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★ Releasing Trauma Through Bodywork The Power of Awareness

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In Polarity Therapy we recognize that the harmonious flow of energy within and around the body is the essential prerequisite for health. The same perception is common to many other approaches to bodywork. For Polarity Therapists, the safe release of trauma is a key concern; we seek ways that are simple and effective and which may be integrated within our bodywork. The same need applies to bodywork in general. It is hoped that the approaches discussed in this article will be found to be of general applicability.

Tissue Memory

We know that trauma, especially emotional trauma, may be locked within the tissues of the body, disturbing or blocking energy flow, with ill-health as the result. The concept of 'tissue memory'[1,2,3,4] is fundamental to our understanding of the connection between bodywork and trauma release. 'Tissue memory' refers to the ability of our body's connective tissue to register all impressions which we experience during life, both enriching and harmonious, disturbing and inharmonious. In the words of Donald VanHowten:4 "In the formation of a life impression, the membranes are the clay upon which the information is etched."

Connective Tissue

Connective tissue forms the 'skins' that surround the whole body and all internal structures e.g. muscles, nerves, organs, glands, brain and spinal cord, blood and lymphatic vessels. In fact, the connective tissue creates and defines the form of the body.[4,5,6] This connective tissue contains collagen fibres embedded in a jelly-like substance called ground substance. Ground substance contains complex molecules and water; just as the 'jelly' we eat, which does not obviously contain water; in fact it contains mostly water bound together by gelatin. The ability of connective tissue to register impressions, rather like a 'floppy disc', is a property of the collagen fibres and the water in the ground substance jelly. Ida Rolf tells us that the collagen fibres of connective tissue "can be changed by adding energy"[7] while water has the ability to register vibrational impressions[8,9,10] often called the 'memory' of water.

Impressions, Connective Tissue and Energy Flow

The impressions received by connective tissue can affect its form and structure. This is important, for the form and structure of connective tissue will affect the ease of flow of energy along its subtle pathways.

It seems that reception of harmonious impressions by connective tissue maintains it in a form that allows the energy to flow through it without impediment. We feel well and alive. Disturbing vibrations, i.e. trauma, lead to changes in the connective tissue, e.g. tightening, solidification, lengthening, and shortening.[4,5,6] Stephen Typaldos has illustrated different fascial distortions e.g. twist, crumple, knot, wave, etc.[12]

Such structures are familiar to the touch of bodyworkers. The effect of these connective tissue changes will be to inhibit or block energy flow and the tissue may well be sore where the energy is "stuck". In one way or another we do not feel well, our vitality is compromised, we become ill.

Thus subtle bodywork aims to help the body to both resolve its connective tissue distortions and simultaneously to release the embedded trauma. Two factors enable this to happen: touch and the body's self-healing process.

Touch

In Polarity therapy three different kinds of touch are used according to the needs of the patient:[13]

Deep touch, as used in massage, will loosen tight tissues; Touch with movement, e.g. rocking, will stimulate energy to move; With light touch, the energy will flow harmoniously through its subtle channels. The effectiveness of touch, especially light touch, is facilitated by the bio-magnetic energy which emanates from the hands.[14] This energy is absorbed by the connective tissue and used by the body's intelligence to aid the healing process.

The Body's Self-healing Process

The energy knows how to flow; all that is required is for the impediments to be removed. This innate intelligence regulates the self-healing process; the therapist is a facilitator, not a 'doer'. This awareness is vital for any trauma work. The therapist offers skills, but the client's system alone knows whether the time is right, whether it is safe, to release the traumatic state. We have to remember that even if trauma embedded in the tissues causes disruption to energy flow, the withdrawal of these trauma from conscious awareness will have been necessary for the client's survival. When trauma presents itself for resolution during bodywork we may assume that the client's self-healing process has 'decided' that the time and conditions are right for resolution. Herein lies the particular value of trauma work linked to 'hands-on' therapy: we follow the client's own process at all times.

There are therapeutic skills that may be used along-side bodywork to aid the processing of trauma. Three of these, Focusing, Journey Work and Trauma Energetics, are discussed later in this article.

The discussion so far may be summarized by the following flow diagram:

Trauma Resolution

The most common types of trauma are best described as emotional trauma: our fears, anxieties, anger, insecurities, sense of abandonment, isolation, lack of self-worth and so on, which have become embedded in the fabric of our being, our connective tissue, unexpressed and overlaid with life's activity, until in time a health problem forces us to address the inner problem.

