Exploring Integrative Massage Therapy

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Integrative Massage Therapy (IMT) combines bodywork, conscious psychotherapeutic work, unconscious and spiritual levels together. IMT offers you a safe place to explore what it means to be you, and to allow you to express life more fully in yourself - physically and emotionally, sexually, intellectually and spiritually. You are given support, facilitation and guidance to explore deeper levels of being.

Since IMT is personally tailored for each person, every session is different. Various skills and techniques might be used in the sessions, from body rhythms, touch and massage, through trancework and shamanic journeys, storytelling or healing, to reflective listening or playing. Clients are given a chance to observe patterns and discover new choices in a respectful and supporting way. Some sessions may involve only touch, others only hypnotherapy. However, the therapeutic space is a joint journey, and the client is an active agent in the process, not a passive recipient.

Working with TMJ to unlock holding patterns in jaw and combining it with trancework

IMT draws knowledge and experience from different modalities, including massage techniques and Reichian bodywork, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and hypnotherapy, psychotherapeutic skills and stress management, movement, shamanic work and meridian therapies.

I believe that touch is a basic, fundamental need. We all need to touch and be touched. In IMT sessions, I try to use all the resources I have - from within me and from without - to supply you with all the warmth and love I can give you. Together, we create a bond, from which healing is naturally flowing. This bond is the essence of IMT practice. I am reaching out to touch your innermost needs for connection; I am touching your baby. This space of congruent 'I and thou' is what I aim for. From there, the story will blossom without help.

Although the media throughout which IMT is carried are touch and body, in a way IMT is closer to neuro-linguistic psychotherapy and Ericksonian hypnotherapy, than it is to body-psychotherapy and bodywork approaches. Like NLP and hypnotherapy, the IMT practitioner joins the client's model of the world - realizing that each person perceives the world differently and constructs a unique and valid reality. Joining the client's reality means using the client's own model of reality to facilitate more life, rather than forcing theories upon him or her. In itself, IMT is (as much as possible) empty from theories, and the theoretical and practical input is chosen ad hoc to best suit the client's reality. However, IMT adds to hypnotherapy and NLP the body contact and body-psychotherapy, which bring the body into the equation of transformation; but even more important - touch enhances the therapeutic alliance; the human connectedness grows through touch.

Touch solidifies the I-thou connection, like a strong, beautiful kite. Your two legs are strongly touching the ground and the string is firm and long. You can fly your kite so high that you can explore amazing realms of being, expanding your choices. You can do that because you are firmly held to the ground, because you can come back, because you are allowed to fall. Touch grounds you and strengthens the string; touch invites the earth element in.

Therapy is a ritual, and the different modalities of therapy are different myths. The therapist holds her clients, grounding them to free their energies, so their fantasies would transcend beyond what is known to be possible. In IMT, the grounding is the therapeutic relationship, aided by the therapeutic touch. Together, we warm our hands by the fire, and as you are held the story tells itself; a myth is being created. All the rest are techniques, applied mythologies.

This article tells the story of the myths behind IMT.
In a damp cave and starless night, some woods are lit and the flames of the fire dance. The storyteller sits somewhere in the circle, and a few people join her, listen and listen. The storyteller enchants her listeners; she holds her crowd. The food and fire ground them to earth, the water allows movement. With her mythologies, they are sent to fly, to dream, to fantasize and find their own answers. When the story is finished they slowly get back; some fell asleep and others are tired. They will all change. Hopefully, they will own their changes, but thank the storyteller. The story was the myth of transition, and they understood it in the best way possible for them.

Now, different storytellers tell different stories. Some move dramatically, and their voices are threatening; others tell their listeners to altered states of consciousness; yet others interact with their crowd. Some storytellers only listen inventedly. At times the story will touch the core of your being, shifting everything about you.

At other times a sentence will move something in you; and at times you will remain indifferent. When is a story good? How do you know which fire to join?

