

TRANSCRIPT

Are we intelligent enough to know how intelligent animals really are?

By Rosalyn Maynard© 2021

The transcript from Body-Mind Centering® Presentation given on 22nd May 2021

at SOMA France, Valcivière, Grand Massif, France

Introduction

Body-Mind Centering (BMC) offers me a way to be in the world; a different way than is perhaps currently familiar to many people ... a *waie* to be in the world in fact similar in meaning, in a sense to the Tao, a waie of being in the world that I have been exploring cultivating, tending and developing in my practice as a Biodynamic Farmer (BD). So actually, for me it is a marriage, a partnership that I have been exploring in practice for about ten years between BDs and BMC.

For many years I have been exploring somatics and BMC as a way of knowing self, other and place through direct experience in the body and exploring the application or practice of this in other fields including tracking, foraging, natural horsemanship, performance making and walking, as well as farming. Sharing BMC with folk in these other traditions I have come to learn from them the value of a somatics approach to knowing and perceiving oneself, other and world in a wider context and taken the opportunity to share this approach in these fields, in workshops over the years.

In this presentation I would like to take this time to share with you, from my perspective as a shepherd how I have come to deepen my appreciation for my flock of sheep and to learn how intelligent they really are. My small flock of sheep numbered about 50. We farm on a small hilly area just south of the Dartmoor National Park in Devon, in SW England.

Sentient, sensitive sheep

It was with great happiness that I learned that in 2020 the UK Conservative government acknowledged farm animals as sentient and so it opens us up to possibly consider, in a wider sense, the realm of the wellbeing of the essence of life and the realm of what one might describe as the soul.

Today, I would like to share with you how I have learned from my sheep through the practice of BMC; a radically different approach to studying animals that in many research contexts would be an anathema. In the modern agricultural sector, we have been researching and “improving” farming techniques for many decades based on quantitative data, more often than not collected in controlled conditions. It is common knowledge that in western agriculture animal disease, immunity to meds and antibiotics and the general wellbeing of our livestock is and continues to be unsustainably compromised and to such an extent that it is impacting on the health of planetary life systems. I therefore suggest that if more research and more “improvement” is to save us it will need to be of a very different kind.

Sheep are considered to be “flight” animals alongside their four-legged cousins’ horses, as opposed to, say, cattle who we might consider as “earth” animals. And, it is a well-known fact in many contexts within the farming industry that the biggest contributor to dis-ease and illness in sheep is stress. This is

recognised in many aspects of farming including: homeopathic veterinary, herbal medicine for farm animals, organic farming and even traditional veterinary now. Sheep are tremendously sensitive, loving, social animals who “jump” and/or “shut down” rapidly and in an instance, in many of the contexts and environments in which we currently farm today. Therefore, one question might be “how does this impact on their health?”

Research of a different kind

How I have come to “study” my sheep is through the BMC “Mind” of cellular consciousness. To be with them in the same way we might be with a client in an individual session, or a baby in an Infant Development Movement Education (IDME) session or teaching a workshop; “holding the space”; being peaceful, without ambition, not coming or going, just present. And, from this “mind” a context emerges that allows us to meet and that allows the other to meet us, on their own terms. To meet or to “match their “tone” and for them to meet or to “match my “tone”.

Somatisation: [from “The Process of Embodiment” in BMC: Visualisation, Somatisation, embodiment].

Following this verbal introduction, the main body of the presentation takes place experientially through guided somatics inquiry and silence as participants explore a sense of thinking in sheep, through the ruminant mind, in embodied practice.

As we lean more into the experiential research of the presentation, I introduce the notion of kinaesthetic empathy; as a way of perhaps meeting sheep “knowing” or “being” of themselves and world that is not pretending to be a sheep but is perhaps applying the process of embodiment to meet the sheep in their “sheepness”. Sheep are able to empathise and possess emotional intelligence.

We take time to explore the following activities experientially:

- Experience silence...standing...lying down...
- explore your own sense of four leggedness...we were after all, at one time in our own ontological development four legged in crawling and creeping...I even invite you to let go of arms and hands for a moment....to appreciate mouth/nose as limb; to reach, grasp, hold, nurture and relate through nose and limb. Sheep spend up to 12 hours a day grazing. Sheep have an acute sense of smell and “categories, rank, recall, plants on a similar level to chimpanzees. Explore knowing world through nose...close eyes perhaps...explore “nosing”...
- Eyeline...sheep’s eyelines...
- Walking on two toes...relationship to earth and ground...walking on our toes...what kind of state of consciousness does this elicit as we perceive ourself, our world waling on toes...
- Communicate through movement, touch, gesture, position – rarely if ever use voice...having a contact jam with my sheep...one ewe; Elfin, is particularly fond of a contact jam...as was her mother, Shy...
- internal body Temperature 40 degrees Celsius...heat, temperature...an inner sense organ...warmth...feel warmth...inner temperature...wool...uniquely sheep...wool...an overlooked little miracle...what do you know about wool...how might we meet it...

• And finally, today I would like to invite us to focus on the Enteric Nervous System (ENS) or the gut brain and the gut-mind connection. Sheep have four stomachs, a longer intestine than humans and a rhythm of thinking through digesting. What we might call in BMC the mind of the ruminant: knowing our self and world through the process of digestion; the ENS; through our gut feelings. After all the ENS is the most ancient branch of our mammalian NS today and potentially can inform us and support our most fundamental life processes; including our relationship with modern day stress and our life sense; the immune system. I invite you to open your awareness to your gut tube ... etc ... Participants are led into an embodied inquiry exploring digestion and their ENS.

Conclusion: A *waie* of tendering our sheep that may be better for our hearts and soul(s)

In sum, I am still learning from my sheep ... but for us to perhaps begin to consider how we might:

- i. reduce the use of meds and consider medicine efficacy such as drenches for worms etc.,
- ii. reduce use of machinery in sheep farming, of mechanisation, fossil fuels and excessive energy use;

may not only offer better financial sense, may not only (as some of us already know in some farming contexts) produce better products (meat, milk, cheese, wool etc. and breeding stock) but, also and radically so, potentially be better for our own hearts, our soul.

It's a kind of magic to be in relationship with the four-legged grass eaters without ambition or agenda, not seeking anything, not analysing, objectifying them ... objectifying us ... just being ... It is *The Process of Embodiment* (from BMC) ... and "... the source of this process is love" (p.157, Sensing Feeling and Action, Bainbridge Cohen, 2nd ed.) ...

'The soul is the same in all living creatures, although the body of each is different.' Hippocrates



Cellular touch: With Long Tail, Big Meadow, August 2020. Photo copyright: Emma Freeman. Used with permission