

Mind & Body

by Todd Fiorentino

Compartmentalizing Versus Assimilation

While this may seem like an overly academic heading, I think these are important concepts to understand as they relate to bodywork. Many of us have experiences that we haven't yet reconciled mentally so in order to continue functioning in the world we compartmentalize. We set that experience aside to deal with later. Eventually, we may assimilate this experience and find the proper context to put it. Often some kind of self-justification process goes to work at this point.

Sometimes we compartmentalize so many things that it becomes difficult to function. We start to internalize events, and think to ourselves: 'there is no reason or explanation for this, the world doesn't make sense, people are bad...' or whatever the case may be. I find that being aware of these two mental processes/techniques helps me to avoid being overwhelmed and remember to put things in their place. Writing (unsent letters, diaries, etc.) can help or talking to a friend.

In fact, I believe it was Hemingway that said, "I write in order to put things away."

The Emotion Basis of Muscular Pain

During a recent massage session, my client said, "Right there, that's where I put everything." This was a very wise statement because many therapists believe that emotions are stored in the body. When a therapist works to facilitate a release, they are releasing the muscles, but in doing so—they release that emotion, that feeling that someone is holding onto. Holding patterns can be very telling. For instance, many people seem to close up, their shoulders come forward to protect their heart.

It's hard to be open to the world, and yet, we must be in order to experience it fully.

How can only five moves bring so much relief?

Swedish massage, which is the standard modality that therapists are trained in, really only involves five moves. Remarkable isn't it? But there are so many variations on each one and often two or three may meld into each other as the therapist injects their own personal style into the massage. Who the therapist is often comes across in the massage even though no words are spoken. And sometimes, we can sense certain things about a client's state of being.

Holding moves, such as grounding and centering, not only create a beginning and end for a massage session, these moves also allow you to check in with yourself and your client.

Empathy, Intention, Energy

Empathy, intention and energy are three of the most important aspects of massage therapy, I believe. Do you really want to help this person? Do you understand that they have been through a lot? I find that for every hour of massage that I do, I should be doing ½ hour of some type of energy-building activity such as exercise, yoga or meditation. What are you doing to keep your energy high so that you have something to give? Horst Rechelbacher, who founded Aveda, suggests a whole program in the morning for self-care in his book, “Daily Rituals.”

Horst also states that we should “be like a dart” moving toward our goals in the world.

What a wonderful parting thought...