

Loss and Trauma- a journey of transition to inner peace

Kay Distel

This story journey took about six years - through emotional trauma: loss of a partner, loss of place: through the physical trauma to the ears from a severe blow to the head resulting in tinnitus and an exacerbated emotional dysregulation.

I will introduce the main features of the analysis of this story is done through the use of auditory graphs which were taken at the beginning and end of HKs two intensive Tomatis clinical programs. I parallel this information to the theoretical framework of the Tomatis Listening test. Presented in italics are the un-edited reflections written by KH during the intensives and follow- up discussions.

Keywords: *auditory processing, emotional self-regulation, brain stimulation, therapeutic listening*

I felt like a plant in barren soil, just drying up, or pot bound with my roots all wrapped around each other choking me from the inside. The program offered a way of internal healing that lead to me being able to connect with my external environment and create nourishment in my world internally and externally KH 31V12/2015.

Introduction: KH History

KH is a single woman in her mid-fifties who lost her life partner by sudden death (2009) leaving her to manage a primary industry property. In late 2012 she moved from the farm to pursue her love of horses and begin to relate to the world again. One day in mid-2013, while working in a paddock, a tree branch impacted on the left side of her head at the base of her skull causing uncontrollable ringing ears, (tinnitus) disorientation and a very foggy pressured feeling in her left ear. In retrospect, confirmed by a phone call in 2015, her program represented on an emotional level the first space she could let go after leaving her farm and re-access her options. She was unsure of how long such a process would take.

I had known KH for over twenty years. We shared a common interest in the mastery of voice and healing sound. We had lost contact for over fifteen years when she rang to tell me of her demise. In deeply distressed state when she arrived for her treatment in March 2014. She had driven six hundred kilometres to attend my clinical program. She had been living with this head pressure, the ensuing confusion and withdrawal for nine months.

A background to the Tomatis Listening test and a short analysis

As a medically trained ear, nose and throat specialist and also researcher Dr Tomatis was familiar with the use resonant frequencies of body organs to perform medical procedures. An example is the use of, EEGs to measure brainwave frequencies with different frequency bands that correspond to different functions, such as sleep and attention.

In his early research work in the 1950s, he identified three frequency zones corresponding to different areas of human brain and body functions; which provided a developmental framework and established a direction for an individualized listening training.

These frequency zones came from extensive clinical observations in the manner the sound stimulation was received in the various sound frequency bands. While at first site these zones seem a broad generalization from practice and consultation there is no doubt that many of these variables exist and can be shown to change through the listening test.

Below, depicted in yellow, are the areas of concern for HK suggested by both the interview and the listening test as needing improvement.

Zone One: The Vestibular area- sensory integration

Low frequency sounds 0-700hz

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| Issues addressed: Balance Rhythm Coordination Muscle tone Body awareness Sense of direction |
| Laterality |
| Right/left discrimination |
| Zone 2: Speech and Language |
| Mid to higher frequency sounds 700- 3000-4000hz |
| Issues addressed: Memory |
| Concentration |
| Attention |
| Speech |
| Language |
| Vocal Control |
| Zone 3: Integration |
| High frequency sounds 4000hz and above |
| Issues addressed: Energy Intuition Ideas Ideals |
| Spirituality |
| Creativity |
| Auditory Cohesion |

The brain organizations are interrelated and interdependent. These three zones can be viewed as a neuro developmental model going from the lower level of brain sensory organization to support the higher-level functions of cortical charge. In practice, the lower level, zone one is the foundation, zone two builds on that foundation, while zone three supports the integration processes of both zone one and zone two

A program starts on the macro level by firstly providing stimulation and calming qualities across the full range of sound frequencies, in a sequential manner, to help the general organization and balance of all three zones, prior to an individual micro level 'fine tuning' takes place.

The Tomatis auditory listening test

The test establishes the patterns within the zones and takes into account both air and bone conduction. Air conduction is working on the muscular system and the bone conduction works directly on the nervous system.

A most informative test is where pure tone signals are presented in pairs -for example 8000Hz. followed by 6000 Hz., for instance- loudly enough so they are easily heard. The subject has to determine the pitch of the second sounds, which are an octave or half-octave apart. Dr. Tomatis called this the test of 'selectivity', describing it as "the ability to tune in to and analyse the specific sounds of one's native language". In today's parlance, this is usually identified as a sound discrimination test. By indicating an error made at the lowest frequency means from this point upward the selectivity is 'closed' at that frequency for all

those frequencies above. This has ramifications for efficient and effective self-regulation.