There are thousands of different models of therapy or healing, and they all work with some success with some but limited with other people. To date, nobody has found the model that will be all encompassing, that will fit all the problems, all the people. How could it be? Can it be that 'the theory' or 'the therapy' hasn't been found just yet? I think not. We are theory proof creatures; no single system will ever explain us fully. We are non-linear and multi-parallel beings, and we respond to different models of reality (different myths) inasmuch as they appeal to our whole being, inasmuch as they make sense to us - at the moment.[1]

Let me give you a simple example, by examining migraine headaches under different therapeutic models. Migraines can be a circulation or nervous system problem, and can be eased with medication.[2] They can stem from cervical muscular tension or orbital strain, which can be relieved with massage, stretching or aromatherapy.[3] Migraines may be the result of chronic holding patterns (or armouring), manifesting an inability to express longings, in which case relearning healthy body patterns and emotional discharge might be applied in the form of body psychotherapy, physical manipulation, psychotherapy or even imagery techniques.[4] Migraines can be psychosomatic responses to trauma, guilt, fear, anger or depression and can be helped with relaxation or stress-management techniques, through dealing with the core problem or symptomatically,[5] they can be solved using uncovering hypnotic techniques or submodalities change (NLP) or by gaining conscious insight to their reason.

Migraines can be allergic responses and might be helped with nutritional change and immune system strengthening.[5] They can be manifestations of 6th or 7th chakra blockages or energetic disturbances and can be substantially eased with energy work and chakra alignment.[6] Migraines can stem from pressure on the spinal nerves and be taken care of by hard-tissue manipulation.[5] They may even be a result of past life trauma kept in the body, and relieved with past life regression.[7] Enough? There are so many models, under so many doctrines - and they are all helpful at times and limited at others.

Although IMT uses many practical and theoretical models, it offers no new understanding about how we work, how body, mind and spirit interact or how energy is used. All we do is create a therapeutic bond, and wait. The therapist will metaphorically find a sheltered space and arrange the fire and the food; he or she will watch the person sit and invite the story to come. And the storyteller will let the story of the client tell itself.

In IMT, the therapist joins her client's reality - by accepting the local mythology - and together we look for a better structure, a creative way for the story to expand. IMT can therefore be goal oriented, process oriented or both; short term or long term; difficult (no pain no gain), fun (enjoying growth) or both. Sometimes the therapeutic framework is very ordered (weekly or fortnightly sessions) and at other times the clients come when they need to. The question I ask myself as a therapist is what would be the most elegant, most ecologic and lasting way of promoting expansion of life. Then, I try to follow what the client and my heart were answering. At times the IMT practitioner would be provocative, intensively intervening and challenging; at other times the therapist would be accepting and reflecting, bringing little personal input.

The Story Tells Itself

When I was preparing this article, my space was restless. Ideas, feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations kept pulsating strongly in me, and sometimes it was just too much to handle. How can I contain it all? It takes some time to tolerate high levels of excitation, of life energy, and my wife's support was to hold me as I pulsated. A few nights ago, just before falling asleep, I told my wife, "You know, sometimes I think that at the end of the day all the techniques, interventions and theories I work with are faceades; it's just the fact that I love my clients that gives them permission to transform." "Of course," she said, "but you cannot just sit there and love them for an hour, you need to put it in a context, to realize it."

John Grinder, co-founder of neuro-linguistic programming, has claimed that all psychotherapies are rituals, aiming to bring congruency between therapist and client about what they are doing. The rest is relatively insignificant.[8]

And indeed, while the context of IMT sessions constantly changes - from soothing massage or deep tissue work, through cathartic emotional discharge to past life explorations (and usually combinations of these and more) - the I-thou contact is the thing that stays solid; a focal point in the therapeutic space. Here I am, for you, willingly giving you love, so you can find your own way to grow.

A little girl walks on a fence, reaching out to hold my hand so she could walk fearlessly; a baby is securely embraced in the womb; a solid; a focal point in the therapeutic space. Here I am, for you, willingly giving you love, so you can find your own way to grow.

IMT explores the patterns and context of a person (and of a problem) and, through trusting the unconscious processes, experience and constant trial and error we find the best story (the most efficient myth) to tell. A typical matrix of a problem is usually quite complex, and to choose consciously the best therapeutic modalities is extremely complicated and confusing, so I don't. In practice, all that is needed is trust (in love, in unconscious processes, in god). When there is love, when the client and therapist are both willing to trust the client's own resources for change - the choices will be made effortlessly. It takes courage to accept the dynamic energetic movement, to surrender to the life principle.

