

Elemental Bodywork

Thoughts on encouraging elemental response through appropriate touch.

by Morag Campbell, RPT

ether
air earth
fire
water

It is a well known and tried and tested saying that we may only lead another where we ourselves have been, so in order to work with others and encourage them into a recognition and further exploration of the five elements as they manifest within them, we have to be able to 'be' in each element ourselves. As polarity therapists, we are familiar with the manifestations of each of the elements and the body parts associated with each. We know that releasing holding in the neck, for instance, effects a release in the digestive area, just listen to all that peristaltic activity! It also encourages a general 'letting go' in the entire system, the neck being the control centre for the body. The release however will be all the more effective if we can also 'let go' in the area that is being worked. The client then responds, by resonance, to our relaxation in the corresponding area. The release in us is transmitted subtly through our hands. Any release can be further encouraged by the appropriate use of touch on our part and can include movement that resonates with the particular element we are working with.

Satvic touch is employed to relax the client and allow time for the energy fields to open and expand as it encourages the activation of the ether element. The client becomes receptive to our presence and touch and engages with the process. We need to recognize when the client's system needs the space and time to assimilate new information as the energy is re-organised through bodywork. Every time we aid the release of holding in the body or stimulate the energy in an area we need to return to ether to allow both the client and ourselves the time to listen, re-assess and acknowledge the communication that is taking place. We need to be comfortable in just 'being' and waiting and able to get our conscious mind (I need to 'fix' this person) out of the way.

In order to then encourage energy to move through a client's system it is important to activate the air element and this is best achieved with rajas. Rocking the body parts or applying a gentle stretch or traction to the body and then rocking or pulsing can enable this to happen. Free fluid movement through your own body will be transmitted to the clients and all that movement helps start the letting go process. Maintaining your own even deep breathing as you work, entrains the client to also let go of any holding of the breath. By taking a light hold of the clients ankles whilst they lie on their back, and pulsing the body from side to side also quickly allows you both to recognize where the holding is in the system. This kind of pulsing can also be particularly beneficial when you notice, during a session, that the client's body spontaneously moves from side to side creating a snake like movement culminating with a slight shaking of the head from side to side. Often this kind of tension pattern in the body is indicative of an internal conflict or being in a situation that one does not want to be in.

It is as if the body is saying 'No'. By encouraging and accentuating this movement and you may need to be prepared to pulse for several minutes, you are in a sense encouraging or intensifying the 'No' response and this exaggeration often enables the client to recognize and acknowledge the conflict within. To maintain this easy pulsing rhythm and notice when it changes and respond accordingly, means you have to stay in your air element throughout, shifting and changing direction of the pulsing impulse as the body changes with each release. Beware if you have a tendency to be naturally in your air element a lot. Too much air in you can introduce too much air into your client's system and for some people this is too much. I had a very airy friend that I used to swap sessions with and by the end of the session my nervous system was buzzing and my digestion was going berserk. My system was certainly activated and then some!

Fire, is in many ways the most interesting of the elements in terms of your ability to encourage and acknowledge its effects in others. Fighting fire with fire means that you have to be comfortable in your fire energy in order to engage with someone else's. Fire responses can be encouraged by tamasic touch, which is direct and deep. It demands a reaction, often goading someone into responding to the touch. If you are uncomfortable with fire energy and it is an energy that causes problems in your life, you are unlikely to be comfortable taking your client in those fiery arenas. As with all the elements, it is important that we realise and acknowledge to ourselves where our own limitations lie and that we are conscious of the difficulties that we may be experiencing with a particular element. If we are unconscious of our anger and aggression then we can unwittingly transmit too much fire in our touch, pushing the client too rapidly to a place that they do not have the resources to deal with effectively. We can also be in danger of imposing our will (I will get a release here if it kills me!) onto the client - remember fire can get carried away! Well balanced fire ie: touch that is direct and to the point, can keep the client focused sufficiently to deal with what is coming up and with clients that have a tendency to hide or disassociate during sessions, it can keep them in the "here and now"

Water energy is encouraged in others by the use of sensual, contactful touch accompanied by slow rhythmic movements. Here gentle rocking also encourages this element, being passive, it needs an impulse to move. Head to toe pulsing can be useful here. By adding energy to the feet say in a rhythmic pulse that is transmitted the length of the body right up to the head we can encourage that fluid movement in the system. If we vary the direction of impulse slightly we can notice the subtlest of restrictions and help to unravel them. This vertical motion, unlike the side to side motion mentioned above, encourages the nodding of the head, in effect you are encouraging your client to say 'Yes' to life. Resonating with the water element means that you have to convey nurturing and caring in your touch, hands have to be soft at all times and your actions directed by the heart. Keep your actions fluid and connected. The body loves to be moved in this passive way, letting go and surrendering to the impulses, gliding like a sail boat on the currents of energy.

Many people talk of the earth touch as manipulation of the skeleton and joints, such as the toe pulls or leg pull, but to convey earth in your touch means to convey safety and support. Some clients can feel unsafe if the touch is too light or lacking in contact. The earth touch, like water, is still soft but yielding. It conveys strength. It encourages the body to let go and let down into the contact. The movements are slow so as to give the body time to respond and it encourages trust.

When giving an elemental session we can give a session that is similar to the elemental imbalance ie: fight fire with fire. This is rather like the principle of homeopathy where like treats like. By removing the impediments in the system, then stimulating and balancing a particular element, we are relying on the innate wisdom in the system to re-organise and re-balance. On occasions, it can be more beneficial to treat a particular elemental imbalance by working another element to achieve a desired effect. Too much fire in the system can be balanced out by encouraging more water energy and this would be a case of opposites working together to bring about balance. Experience and instinct will guide you as to which might be the most beneficial in any particular case.

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