

# Exploring Creativity and Reflection in the Healing Process

Jo Green

*From early in my practice as a massage therapist and healer, I became aware of how the body tightens and creates areas of blocked energy. After training in Swedish massage, mental colour healing and aromatherapy, I studied Biodynamic massage, therapeutic healing and the use of the creative arts. Today I combine biodynamic massage with healing and creative arts in my work with clients.*

## **Biodynamic Massage**

Biodynamic massage recognises that an elaborate system of defence or armouring will be set up from early childhood by the ego to protect the fragile self from pain. The effect is profound both in the physical structure and where internal rhythm will adjust to synchronise with the emotions as with the parasympathetic nervous system, the system associated with respiration, peristalsis and other unconscious processes, which can self-regulate over time. It involves a broad range of techniques that work not only on the level of skin, tissue, muscle and bone, but also

at the more subtle level of the aura to create a homeostasis or balance in the body. Each session is different depending on the client's energy and needs. Before treatment starts, an intention is formulated between client and therapist and reviewed after a period of time. This gives structure and involves the client in their healing process. Intention is also ongoing, as the therapist needs to decide on the best technique to support the client, rhythm (ie energising or sedative), touch that is either nurturing or 'matter-of-fact'. As I listen to the non-verbal signals of the body, the intention may

change, as I illustrate below where I combined healing with the massage.

There are many similarities between biodynamic massage and healing. Hands-on-sensing, (see Jen Altman's article in this issue), is at the heart of both integrative healing and biodynamic massage. In biodynamic work the emphasis is not on the technique used, but on how the body is responding to the touch, and how the client is 'met', their body listened to and validated. The subtle energy work is similar to healing. 'Energy Distribution' is similar to sweeping or cleansing the aura. This technique, rather like sweeping or combing energy down the body from head to toe can be used to energise as the client feels the actual movements - the intention is to re-distribute the energy or it can also be adapted to clear the energy as I recently found. 'Just Holding' is another massage technique which I have used with both massage and healing clients, where the surface of the body is held progressively for the person to feel safe and grounded, where their energy is scattered. The therapy works in depth with the link between mind, body and spirit and non-verbal language is also used as a way of communicating between the conscious and the subconscious.

However, there are also ways in which the two therapies differ. Varying degrees of pressure are used in biodynamic massage where the musculature is very tight, or the client needs a deep pressure to feel supported, unlike healing where the touch is usually very light or the healer

is working off the body. Biodynamic massage looks at the embodiment of stress from a physical as well as an energetic perspective, and how to work with energy that is physically 'charged' where the client may need to express sound or movement physically in order to release the energy. Biodynamic Massage gave me a different approach to healing as I learned to 'tune' into different areas of the body, to be aware of or to scan the body energetically while I work, also gaining a greater awareness of working with the autonomic nervous system, an important part of this practice.

### **Integrating Biodynamic Massage and Healing**

I treat each session differently, always noting as clients are talking before a session how their energy is resonating with me, and where I feel drawn towards working. Two examples illustrate how I integrate massage and healing.

I treated Phyllis for over a year. She had lung cancer and crippling rheumatoid arthritis. I was told when I started that she had six weeks to live. I worked with the gentlest of movements round her arms and a combination of healing colour, holding and light lymphatic drainage on her hips, which were swollen. She really enjoyed the sessions, the feeling that it was 'her' time and that she could tell me what she wanted. The first summer she was very tired, but then the next summer she was able to go outside for short periods and enjoy watching nature. She died peacefully in

her sleep two months later. I shall never forget her courage.

Anne, a woman I have been working with over many years, a charming lady who never grumbled or protested, came to see me recently, justifiably furious about people's behaviour. I started to work with biodynamic massage with a 'matter of fact' touch. As I worked on her legs, I felt they were quite energised and needing to move, a new sensation as previously they had felt vulnerable. I was guided to work on her solar plexus, where I felt a sensation of stress and sadness in my hands. I worked with healing, noting the stress 'melting' under my hands and then continued with gently massaging her head and shoulders. I felt the healing had helped to more fully integrate and validate her process of the many times in her life when she was not heard.

### **Using Creativity**

Body-mind work is fascinating and I find each body has a language of its own. Often a client's body seems to be expressing or reflecting a deep emotion trapped in the body through stiffness or swelling. When as children we are not heard, feelings get buried and tension builds up until eventually the body calls for help. The body has no sense of past or future, so cannot listen to reason, and instead it resonates to intuitive movement, imagery, shape and sounds. When I sense a feeling or even a sound that seems to be coming from a client's body, and reflect it back, there is always a subtle change as

energy is released. Sometimes this can be dramatic as the body starts to feel acknowledged. Kate Williams MacKenzie (this issue) describes the language of the body-mind more fully.

