

October 2008: Stuart Black

Stuart Black has been Director of the New York Institute of Core Energetics since 1989. He is the author of: *A Way of Life: Core Energetics*, and *A Way of Life With Another: Relationships*. He is an instructor in the international training classes and has been leading groups for over 25 years. Stuart has been a teacher of the Pathwork in Mexico and in Phoenicia, NY, where he was both a member of the Board of Directors and spiritual leader of the Pathwork Studies program. He has been an instructor to both faculty and students of the Barbara Brennan School of Healing. Currently he is teaching master classes to the faculty in the New York training.

The following is a transcript of the original audio, which is part of the *Somatic Perspectives* series (www.SomaticPerspectives.com). Please note that this conversation was meant to be a spontaneous exchange, not an edited piece. For better or worse, the transcript retains the unedited quality of the conversation.

Serge Prengel: Hi Stuart.

Stuart Black: Hello Serge.

S P: How are things these days?

S B: Things are good. You know were here at the convention and its nice to be here, its good to see USABP in action and the loving support that comes really down from the top, it's very nice to be present in it.

S P: So Stuart, I know that your vision has changed over time. Do you want to talk a little bit about what your vision is these days?

S B: Well my vision, or maybe, Core Energetics, or let me say it differently, where I am in my life is I'm more aware of these days than ever is the more training that we have, the more knowledge that we have is not really what makes people's lives change. It's not really what makes them heal, its not really what makes them have significant improvement in fulfillment of life. I think what it is that does that is what I would call a spiritual connection.

S P: So not the training, not the skills, but a spiritual connection.

S B: Yeah, I don't mean you don't have to be trained. You can't walk in off the streets and say, "Okay I'm a spiritual man, you're healed." No. But I think the training needs to serve the intuition, the training needs to serve what I would call the spiritual connection...serve your higher power, your god, your core as we call it in Core Energetics.

S P: So the spiritual connection and the intuition.

S B: Yeah I think it's the same in a certain way. You know, the intuition comes from something that's not in your mind, something greater than a concept, something greater than "What do I do now?" you know, "I'm the one that's gotta do it, I gotta know how to fix this problem." I think it's just the opposite. I think the prayer is, "Please God help me not know what I have to do." Just be with this person, see them and love them. The skills that you have manifest; and you take a parallel journey with the client, and it enables them to go to the place they need to go.

S P: So you get out of your own way, out of your own mind.

S B: Yes, exactly.

S P: So what happens in a session for those moments and does it manifest?

S B: Good question, and does it always? The goal is to have it manifest as much as possible. And again, for me, the tool is prayer. I think in some ways the people who don't know about Core Energetics, we get kind of a bad rep. Core Energetics is a catharsis for getting rid of your anger or getting out aggression, and I think a lot of work has to do with the shadow side and moving energy. Basically, the main teaching of the work from John Pierrakos is about the heart and I think what we're doing more and more is whatever you do if there's no heart involved it's not going to help. It's about the relationship with the practitioner and about the relationship having a connection that involves your heart.

S P: A relationship about the heart and you say all this stuff about anger, about the dark side.

S B: But that doesn't go away, we work with that. But let me answer your other question which I didn't fully answer: the thing that I'm proposing is that we actually, in the middle of our sessions, pray. The people don't accept it as a prayer concept. You're aware something isn't happening that should be happening and you stop, and it doesn't have to be out loud, the client doesn't have to know, but it's something that gives you an intention to take the work from a different place in yourself. Not about having the client do something, the prayer is for you to get out of your way; "Please God, help me not have to do anything."

S P: So I want to just check with you if calling it prayer and the sense of "please God" is important, or if it's ok for somebody

who would not traditionally think about God to do this work.

S B: Good question. I think it's what comes up. I think when I teach this thing in places that aren't actually part of the core training, there's a lot of, "I don't believe in God, what do I do in this kind of place? I surely don't believe that there's an entity." These are things that many people feel. I think for me to own and claim at this point in my life that I do believe is a major thing for me because I didn't always. But I think the people who say that they don't believe in God can be the most spiritual people. I think it's a matter of having a capacity to contact your inner wisdom; your own inner truth.

S P: Since you're mentioning God and prayer as something so crucial, it makes sense for people who are not necessarily familiar with 'core.' Do not think that there's some kind of a litmus test that you have to believe in God, or there's a certain preconception of God, in order to be comfortable in the core community.