When the client gets to taste how sweet life is, the thriving part of her will become hungry, and the therapist need do nothing but hold the client's hand as she follows her nose into life.

Can It Be Your Story?

IMT is most effective when working with a systemic problem. Of course, the bodywork aspects of IMT can be helpful for plenty of physiological and psychosomatic problems. The hypnotherapy and neuro-linguistic psychotherapy aspects of IMT can aid with emotional or psychodynamic difficulties. People seek help for chronic pains and chronic disease, for migraines and skin diseases, for phobias and habit control. However, IMT is probably most influential in cases where one system of explanation (one story) is just too narrow. I found IMT mostly helpful to sufferers from depression and sexual difficulties, distorted self-image and body image, to people with eating disorders and people with a history of abuse. Those are usually generic and more life-encapsulating problems, requiring a non-specific approach more than a firmly conceptualized theory and practice. In helping these people, IMT can
be revealed with its full transformational power.

But IMT can also be an interesting therapeutic journey for people who didn't suffer unbearable childhood traumas. If you are looking to live more fully, in your mind, body and spirit, the journey of IMT might be for you. If you find your values and limits compelling and confounding difficulties in your life, IMT might help you. If, for whatever reason, you don't express life as fully as possible - intellectually and emotionally, physiologically and sexually, spiritually and practically - in relationships or at work, the journey of IMT might be an interesting exploration for you.

If you are willing to explore your life stories, to own them and to dare to transcend them to create new enchanting ones, you will surely benefit from IMT.

**Taming Wild Horses: A Case Study**

Eric, an extremely successful and creative man in his mid-thirties, sought help for his reoccurring panic and anxiety attacks. He had an incredible amount of creative energy, and just as much fear in him. For many years, Eric visited in his mind places of horror, shame and fear that had cumulated to a pivotal moment. One day everything climaxed: where excessive lifestyle, immensely paralysing panic attack, paranoia and sadness all peaked at the same time. From that moment, five years ago, and onwards Eric fought and succeeded to change his life and lead himself into a healthier, happier self. And yet, these extreme mood swings and fears haven't ceased.

I have seen Eric for seven sessions spread over ten weeks.

Eric has sporadically suffered from these paranoid anxiety attacks for over twenty years, manifesting in palpitations and frightening thoughts, terrible nightmares and a feeling of doom. What people said, did or thought had an immense effect on how he felt, on the way Eric perceived himself. While his daily life was that of success, prosperity and liveliness, his fears and dreams carried an apocalyptic nature of doom, murderous suffering and lucid reality. He would wake up from these nightmares tragically sad.

Eric didn't need any help with conscious understanding of his situation; he was perfectly capable of analysing his problems on a cognitive level. All the same he was hiding in his body, breathing shallowly and smiling very little; his eyes kept moving, as if looking for something, or aspiring to a safe place. His body was collapsed and controlled.

Because of the intensity of his feelings, Eric became afraid of them. His decision-making was very dry and clinical, and he wanted more than that. Finding himself increasingly in the media spotlight heightened his anxiety and sensitivity. This catalysed his questioning not only his career choice but also his fundamental role in society. Eric started dating a new girlfriend, and these fears prevented him from fully being himself with her. “These fears,” he said, “are lowering my energy flow, and when I get this energy flowing I'm unstoppable, I'm disciplined and creative.” And he needed these energies, because he is a writer; he needed them because they could change his life, because he wanted to be with his girlfriend and at the same time be free of anxiety.

When we triggered, through touch and hypnosis, the future feeling of aliveness and flow, of pulsating energy and containment, Eric was bewildered. It tapped exactly into the unstoppable sources of energy in him; the roarring herd of his wild horses are all his.

With his vivid imagination, Eric created a safe place, and this peaceful house on a hill, with a young woman whispering to him, "Don't worry, it's all so insignificant", was a place he came back to many times, consciously and unconsciously, intentionally and unintentionally. His virtuous imagination was, this time, harnessed to help him.

