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**Feeling Something Better**

The receiver must first feel something different and better in order to establish and develop a different and better pattern. If I am always anxious, I cannot change fundamentally until I have felt calm and peacefulness. If I am uncomfortable, I cannot change until I experience comfort. Once I have experienced a better sensation, the possibility of returning to that improved feeling state will always be available.

Psychologists would refer to this approach as fostering positive change through state dependent learning, memory, and behavior, a kind of conditioning in which associations are developed between positive feeling states and improved bodily functioning. By returning later to the positive feeling state, the body then automatically returns to its improved functioning. This new learning counteracts body learning received under more stressful conditions which may have become associated with bodily tension, holding, guarding, or weakness and paralysis.

**Mind to Mind Feeling**

Thinking about comfort, relaxation, peace, and ease of movement are not the same as feeling them, although the mind is used in both thinking and feeling. We can think of feeling as the ground state out of which the thinking, planning, and analysis functions of the mind emerge. But to "feel" feeling is another kind of experience. When the mind and body are at rest and in peace, we experience a feeling state which is evident not only to us but to those around us.

All of us can sense the presence of a person who is internally comfortable and at peace; the feeling that person exudes can even be contagious. In the Trager approach, the contagiousness of such a state is used purposefully, and therapeutically, by the practitioner for the benefit of the receiver. It is brought close through touch and other sensations, the better to be transmitted to the mind of the receiver, where it is felt and "caught" and where it produces corresponding

changes in the body.

**The Tissues are "Dumb"**

Muscles, connective tissue, and bone do not think; they merely sense and relay their sensations to the central nervous system. Changes in those tissues are directed by higher centers of the organism. The changes can be instantaneous, brought about by a reflex arc to and from the spinal cord, or by thoughts, desires, and feeling states. And the muscles and other tissues become servants to those messages from the higher centers.

**How Should It Be?**

Practitioners use their own state-dependent learning and memory to bring about personal changes in their body states. By asking internally and recalling the state of peaceful, relaxed, and light free movement, their own bodies respond, becoming soft, graceful, easy, and comfortable. Even the enquiry must be made easily, without demand but with the expectation of a response, to facilitate retrieval of the desired feeling state.

And the same questions are asked in relation to the receiver, while messages of free, easy, soft, smooth, pleasant, effortless, balanced, responsive, and graceful motion are continuously and repeatedly being transmitted to the receiver. What is soft? What is light? What is free? And what is softer than that? And what is lighter? What is freer?

**It's Like the Measles**

"You catch it from someone who has it," Milton says.

A feeling can be as contagious as a yawn. The practitioner loads the atmosphere with the "virus" of relaxation, peace, and flowing movement. Every action, every word, every touch is filled with it, until the receiver catches it and "comes down" with it.

**Recalling the Feeling**

"I was lying on the table and I felt really good and it felt like.....Well.., how did it feel?" Like a hypnotic suggestion, the recollection of the feeling of the Trager approach brings with it the entire experience and the desirable behaviors associated with it.
Sometimes the act of asking the question is enough by itself to bring the recollection; at other times, a simple movement of an arm or a leg in the manner it was moved during a Trager session reproduces the experience throughout the body.

Each time the feeling is recalled, the body reproduces the improvements it learned when that feeling was initiated. The more recall is used in this way, the easier it becomes to return to the more desirable state.

**No Technique**

The Trager approach is based on feeling and response. If nothing is felt, then nothing happens. If something better is felt, it may be completely unnecessary to touch the receiver or teach anything. While standardized movements are taught and commonly practiced, they are never routinized. Each person brings a different body and a different history.

The practitioner feels what the receiver brings and acts accordingly, responding only to what he or she feels. When a positive response is felt in the receiver's body, then the work is accomplished. That may take an hour or a second, one session or many, depending on the development of the practitioner and the nature of the problems the receiver brings. New movements may be created on the spot if they are appropriate to the unique individual receiving the work.

## TECHNIQUE

Now that the foregoing caveat has been stated, it is possible to introduce and describe specific ways the practitioner works, using the Trager approach. But no amount of technique produces change. Techniques and movements have been developed because they help the receivers to pick up feelings and change themselves in a positive direction.

### Structure and Function

First, the approach is functional, rather than structural. While practitioners learn anatomy and use their knowledge of it, their goal is not to re-align or reposition the body. They want the receiver to be able to perform any and all movements comfortably, painlessly, and pleasurably. They constantly observe and feel what is moving and what is not, how it moves or does not move. They seek an easy balance rather than a so-called "right" posture which often produces unnecessary muscular tension.