Peter Levine[15] has described how the human being, faced with a 'fight-or-flight' situation, mobilizes huge quantities of energy. Often the situation does not permit this energy to be released when the danger is past. Thus the action is not 'completed' and the energy becomes 'frozen' within the tissues. Many childhood experiences can never be expressed, i.e. the action is never 'completed', the frozen energy often casting its shadow over the whole life. Peter Levine observed that wild animals discharge the 'fight-or-flight' energy when the danger is past using such strategies as shaking or running. This discharging of energy, as in crying, shouting, or shaking on the therapist's couch, may form part of trauma resolution during bodywork.

In many cases it is the experience of the Polarity Therapist that no conscious awareness of trauma by the patient is necessary for a health problem to resolve as a result of bodywork. Nature works in mysterious ways: possibly a chance comment by the therapist, or the quality of listening, was all that was needed to stimulate the client's self-healing process. It may also be the case that the client has already resolved their trauma, the physical body holding onto its problem through habit. Such situations should resolve quickly with bodywork. However, there are occasions when the therapist senses that the client's progress is somehow 'stuck' and that there are deep unconscious issues, trauma, that need to be released. These underlying trauma may surface during bodywork, freed from the tissue memory and revealed to conscious view. Such occasions are full of potential for resolution of trauma. As bodyworkers, we need to acquire the skills to work with the client at such times, or the opportunity will be lost.

Often, the client simply experiences emotional release without knowledge of the underlying cause, knowing that "something" has changed as a result of the release, but without being aware of what this "something" was. Nor is this necessary. During such times, the practitioner provides a safe and calm environment, simply listening. Anna-May Silvestro describes this process beautifully from the perspective of acupuncture.[16] However, there are skills which can aid the client to work with trauma during bodywork. The additional skills that I use in processing trauma are: Focusing,[17,18] Journey Work[19] and Trauma Energetics.[20]

Focusing

The technique called Focusing was developed by Eugene Gendlin, a psychotherapist, who discovered that patients who made progress with the resolution of their problems were those who were able to 'get out of their heads' and connect with the feeling content of the body. Eugene Gendlin coined the phrase 'felt sense' to describe that feeling which corresponds to the trauma. By using appropriate words to describe precisely the felt sense, the client is guided to move inwardly very close to the felt sense. The touch of the therapist, often maintained over the part of the body where the disturbance is experienced, aids the concentration of the client and provides a calm presence. Very often the action of allowing the felt sense to be fully experienced results in its release: the trauma cannot withstand the power of awareness, the focused attention. Sometimes the intelligence of the body-mind presents an intuitive sense of what practical steps need to be taken. This would not have been possible without the client allowing themselves to be present with the felt sense.

At the start of focusing the client will be aware of several problems. These are 'stacked' until, using Eugene Gendlin's words, you hear something say, "Yes, except for those I'm fine." We see from this that focusing embraces the sense that there is something in the human being that is beyond trauma.

The stacked problems are dealt with one at a time, the client choosing which concern needs to be dealt with first. Thus it is the client's own self-healing process which regulates what takes place; indeed, the client can decide to stop at any time.

Journey Work

Trauma exist in layers, beyond which lies our Source, a place of peace and calm untouched by the over-lying layers of disturbance and agitation: this is the knowledge which underlies Brandon Bay's Journey Work. Like Focusing, Journey Work requires that the client focus with total awareness on whatever disturbing feeling is present. Again, any mental activity is put to one side. The aim is for the client to experience fully the feeling or emotion, even to the point that it is almost overwhelming. In this experience, the supportive presence of the therapist is very important. As soon as the emotion is fully experienced, the client 'drops through' to the next layer, fully experiences it and immediately 'drops through' to the next layer. This process continues until the client reaches a kind of void, sometimes experienced as a place of no identity, sometimes as black. The void is often difficult to penetrate. Passing through this void, Source is reached, experienced in various ways as a place of light, peace, calm, all pervading presence, God. In focusing terms this is the place, beyond the stacked trauma, of which it is said: "I'm fine".

