

Therapeutic Artistry

by John F. Barnes, PT

To ask how the mind communicates with the body, or how the body communicates with the mind assumes that the two are separate entities. My experience has shown me that they are a single unit. The body is not just a reflection of the personality -- it is the personality.

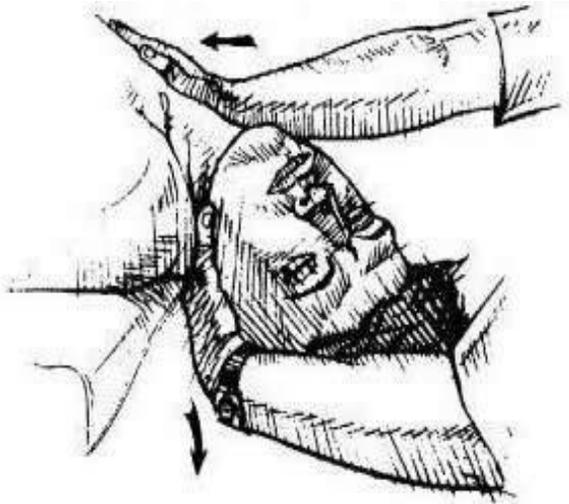
Therefore mind-body awareness are two sides of the same coin, different aspects of the same spectrum, inseparable, connected, influencing and communicating constantly. Myofascial release techniques and myofascial unwinding allow for the complete communication necessary for healing and true growth. I believe that the body remembers everything that ever happened to it.

The link between mind-body awareness and healing is the concept of state-dependent memory, learning and behavior (also called *deja vu*). We have all experienced this. For example, when a certain smell or the sound of a particular piece of music creates a flashback phenomenon, producing a visual, sensorimotor replay of a past event or important episode in our lives with a vividness as though it were happening at that moment.

I would like to expand this theory to include position-dependent memory, learning and behavior, in which the structural position of the body in space is the missing component in the state-dependent theory.

Studies have shown that during periods of trauma people make indelible imprints of experiences that have high levels of emotional content. The body can hold information below the conscious level, as a protective mechanism, so that memories tend to become dissociated or amnesic. This is called memory dissociation, or reversible amnesia. The memories are state-or position-dependent and can therefore be retrieved when the person is in a particular state or position. this information is not available in the normal conscious state, and the body's protective mechanisms keep us away from the positions that our mind-body awareness construes as painful or traumatic.

It has been demonstrated consistently that when a myofascial release technique takes the tissue to a significant position, or when myofascial unwinding allows a body part to assume a significant position three-dimensionally in space, the tissue not only changes and improves, but also memories, associated emotional states and belief systems rise to the conscious level. This awareness through the positional reproduction of a past event or trauma allows the individual to grasp the previously hidden information that may be creating or maintaining symptoms or behavior that deter improvement. With the information now at the conscious level, the individual is in a position to learn what holding or bracing patterns have been impeding progress. This release of the tissue, emotions and hidden information creates an environment for change that is both consistent and effective.



Memories are state, or position-dependent and can therefore be retrieved when the person is in a particular state or position

The physician or therapist using the myofascial unwinding process acts as a facilitator, following the body's inherent motions. When a significant position is attained, the cranosacral rhythm will shut down into a still point. During this still point a reversible amnesia surfaces, replaying all the physiologic responses, memories and emotional states that occurred during a past traumatic event. This dissociation, or reversible amnesia, is a "double-conscious state." What is learned or remembered at the time of trauma is dependent on the psycho-physiologic state of the individual at the time of the experience.

This block between the conscious and subconscious minds is the source of many poor or temporary therapy results. Myofascial release and myofascial unwinding bring the tissue or body part into a position to allow the individual to be fully aware of this divided consciousness. Reactivating the conditions and the resultant physiologic responses during which they were acquired by this flashback phenomenon allow for conscious awareness and then provide the choice to change.

New neurobiologic research and Hans Selye's classic work are concerned with the phenomenon of state dependent memory, learning and behavior. State-dependent memory, learning and behavior is the general class of learning that takes place in all complex organisms that have a cerebral cortex and a limbic-hypothalamic system, and Pavlovian, Ian and Skinnerian conditioning are specific varieties of it.

1. There is a memory trace on the molecular-cellular-synaptic level.
2. An involvement of the amygdala and hippocampus of the limbic-hypothalamic system in processing and encoding, and recall of the specific memory trace may be located elsewhere in the brain.

The limbic-hypothalamic system is the central core to Selye's general adaption syndrome, the three states or resistance, and the state of exhaustion -- take on profound significance.

