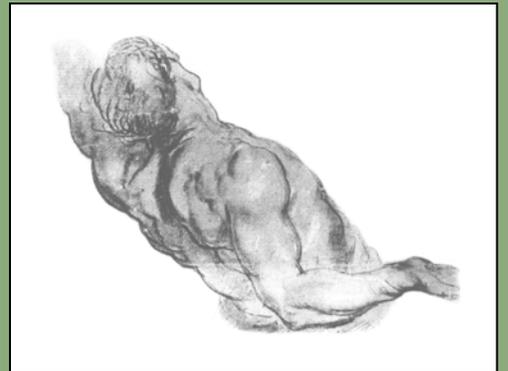


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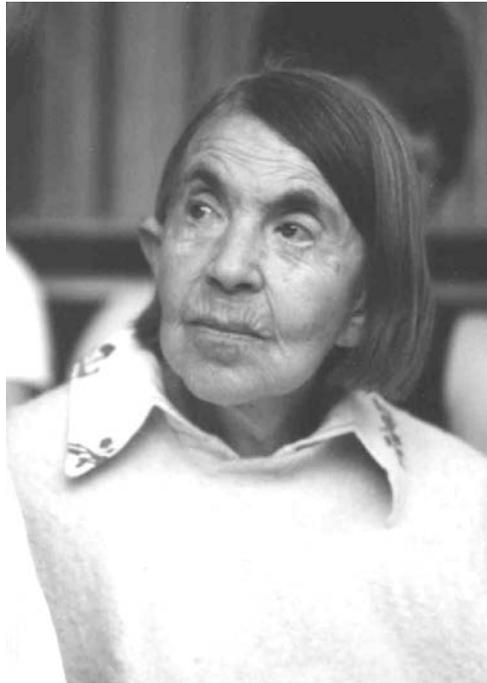


Volume 3 Number 1 2004

The Official Publication of  
THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION FOR  
BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY

## Table of Contents

Charlotte Selver Tribute	3
Editorial Jacqueline Carleton, PhD	4
Guest Editorial Judyth O. Weaver, PhD, SEP, RCSP	6
On Being in Touch with Oneself Charlotte Selver	7
On Breathing Charlotte Selver	10
Sensory Awareness and Our Attitude Towards Life Charlotte Selver	13
An Interview with Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks Ilana Rubinfeld	14
Interview with Charlotte Selver Charles Schick	19
The Influence of Elsa Gindler on Somatic Psychotherapy and on Charlotte Selver Judyth O. Weaver, PhD, SEP, RCSP	22
Gymnastic Elsa Gindler	27
Integrating Sensory Awareness And Somatic Psychotherapy Judyth O. Weaver, PhD, SEP, RCSP	31
Charlotte Selver in 1965 Peter Levine, PhD	36
Experiencing: A Memoir Marjorie Rand, PhD	37
How is Breathing Now? Terry Ray, MA, LPC	40
My Experience with Charlotte Selver and Sensory Awareness Barbara Cabbot, PsyD, LMT	42
Sensing is the Heart of the Contact Ginger Clark, PhD, MFT	44
How Charlotte Selver Influenced My Work Richard Lowe, MA, MFT	46
Sensory Awareness, Creative Expression, and Healing Connie Smith Siegel, MFA	48
Sensory Awareness and Graduate School: Reflections of a Grateful Student Susan Kilkus, MA	52
Epilogue Charles Brooks	55



## Charlotte Selver

Born April 4, 1901 – Ruhrort, Germany  
Emigrated to United States - 1938  
Died August 22, 2003 – Muir Beach, California

**“Becoming more and more able to be there in situations, whether easy or difficult; to be more there with our mind, with our hearts, with our sensitivities, with our strengths - this is very, very important.”**

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USABP Mission Statement

The USABP believes that integration of the body and mind is essential to effective psychotherapy, and to that end, its mission is to develop and advance the art, science, and practice of body psychotherapy in a professional, ethical, and caring manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.  
(revised October 1999)

# How is Breathing Now?

**Terry Ray, MA, LPC**

## **Abstract**

The work of Sensory Awareness is a way for the psychotherapist to listen to what is underneath the words that the client is saying, and a way of guiding her to open to her deeper and more profound understandings. The author describes her powerful introduction to Charlotte Selver's work and offers a clear example of how she brings her background of sensing to her psychotherapy practice.