Unlike Focusing, Journey Work makes conscious use of the client's experience of Source as a powerful aid to trauma resolution. With the client established in the awareness of Source, each of the layers of feeling or emotion is revisited, with the result that its debilitating charge is taken out. For example, with one patient a deep fear may appear simply as 'irrational' when viewed in the presence of Source.

Other aspects of Journey Work enable those people associated with a trauma to be identified and forgiven, forgiveness being an action which may totally clear the trauma pattern.

Trauma Energetics

William Redpath's Trauma Energetics requires that the awareness be sharply focused and the ordinary mind put to one side, just as is the case for Focusing and Journey Work. However, the approach of Trauma Energetics is totally different. In Trauma Energetics, experiencing feelings or emotions, or recalling past events do not play any part in trauma resolution. This approach could therefore be the method of choice for clients who fear that to contact trauma patterns would be overwhelming.

The method involves closing the eyes and surveying the field of the mind. A variety of colours may be present, including black, sometimes in diffuse moving forms, sometimes as recognizable shapes. If the awareness is directed at the black areas, using a variety of strategies, the black can be penetrated and resolved into colour, e.g. yellow, green, red, white. The therapist, maintaining touch contact, directs this process and helps the client maintain the focused awareness necessary for it to take place. After the session, the client may well discover that certain problems have resolved, even though they were not directly confronted during the therapy session.

With Trauma Energetics we are working at a causal level. To quote William Redpath: "black is held energy which does not move." It is as if the energetic particles from which substances are made have been compressed under the influence of trauma, black being the colour corresponding to this situation. Direction of the awareness at the black frees the particles, which then reassociate into vibrational forms observed as colours, the intelligence of the body-mind guiding this process.

If a client is able to view their body as colour, areas of energy congestion, e.g. a cancer, will appear as black.[21,22] Sore reflex points can also appear as black. As the reflex points are being worked and the client focuses on the black, they may observe a change from black to bright colour, while at the same the therapist senses softening of the tissue! (See case history). Here we have a remarkable demonstration of changes taking place simultaneously at the causal and physical levels.

We note here that focusing on the black, by directing the awareness, enhances the speed at which the 'stuck' energy is released. A similar effect is achieved using the technique of 'breathing into the tissue', often used in bodywork. [23]

Combining Approaches

In practice, the three approaches to trauma resolution described in outline above often combine as the therapist gains experience in their use. For instance, focusing can be a useful way for the client to approach their first emotional layer, where this is found to be difficult. In focusing work itself, the client will sometimes describe their felt sense as an image rather than with words. If the image is seen in terms of colour and contains black, the way is open for resolution using Trauma Energetics.

Beyond Trauma

With Journey Work we find that Source lies just beyond the layers of emotional patterning; with Trauma Energetics, the process proceeds from black to colours and finally through white to a place beyond colour described as 'clear' or 'translucent' (see case history). To quote William Redpath "At the centre of all black configurations, hidden sometimes in places we would never look at or think were important, we faithfully can find clear, sacred light." A similar observation has been made by Eileen Seymour.[24]

Thus the place where freedom from trauma lies, is very close, just beyond the darkness which appears so overwhelming and impenetrable. To quote Peter Levine: "Trauma, resolved, is a blessing from a greater power."

Case History

Jane is 36 years old, married with two children, one of whom is mentally handicapped. Her childhood was traumatic by any standards. She had six step-fathers, never knew her true father and suffered abuse from at least one step-father. As the eldest child, it was her task to act as a mother to her brother and five sisters, responsible for the ironing at six years old! She describes her mother as evil and avoids contact with her.

Jane came to us in a very poor state of health, feeling desperate about her condition. Over a period of about two years prior to seeing us she developed the following symptoms:

- Depression
- Headaches and panic attacks
- Bad indigestion
- Little desire to eat or sleep, sickness
- Loss of weight and libido; lack of energy
- Feeling of unreality
- Shaking and trembling; unable to stand for long periods
- Feeling of falling down
- Most muscles sore and aching
- Burning feeling under the skin
- Furry tongue (Candida)
- Acne

For seven months we have treated Jane with a combination of herbal medicine, nutritional advice and Polarity Therapy incorporating Focusing, Trauma Energetics and Journey Work.

