

FIND YOUR BODY'S FREEDOM

The Trager® Approach

by Anton Knoll

Have you ever watched little kids play? They spin and dance and move with such freedom, as if stress and tension do not exist. Would you like to move like that again? Recently, I visited Rev. Lindsley Field for a Trager® session, and in an hour and a half I was moving just like the kid I was 30 years ago.

The session started and ended with something called Mentastics®. Lindsley and I stood facing each other, while she guided me through some very simple movements. We rocked from side to side, allowing our arms to swing freely as we did, then paused for a deep breath or two before we moved some more. "The form of movement isn't all that important," says Lindsley, "it's the freedom and playfulness of the movements that matters." The continued practice of Mentastics® helps one return to a relaxed state, relieving tension and stress throughout the body.

The next part of the session was conducted on a massage table. Lindsley started with a gentle touch, walking around the table pushing and moving my limbs, shoulders, and head, just getting a feel for how I moved and where I was holding tension. Over the next hour, Lindsley identified my "holding places" and, through guided movement, massage, and applied pressure, helped me to let go of the tension and patterns that stifle freedom of movement. It was amazing, like waking up when you didn't even know you were asleep. I am a big fan of deep tissue massage, which can have a little pain associated with it, depending on one's tension and accumulation of knotted muscles. There was no pain with the Trager® approach, only freedom and lightness.

The thing I noticed at the end of my treatment, aside

from how good I felt, was the relaxed feeling through my shoulders. Lindsley said, "Your shoulders are about 2 inches lower than when we started, though you are not consciously relaxing them." I am one of those people whose shoulders seem to be always striving to touch my ears (it must have something to do with the mouse glued to my right hand and the keyboard in my left).

What is Trager?

I asked Rev. Field to explain to me the whats and hows of the Trager® approach. "Trager is a mind-body approach. It does what massage does, but it is different. Trager re-educates the nervous system using relaxation and passive mobility through touch, rhythmic movement and an open meditative state." It is through these techniques of touch and movement that the nervous system and subconscious are shown what true freedom of movement means and feels like.

The table work is geared toward creating pleasurable and relaxing sensory experiences, which enter the central nervous system and simulate tissue changes through a feedback loop between the mind and muscles. All of this happens below the level of conscious awareness, yet can be re-accessed long after the end of a session. The simple movements of Mentastics® that began and ended the session are used to tap into sensory memory, and to allow a return to that relaxed place of optimal functioning experienced on the table. Daily practice of Mentastics® not only re-enforces the work done during the session, but deepens it as well, allowing free access to a calmer, more relaxed state.

How did Trager® develop?

The birth of the Trager® approach can be traced back to the mid 1920s. At the age of 18, Milton Trager was training to be a boxer. At the end of each workout, his trainer would give him a rub down, but one day the trainer looked so tired that Milton offered to do a rub down on him instead.

The trainer was astonished at what he felt from Milton's hands, and Milton was so surprised and encouraged that he went home to try it on his father.

Over the next 50 years, Trager worked on developing and refining his integrated bodywork technique. He worked as a lay practitioner for more than 20 years, then spent another 20 years as a medical doctor using the techniques on his patients. Throughout this time, Trager longed to teach his method to others, and was frustrated at not being able to 'break in' among established teachers and methods. In the late 1970s, Milton was invited to give a demonstration at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, where he worked on Betty Fuller, an Esalen



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instructor instrumental in bringing the Feldenkrais Method to the United States. Betty was instantly 'hooked' on the technique, and was so impressed by Milton that she co-founded the Trager Institute with him in 1980. Shortly thereafter, a teaching and certification program was created for the Trager® approach.



Dr. Trager continued to teach until his death in 1997 at the age of 88. The Trager Institute continues today as a nonprofit, public benefit, educational corporation registered in California. Today there are thousands of Trager® practitioners around the world in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and Japan.

For more information on Dr. Milton Trager, the Trager® Approach, or the Trager Institute, see Trager.com. Rev. Lindsley Field practices in Murrells Inlet and can be reached at (843) 651-1086. See ad page 33.



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