in the last several minutes, it will be free of dynamic stretches and movements and focus on subtler nurturing and energy work. This makes for an imperceptible transition to the stillness at the wall. To unceremoniously prop partner against the wall yanks her rudely out of her Watsu reverie. Instead, we create a bridge between the horizontal dependent state and the vertical self-supporting state at the wall by first bringing partner's back vertical in the Accordion and cradling her head to our chest for a while.

Docking at the Wall

All else being equal, setting partner down on her bottom on steps or on a bench is preferable to standing her up on her legs; it demands less energy from her. Even sitting, though, if too much of the body is out of water, requires more effort than standing neck deep in water. Finishing partner in a state of energetic equilibrium is generally best. Our responsibility to first timers is to ground them, while experienced Watsu adepts might be given a choice of finishes, including neck and knee floats and being left to float on their own until they choose to come out.

The finish is a transition from timelessness back into time. A leisurely docking is a sensitive one. Pausing to breathe between each move slows down the procedure, and allows our voyager an unrushed re-entry into earth plane. In truth, the body we place against the wall is sometimes unoccupied--the head lolls unconcernedly into the water and the legs are all rubbery and refuse to bear weight. So we call to them across the cosmos, *"Chris, we're finishing now. Are you ready/Are you able/Would you like/ to stand on your legs?"* In such situations we'll be glad we learned some Shiatsu resuscitation points. Governing Vessel 26 (below the nose, a little above the midpoint of the philtrum), Governing Vessel 20 (on the mid-sagittal line 7 inches above the posterior hairline, on the midpoint of a line connecting the earlobe and the ear apex, 5 inches behind the anterior hairline),

Pericardium 9 (0.1 inch proximal to the corner of the nail on the radial side of the middle finger.), and Heart 9 (on the radial side of the little finger, about 0.1 inch proximal to the corner of the nail) are certainly handy to know, aren't they? They work very well

to reground consciousness in the body. Additional grounding techniques include standing on the feet, pressing the Four Corners (hip and shoulder joints) into the wall, and kneading the neck, upper trapezius border and down the arms. Silently affirming partner's ability to return and function in the world could also be worth giving a try.

In sharp contrast to the Not All There's, are the Hypers, who pop open their eyes and take charge the moment they feel the wall. We don't get to stand on their feet or namasté or nuthin'!....And what's this?! Oh, no!! After all the trouble we've taken to keep partner's nose out of the water for the last hour, she just sank to the bottom of the pool, where she's lying very still. Not to worry; she knows what she's doing. Don't be surprised if she stays down there quite a while. Clients can be so relaxed at the end of a Watsu that, just as in a WaterDance, they don't need to breathe for a minute or longer. We will be observing her closely and resisting the impulse to dial 911.

A Watsu practitioner is a good housekeeper. Here is a list of chores:

- 1) See that the entire back is firmly in contact with the wall, from the pelvis up to the shoulders. The arm supporting the knees guides the pelvis firmly but gently into the wall (the docking). The hand of the arm supporting the neck pushes the far shoulder to the wall.
- 2) Lower each leg far enough out to the side so as to create a wide base for easy balance. If the legs are too far apart, though, it will be difficult to stand on the feet. If partner is wearing leg floats, remove them at this time.
- 3) Verify that both the heel and ball of each foot are flat on the pool bottom and able to bear weight.
- 4) Ground each leg by pushing the thigh above the knee downward. Feel the pool bottom through partner's leg as you take a breath.
- 5) If necessary, align partner's head and neck with her back by taking the head in both hands while coming around in front.
- 6) Center partner's back vertically over the legs, either in the preceding head traction move, or by taking the ribcage in both hands and shifting it sideways.

Being Present

Let's say we have succeeded in docking partner against the wall. Now what? Our spatial coordinates have us a few degrees off to the side and a step backwards. Why? When partner opens her eyes we don't want to be looming directly in front of her, filling her field of vision. As we stretch out the kinks in the interim before she opens her eyes, we remain ready to meet her gaze, should she choose to look at us.

The session isn't over until our client has shifted into drive, heading for the parking lot exit; so we are still holding space and facilitating. We want to be on hand to offer full

integration, to honor a human interaction with divine overtones, to listen and reflect in the interest of the client's understanding of the experience and of self. In short, it's not just a conversation--we are still in the role of therapist.

We do, however, want to be meticulous in cutting the energy cords between us; this is why we step backwards, perhaps turning on our axis a few times, or passing our hands in front of our navel while repeating to ourselves a formula along the lines of, "I am I, you are you." Honoring the space means not only bowing to the divine in our partner and thanking them for the opportunity to have served them and learned from them, it is also honoring their own space, granting them the distinctness of their own being, free from the pressure of relating and energetic merging.