S B: Not at all. The belief is not a belief in a god; the belief is that there's something beyond your mind. You do have to feel and believe—I think anybody that's doing this work would have a modality you're using—if the work is working, the reason is you're doing something that's not mind directed; it's something that's coming from a connection. We all do that at some point or other.

S P: In a way, the statement is that as you hear God, you can very easily interpret it as, "I'm just talking about something that's beyond your mind, something larger than just your mind, a sense, a moment of wanting to stop and connect with something larger than your mind."

S B: You can even call it, simply, inner wisdom.

S P: So there is something that feels right for you to call it God, but it doesn't have to be for somebody that's involved in this work.

S B: I think in my life, the concept of there being some spiritual entity is a big concept for me, personally. But I don't think in terms of teaching that anybody has to have that concept; to understand the concept that I'm trying to express here. It's not a belief that there is—whatever—a being.

S P: But the belief is in that inner wisdom or that something larger, whatever name it has, that one can contact by going beyond skills, training, moment, mind, striving, and just making room for it.

S B: Yes, and to answer your other question, which was, where does the anger work come in the session, or how is that related: the energetic part of Core Energetics is most of the time not about anger, it's about moving the energy to get somebody more present in their body so that they're able to take a journey. People come to a session, or people come to therapy, throw a lot of money to a lot of stuff, do everything they can to avoid taking a journey, so the places physically that are involved in helping somebody avoid the journey is locked in the body. I think most of us that are doing the work have some form that agrees with that and I think we all have different ways of what we do with it. The Core Energetics way is a charge-discharge model which puts something physical on the places in the body that are held. So hitting, for instance, or punching, or something of that nature, the purpose of it isn't to be angry or to kill something, the purpose of it is to release the holding places in the shoulders, in the upper body and when that's done, what happens is the person becomes more present in the moment, more grounded, more available to go to a deeper, more difficult place.

S P: So the concept that's meaningful is that's why John Pierrakos always made the link between consciousness and energy and not just energy, not just the movement.

S B: If I could say that differently, I'm agreeing with you 100%, but if someone has a mental experience that they understand something, a conscious experience, it doesn't make life change; they understand it and the next day things are the same. If someone has a deep emotional experience, without understanding what happened, without the consciousness, it also doesn't make life change. You need both: you need emotional experience and the conscious understanding of it.

S P: But also what you were describing before of moving energy, it's not just anger work, it's not just expressing anger, it's moving energy, and this is why in the Core Energetics model it's possible to move energy as a prelude to doing further work.

S B: Exactly.

S P: It's not necessarily that you're going to wait for somebody to have a certain movement that going to turn into the movement. At that moment you do the moving simply to free up the energy, get the energy in movement, give you the momentum to do work.

S B: And there's a lot of people that disagree with that, that would say, "You're setting up an artificial situation: somebody comes in, they may want to talk about something else," and I'm saying at the beginning of the session you have somebody move their energy so you make them more available to take the journey. Even though in a certain sense it's not organic because they didn't come in with something that sent them in the direction of moving energy, it's just a mechanical thing; you said, "Let's do it."

S P: But then it has a different function when energy moves organically because at the moment you're simply moving energy to start getting some momentum to make it possible to move.

S B: And even though it starts as a mechanical thing, it has a profound effect. The fact that you're initiating it from a conceptual place, sort of by saying, "Let's go do this," it doesn't change the fact that it has effect. When you move the energy and you do it in a way that's meaningful, it's going to affect you and you're going to be in a softer, more available, more vulnerable place.

S P: And it doesn't mean that there's not times where actually you take actions in an organic way. So it's not a thing of "it's always going to be organic, or it's never," but in Core Energetics you have two moments of moving energy: one that's organic and one to simply create energy.

S B: Exactly. I'm recommending more and more that people do this 'creating' one because what I see when it's done is that the session is able to go deeper faster. It doesn't mean you won't get there, it means someone will talk for half an hour and then move some energy, the session's almost over by the time they get to a place that they're available to go someplace; if they do it the other way around, they move the energy first, the talk goes much deeper, much faster.

S P: So in that part, energy is really a means to an end, a vehicle, a way to change the tenure of the session.

S B: To make the feelings and the vulnerability more available.

S P: So as this happens, what's the role of what we were talking about before, of the moment of prayer?

