

Taking the "Magic" Out of Energy Work

By Julianna Holden, LMP

If you've surfed the Web or looked at advertisements for bodyworkers, you'll find a host of modalities and mysterious-sounding "magical" work out there. Doctors might call this work simply "hokey." We're written about on Quackwatch, and some of the arguments are valid. Others in the field familiar with energy work might think it's grand and even magical, while still others think it's natural and commonplace, so why make it sound mysterious?

Many of us want to add credibility to massage as a valuable health care profession. Some have resorted to calling it "medical massage" to separate it from the magical, or less professional (or even sensual) sounding stuff. In the same way, I want to give credibility to energy work as part of massage and bodywork. Many try to add credibility by renaming energy work or identifying it in such a way that takes away the mysterious nature of the words.

Some clinics have set up a way to keep out the "airhead" or even hedonistic images of massage and demonstrate it as a credible healing profession. But I really don't think it's necessary to separate modalities, so long as we're careful to get rid of the magical images so often ascribed to energy work. If we're more careful in describing the type of bodywork in scientific terms, it's less likely to be seen as radical or "airy-fairy."

Personally, it seems some terms are overused in the industry. As long as we pay tuition fees and pass a class, anyone is willing to call graduates a master. Add several thousand dollars into the mix and you can call yourself a "light worker" or quantum this or that therapist. Some of these terms are derived from scientific explanations; however, they often are improperly used and out of connotation. What is it truly to be a master of energy? Is that really possible? And who gave them their original titles, anyway?

I'd like to take away the mystique of energy work and put it in the realm of science. Every living thing can be measured electrically. There are devices that measure electrical brainwave activity, or stimulate the brain

during brain surgery, causing a recall of memories.

I'm no scientist and I can't describe things in scientific terms, but it occurs to me that if something is electrically charged, that if another circuit makes contact, the two have the power to interact with one another. Energetic flow just happens naturally. When a mother touches her child, the child feels the love and calms down through the contact. Does that make her an energy worker? Is that considered magical? If not, then why do energy workers or massage therapists relate energy work as magical?

When a therapist begins bodywork, they may notice themselves slipping into a type of slow thought process and mental relaxation. Administering bodywork often is very relaxing, even though physically taxing, simply because we enter this alpha state of brainwave activity. When electrical impulses are slowed down, the calming touch has the same effect on the recipient. I like to think of it as duo-homeostasis. Just as when a child is crying, the touch of the caretaker can calm them both. We don't call a mother's caring touch "hooley." Therapeutic touch - from an energetic level - should be no different.

The Importance of Intent

At some point, intent enters into the picture. Some might try to declare they have some magical power to heal - that they are divinely gifted. Well, everyone has power, whether they're a body worker or not. Let me state it more clearly: You are powerful. We all are. Get over it. However, the moment someone declares they have power, they actually might diminish themselves because the intent to impress others is revealed.

This same power can be used toward creative, economic, positive, healthy and various other (even destructive) types of purposes. At some point, we can benefit clients by using this power with our own ethical intent. Energy work can't be delivered without intent. The best of intentions can also harm. Even ethics can be a subjective term.

So what exactly is intent? We can't get through life without it. If I want to pick up a glass of water to drink, it's not going to get to my lips if I don't have the intent to get it there. Something of my own initiative makes my arm move to pick up the glass and lift it to my lips. The somatic nervous system is involved in this process.

A therapist's somatic nervous system seems to affect the client's autonomic nervous system. A therapist places their hands on the problem area, feels these areas by simple palpation, and then sends a type of message (again somatic) to the muscle to release. This message can be by various methods: by touch alone,

a combination of touch and thoughts of release, or simply thoughts of release (or allowing well-being) while in the "energetic field" of the body. Without realizing how the muscle releases, the client's autonomic nervous system seems to receive an impulse or electrical charge and often releases the muscle. In essence, the therapist seems to become an extended neural system to the client, directing the release of musculature. It's as if a therapist's electrical charge jump-starts a synaptic response in the client's musculature to begin firing the muscle normally again.