The needs of a client at the end of a session are as much a mystery to us as the content of the session. So we pay attention and keep our communication skills ready to deploy. Some people need a lot of time to return and won't be too articulate. At the other pole are those who are instantly all there, balanced and verbal. Some require nothing more from us to be complete, while others need very much to connect. If the scheduling policy of our spa permits, we allow time.

The Zen Practitioner doesn't speak until spoken to, however; it is for the client to utter the first Wow or Oh My God. The client should never feel pressured to share. How nice for her when she senses we support her in privately enjoying her own indescribable sweetness of self. After a few minutes of silence we might ease up alongside partner to let her know, *"If you don't wish to talk, that's fine, and if there's anything you want to share, I'm open."*

"I'm fine," might be the response.

"Are you okay to be on your own, then?"

"Yeah, thank you," she smiles.

"Thank you." We namasté and exit.

"What are you aware of?" is an excellent opening to share. It avoids the everyday, *"How are you?"* to which it would be too easy to reply superficially. *"What are you aware of?"* is neutral, leaving space for negative feedback and encouraging the receiver to remain in the present. A hypothetical exchange:

"Wow!" she whispers, her eyes still closed.

"Yeah," he answers and waits.

"That was incredible."

"Umm." Silence. *"What are you aware of?"*

"I feel so different..." Pause.

"Different. Uh, in your body?"

"Yeah, it's like I'm filled with bubbles."

"Really? Bubbles. How is that for you?"

"It's great. There's energy moving everywhere! Is that normal?"

"It happens. Are you okay with it?"

"Yeah, I guess so. What should I do?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Maybe just hang out and breathe."

"Cool."

The following questions are appropriate to a post-session exchange:

- 1) *"What difference in your body and yourself do you notice between before the session and afterward?"*
- 2) *"What is your main impression from the Watsu? What stands out, what will you remember; what is the essence of it?"*
- 3) *"Was there any movement, position or hold that stands out for you?"*
- 4) *"Was anything uncomfortable?"*
- 5) *"How would you change or fine-tune a next session?"*
- 6) *"Is there anything else you want to share?"*

The occasional client has some considerations to share. He may have some pain, disappointment or anger. Our communication skills will let him feel heard. By reflecting we get to "yes", and with luck, to "solution". A hypothetical exchange:

"Damn. My neck is sore and I'm feeling kind of dizzy. I thought you knew what you were doing."

Sidestepping a defensive response, such as, *"Hey, I specifically asked you to let me know of any discomfort,"* practitioner reflects with concern, *"Hmm. Your neck hurts and you've got some dizziness. When did you start to notice this?"*

"Oh, about three quarters of the way through. It wasn't so bad until a few minutes ago. I almost asked you to stop."

"Gee, I wish you had let me know. I'm sorry this happened. Maybe you needed more neck traction and slower movement."

"I think you're right. I forgot to tell you I get seasick easily and it began to feel like that."

"Okay. Well for next time we could try going slower and paying extra attention to your neck. Would that work for you?"

"Yes, I think so, because I really enjoyed it otherwise."

"Right, so can I give your neck a little massage now?"

"Yeah, that would be great. Thanks. Oh, yeah. Right there. Ummm."

In most cases, clients who pass through feelings during a Watsu session succeed in integrating them enough to be able to function in the world immediately afterwards. Some however, do not. Only a small percentage of Watsu practitioners have the professional qualifications to authoritatively process with a client who has not come to completion or who is actively catharting. For the rest of us, if the client is catharting, stay with her in the water, encouraging her to breathe and stay with her feelings. We can create a safe place for her to feel by assuring her that her feelings are okay with us and by being physically present to a supportive but not invasive degree. This could look like holding the client and gently massaging her back.

For the client who has not come to completion emotionally, it may regretfully be necessary to bring her out of her feelings. We can lay out the situation: our next client has been waiting ten minutes and our employer is signaling us to get on with it. We need her to shift. First, get the feet on the ground, literally. Remind her of other options and impress upon her that she is able to be self-responsible. Another strategy is to begin to question her to bring her out of feeling into thinking. Leaving the pool together is a good idea. Breathing and walking on land with the eyes open can work to short circuit a feeling process. Ask her if she has a support system, someone she can call--a friend, relative, mate or lover. It is good to have a therapist to recommend. Though we may never need in it many years of practice, request an number in case of emergency in the intake form.

Guiding Onwards

1) For the client who has arrived by car, it is of prime importance to give this reminder: *"You may be in an altered state and not aware of it. Be careful driving your car."*

2) Offer the client a drink of water. Tell her to be gentle with herself, to rest, to go slowly and take time for herself. A quiet alcove with a divan on which to rest for a few minutes before she departs would be ideal.