Trauma Energetics. On one occasion Jane came with a painful lower back and painful, sore shins. She complained that she had not been able to relax in bed the previous night; she could not get comfortable. Testing Polarity reflex points, it was found that neck, spine, sternal, pubic bone, knee and shin reflex points were all sore. Jane was asked to view her body as colour with the eyes closed. With a light touch over the pelvis, the colour was yellow with some red. This immediately changed to black with gentle pressure on the pubic bone. Part of the ensuing exchange was as follows:

Practitioner Is the whole pubic bone black?
Jane There is grey round the black.
Practitioner Get closer. Are you able to get to where the gray meets the black?
Jane Yes, I have yellow!
Practitioner The tissue has relaxed! Stay with the yellow. What colour do you have now? Is it sore?
Jane White, now clear, translucent. It is calm. The bone is described above.

All reflex points cleared in a manner similar to the pubic bone described above. In all cases, as the colour changed from black to white or clear, the soreness dissipated; simultaneously, the practitioner felt the tissue soften. Eventually, the whole body appeared as white except for the head which was black. This changed to white using a cradle hold, with the practitioner focusing on the cerebro-spinal fluid tides.[25] Jane felt very calm.

Jane said that resolution of the soreness was much faster using this method. "You have to concentrate to get through. You get impatient because you want to get through to the other side."

The following night Jane slept extremely well, with more energy the following day than she had experienced for many months.

Journey Work. On one occasion when holding the head in a cradle hold, Jane described her many fears. These included fear of dying: she had seen her Grandmother dying and found one of her step-fathers dead. This was somewhat tied up with this was the feeling of being "Fatherless". She had never met her real Father; this was prevented by her Mother. Jane's view was that "fear must be cleared out affects everything".

Jane used Focusing to identify the feeling in the head which she described as 'upset'. As the therapist held the head, Jane allowed the feeling to intensify and tears began to flow. She then 'dropped through' the layers of emotion:

When Jane reached 'Calm', i.e. Source, the crying stopped. She experienced being peaceful, happy, tranquil, harmonious.

	Upsetness
	Horribleness
	Scared
	Heartache
	Pointless
	Self-pity
	Claustrophobic; can't handle it
	Going Mad
	Nothing
	Calm

At the 'heartache' emotional layer, Jane's Mother had come into view. The therapist suggested that Jane should come to a meeting at a place of unconditional love. She would be present both as the hurt child and as the adult. Jane firmly rejected inviting her Mother to the meeting, she wanted her true Father to be present. Part of the conversation at this meeting was as follows:

Jane I have always wanted to meet you: I love you and have missed you so much. Do you love me?
Father I do love you. I had to leave, had to go. It was horrible for me to go. I had to start a new life elsewhere. I wanted to see you but this was never allowed. So sad.
Jane I have met my Father, I love my Father. I forgive him from the bottom of my heart for what has happened. I am forgiven.

When Jane revisited the different emotional layers whilst remaining in contact with her Source they had changed, e.g. 'self-pity' became 'not relevant' and 'scared' became 'better'. She ended the session feeling bright and happy and announced that during the Summer she intended to seek out her Father.

Over the seven months of therapy Jane's condition has much improved. She no longer has dizzy spells, sleeps well and has put on weight. 'Burning feeling under the skin' and shaking are now rare. Acne and indigestion are better. There is further to go, with loss of libido, muscle ache and occasional depression still a problem. Recently Jane announced that she had been able to go shopping in the supermarket on her own without any panic attacks, the first time for years!

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Further Information

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About Anthony Deavin

Anthony Deavin BSc PhD RPP RCST has a BSc and PhD in chemistry and research experience in the biological sciences. Anthony then studied Ayurveda (Indian Medical Science), qualified in Medical Herbalism, and lectured in Anatomy and Physiology and Pathology. Subsequently he qualified in Polarity Therapy and Cranio-sacral Therapy, and established a Training in Polarity Therapy. More recently, Anthony's focus has shifted to gaining the skills necessary to help his clients overcome the trauma, limiting beliefs and turbulent emotions which prevent them realising their direction and purpose in life. To this end, Anthony has qualified in Journey Therapy and Theta Healing and has studied many other methods, most recently Reference Point Therapy. Anthony now teaches Causal Healing, which integrates all the methods he has studied and practised into one unified approach. His clinic work combines Herbal Medicine, Polarity Therapy and Causal healing.

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