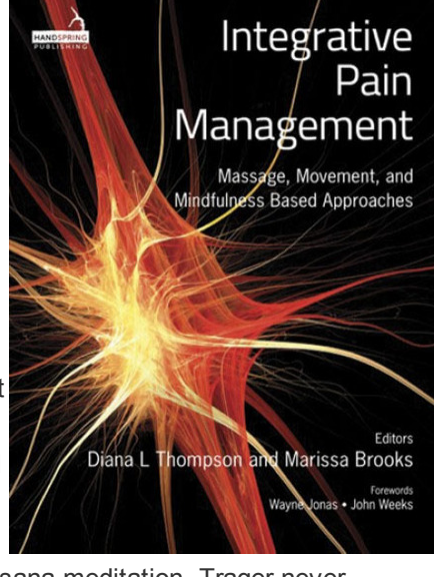


Presencing Issue 59

Touching Pain V Background Story

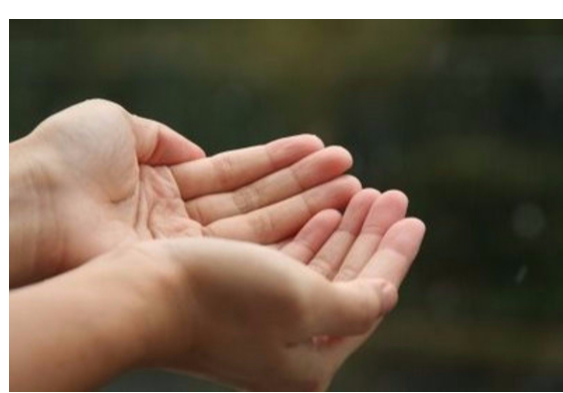


Pain Management: A few years ago I contributed a chapter for the book, Integrative Pain Management, about working with pain from a Trager perspective. The purpose of the book was to acquaint medical practitioners about different alternative therapies; explaining their methods, their underlying philosophies, and relevant case examples. In the last 10 years there has been a growing movement towards integrating alternative modalities with medicine. I am adding some excerpts from that chapter to the Touching Pain series in my Presencing Newsletters.



Trager and Hookup: Sharing the presence of this moment (bodily sensations always occur in the present moment) has infinite possibilities for change. In 1985 when I learned to practice "hookup," (what I call presence) as a Trager student, I realized that there was some resemblance between Milton Trager's teaching and my practice of vipassana meditation. Trager never revealed the origins of his practice of presencing as a core of his personal inner experience, or a key to how he would work with clients. Perhaps it came when he was training his own body as an athlete, perhaps as insight while giving sessions. Years after he started training practitioners, when his own approach in giving sessions became much less physical and the client body movements he was creating became smaller and more subtle, he stated that "Hookup is the work." By that I believe he meant: "Don't pay so much attention to what I am doing with my hands, don't focus so much on the movements. Join me in hookup and then you will really understand the work." Towards the end of his life, not overwhelming the client with technique or expertise became much more important to him..

Weighing Hands: Milton Trager advised that when you feel stuck because you are trying to produce results, step back from the table, weigh your own hands to bring you back into hookup (presence - the sensations of weight happens in the present moment). Then come back in newly refreshed, newly filed with curiosity and creativity. Many bodywork modalities teach never remove contact with the client or she will feel abandoned and you will lose the cumulative benefits of the session. But if you don't remove your hands, clients will credit everything that happens to you. By removing your hands and asking clients to feel into their body; they can start to feel the effects of their own involvement. I was at the last Trager convention Milton attended. During the Q and A period, a practitioner asked: "When I do that move in which we rotate the client's leg around 180 degrees at the hip joint, I always feel this 'klunk' at one part of the movement. What should I do?" Milton replied in his usual terse manner: "Don't." that was all he said. What he was imparting to all of us is: Don't cause pain; don't do movements in ways that overwhelm the client and trigger fear. Don't blindly pursue a goal... Instead follow the shared sensibilities that are arising between you and your client.



Thinking back on Trager: Six months after becoming a Trager practitioner I took a weekend class in giving Trager sessions to clients who were positioned in alternate body positions; sitting in a chair, lying on the floor, and especially side-lying on the table. That started a whole new perspective for me. I personally had some difficulties when receiving the Trager move-routine that I had learned in my first classes, I realized that for me there were some problems inherent in that routine. The first problem was in the neck work. The intricate design of the cervical vertebrae allows our head and neck to move in flexion, extension, rotation, side bending, translation, and combinations of all of those movements. What I noticed in my neck was that unless the practitioner was very practiced, I would often wind up with a stiff neck at the end of sessions. I was told that there was something wrong with me and that I just had to learn to relax and let go. But over time I came to realize that the neck work we were taught was an attempt create various neck movements without knowing the signs and symptoms of neck pathology. Milton's neck work was quite lively and enthusiastic at the time. He'd had many years of practice; learning the anatomy and feeling the subtlety of neck structures and possible movements. Also I had great difficulties in my own and clients' bodies when we were worked vigorously in a prone position. When I received the prone work, I often wound up with low back pain, sinus problems, and especially neck discomfort.