Another element of the testing is mapping bone conduction. A bone vibrator is placed just behind the ear and ideally one hears the sound just as one would hear the sound produced through the air conduction earphones. If the sound is perceived as coming from the middle of the head, on the opposite side, or from somewhere beyond the skull, it infers that any sound referral is likely to cause a level of confusion. This is called spacial error.

Distress in the body is indicated by the shape of the bone conduction curves. A normal curve is considered to be ascending from base to 4000hz and then lower in the high frequency range. If both ears have the same peaks and valleys at the same frequency range, we assume these represent the distressed areas in the body as well as indicating in what zonal functions are being compromised. This can be an indicator of actual or potential health and/or learning issues.

Selected analysis of the KH auditory graphs

- Sound discrimination: I found four errors with closure from 4000hz on the right ear (RE) which effectively closes the whole of the left ear (LE). This was felt by KH as an exacerbated feeling of pressure in her left ear.
- By the end of the second program, three errors remained on the high frequencies of the left ear effectively meaning the whole system was now only closed in the left ear high frequencies, the fog had disappeared and a new self-regulation had been enacted.
- Bone conduction and the spatialisation: Nine spatial errors: two errors on right ear and seven errors on left ear. This meant KH was perceiving these left ear sounds on the right ear. By the end of the first program only two errors remained on the left ear.
- On return for the second session some weeks later, the errors on left ear had returned indicating that the integration time between these sessions had been too long. However, by the end of the session of this intensive these errors had disappeared entirely.
- The shape of bone conduction curve: Six errors at 1000, 1500 and 3000 kz frequencies in both ears. These three frequencies in the language zone of the graph account for the disharmony of KH in her inner and outer world: an inward turning and lacking motivation to outwardly communicate. By the end of the first program there were two errors: on right ear 1000hz, and left ear 1500 kz. Had an order been restored to the left ear? No not at this point.
- Again, by the end of second session the graph showed both bone conduction curves were only slightly above the top of the air conduction, rather than as previously a huge gap was seen between bone conduction and air conduction. And a smooth curve rather than peaks and valleys ensured which was interpreted as the inner and outer selves were no longer at war which is very evident in HKs reflections.

In the beginning discussion KH reported that she couldn't hear out of the left ear, it had a 'fullness' and was deeply muffled. She would cover her left ear and while it 'felt like herself with a sensation of deadness', her experience of the fullness was not as uncomfortable.

Reflections from KH

1. Following her first fifteen program, March 2014

A wider spectrum of my 'Self'

I started out pretty distressed. It was a real relief to cry about distressing things and feel a current of love stir deeper in my being. (This was) an opportunity to listen for my 'Self', to listen through pain and loss and reconnect with creative expression in colour and words. And a chance to stop everything else and listen to my distress, my yearning, my love, my hopes and my needs.

Listening to a musical language that covers so much more of my being than the general use of words. Hearing the contrast, in the quiet place of the Gregorian, to the narrow band of thought I had become accustomed to.

As the week progressed I became aware of changes in my sense of solidarity within my own mind and body. As if I had more resources to tackle my life with. More ready access to the 'more' of my being. My mind rewired (along with my brain) to listen for a kindness and a potency that I found in the music.

I am resolved to improve the quality of sound I expose myself to and to listen to what is there even more fully: to nurture my ears as the custodians of my being. Through the stimulation came the art: I did, however, have to listen for that as well.

I have remembered myself in a new way. The support of the stimulation of the music and the bone conduction, showed me that I need this support to thrive. Disconnected from, it, I wither. Pay attention to the music, the vibrations. The inner sounds of my body and my being are thrilled to have so much more direct communication with the outer sounds and vibrations of the stimulation provided.

I am released from the stresses of talking: searching for nourishment there, is like squeezing water out of a potato. It's there, but you have to work really hard for a very small amount. Realising that the food I seek cannot really be found there, helped me look more directly where it can be found, felt and received; directly, through the languages of light, colour, sound and touch, felt in my skin and deeper within.

Going beyond words again.

Quietly waiting for spirit's breath

Inspire.....

Expire.....

After about 5 days (15 hours) I experienced a very distinct change. A real sense of integration and empowerment - I could manage outside influences, I was sure of it, and able to go forward with direction.