Through regression work we explored Eric's nightmares and fears, stemming from being abandoned and secluded as a child, and from a chain of a few traumatic, claustrophobic incidents at a very young age. We have relived the horrific panic attacks from a distant place, changing elements (submodalities), and sequences (strategies), and bringing the little frightened boy into his own safe place. Eric has integrated the little boy with the man he was. Not surprisingly one of his dreams is to set up a charity for young children.

When Eric tasted his ideal safe place, when he experienced it in his body and mind, I knew that a pulling motion was created and the movement towards life began. All it needed was taming, direction and facilitation.

Together we cleared fear from his body, loosening the intercostal muscles (between the ribs) and creating pressure - Eric's breath expanded and released. Together with breathing fully, emotions surfaced and were expressed - sadness and anxiety, years of frustration and exhaustion. With support, Eric's body was softly sinking into an infant space of being nurtured and growing healthier, of asking for help, receiving it and taking it in.

Gradually Eric's fears decreased, he learned to contain them more. Noticing when an anxiety is approaching, Eric could stop it in the earlier stages. His image was one of taming horses, gathering them into a safe place. It was a process, and Eric wasn't still perfectly grounded in his ability to do that, but as time went by he became better; learning to be the master of his mind and a leader of his herd is a lifelong journey.

In the process of working together Eric experienced extreme panic attacks, but surprisingly emerged out of them much quicker than he ever did before; he survived. Together with balancing his fears, Eric became clearer about his vocation, and started thinking of changing his financially rewarding job into something that would satisfy the whole of him.

To enable these structural changes, and deepen his freedom from anxiety, I've guided Eric to embark upon a journey into the depths of his soul. Guided by a panther, his totem animal, and with expanding energies in his stomach, Eric visited his soul. A fearful boy was handed the gift of panther eyes, so no boy would dare pick on him again; his legs sprouted firm roots into the earth, as Eric grew stronger. The boy was no longer afraid. In a magical pond, a golden coin waited for him to fly and sparkle it down to earth, bringing change unto his soul-land.

Eric learned to integrate these virtues: his feet got bigger, sending roots deeper; his eyes were the eyes of a fearless, wise panther, his child and adult one at the core. Eric's life calling henceforward pulsated stronger; life was calling for him to take it.

Deep tissue massage was implanting the structural changes in Eric's body. The toxicity and fear were disappearing from the muscles as his chest expanded. Eric's energy was the flowing energy of water, the beaming energy of fire, and he needed containing. I gave Eric the touch of earth to nurture the water and contain it, and to create a holding place for the fire. I gave Eric the touch of air to enrich the water and allow movement, to feed and stabilize the fire. Eric's relationship with his girlfriend deepened; his ability to contain his fears grew. His thoughts were his, and as Eric learned to ground himself a deeper, yet more profound change, was taking place inside.

The time came for Eric to start to expand the circle of his actions. His self-hypnosis practice was very helpful, and he started balancing beyond deficiency, towards growth. Deep trance carried Eric further into his dreams, into his fantasy - into his parallel universe. Deep bodywork carried Eric further into himself, into realizing his abilities, into growing.

Eric went on holiday with his girlfriend, and although there were anxiety-provoking experiences, he stayed calm. "These panicking thoughts,” he said, “are no longer dominating my life.” Eric started to shift his energies into doing what he really wanted; he got back to writing; he plans for the future. The integration journey we took was done with touch and trance, and Eric travelled into a place of
solidity and calmness, whereupon rested the freedom to define himself as he wished. A wise person gave him the gift of water and Eric was allowed a glimpse into his future. Yet another mountain is to be climbed, another scenery to be seen. This time, Eric can take his map and walking stick, his panther and compass; on these future journeys, Eric doesn't need me any more.

References


Further Reading

Sleep
Spiritual
Loneliness
Dementia
Erectile Dysfunction
Music
Gardening
Menopause
Gluten
Chaga
Mistletoe
Neuromuscular
Neck Back Pain

http://www.positivehealth.com/issue/issue-251-

January-2019


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