Thus the approach is free-form and seeks to free the form of the body. It is for that reason that the Trager Institute has as its logo the Chinese characters which represent a dancing cloud.

### Pain

The Trager approach is painless. The receiver is instructed to notify the practitioner of any pain which is produced or increased during a session. The many people who live by a "no pain/no gain" worldview, or who are otherwise accustomed to tolerating pain, often find this an extremely difficult instruction to comply with. In addition to their basic desire to "do no harm" which is inherent in their approach, practitioners exclude pain from the work so as not to reinforce the harmful patterns which receivers bring with them. Pain produces guarding which is tissue tension. After a session, the practitioner cautions the receiver not to look for the pain. Often when there is pain relief as a result of the work, the receiver immediately wants to see how far he or she can move a previously painful part before the pain returns. This again reinforces the harmful pattern and undoes some of the just-completed work.

## Tablework

The two major components of the approach are tablework and movement education, which Milton calls Mentastics (mental gymnastics). In the tablework portion, the receiver lies on a padded table wearing loose clothing, or undergarments only if the person feels comfortable that way. If the receiver finds it hard to lie down, it is possible to adapt this portion of the work to the sitting position or other positions.

The practitioner may work on a problem area and related parts only, or may do a fullbody session lasting up to one and a half hours. In a full-body session, the receiver begins in the supine position.

The practitioner typically works first with the head and neck, moving then to the lower limbs, followed by work on the belly, chest, and arms. The receiver then turns over, and the practitioner works the back of the lower limbs, then the shoulders, back and pelvis. The receiver turns over once more, and the practitioner finishes by returning briefly to the head and neck.

## Mentastics

Before or after the tablework session, or both, the practitioner demonstrates and has the receiver learn and practice some extremely simple movements designed to recreate the feeling of the tablework movements. These then can be used at any future time to help with specific problems or to evoke the relaxed and freely moving state felt during the session.

Some practitioners offer regular Mentastics classes to small groups, without the tablework component. The practitioner may use verbal imagery to help the receiver get the feeling of the movement. All movements are accomplished in an easy and playful way, without effort or undue emphasis.

The practitioner draws from specific movements which Milton has taught or devises new movements and images to fit the needs of the receiver. All of the movements are designed to make the receiver more aware of body and mind sensations. They promote balance, grace, and coordination, and they reinforce feelings of elongation, lightness, and easy looseness.

Mentastic movements are not exercises in the traditional sense. There is no specific number of repetitions, no specific length of time to practice them. As in the tablework, once the response is felt, the job is done. The movements can be used easily during the day. They require no special clothing or equipment; they are generally small and subtle and thus do not attract undue attention. Their purpose is to evoke the positive sensations which allow the body to move comfortably and easily.

**Feeling the Tissue**

During the tablework, the practitioner assesses and treats at the same time, by feeling the body tissues. The tissue should feel light, soft, and vibrantly toned, almost fluffy to the touch, throughout the body. It should move easily. Practitioners use their entire hand to encompass and give security to every area that is touched; the hands are soft sensors which impart the very feeling that the receiver's tissues should have.

Movement is initiated by the practitioner's entire body weight, not by the muscular activity of the arms alone.

**Feeling the Weight**

The capacity to feel body weights, the practitioner's and the receiver's, is essential to the effectiveness of the practitioner. The improvement of the receiver depends also on the development of his or her capacity to feel body weights, to become intimately familiar with them, especially during the Mentastics work. The practitioner lifts an arm or a leg and feels the weight of it. If the receiver unconsciously uses muscular activity to prevent gravity from letting its full weight rest in the practitioner's hand, then the practitioner has more work to do.

Throughout the session, the practitioner feels the weights of the body. When they are fully in hand, then the tissues are relaxed. Likewise, the practitioner constantly attends to his or her own body weights, appreciating their relation to gravity and balance, using those weights to maintain personal comfort and ease and convey those qualities to the receiver. In the Mentastics work, the practitioner teaches receivers to feel their own body weights and how to give the weight up to gravity at will.

This is one of the most difficult lessons to learn for those who are convinced they must use effort to accomplish anything important. Letting the lower limb drop out of the pelvis, letting an arm simply fall to the side, may be profound and novel experiences for many.

