

Foreword

In my work helping people recover from the effects of trauma, I have observed that the shocks to the system life sometimes delivers can have a numbing effect on our ability to feel fully alive. Through a series of practices and psychological induction processes, I help individuals regain a “sensed/felt” connection with themselves. This recovery of feeling is an essential key in attaining personal wholeness and freedom from neurosis.

John Maxwell Taylor’s work, as outlined in this book, also encourages a return to wholeness, but from a different yet complementary approach. He proposes that the energy in a stressful and potentially demoralizing social situation can be converted “on the spot” into a powerful source of clarity and self-transformation. As in my own work, the accent is on the recovery of sensation and the reestablishment of active consciousness as opposed to passive reactivity. John practices what he preaches in the thick of what he refers to as the “improvisational theater” of everyday life.

My first experience of John was when I saw him performing his award-winning twenty-character, one-man-play *Forever Jung* on the life of famed psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. From my own background in Jungian psychology, I was able to clearly recognize that he had captured not only the essence of Jung, but also many of his associates, including Sigmund Freud. Compacting the essential incidents of Jung’s life, his inner explorations, and interactions with his wife, mistress, and a host of dream figures into a two-hour performance must have been a daunting experience. But John apparently thrived on it in a poetic and dazzling performance.

When I asked him how he managed to stay so energized on stage, he replied that he was practicing “divided attention” throughout the show. Further inquiry revealed that this meant he consciously kept a continuous “sensed/felt” connection with his body throughout his performance. This way he could place 50 percent of his attention upon the audience and 50 percent upon experiencing the totality of himself on stage during the experience of acting.

“The play is naturally word and idea heavy,” John told me. “If I were to stay in my head the audience would perhaps find it wearing. But as an actor I have learned to feel my body and my emotions to the same degree that I am mentally active on stage. This automatically puts the audience in touch with their bodies and their feelings. The words and ideas then fall into a collective audience mind which is like a still pool, a well of mental receptivity.”

Later, as I got to know John personally, I found that this is how he approaches all of life. For him, as for Shakespeare, “all the world’s a stage,” even for ordinary social interactions. This does not mean that he is a “drama king,” constantly overacting in public and stirring up scenarios of human confrontation. On the contrary, most of the time he comes across as a rather private person with a quiet, focused demeanor. Yet when he speaks about that which is meaningful to him, one finds oneself placing clear attention upon him and what he is saying. One senses that something is going on inside him. He emits a sense of “presence” that commands attention and respect. And this internal, yet outwardly expressive, state seems to be in a condition of constant regeneration. Indeed, I was so taken by this work that I took a few individual coaching sessions, which greatly enhanced my capacity to speak comfortably in front of large audiences.

In this book you will find the thoughts and ideas, key tools and techniques, and perceptions that John uses, not just on stage but in daily life. He knows how to transform potentially negative, disturbing, and disruptive social situations into a regenerative healing power, in the moment, amidst real-world situations. Before we can transform the world at large, or anyone else, we must first know how to remain centered within ourselves amidst interpersonal friction and even conflict. Without friction, or the play between positive and negative forces, the human race would never have discovered fire or electricity, learned to make heat at will, or light our streets and homes. To create a better world, a more enlightened world, as John proposes, we must first enlighten ourselves as individuals. From that place of self-illumination, we can then extend to others the option to join

Foreword | xvii

us in the light, if they so choose. If they do not wish to, at the very least, we ourselves shall be able to travel through the world in an illuminated manner. By doing this, not only shall we see clearly where we are going; we shall also be blazing a trail that future generations, with perhaps a more innate predisposition toward the truth than at present, may choose to follow.

The Power of I AM shows us the way and, happily, it is highly entertaining and a rattling good read. Enjoy your journey with John Maxwell Taylor. I can assure you that you are in very good hands.

Peter A. Levine, Ph.D.

Author of *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (North Atlantic Books, 1997) and *Healing Trauma: A Pioneering Program for Restoring the Wisdom of Your Body* (Sounds True Book/CD, 2005)