S B: The prayer might be something to the effect of—again if I stay with my words which has a God concept to it—"please God help this person go to the deepest place they possibly can." The prayer would be like while they're doing it to support their journey. Most of the prayer that I'm trying to talk about in this, I'm suggesting that people do that I think isn't done, what I'm

saying about wishing the client well and calling it a prayer, I believe most people are doing that in some form, whatever you're calling it. The thing that I think most people are not doing is praying when nothing is happening, when you don't know what to do. We all have places in the work where it seems to be stuck. Now what happens when the work gets stuck is 90% of the time the therapist feels responsible to manifest something and does some kind of action or behavior for the purpose of feeling responsible to fix something. And invariably whatever they do does not come from a core center place that's going to really help.

S P: So let me translate that into different words to see how without using God it might work. So as a therapist you're in the middle of a session where suddenly you feel stuck, nothing's happening, and the normal human tendency is to feel responsible, to feel a weight and a sense of trying to figure it out and at that moment what's really important is to remember, "I don't have to figure it out, I have to just let it happen and trust in something larger that is going to actually organically bring something good from that and have a sense of trust that something good can come out of that.

S B: Yes, I would add a little piece to it: the prayer for me is, "Please God, let me *not* have to do anything." The strong place that I want to say is at that time the task is not to do anything and when you're saying trust, I agree, it's to have the responsibility for the journey be the client's, not yours.

S P: So the profound sense of acceptance that, 'what is at this moment is ok and that it's maybe right for the client.' And you're not going to try to manipulate it into something.

S B: Exactly: you're not going to control it, you're not going to fix it, you're not going to make it better, you're not going to get credit for it, you're not going to get blamed for it.

S P: So in that sense, a very deep sense of acceptance of what is.

S B: And acceptance that there's a humility in it. There's an acceptance that, 'it's not my great magical powers that are making this person better.'

S P: And maybe part of I can see in body-related therapies, there's a sense of wanting to have godlike powers because so much of what you can do in a body psychotherapy like Core, which is very spectacular, is to create spectacular effects. So the humility is the counterpart to that.

S B: When you create spectacular effects, you have to ask who they're for. "Is this for the client or for me to create a spectacular effect?" Because spectacular is sometimes very small.

S P: So maybe that's a good transition to the part that many people from the outside think about Core is something that is a lot of noise and high effects; Core can actually also be softer.

S B: Core is softer. I think everything I've been saying is about the soft place, the core. Again, to go back to John Pierrakos, his teachings had to do with, "it's all about your heart, it's about love." And I think that it is all about love and about your heart, I'm not calling it spiritual, whatever you want to call it, but if you don't have that, the best techniques, the perfect therapies, the greatest interventions, the wisest wisdoms, are not going to affect you; it's about the relationship. The clients come to you, the practitioner, because they have something about you that appeals to them and the chemistry in that is what makes the stuff happen; the chemistry in the relationship. And the chemistry means your genuine ability to see them and care about them, which is the soft place. From that place you can do a hard technique; they can do the killer and the cruelty and we all need to work on our killer and our cruelty.

S P: So I want to spend a little more time on this because it is a little paradoxical for someone who's not familiar with it, the part about the killer, the beating up, the heart thing, the anger, the energy, and also talking about the love and the softness.

S B: So in Core Energetics we call it the lower self, the shadow self, everybody's got lots of different names for it, but the concept is that we all have a place in us that's cruel, hostile, doesn't care about anyone else, wants to take what we can get and push anyone out of our way. The problem is that that place is so distasteful to us that we don't admit it to ourselves; other people see it more than we see it usually. So the work is about having permission to see it and still know you're OK.

S P: And spiritual so that you don't put an 'either-or; '-- far from that.

S B: Exactly, it's like to accept that you have this place in yourself, it's not all of you, and that owning it and revealing it and making contact with it lets it go away—well go away is the wrong word—lets it not harm you and harm others; lets it take a back seat because you've become aware of it, you've become conscious of it, you don't become enslaved. When it's unconscious, it rules you in some way.

S P: It's not a question of purifying yourself so this place disappears from you; it's inherently in all of us.

S B: Exactly. If we're going to stay human we're going to die with it. We don't even want it to go away. You don't want to eliminate, what you have to do is make it conscious so it doesn't affect you in the times that it's just doing its thing without your awareness. I think that's true with all our protections and defenses, too: you don't want to eliminate them; you want to know when they're there so you can choose to not go there. You can choose the way from what we would call the higher self, the god-self, the place of wisdom, the core.

S P: So there's a very loving attitude and also a very accepting attitude to who we are.