I see the human energy field as part of the body and consider it a physical manifestation. But this chakra thing kind of bugs me. What are people trying to accomplish by opening chakras anyway? What is our real intent? We need to ask ourselves, are we trying to treat symptoms or find the cause? Why would energetic fields be unbalanced in the first place?

In massage or any kind of bodywork, a therapist notices (by palpation) when a muscle won't release by any means attempted. Some therapists may become more aggressive at that point by instituting deeper massage (deep tissue) or painful trigger point pressure, which are forceful (and sometimes useful) techniques. I see chakra opening similarly, as a more forceful technique. If the real cause is discovered, they will balance on their own. In essence, it doesn't matter if I believe in chakras or not, if they can be scientifically proven or not. I personally don't think it's my job to adjust them directly.

I've noticed that if a muscle won't release, there might be any number of reasons. One reason is trust in the therapist's intent. Clients can sometimes sense (usually unconsciously) if a therapist has a goal in mind or if they become frustrated for being ineffectual. At this point, mistrust can begin. Another reason could be we haven't addressed the core issue. If we address the core issue, the others might release more easily. If the core issue involves a past traumatic experience, the client might be too afraid of change and release. They might view this holding pattern as a means of survival. At that point, it's not a good idea to intrude by taking away something they aren't ready to release or give up. But often, I find the client begins telling me events involving that muscle, and through the re-experience, there is release. They realize they're safe now and the experience is in the past.

In my experience, intent is not something talked about in much depth in massage programs, but it should be. It seems to be an issue we dance around because of the diverse backgrounds of students. Some think there's nothing to it, as long as you know how to physically manipulate a muscle. And perhaps that's all clients would be comfortable with. Energy work of any type might seem too "magical" to those with a mindset that

massage is for a physical and/or psychological outcome. When bringing spirituality, divine energy, or energy work into practice, it can go beyond boundaries of clients, other therapists and especially doctors.

But what about those that feel the power of intent is just as important, or more important, as the physical manipulation? Because we believe in intent or have seen amazing results doesn't automatically make us responsible and capable to work with it. Nor does it make us automatic "masters" even if we've passed a course that says we are. If a student pursues a doctorate in medicine, that doesn't mean they can perform any kind of medicine, such as brain surgery, which requires specialized training. It's no different with massage. Keeping our minds clear of personal motives and learning how to work with such a powerful tool as intent helps.

I'm not out to impress. If I need to relate what I'm doing when a client asks, I try to use scientific explanations or something that takes the mystery out of the work. Firm scientific results would be helpful for explanations, but few of this nature exist, if any at all. To me, there is no real mystery to energy work. It's my belief that when someone tries to make something sound mysterious, they're looking for a following or profit.

All Bodywork as Energy Work

It's my belief that scientific inquiry and testing should take place to validate the transmission of energetic response. By no means do I consider the field of energy work proven. But then again, that a child feels loved by its mother's touch, affecting the health and well-being of the child, doesn't seem to need proof. Scientific evidence isn't the only thing that validates, but when attempting to validate the science of massage or energy work, it can give massage the credibility it deserves.

Energy work is a natural part of performing bodywork. Our bodies have electrical charge and chemical impulses from the somatic nervous system. Thoughts are the power behind the somatic nervous system. Whether we believe in energy work or not, and no matter what you want to call it, we send intent to clients. The way intent comes out varies greatly. All different ways can be helpful, no matter what modality we want to call something.

I view all bodywork practitioners as energy workers. We might call it by different modalities, but the desire to help others brought us to this branch of health care. What we do about our own intent is key. Do we want to impress or to serve clients? If our intent is to serve, we will do everyone, including ourselves, a service by

taking the mystery out of energy work.



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