

Lifetime Achievement Award

An Interview with Judyth O. Weaver

By Nancy Eichhorn



Form and formless
Movement and stillness
Loudness and quiet
Self and other
I and thou

Can you truly present a picture of a person, on a page, when the dimensionality of the being moves beyond the here and now, expands beyond the human container of skin and bones into the expanse of all cellular energy, where dualities shape the singular organism?

No, not really, but one can share snapshots of a woman who has contributed much to the field of body psychotherapy, who has had an impact on many therapists' lives and on countless clients' lives. From dancer to sitter, from mother to teacher, from self to other, Judyth O. Weaver brings her essence into this life in wondrous ways.

Continued on page 20

On Being Noticed: Getting an Award

When Karen Roller, secretary from the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy (USABP), first contacted Weaver to let her know she was this year's Life Time Achievement Award recipient, Weaver replied quite honestly, "Why?"

Talking about the distinguished award, Weaver shared that in her recollection past awardees were people who had created schools or methodologies like Stanley Keleman, Ilana Rubinfeld (the only other female recipient), Peter Levine, John Pierrakos, Alexander Lowen and so on. In her own humble way, Weaver said, "I've just been putzing along doing work I saw needed to be done and tried to do it. There were holes that needed to be closed."

Filling holes. Completing the incomplete. Finding stillness in movement, formlessness within form. Weaver has a knack for bringing seemingly disparate aspects into a cohesive whole.

At age 79, Weaver says that in Asia they count age differently, giving the person credit for the life before birth too, so in Japan she would be 80 now.

Weaver shared that she had an abusive childhood—she was not allowed to move and what she really wanted was movement. At age 17 she went to New York to be a dancer.

"I studied dance and also Asian culture... mostly the philosophy. As an unhappy child I searched for answers as to why I was here. What am I supposed to do? Different Western religions and philosophies gave me answers that I could not accept. When I studied Taoism and Buddhism it gave me no answers but told me that since I was here, to do the best I could. That I could understand and accept. I wanted to go to Asia and study more deeply. I was interested in China, but it was closed to

Americans at that time. India was too far, and Tibet, well I just wasn't sure where it was, so I focused on going to Japan. I went there in 1965 and studied movement, all kinds—kabuki and noh (both classical dance-dramas), tea ceremony, etc."

"After a year of studying the dance, etc., I went to a Zen Buddhist monastery and asked to be accepted. I was so passionate about wanting to stay there and study I forgot at that point that I was Caucasian, and I was a woman. This was a traditional Japanese, male enclave. 'Grace' and an enlightened teacher allowed me to stay."

"When the Zen master asked me what I had done in the U.S. and I told him I had been a dancer, he smiled and said, 'Now you will learn the highest form of dance, movementless dance.'"



Weaver laughed and admitted that while sitting on the cushion, supposedly in deep meditation, she had choreographed the best dance she ever did, in her head. She eventually performed it in Japan and in the United States.

After three years abroad, 2 ½ years in Japan and half a year in Mexico where she started a Zen center with a Zen monk friend from Japan, Weaver returned to the United States.

image from <https://www.holisticogaschool.com/entering-stillness/>

She recalled a moment in 1959, New York, before her journey to Japan. She was in her learning phase and saw a class for nonverbal communication and thought, *this is right for me*. But the course schedule interfered with one of her dance classes, so it was a no go. Several years later, after her return, she saw the same names: Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks offering another class, this time called Sensory Awareness.

"After all my aspirations for dancing. I was no longer interested in putting my ego on a stage. I wanted to combine my desire for movement and stillness, for loudness and quiet. I came back with damaged knees after all that dancing and then sitting for hours in the monastery. I went to see Cheng Man-Ch'ing, one of the best T'ai Chi masters of the 20th Century, for medicine for my knees. I studied at his studio with his senior teachers and learned the form of stillness in movement."

"Then I found Charlotte again. Sensory Awareness (*see side bar on page 23*) offers a slight form—people gather or one person, a leader makes suggestions, invitations. Charlotte hated T'ai Chi and the fact that I did it because it was a form. But for me, I had form and formlessness, moving and stillness."

Looking back on a lifetime of happenings, Weaver reflected for a moment, then said, "How did I do these things?, Well, I learned at the monastery that when you pass a piece of paper on the ground you don't say 'I didn't put it there so I'm going to leave it', you simply pick it up and put it in the garbage. You do what needs to be done. I left with strong learnings from the Zen monastery."

The Sensory Awareness (SA) Way

Weaver's *curricula vitae* includes extensive teaching experiences nationally and internationally, co-founding a private graduate school, creating programs for graduate programs studies at an accredited institute, private client work, and writing/publishing articles, book chapters.