S B: Yes and I think if anything comes across from this thing, the message I would like to help have is that people become aware that Core Energetics is a gentle method; it uses the energetic component and it uses the lower self work, but not for the place of getting it out or being hard or of exploring aggression; it uses it for the place just the opposite: to get to the core and the higher self and the softer places and to live from your vulnerability.

S P: To go beyond that shell that becomes possible to go beyond once you know of its existence.

S B: The shell we would call the mask which is the place that's presenting the face to the world but isn't really your truth.

S P: So I want to introduce the part about intensives and working with other people and also the whole aspect of working with community as part of the healing process and see if you want to say a few words about that?

S B: Few words? How long do we have? I'm not sure how to summarize, but maybe to say I have a very strong connection to community. It's my belief that people heal and take a deeper journey and learn—an institution where you teach, if there's a community involved, people learn faster, better and deeper if the community's safe. If they can ask questions that are stupid questions and not feel humiliated for asking them, you're creating an environment where people can learn. If there's a community of students that are ahead of you and behind you, it creates a certain safety, I also believe that teaching is done better in a community and the way we do it in Core Energetics: we don't have individuals, there's a team of teachers. So each year of the training has some place between 6 and 8 teachers that are there for that class. It doesn't mean they're

all in the class at the same time, but they all prepare the classes together so there's a community aspect on the teachers' side and there's a community aspect on the students' side, there's a lot of stuff done together and it's done in resonance so that all the trainings are going on at the same time. So that in itself creates a community, our training weekends have 120 people. So there's a lot of possibility: it creates a certain excitement, a certain Eros, and I believe that's much more conducive for learning and teaching.

S P: For the teaching itself, in a way, the key part of the experience of learning Core Energetics is not just the curriculum, is not just whatever happens in the classroom, but it's actually that experience of being in a very intense community, is an integral part.

S B: And it isn't just classes, I mean you're there for 4 days and things happen in the evenings, there are programs, there's community meetings that are not like business meetings; they're process meetings. The belief is, my belief is very strong, that you have to take your own journey. You can't help someone on their journey without taking the journey.

S P: But there's the part I want to emphasize that it's not just a journey that you go in and out of, but when you're in the training part, in the 4 days, it's a very intense process.

S B: Exactly and a lot of the work that I do is with the faculty, like when I said there's 6 to 8 people on a team, you get into competition with who's going to do what and who's better, and I have meetings with them each training to deal with their issues with each other so that they come to a more united place with each other and they model a certain kind of caring for each other that transmits to the students and enables them to feel safer to take their journey.

S P: And part of the safety is not in people being perfect, but the sense that there is ongoing process.

S B: . . . that everybody is working on themselves, including me. Lord knows I'm definitely not finished.

S P: So I just cut you off when you were going to talk about the intensives.

S B: Well I think the truth of the matter is that the teams for the faculty came out of my idea for the intensive, which took me something like 10 years to create it, but it's part of the training, the students at the end of their 3rd year of 4 year training, they have an experience for 4 days where clients come and pay to have an intense experience and teams of three students work with one client. So the client has three therapists working with them and it creates community again. You have the community of the therapists and of the clients and they have different experiences; the clients have just sessions with the therapists, but interactive experiences that come out of the sessions to help them take their journey. So it's a deep process for the clients and a deep process for the therapists and the therapists also get immediate supervision because before they do the sessions and after they do the sessions, they meet with me and we talk about what they've done and what they're going to do, any supervision that might be required, and the same kind of thing of dealing with competition. So all of that happens in a residential environment and the clients, they're there for 3 days, have a very

deep, profound experience; it's very transformational.

S P: So that in a way this is something where the number of therapists that are for a client and the process that the therapists themselves are part of create a very powerful container.

S B: Exactly, they create a community. It starts out actually as two communities: there's a therapist community and there's a client community. There's a givers community and a receivers community. And my premise is that when you're truly giving from a place that's there, that has come to this experience for the sake of giving to these clients whatever it is you possibly can, at the end of the day, you don't know who the givers are and who the receivers are. That kind of giving, you receive so much, it's indescribable.

S P: And maybe that again is part of the spiritual aspect of Core.

S B: Exactly, I think it's the source of it. The source of spirituality is generosity and giving. I believe we have two life tasks: one of them is to deal with our own personality distortions and defenses and to heal them as much as we can in this lifetime. And the other life task is to do what we can to help others.

This is part of USABP's "Somatic Perspectives" series, edited by Serge Prengel. Transcribed by Calin Cheznoiu. Transcript was not proofread.

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