## **Keywords**

Listening – Questioning – Vipassana Meditation - Yoga

I first met Charlotte Selver in Mexico in 1975. It wasn't love at first sight. It wasn't even close. I liked being on the ocean in the small fishing village, Barra de Navidad, but the classes were strange. I waited for days for this little old lady with a funny accent to explain what we were doing and all she would say were things like "Do you feel your feet?" and "How is breathing?" To which I replied silently, "Of course I feel my feet, and what do you mean, how is breathing, and what does this matter anyway?" I put up with this for over a week, obediently doing the experiments in class, but mostly looking forward to lunch.

It happened with a jolt. About ten days into the workshop, I was in my small apartment washing dishes when heard my own critical voice for the first time ever, and in the same instant I felt a deep self-hatred. I felt it through and through, in the way I stood, held a plate, walked across the room, and spoke. The hostility informed my thoughts, and was lodged in everything I did. It was in my musculature, and in my breath. This shocking insight was so powerful and pervasive that it wasn't even unpleasant. It was more like, "Wow!" It was just the truth. I lived this, experiencing it for almost three days. As I felt it subside I began to feel a new warm and wonderful and tender place inside me, and compassion began to emerge for the first time I could remember in my entire life.

I was hooked. I studied with Charlotte, for many years, discovering deeper and deeper layers of who I am, and finding out about being present, or being "all here" as Charlotte would say. Through her guidance and presence she taught me how to simply be with what is happening without having to change anything, and that this in itself leads to natural healing.

The most valuable qualities I can bring to my practice are the ability to listen deeply, and to be open and present to my client in a nonjudgmental way. The person I am with senses this and begins to have confidence in me, and more importantly, in herself. When I hear the depth of her terror or shame or hatred or sadness, these feelings have space to exist and be accepted by her and consequently lose the power they once held.

Charlotte taught us to "listen with our whole being." She would ask us, "Is your belly listening? Are your feet listening?" I learned to listen with more than my ears. I began to hear when there was something underneath the words my client was saying. I could hear what was not being said, or know when someone was talking around his feelings instead of really feeling them.

A client I'll call Roger came to talk to me because his wife, Karen, stopped wanting to make love with him. It started after their only daughter went off to college and Karen decided to get a job. He was considering a divorce.

Roger was the president of a large company and had a substantial income. He had been the sole income producer of the family since he was first married. Roger spoke with clarity and conviction when he was talking about his work. I asked him how he felt about his wife's working, and when he told me he loved his wife, accepted that she wanted to go to work, and that he supported her in this, he sounded convincing. He believed what he was saying, and I almost believed him too. But there was something that told me otherwise. At the time I wasn't aware of how I knew. I only knew that he didn't accept his wife working.

On reflection I realized I could hear slightly less strength and conviction in his voice than he had when he was talking about his work. As he said the word "accept" he said it quickly and there was a slightest dropping the tone of the last syllable. He was better than most at hiding his feelings, or more accurately, better at hiding from them.

I asked Roger to talk more about Karen working. He paused, his breath got shorter and his lips tightened slightly. I then asked him if he could feel anything in his mouth. His lips tightened more. I asked him to stay with what he was feeling. After a minute or so, he looked out the window and said, "I'm really pissed."

Roger wanted to be encouraging to his wife, but in fact he didn't like her working at all. I praised him for acknowledging what was true even though it was unpleasant.

The next time Roger came to see me, he was still angry and said he and his wife had been cold to each other all week. He talked more about his wife and was annoyed that she seemed happy in her new job. He said he felt more in touch with what was happening in him. He said he felt his anger. It seemed to me that there was something more.