2. Verbal comments at the end of the session

You offer a lot of emotional space and I find that really helpful. You came in and talked and sometimes I could do it both ways - listener and listen.

I don't care about the tinnitus it's now background not driving. It is (like) a banquet of sound to listen to and tinnitus is a decoration on the table.

3. The follow up program April 2014

Coming back to this intensive KH was very aware of how much more active and motivated she had been following her first program. In this session she did voice/ear/brain reconnection work which she discusses:

I was not nearly so chronically and easily overwhelmed, able to engage in outside activities, focus more easily in general, and hold my own sense of self in conversations with others. These skills continued in develop through the second program. I appeared to be much less dependent on visual aids in listening. For example, I could look into the person eyes in conversation - not so focus on the mouth to back up my hearing. The other level of this was simply being more interested in the other person's state. Prior to staring Tomatis I was very easily overwhelmed by other people and not interested in them for that reason. I felt I had very little to give directly, rather more able to give by working in the background. This round of the program has given me more of a sense of direct exchange in communication and discussion. I don't feel depleted by or avoid interactions or am I having to adapt myself to suit the other person's state.

The active voice work has been very stimulating and gave me a wonderful sense of promise that the electronic ear voice could teach my brain to reach for more of me. Gradually, my voice would soften around its current edges and more of who I sense I could be, would be present for me to enjoy.

While the work is subtle it's also quite tangible for me. The changes I feel currently are encouraging to my general functioning in the world. I hope to be better equipped to maintain an ear on my own presence and be less affected/pulled about by other people's stresses and unconscious needs.

By firing up more of my brain, I like to think of it as my inner self training my local self to expand, giving my inner and outer egos a better alignment and giving me better access to more of who, I quite naturally, am.

I found the reading quite tiring and had to open myself quite softly to a different way of relating to the words on the page. That was really a great change.

Kay's knowledge and awareness of the process are obviously invaluable. She is constantly present to the subtle impact of the process, tailoring the next step specifically for me and my progress.

4. Contact by phone December 2016

An opening remark from KH as she summed up the experience:

I didn't know how long it would take to adjust. It was like being a newborn again. I had an intrinsic self, but I had to develop these renewed neural pathways through my sensory interactions with the world. Not relying on my intellect to fill the gaps. I had inner motivation and I knew I could build on that and learn the rest. Looking back, I can see that I felt I could be who I wanted to be in the world in a way that had previously eluded me.

I didn't have to know everything before I began. I could rely on myself, my resources and my life, to shape me. I no longer felt abandoned, in a tiny life boat, awash on an enormous ocean that I was supposed to know how to navigate and couldn't. I stopped feeling isolated from myself. From my inner Self. I had a long way yet to go, but I had a genuine sense of myself as a foundation.

The program was like a pragmatic spiritual tuning. The neural changes led to tangible changes in my sensory relationship with the world. The way I inhabit myself and my life changed. I recovered a sense of presence I hadn't felt since leaving the farm. There was much more to develop but I knew I had the wiring for it. I could learn the rest and grow stronger in my own way. I was now so much less confused by other people's contradictions and subterfuge. I was much more able to recognise and validate my own instincts, especially when confronted with mixed messages from other people.

While there have been other things I've used to build on the foundation the program gave me, it was the place where my internal world rebooted in my brain after leaving the farm. I now have a deep and abiding sense of Ray's presence, ever near and always willing to be brighter. I don't feel alone, even though I spend a great deal of time by myself. I have retrained as a life coach and am in the process of creating a little business called 'Knowing by Heart' that will incorporate my writing and my horses, for those who wish to work with them or their own. I finally feel I am well on the way to planting myself in a garden of my own making.

My summing up

KH agreed that the highlights on the zone map (depicted in yellow) could represent some of the changes she experienced on her Tomatis program. The major change in laterality, (zone 1) depicted by particularly the left ear bone conduction graph, had a reduction in errors from seven to two errors by end of the first program,. When she returned for the second intensive it was very evident there was a difference in her emotional self-regulation. This cross lateral migration of the bone conduction exacerbated by the head trauma, was corrected and the foggy pressure eased leaving her able to improve and make changes in concentration, attention, speech and vocal control. Her groundedness and clearly embodied life approach was articulated clearly in her spoken and written reflections as her spiritual peace and creativity transitioned by the end of the program and eight months beyond.

Bio

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