The foundation for her practice is an integration of Sensory Awareness with her Reichian training (she was certified in 1976 and earned her doctorate in Reichian psychology in 1979). Sensory awareness was an easy fit—it paralleled her life in the monastery: pay attention to detail, be conscious, aware, present, don't let your mind carry you away.

She became a devout Selver/Brooks follower. She studied with them starting in 1968 until 2003 when Selver passed away. Wherever they went, she was in tow, including places like Esalen Institute (Big Sur, California), Mexico, New York City, and Monhegan Island in Maine. With each stop, she met others who had been impacted by Selver's work, who brought SA into their own practice, at times without even being aware.

"Sensory awareness is essential," Weaver said adding that it is not a training, not a system. "You can't have mindful practice without the mind/body experience. It has always been part of traditional meditation, Buddhist and otherwise. I look back at the fifties and sixties, we were all in our minds. Then Esalen Institute opened and we were all in our bodies, but no one was connecting it."

"Charlotte Selver's work did that. She was teaching Sensory Awareness at Esalen. Selver gave Esalen's first ever experiential workshop in 1963. So many people were influenced by her—Rubinfeld, Levine, (*see www.IBPJ.org archives, volume 3, number 1, 2004—Selver for tributes and information*). Fritz Perls, Eric Fromm. Psychoanalysts were influenced. Fritz had private sessions with her for one and a half years in New York. He wanted her to work with his clients, but she refused. Wilhelm Reich was influenced by Elsa Gindler, Selver's teacher in Germany. Reich's second wife, had studied with Gindler and influenced Reich to include breath, energy, movement into traditional psychoanalytic practice.

Continued on page 22

“Charlotte was never a psychologist, she was a teacher. I’ve taken her work further in that direction since I’m also a psychologist and can integrate both forms of work,” Weaver said.

As guest editor for the USABP Journal highlighting Selver’s work after her death, Weaver writes:

“In Sensory Awareness, there is nothing to teach. It is just the activity of experiencing and working to be ever more present for the moment. As my ability to be more present deepened, like in Zen, the SA became more in me and I became more it . . . If I am going to be fully present and responsive to the moment and be able to help another be more in the moment, it doesn’t make sense to use a technique that I was taught some time ago. Sensory Awareness taught me the essence of being fresh and responding to what is happening at each moment . . . just what I learned in Zen” (Weaver, *IBPJ* 3(1), 2004/2005, pg. 57).

Weaver taught at the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS) for over 25 years. She was hired when it was still called the California Institute for Asian Studies to teach T’ai Chi. While there she integrated sensory awareness into the curriculum as a required course—one hole that really needed to be addressed, she said. She also established a course in the Psychology of Wilhelm Reich. Her courses included both form and formlessness.

Her work at CIIS involved creating the kind of training that she felt was necessary for somatic psychotherapy with a base in SA. She also integrated somatic inquiry into clinical applications in more professionally-oriented courses. These experiences supported her work when she was asked to create a doctoral program in somatic psychology when she co-founded the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute.

“In Sensory Awareness, there is nothing to teach. It is just the activity of experiencing and working to be ever more present for the moment. As my ability to be more present deepened, like in Zen, the SA became more in me and I became more it . . . If I am going to be fully present and responsive to the moment and be able to help another be more in the moment, it doesn’t make sense to use a technique that I was taught some time ago. Sensory Awareness taught me the essence of being fresh and responding to what is happening at each moment . . . just what I learned in Zen.”

Charlette Selver

Charlotte Selver is considered a pioneer in the human potential movement. During her lifetime, she spoke against compartmentalizing humans into bodies or minds; rather, she supported a focus on a unified organismic human being. "The primary aim of the approach was to make it possible for a person to re-experience himself as a totality, to bring him back to the degree of aliveness and receptivity of which he is capable" (Selver, *IBPJ* 3(1), 2004/2005, pg. 8). She "coined the name Sensory Awareness to single out the awareness of direct perception as distinguished from the intellectual or conventional awareness—the verbalized knowledge that is still the almost exclusive aim of education" (Selver, *IBPJ* 3(1), 2004/2005, pg. 24).

SA is not therapy. "Its purpose is not to make living healthier but to make it more conscious; not to make it happier, but to let it come more into accord with our original nature . . . The more we arrive at our own original nature, the more we discover that healthier and happier living and relating comes about by itself" (Selver, *IBPJ* 3(1), 2004/2005, pg. 13).

"Marti Glenn and I met studying with William Emerson. When she thought of starting a school she asked Wendy (*McCarty*), me and Ken (*Bruer, her husband*) to get together. We all wanted prenatal and perinatal psychology to be integrated into mainstream practice. There was no degree, no strength behind it with medical professionals. When we learned from the state that the \$5,000 we were putting down to start the school meant that we could have four programs not just one, Marti asked me, 'Do you want to do a program in somatics?' I said, 'Yes.' I taught there and arranged it so that every time the students met on campus for the first year we did sensory awareness for them as a person, as an individual. The second year of their coursework, SA was integrated into more clinical use with clients, and the third year we offered supervision work with their clients so that the sensory awareness process in clinical application was witnessed and observed."