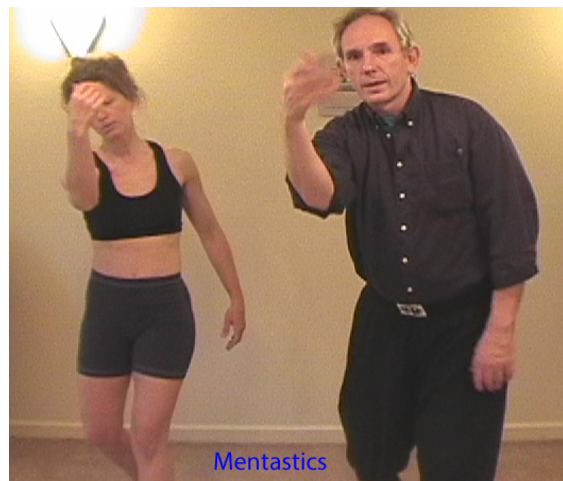


Working on the Side: Thinking back on my introduction to alternative receiving positions, I realized that side-lying positioning, with proper bolsting, was much better than prone. It was not only very comfortable for most clients, but had the potential of correcting most of the difficulties I was noticing with the routine that was taught in Trager classes at the time. I started looking at side-lying positioning as a possible way to adapt some of the aspects of the then Trager routine that were proving questionable. My first five years as a Trager practitioner were a period of testing and development. I was

wondering what other modalities might be added to Trager to enhance our effectiveness with clients. At the early official NW Trager gatherings I was asked to present many of the aspects of side-lying that I had developed. In 1995 I started teaching Reiki at the request of my Trager colleagues and then expanding my classes for licensed bodyworkers. In 1996 I was approved to start teaching: Advanced Side-Lying (later Side-Lying Somatics) as a continuing education elective in the Trager organization

Other Modalities: Like many of my professional Trager colleagues who were earning their living doing bodywork, I realized that we did not know the origins of what Milton was teaching. And when filing insurance claims we needed to know what specific conditions we were trying to alieve with each move. Also, at the state level, we were required to complete a certain number of CEUs each year to maintain our professional license. There were not enough add-on classes in a Trager context to achieve this requirement for myself. I also realized that my Island bodywork colleagues, like myself, faced steep financial and logistical challenges of having to leave the Island to keep up with their CEU requirements. I started bringing teachers to Orcas Island who could give us classes in Craniosacral, Feldenkrais, and Polarity. I also brought my Trager colleague Deane Juhan a few times to present concepts of dynamic anatomy and physiology from his new book Job's Body. Practitioners came from all over the Northwest to attend his classes. Prior to learning Trager I myself had learned Therapeutic Touch, Orthobionomy, hospice work, emergency medical techniques, and vipassana meditation. I drew from those earlier trainings. During those years I added craniosacral and Reiki to my work with clients. I was also exploring Bioenergetics, and Co-counseling and Jungian dream approaches.

Refinement: In the late 1980s Trager practitioners would come to the Island for weekend gatherings at my place, so that we could experiment together sharing the new concepts and body movements we were each exploring in our practice. During that time I was working at an Island resort, where I would work on mostly off-island clients. I would see them once or twice and then they would head back to their homes. I started getting requests to come to where those clients lived so they could receive more work. Those travels also gave me more opportunities to develop my own understandings of how Trager could be used in combination with the other modalities I was learning. It also gave me opportunities to observe clients in their own home environments and wonder how bodyworkers could become more effective in helping clients become more proactive in their body awareness. In Trager we were giving clients homework teaching them Mentastics movements that Trager had developed. We were also aware that, like PT client exercises, many if not most do not do them.



Milton Trager: Trager put the client's body into motion without stimulating pain, fear, or resistance. He used Mentastics for eliciting feeling responses in the client's self-generated movements that bypassed unconscious guarding. He taught clients and practitioners to share a state of presence by feeling weight, by measuring effort, and by giving up "trying." Hookup or presencing became the cornerstone of Trager's approach. He was convinced that pain and inhibition were coming from the client's mind. The basic approaches to changing the mind of the client involve various kinds of somatic interactions between practitioner and client and within the client's own consciousness. Because Trager, was working primarily on Island tourists (Hawaii), he would give them Mentastics movements to take home with them. But he usually had no way to track the effectiveness of those gentle body reminders. After spending time with clients in their home environment I thought: "Could there also be other ways to initiate client participation in their own body awareness and well-being."

New classes start January. Teachers: Deane Juhan, Brian Utting, Anastasia Brensick, Jack Blackburn, others. Classes+dates+locales+fees will be posted in the next few issues of Presencing. Staytuned!



- Open hands
- Open mind
- Open face
- Open heart

Jack Blackburn, LMP, Master's in Theological Studies, Certified Spiritual Director, specializes in body centered spiritual growth and healing. He has been a Trager® practitioner since 1986. He has been a Trager tutor since 1993, has taught Trager electives classes since 1996, and teaches a variety of classes to care giving professionals. He is a NCBTMB Approved Continuing Education Provider and AMTA National Presenter. He is a Focusing Trainer and teaches Bodywork Focusing classes for professionals. Jack is also a Reiki Master and teaches levels I, II, III and Advanced Reiki for Bodyworkers.

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