The hormones responsible for the retention of memory, epinephrine and norepinephrine are released during the alarm stage by the activation of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. The state or position the person is in at the moment of trauma is encoded into the system as the person progresses into the stage of resistance. The systems adapts and develops strategies to protect itself from further trauma, fear or memories by avoiding those three-dimensional positions. The emotions communicate this mind-body information through its network by way of the neuropeptides. This creates a vicious cycle of interplay among the endocrine, immune and autonomic neuromyofascial systems, and the neuropeptides.

If this cycle continues too long, the person enters the exhaustion stage, in which the body's defense mechanisms expend enormous amounts of energy, thereby depleting one's reserve and perpetuating or enlarging the symptom complex.

Selye frequently described this type of resistance as being "stuck in a groove," something we have all experienced. When something familiar happens we react subconsciously in a habitual pattern before we can consciously control it.

For example, if you were injured in a car accident, every time you see a car coming too fast you tighten and brace against the possible impact. People replay these incidents and the automatic, habitual bracing patterns associated with them subconsciously, until these hidden memories and learned behaviors are brought to the surface. Myofascial unwinding brings this information to a conscious level, allowing clients to experience it and let go.

Subconscious patterns

Why don't normal bodily movements or daily activities reproduce these memories, emotions and outdated beliefs? I believe that these positions represent fear, pain or trauma. In an attempt to protect itself from further injury, the subconscious does not allow them to move into positions that reenact the micro events and important micro cognitions essential for lasting change. The body then develops strategies or patterns to protect itself. These subconscious holding patterns eventually form specific muscular tone or tension patterns, and the fascial component then tightens into these habitual positions of strain as a compensation to support the misalignment that results. Therefore, the repeated postural and traumatic insults of a lifetime, combined with the tensions of emotional and psychological origin, result in tense, contracted, bunched and fatigued fibrous tissue.

A discrete area of the body may become so altered by its efforts to compensate and adapt to stress that structural, and eventually pathologic changes become apparent. Researchers have shown that the type of stress involved can be entirely physical, such as the repetitive postural strain adopted by a dentist or hairdresser; or purely psychic, such as chronic repressed anger.

More often than not, a combination of mental and physical stresses alters the neuromyofascial and skeletal structures creating an identifiable physical change, which generates further stress-- such as pain, joint restriction, general discomfort and fatigue. A chronic stress pattern produces long-term muscular contraction, which, if prolonged, causes energy loss, mechanical inefficiency, pain cardiovascular pathology and hypertension.

Working in reverse, myofascial release and myofascial unwinding release the fascial tissue restrictions, thereby altering the habitual muscular response and allowing the positional, reversible amnesia to surface, producing emotions and beliefs that are the cause of the holding patterns and ultimate symptoms.

Thus it is important for the therapist to quiet his or her mind and feel the inherent motions. Quietly following the tissue or body part three-dimensionally along the direction of ease takes the client into the significant restrictions or positions. With myofascial unwinding, the therapist eliminates gravity from the system. This unloading of the structure allows the body's righting reflexes and protective responses temporarily to suspend their influence. The body then can move into positions that allow these state-or position-dependent physiologic or flashback phenomena to reoccur. As this happens within the safe environment of a myofascial release session, the therapist can facilitate the body's inherent self-correcting mechanism to obtain improvement.

**The myofascial release approach is not just an assembly of techniques.
Instead, it creates a whole-body awareness which allows the health professional to facilitate change,
growth and the possibility for a total resolution of restrictions,
emotions and belief systems that impede patient progress.**

A new era

The physician and therapist of the near future will function quite differently from those of the past. Building on and respecting the foundation developed by various health professions, they will treat the whole person intellectually, emotionally and structurally. They will have a wide variety of techniques with which to help others, thanks to continuing advances in scientific technology. With highly developed sensitivity and creativity, they will be able to interact with the client intelligently and humanely, on an individual level and / or as part of an interdisciplinary team.

These practitioners will be concerned with releasing the body's fascial restrictions mechanically and reorganizing the neuromuscular system. This reorganization occurs by supplying the central system with new information (awareness) that allows for change, an improved movement potential and consciousness. They will respect the wisdom of the body and its capacity to self-correct.

It is important for those providing myofascial release to realize that the body is a repository of information. The body can be used as a biofeedback system for the master therapist's finely trained, sensitive hands. It can be then used as a handle or lever to provide access to emotions and belief systems and allow for structural and biochemical change.

Mastery

The mastery recognizes the importance of pain and, instead of masking it, enables the client to go into and through the pain, fear or lesion. As the client does this, awareness occurs and function will improve spontaneously.