Coming to a Name: Somatic Reclaiming

While living and teaching in Berlin, Gindler never named her work. When asked what she called what she did, she just said, *I work with the whole person*. After arriving in the U.S., Charlotte eventually named it Sensory Awareness. Weaver faced a similar situation. She did what she did but didn't have a name for it.

"One day after working, a client asked me, 'what do you call this?' I said, 'huh?' then thought a moment and replied, Somatic Reclaiming, because it is not that we have to acquire something new, but that we need to come back into ourselves . . . to rediscover, to reclaim our true natures."

Further contemplation on a name. The year, 1985. The place, Berkeley, CA. The Reichian "people" met monthly for a potluck and meeting, a time to socialize and share. Once Eva Reich joined them, talked about her work, her father's work. She needed a ride to the airport and Weaver volunteered her blunt-navy-blue 1965 Volvo. She called it her Jewish Model-T Ford. It was so old she had brought her daughter home from the hospital in it and drove said daughter to the airport to fly off to college. As no surprise, they were stuck in traffic and had time to talk, to get to know one another better.

"She asked me, 'What do you do?' I hesitated. Reich never wanted his work to be named after him but here in the West Coast we were trained in Reichian therapy. I said, 'I've been trained in Reichian therapy and integrated the work of Sensory Awareness.' Eva said, 'My father would be so very glad!' which started my relief and our connection— she has since become my mentor and my friend until her passing in 2008."

Continued on page 24

Coming to a close

"When Karen Roller initially told me about the award she also mentioned that she had seen on my website that I was scheduled to be in Japan for a week-long workshop during the conference dates. 'If you can't make it, we can have someone else accept the award for you,' she said. Someone here said, 'Are you crazy! You are getting the Life Time Achievement Award and you are not going to be there!' Well, it was a miracle. People in Japan don't change easily. I had to find out if I even could change the dates. And I have a wonderful translator who really gets the work I do, and this was an even greater miracle—she could change her schedule, too. So, I fly to LA from Japan to attend the conference. I haven't been to a USABP conference in a few years. I was there from the beginning. I attended every USABP conference and presented, too. I'm excited about being there. Then I fly back to Japan for another SA workshop and then a weekend workshop on Reichian Therapy."

When asked about her intensive work schedule at age 79, she said, "I do consider myself retired. I'm not seeing as many private clients. I still do my two-week SA workshop on Cortes Island every other year. I teach every summer. I'm going to Japan and teaching there every year. I couldn't imagine not. I tried to skip a year, teaching the T'ai Chi workshop, but it didn't feel right. I still do T'ai Chi every day."

Weaver is receiving the Life Time Achievement Award for what she's done thus far. It wouldn't be a surprise if, in another decade, she's honored again for the work she's brought forward from 2018 to 2028. She certainly isn't slowing down anytime soon.

Judyth O. Weaver is a multifaceted teacher and counselor, incorporating extensive training in diverse areas. She holds a Ph.D. in Reichian Psychology. Judyth is the creator and founding chair of the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute Ph.D. Program in Somatic Psychology. She taught at the California Institute of Integral Studies (San Francisco, CA) for 25 years and at other graduate schools in the S.F. Bay area as well as being founding faculty at Naropa Institute, now Naropa University, (Boulder, CO) in the 1970's, creating it's T'ai Chi



Ch'uan program. She is certified in Reichian Therapy, Somatic Experiencing, massage, Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy, Prenatal and Birth Therapy and as a teacher of Tai' Chi Ch' uan, a senior teacher of the Rosen Method and Sensory Awareness. A former modern dancer, she lived in Japan 1965-1968, studying classical dance (Kabuki and Noh), tea ceremony, and other aspects of Japanese culture. She then lived and studied at Shofukuji, a traditional Rinzaï Zen Buddhist monastery, under Yamada Mumon Roshi. Since 1969 she has taught and led workshops at Esalen Institute in California, Hollyhock in Canada, and other educational centers in the western world, as well as in Russia, Japan, Taiwan, Mexico and India. Her life-long studies have been in dance, body/mind/spirit integrative practices, Buddhist practice and Taoism. Judyth now lives in Seattle, Washington, having relocated there to be closer to her grandchildren. Judyth maintains a private practice in Somatic Reclaiming, her development of body/mind/spiritual integration, which bases its work on the belief that we are all born basically whole, with what we need, but traumas, teachings, etc. confuse and deter us and that with support and awareness we can reclaim our natural inclinations and live the full lives that are our birthrights. Judyth's private practice is in Seattle, Washington and on Cortes Island, B.C. She also travels and teaches elsewhere throughout the world.