

This, That & the Other Thing

By Todd Fiorentino

I know a woman with sciatica who recently saw a doctor for her pain. The doctor essentially prescribed sleeping pills for her problem, the idea being, I guess, that if you're asleep, you're not in pain. I wish I were making this stuff up. I continue to tell people that for muscular or soft tissue dysfunction, your best bet is really to see a doctor of osteopathy, physical therapist or massage therapist. Doctors, and even chiropractors for that matter, are just not the experts here. Massage therapists also are quite versed on the nervous system—an added benefit.

As a therapist, you sometimes find yourself asking: Why has this person come to me at this particular time? Without delving too far into a philosophical conversation about fate, it's just true that you meet certain people through out your life who push you in the right (or wrong) direction. Sometimes we need to do wrong before we can get it right. I'm not saying that everything is pre-determined or that all encounters are rosy and will take you down the path of spiritual enlightenment. But there are some very special people in the world who can help us toward the path of self-realization. As you reach it yourself, it becomes your obligation to help others along.

I saw an ad the other day for a massage school in Manhattan, which emphasized how massage bridges the gap between cultures, strengthening our connection to others in the world. This cultural connection, this broadening of cultural understanding and healing is a fascinating idea as it relates to massage. I remember working on an older Korean woman and feeling a profound sense of sadness during the massage. I put the feelings away in my mind so that I could finish the session, but at one point I was almost overwhelmed by grief and emotion. Was it something in her past that I was coming into contact with? Was it our American history of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, somehow enmeshing Korea with Japan in my head? Hard to say, but in massage, we are coming into contact with the emotional self of others. Some therapists are quite good at separating themselves from others despite close contact. You can see it in their demeanor and the way they talk to clients. I have also seen therapists shake-out their hands after a session as if the client's energy were dripping from their fingertips. Not a bad idea.

Massage continues to bewilder and enliven me. Remarkably, even though we all learn the same Swedish moves and similar techniques, each therapist has their own style. Where does it come from? It's almost like asking where does personality come from? I believe that it is the power of the ages. Let me explain. Each of us comes from a family lineage. I'm sure you've noticed that some people seem to be just "good with their hands." And yet, a woodworker, for instance, isn't automatically going to be a wonderful therapist, even with the training. So what is it?

Your family may teach you empathy, which is important for massage. It may also teach you to treat everyone the same and not to judge. These are also important traits. But what I'm getting at is that your energy has been transferred from your parents who got it from their parents. I don't know if it's programmed into your genes, but I do believe that

some people have healing powers. It may be that everyone could develop them, just like psychic ability, but there is a range. What's so amazing about the world is that we each have different skill sets that we are predisposed for. You have your technical people; your ideas people; and so on down the line. Human resources departments discuss this idea in great depth. You need the right mixture for your team.

Society is the same way, which is why self-knowledge and self-awareness are so critical. I used to set out to try anything that I thought I was bad at, the idea being that I could improve my skills. This wasn't a terrible idea and I did learn a few things, but now I realize that I had it all wrong. It's okay to have certain strengths and to play to them. The difficulty is that society rewards vocations unevenly. Many people, I believe, become doctors or lawyers when they really aren't that interested in healing or justice. They want prestige, money and power. Later in life, they realize that they are not making decisions for themselves or for the good of the world. Power of the ages is almost a cliché, and yet, I really see it in my family. We are teachers and communicators and writers and dreamers and healers. Idea people, in short. What are you?