Mastery is defined not only as achieving a certain level of skill, but also as an attitude. Masters are fully aware of what they are doing. They understand the importance of touch as an expression of acceptance and nourishment and as a form of biofeedback to glean information from clients mind-body awareness. Their touch should be applied with focused awareness and conscious purpose. The focus should be fluid--moving from tight and narrow, logical analytical thought, to an open feeling of everything at once without thought or effort, using intuition and insight.

Ordinary consciousness has been described as "goal directed, focused, externally oriented...bounded by an awareness of space and time" Ordinary consciousness operates out of habit, barely paying attention while in hot pursuit of goals, ignoring the possibility of information available in the present moment. People who constantly function in ordinary consciousness are on automatic, unaware and "in kind of a trance."

**With myofascial unwinding the therapist eliminates gravity from the system.
This unloading of the structure allows the body's righting reflexes and
protective responses temporarily to suspend their influence.**

To experience deeply and wisely, one must be balanced and fully aware, using the analytical, logical, narrow focus and gleaning the insights available from a creative, feeling open focus (focused awareness). This is a vital way of functioning and goal we should have for ourselves and our clients.

The compulsive, narrow-focused therapist has difficulty easing back. Frustration surfaces quickly and in an effort to make something happen, he or she uses more technique or force. Effort is a function of the ego creating either / or situations, thereby setting up resistance. Effortlessness allows ego to let go and creates an environment for the spontaneous to occur. Quality therapy feels easy and right. It has a spontaneous flow that leads to discovery. Then the logical, analytical mind has relevant information with which to make purposeful decisions and treatment choices.

The alert therapist looks for patterns in clients, the mechanical or automatic in movement, experiences and words. Increased tone in the musculature during movement, posture or expression is a response to one's emotional state or thought and is not part of conscious awareness.

The therapist should focus the client's awareness on:

- (1) any motion with which the breathing is not easy
- (2) where there is a sense of resistance
- (3) where effort is involved or a difficulty with reversibility is involved

This awareness will allow the client to reorganize, for understanding follows rather than precedes experiences.

Other hallmarks of a master are flexibility and courage. Recognize the importance of the status quo as long as it does no harm and as long as it works. Always be open to new and better ways. Just because things have always been done a certain way does not mean that way has any value. Think for yourself and, through your personal experience, decide if it has value for you or your clients.

One of the laws of nature is the "path of least resistance," which is fine as long as it is taking you where you want to go. Being stuck in the left-brained, automatic trance means mindlessly following the goals and ways of others. Choose your own path by the creative use of your insight and willpower, and then have the courage to stick to it.

In making your decisions always ask, "What is in the best interest of my client?" When you come from that orientation, your intelligence, flexibility and courage will be rewarded time and again. That attitude benefits you , your client and your profession.

Mastery has to do with stillness. Eliminating unnecessary internal thoughts and external verbal chatter creates the necessary sense of calm. This quiet ease allows the master to be fully aware of the client's emotional state, fluidity of motion, automatic habits in expression and motion, energy flow, and the feel of tissue restrictions.

Stillness instills confidence in the client and gives the client's central nervous system information about what calm and ease feel like. One cannot learn to be calm and at ease by just intellectualizing these attributes. Through the experience of touch, a sense of ease can be transmitted to the client, which can be an invaluable lesson.

We should learn from each client and it should not be work. Stay light and joyful in what you do. Teach your client to re-experience a sense of joy.

Tell your clients to view what happened to cause their dysfunction not as a defeat, but rather as a lesson. By looking for the positive, they can see its value, learn from it and allow themselves to heal. Help them to understand that one of the best lessons is that they may not be able to change the circumstances of their life, but they can change their reaction to their circumstance, they can move from being passive, helpless recipients to active participants. This important change in perspective creates a partnership between you and your clients where you can help them help themselves.

**Effortlessness allows ego to let go and
creates the environment for the spontaneous to occur.
Quality therapy feels easy and right.**

Thus mastery is teaching through example. The master is real, calm, nonjudgmental, intelligent, sensitive, strong yet flexible, supportive, compassionate, empathic and joyful.

What I have shared with you in these articles is just the beginning. It gives you a wonderful start into a whole new world that is intelligent, humane and effective; a world of reality and accomplishment for you and your clients. Everyday will be a challenge and a stimulating personal and professional adventure. I hope that I have opened a door for you. I invite you to walk through. I encourage and challenge you to dare to be great.

Enjoy the dawn of this new era and allow your journey to be exciting and fulfilling.
