

Introduction to Contact Improv

In the path of awakening, an important way to presence is through the body. The body grounds us in the moment, doesn't get lost as does the mind in all its varied antics. The breath is a central focus of many forms of meditation; others move beyond the breath into the sensations of the body more generally. Vipasana is one such form. Another, Centering Prayer, is from our own tradition. It has been said,

"The reason for paying attention to your body and your interior state is that the mind deceives. The body never lies. Listen to the wisdom of your body. Hear its truth."

One wonderful way to develop that wisdom is a practice called Contact Improvisation.

- It is a non-choreographed form of collaborative movement exploration.
- It is a kinesthetic social form of co-creative play.
- It is an embodied spiritual practice of authentic presence and even mystical union, in which without conforming ourselves or yielding our autonomy (that is, within a practice of our truth and our freedom), we experience ourselves participating in a larger coherence of Oneness.

In improvisation, we get deeply in touch with the body's innate desire to move, to express, and to play. We ask into ourselves, What is authentic? What's interesting? What's joyful? What feels good? And we yield to our bodies' direction. This already is profound, and it is perfectly acceptable to stay here. Continuing in this authentic following, at some point, as humans, we want to expand our awareness out into relationship. A step further into that relationship, we discover Contact Improv.

We listen intently to the sensations of the body, finding in them the impulse to move and the information about our partners and surroundings, which then informs how best to respond. This, however, does not happen cognitively. What guides us is a deeper, intuitive intelligence at work. At every moment, we must be ready to let go of what we think is going to happen, in favor of the reality of what actually *is* happening. Through the practice, we are drawn into the experience of No-Mind, which is found to be an incredibly resourceful and rewarding state of being.

"Through improvisation we can learn to trust the process, learn to let go of concepts, and to perceive the endless possibilities available in the moment."

--from *Contact Improvisation*, by Thomas Kaltenbrunner

Videos:

The first segment of five, narrated by the main pioneer of the form, Steve Paxton, following another central figure in Contact Improv's development, Nancy Stark Smith:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k768K_OTePM

This is pretty representative of what you might see if you go to a jam anywhere around the globe:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQDZT6vfEyQ>

To Find Jams WorldWide:

www.contactimprov.com/worldjammapp.html

<http://www.contactimprov.net/jams>

-- John Adams