**The Weights "Feed" the Hands**

While continuously feeling the weights of the body, the practitioner begins to set them in motion during the tablework. The head is rolled side to side, or the leg is rolled, or the arm is swung, always in the directions of natural body movement, and only within the range of motion where the movement is free and easy. Sometimes the free range of motion is extremely limited; sometimes there is no range of motion. In such cases the practitioner returns to feeling the weight until a release by the receiver allows the possibility of greater motion.

Each time the practitioner moves a body part in one direction, he or she allows that part to return by its own momentum and weight. That same weight, once in motion, can be used to sustain movement in both directions with very little action on the part of the practitioner. It can be used as well to extend the motion further, once the receiver's muscles release to allow the extended motion. The moving weight of parts of the body also set other parts in motion, like a resonant wave rippling outward.

A leg rolling back and forth on a table, for example, sets the foot into a free waggling motion. The momentum of that leg and foot "feeds" the hands of the practitioner. Before long, it is as though the body is moving itself without any effort by the practitioner.
Such internally generated and effortless motion allows more and greater releases by the receiver, and greater motion, until the body is moving with complete freedom.

## Finding the Body's Rhythm

Big bodies move differently from little bodies; big body parts move in a different tempo than small parts. Practitioners feel for the most natural frequency of the part being rhythmically moved, and they move in sync with that frequency, forming a resonant system with the receiver which allows optimal energy transfer. The rhythm lulls the receiver into a calm and peaceful state, so that the conscious mind does not interfere with the letting go of the tissues.

Frequently, a receiver who is unused to letting go in this way tries to consciously anticipate and control the movement, to "get it right."
Practitioners feel this unneeded effort immediately, as it causes the rhythm to break and fragment. They then return to smaller motions until the rhythm is re-established. The lulling rhythms often bring back to the receiver some of the earliest sensations of infancy and childhood, as the rocking--especially of the back and pelvis--continues.

Years of tight holding patterns often fall away as the rhythm works externally and internally, until the body comes to rest, calm yet alive and vibrant.

## The Integrating Wave

Trager movements, in the tablework and during Mentastics, are characteristically curving and wavelike, without clear edges and boundaries. They are smooth and they are smoothing when they touch the receiver's body. They elongate and they expand and open out, away from the midline. They rock, they roll, they shimmer the tissue and make the muscles bounce lightly. They open the joints through gentle traction and by allowing body weights to be acted on by gravity.

Most importantly, Trager touch and movement integrate the different parts of the body, and they integrate mind and body through feeling.

Practitioners notice how the movement of one part affects and resonates with other parts of the body, and they work toward that integration from head to toe. In the tablework, for example, the practitioner moves from shoulder to back to pelvis to shoulder to back, joining them in feeling, giving receivers a sense of their body as a unified and coordinated whole.

Mentastics movements are likewise never jarring or abrupt, but always graceful and smooth. While walking, the person's feet sink into the ground with a rolling motion or touch it lightly as the body casually shifts its weight from side to side. The person is taught to rise from a chair with the flow of the incoming breath, to lift an arm and let it flutter down in a gravity-drawn spiral.

Each such movement allows the person to experience the unity of all the body parts.

**What is Half of That?**

The Trager practitioner uses less to produce more. The approach increases body awareness, opening the mind to greater subtlety of sensation. Where there is excessive tension, excessively forceful action, an appropriate self-enquiry is, "What is half of that?"
And the same question can be asked after each repetition of a motion. It is a useful question for the practitioner and the receiver alike, as both are prey to modern society's overly emphatic, goal-oriented, and pressured style of accomplishment.

The most natural vibration, the most resonant frequency, no more that that, is the right amount. Adding to it does not improve it. How much energy is required to offset the effect of gravity? And what is half of that? All motions become more balanced, graceful, pleasurable--and more efficient--when such awareness is present; yet it can be the most difficult thing to teach.

Here again, the practitioner imparts it by embodying it.

**Resistance**

In the opening session at one of the International Trager conferences, a practitioner pleadingly asked Milton for help. "Lately I've been bumping up against resistance," she said, introducing her topic. Milton interrupted her, "Well, stop bumping up against it." Confused, she tried to continue. "But what do I do?" she persisted. Without a moment's pause, Milton replied, "Say 'excuse me'".

When there is resistance to movement, practitioners do not break through it. They simply do less, until nothing remains to be resisted. At that point the body typically lets go and more movement becomes available. The message of safety and security is thus continuously delivered and the response is not long in coming.

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**Comment : Definitive article on the Trager® Approach - Part II**

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