When someone is speaking from his or her deeper feelings, or what is really true for them there is a certain quality that is difficult to describe but can be felt. The energy seems to change in the room. The truth has a certain ring. When Roger was expressing his anger, nothing rang.

I asked Roger if he could stay with the feeling of the sensations without words, noticing them as if they had nothing to do with his wife, but were more like a mysterious energy in him that he could explore. He said he would try. I asked him to close his eyes and notice what he was aware of. He said he was aware of anger. I asked him *where* he was aware of it. This confused him, and he said he didn't know, so I asked him if he could feel it in his feet and he said no. Then I asked him if he could feel it in his arms and he said no. I continued directing him until I came to his eyes. He replied, "A little," then quickly blurted, "My mouth. It's in my mouth." "Good." I said, "Stay with the feeling."

A few moments later, Roger's jaw started to shake. The shaking was strong and lasted about a minute. Then he said, "I'm afraid. I'm afraid she will leave me. An old boyfriend of hers works in the same company she is in and I'm afraid she will leave me for him." The fear was real for him. The depth and tone of his voice was unmistakable.

Roger, in running his company, had always been the one in control, and now with his wife, he was not. It felt intolerable to him. We continued delving into his sensations and he uncovered and confided feelings of jealousy and helplessness. I was moved by the extent of his vulnerability.

When Roger came to see me the next week his voice was cheerful and he looked years younger. His skin actually appeared a lighter color. He told me that he had shared his feelings with his wife, and as he was talking with her, he remembered the helplessness he had felt as a child when his father came home drunk and had terrorized him and his mother. Roger said that he and his wife had wept together. He said he they were closer now than they had been in years. Karen assured him there was absolutely nothing between her and the old boyfriend and that if it were important to him, she would look for another job. After being close with her, it was not an issue for him anymore.

Sometimes when I am working with a client, either during the session or afterwards, I start to feel angry or sad even though she didn't seem that way. This makes me wonder if something in me has tuned into her on a level below consciousness. The next time I am with her, I can direct my questioning with the feeling in mind, and often it turns out to be true, but not always. Even though I have a hunch, because of the work I have done in sensing, I have learned that I don't really know what is happening in her. When I have a questioning attitude, it creates space and possibilities in me as well as my client. When I think, "I know," it closes the doors.

Sensory Awareness is a practice in which I learned to be with each moment in a new and fresh way. Through sensing I discovered if I don't try to change things and can allow the natural development of a situation, the outcome is fresh, spontaneous and alive. I learned to trust the ongoing unfolding process, and realized that if I don't attempt to fix or help my client, a useful and appropriate response will come about by itself. The ability to not have to be in control or react is crucial to allowing the person I am with to begin to believe in her own inner intelligence and find her own process of healing.

I am endlessly grateful to have this practice and to be able to bring it into the world through my psychotherapy practice as well as leading classes in Sensory Awareness, Vipassana meditation and yoga asking students and clients questions like, "Can you feel your feet?" and "How is breathing now?"

#### Biography

**Terry Ray, MA, LPC**, is a licensed psychotherapist, has been a teacher of Vipassana meditation and Sensory Awareness for over 25 years in retreats, weekly sitting groups, private classes and at Naropa Institute. She is authorized to lead Sensory Awareness classes by Charlotte Selver and has served as President of the Sensory Awareness Leader's Guild. She may be reached at [www.terryray.org](http://www.terryray.org).

# USA BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

The Official Publication of  
United States Association for Body Psychotherapy  
Jacqueline A. Carleton, Ph.D., Editor (jacarletonphd@gmail.com)

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8639 B 16<sup>th</sup> St. Ste. 119  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Phone: 202-466-1619 Fax: 832-717-7508  
E-Mail: [usabp@usabp.org](mailto:usabp@usabp.org)  
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Jacqueline A. Carleton, Ph.D.  
Editor

USA Body Psychotherapy Journal  
115 East 92<sup>nd</sup>. Street #2A  
New York, NY 10128  
212.987.4969

[jacarletonphd@gmail.com](mailto:jacarletonphd@gmail.com)