Intuitive movement or authentic movement comes from deep within. It is giving the body permission to move spontaneously, without being controlled by the mind. In bodywork, I tune into a limb, support it and allow the movement to flow. The breath seems to deepen and there is a sense of freedom, as if something has been worked out within the musculature. When a person has a feeling that they are not able to articulate, or are feeling angry, I may suggest that they draw, just allowing their hand to 'free flow' over the paper, noting their rhythm and movement as they work. They feel validated as they see their feelings emerge on the paper

I spent an inspiring and fascinating year at the Institute for Arts in Therapy and Education, where I learned that feelings could be expressed and 'mirrored' through many art forms: how I feel supported by letting a feeling speak through a sound, a brush stroke on paper, the feel of a lump of clay as a shape emerges. I learned to listen to the stories our bodies tell us as we move intuitively and, above all, the way a metaphor can mirror or reflect a feeling when used appropriately. I now often incorporate some elements of creativity when I work with clients. It may be drawing a 'splurgy' picture of their anger or mirroring a movement or reflecting a simple sound.

## Two case studies

Tania came to see me after a partial mastectomy. She had previously undergone surgery on the same breast and had developed a large abscess under this arm. I tuned into her arm and shoulders, asking the arm what it needed. First of all I had the feeling it was asking for connection. I understood from personal experience how the body often feels unconnected after surgery. As I worked with holding and balancing the energy, I received the message that Tania had not asked permission from her body to undergo surgery. I told Tania about this and quietly asked her body if it now gave her permission. After this, the change in the abscess was dramatic as it seemed to shrink before our eyes.

Some years ago, Elizabeth came to see me after she had had a mastectomy and was suffering from lymphoedema in her left arm. I saw her over about six months. She was a woman of independent spirit who was shaken by the experience of the operation; she had also recently looked after her sick husband, who had died of cancer. As I write, I can feel the poignant sensation in my arm that I felt as I started to massage her and connected with the hardship she had suffered. I mirrored to her the feeling that I perceived that 'it had been very hard', and immediately I noticed a subtle change. As I worked I had the strange sensation of wanting to swear which I thought absurd (or I needed treatment myself!). When I told Elizabeth of this impulse, she told me to proceed, and she seemed to relax and come alive during this first session. In the next

session I noticed how she kept cradling her arm as she talked to me before treatment. At the third session, I suggested that her hands might like to have a conversation. I demonstrated the idea of intuitive movement, just allowing the hands to move in their own way. At first the left hand seemed reluctant, moving toward the right very little, then it was as if the right hand, in moving towards it was supporting and encouraging the left. Soon both hands were actively communicating with each other. After this she found a greater movement in her arm - it became part of her again.

Over many treatments the arm told me how much caring it had done. Elizabeth added how she had also cared for her mother who had been ill for a long time. It seemed as though her arm needed to be noticed. There were times when her arm swelled more than others, but she was not as anxious. Then in one session I had an image of a water carrier, possibly from a past life. I asked her if she had ever carried heavy weights. She told me that when she was a child during the war, she had to collect many neighbours' ration coupons, which meant she had to carry a lot of shopping. Her arm told me 'I need to be so big!' So I stretched my hands out to show Elizabeth a size twice as big as her arm. The arm responded - the swelling instantly started to go down. After this session, she seemed to grow in confidence, informing me that she now put the radio on while she was cooking and danced around the kitchen. At her last visit she wanted to know where she could go to a Tea Dance!

## Conclusion

Through working integratively with each client as an individual and above all the importance of using reflection or mirroring to meet what

was missing in childhood, clients can develop a greater sense of themselves and of their own uniqueness. This support and validation enables them to expand the horizons of their own self-healing.

## References

Altman J. (2007) *Releasing the Tangles of Trauma through Body-energy Healing*. Self & Society

Williams McKenzie, K. (2007) *Circles and Boundaries*. Self & Society

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If each one of us did this with just one or two or three of our colleagues, then we would be increasing the awareness of S&S, and through it of AHP(B). If someone likes S&S, they may decide to join AHP(B), which benefits us all – the stronger the membership base, the more secure the future of S&S and AHP(B) become, which means in turn that the increased number of membership fees received will better cover the costs of producing and mailing S&S, which makes it possible to keep membership fees reasonably stable. It is a virtuous circle.

So, if you have enjoyed this issue, please spare a few seconds now to think of who you know who might also appreciate reading it... and when you could pass it on to them.