

The Ease and the Challenges of Cranio-Sacral Work

The ease and the challenges of cranio-sacral work are the same: being present, listening, and non-doing.

This modality works with the cerebral spinal fluid—or CSF—that surrounds the central nervous system. The CSF supplies the central nervous system with nutrients and removes its waste, amongst other functions. The central nervous system registers all information coming into one's being, and gives out directions for responses. For example, the nerves of the hand send messages to the central nervous system when it touches a hot plate. The central nervous system registers this information and directs the hand to withdraw. It also registers when a person sees another person suffering and responds with sadness, fear, the desire to help, or other emotions.

When the flow of the CSF is optimal and without restrictions, the central nervous system works smoothly—body and psyche are healthy. We can respond to the events in our lives in healthy ways. When the central nervous system is taxed, however, our responses can be unhealthy.

There is health present in every human being at all times.

There is also dysfunction of some sort, whether as a result of physical trauma or as a response to life events, the environment, or an emotional hurt. In cranial-sacral work we focus not on the dysfunction but on the health. We find how this person is expressing health and then invite the body to let the health it knows spread. We focus on what is working rather than what is not. We focus on the CSF where it flows optimally, and develop compassion for the areas where it has difficulties. In this way, with our assistance, the body recognizes its own strength, its own health and healing power, and is likely to allow this health to be present everywhere.

This sounds easy, right? All you need to do is listen. But to be able to listen we need to get quiet in ourselves, to let the chatter of our own minds subside and truly be present to another person. This means not just listening with our ears, but with our whole being: our hands, our bodies, our minds and psyches. When we truly listen, there is no space for preconceived ideas or judgment. When listening is the only objective, we naturally stop trying to fix, trying to find a problem, or trying to make something unpleasant go away.

The amazing thing about listening is, that the body being listened to relaxes and lets his or her guard down. This allows for an eloquence of expression, and the relaxed body communicates its strength, its joys, its sorrows. More importantly, it begins to listen to itself, hearing its own subtle messages, its own deeper truth. The body has all the wisdom it needs; it contains the very blueprint for its own health, and when it joins the practitioner in listening it hears its true stories about how dysfunctions have developed. With truth comes what is needed for healing, for health to replace dysfunction.

Working with the CSF has this wonderful effect on our clients. As their internal chatter subsides, they drop into an altered state of consciousness where a deeper, more soulful wisdom is expressed, a wisdom that both client and practitioner can hear.

Good listening is aided by knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and pathology. The more knowledge I bring to the table, the easier it is for my listening-being to go to places in my client's body and hear what is there. Ever gone to a symphony concert? You can listen to the fullness of the music, or you can pick a particular instrument, or even a particular musician, and listen just to that. Same with the body: you can listen to the whole symphony, or go with your awareness to the heart and then just hear what the heart has to say.

If this sounds like woowoo to you, here are two brief examples from my practice. I was treating an 80-some year old woman, who suffered from a whiplash injury that occurred while she was riding in a taxi. Her body was quite rigid, and at the beginning of our work together, she told me a lot about her life, and how she made sure that everything was up to snuff. Because of her rigid values, she had few friends and felt lonely. After working with her neck for several weeks, listening to its tightness and tense musculature, space started to develop between the vertebra, and the muscles relaxed. She started to talk about all sorts of things—life and death and so forth. She told me that she felt more open to her neighbors and started befriending another lady near by. When our treatments came to an end, she commented: not only did she feel more flexible and was without pain, she also finally got a glimpse of what this life was about.

Another client of mine came in with lower back pain. She talked a lot about her sadness over her inability to find closure for a relationship that had ended. While I was listening to her pelvic floor, she emerged from a deep, restful place, opened her eyes and asked: “Does what you do have anything to do with letting go?” After a couple more treatments her lower back pain was gone, and she felt more at peace with the ended relationship.

Listening, non-doing, and finding health—though central to cranio-sacral work—can be applied in other modalities as well. These three principles offer enough challenges for a lifetime, while opening us every moment to the ease and joy of our own true selves.