

GreenSpirit Journal

www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/BowenTechnique.shtml+greenspirit+Bowen+Janie+Godfrey&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk

The Bowen Technique – integration and wholeness

by Janie Godfrey

Sunday Times health journalist Susan Clark wrote of The Bowen Technique:
“The patients I have seen treated with Bowen report a feeling of deep, peaceful relaxation after a session and it is extraordinary to see the body react. As a patient, you feel only the gentlest pressure because the technique is completely painless. Practitioners report excellent results with persistent and difficult to treat conditions.”

The Bowen Technique is a gentle form of light-touch therapy and can be very effective treatment for a wide variety of physical problems such as back and neck pain and dysfunction, frozen shoulder, painful knees, elbows, etc. Often, these are the result of the mechanics of over-doing it – too much gardening, sports injuries, etc. But many physical conditions have their root in non-physical problems and situations. This connection is acknowledged by many common expressions such as ‘it’s a pain in the neck’, ‘you look as if you have the weight of the world on your shoulders’, ‘I can’t swallow that’. No surprise then if neck pain, shoulder tension or throat cramp is present on the physical level.

We don’t doubt there is a mind-body-spirit connection when someone blushes, for instance, and treating the body as a way into an emotional or spiritual blockage or problem appears to be valid in the clinical experience of many Bowen therapists – and other therapists too, of course. In 1997 the book entitled Molecules of Emotion: the Science behind Mind/Body Medicine was published. Its American author, Candace Pert PhD, researched “new paradigm” healing at the Georgetown University Medical School where she was a professor of Physiology and Biophysics. Her research reveals how the “bodymind” functions as a single psychosomatic network of information molecules, which control our health and physiology. It is a fascinating book and connects the biochemistry of the body with the mind/emotions very clearly. Reading her conclusions, it is no wonder that in treating the body, where anxieties, fears and traumas can become lodged, the effect can ripple through to the non-physical source of these problems and effect a change in the way they are perceived and dealt with.

All spiritual and religious traditions have known this, of course. In Ancient Greece, there was no separation between doctors and priests, temples and hospitals. If memory serves correctly, it was St Bonaventure who said ‘the language of the soul is dreams, spontaneous images or [physical] symptoms’: if you don’t hear the first two, the message is manifested physically. St Francis poetically referred to the body as ‘Brother Ass – because it bears all our burdens’. Many modern psychiatrists and writers have recovered this knowledge and are offering it again to Western populations who have lost living spiritual connections that tie together our lives on all levels. Our Western medical model tends to see the body as something to be

manipulated by surgery or medication. How important it is, then, to have a paradigm and a treatment that acknowledge the body as inextricably connected to the mind, the emotions, the soul.

The majority of people who come for physical treatment, in my experience, are usually not recognising that their emotions may be involved and would not have sought help with those issues.

Bowen's ability to prompt this body-mind connection was demonstrated to me soon after I began my practice as a Bowen Technique practitioner. A man in his mid-40's had come for treatment because of tremendous back pain. Indeed, the muscles on either side of his spine (erector spinae) were so rigid they felt like bones themselves. No wonder he was experiencing a lot of pain. I had great confidence that the Bowen moves, gentle as they are, could help these muscles to relax, which would certainly bring him some relief. He came for his second treatment one week after his first and reported that he had had a brief period of relief but the pain was back and the muscles felt rigid again. But this time, part way through the treatment, he suddenly said, "You don't think this back pain could have anything to do with a relationship problem, do you?" After the treatment, he recounted a very sad and distressing tale about a long-standing estrangement in his family and the great grief this caused him. It had been something that he had avoided facing or dealing with for many years and I was so impressed that he had been able and willing to make this connection himself, prompted by the integrating effect of the Bowen treatment. With the source of the 'pain' correctly identified, he could "own" it and begin to deal with it at the correct level rather than his body having to continue to carry it. I don't think he would have been open to being 'told' he had such an underlying problem – he needed to put it together for himself and Bowen treatment was able to do this in an acceptable way for him.

All aspects of our wholeness can be approached from each other, i.e., through the mind; the body and emotions can be approached as we can see in good mental health care. Through meaningful spiritual practice, the body and mind and emotions can be touched as we can see in instances of physical healing and "the peace that passes all understanding" in difficult circumstances. And likewise, through the body, the mind and emotions and soul can be reached. This is a concept that has been, for the most part, foreign to our mainstream medical concept of physical health.

This is changing, of course, as great numbers of people choose to complement their mainstream medical care with complementary therapies. A convert to the benefits of The Bowen Technique is Dr Barrie Harte of the Selegate Surgery in Hexham, Northumberland. Not only does Dr Harte think that Bowen is an effective therapy, he has trained as a Bowen therapist himself. He says of Bowen: "It is very useful in certain situations like anxiety and stress (and this might well reduce the prescribing costs on hypnotics and anti-depressants); for cervical spine and lumbar spine problems, both acute and chronic, and also with frozen shoulders."

Bowen's integrating healing effect is most poignant with children. I recently treated a 10-year-old boy who is bright, outgoing and curious and was having an average of two migraines per week. He would have to miss school and stay in bed for 5 or so hours until it passed. The situation in which this was happening was that his mother

had been separated from his father since he was a toddler. She had been in a relationship with another man for some years and has a young daughter by him, but he had been increasingly violent with the mother over the past few years and at the time of the first Bowen treatment for her son, she had been separated from the man, involving the police and courts, for some months and the family lived in anxiety about the possible actions of this man. The boy enjoyed his first Bowen treatment very much and in fact went sound asleep. The following week he had a migraine but the pattern and type of it was different from his usual ones. During the week after the second Bowen treatment, two very small, inconsequential incidents (which would normally have hardly been noticed or reacted to) caused him to weep, "inconsolably" (as his mother described it) for about half an hour each time. He has not had any migraines since (about five months at time of this writing). He is also going to bed on time and dropping off to sleep without getting up over and over, as was his previous pattern. Bowen treatment has also had a profound effect on the very disturbed sleep patterns of his 2-year-old sister.

Resolution of problems is also very profound when the patient actively explores the new areas that open to them. Mrs P, age 72, came for Bowen treatment because of pain and discomfort from a number of physical problems and drug reactions. She had had a very bad reaction to a drug prescribed for osteoporosis and even though she had stopped the drug 18 months previously, she still had severe burning pains in her back and arms and soreness in her shoulders. She couldn't stand anything tight around her torso, such as a bra, as the skin was so sensitive. In addition, over the past several years there had been some major family changes and problems and, while they were now resolving, Mrs P was still very anxious and on edge, emotionally and physically. She returned for her second treatment and reported some very interesting responses at the non-physical level:

- She was still aware of her soreness and all, but was now thinking that she just has to live with these things. Most important is that she must manage to totally relax. Her remaining twinges of pain respond to her calming herself and not forcing herself to be so 'people pleasing' (a life-long pattern). She found that the Bowen treatment had brought her psychologically to a point of assessing her attitudes, most particularly the long habit of 'people pleasing' and feeling inferior. She reported an amazing week of mental/spiritual insight and realisation that her bodily health is connected to and comes from health in the spirit and being kind and attentive to herself and receiving calmness.

After her second treatment, the physical pains had subsided almost completely and have not returned over the 9 months since she first had treatment. She feels she has reached a new and beneficial level in her understanding of stress and the body. She says she is facing the fact of growing older and is eagerly exploring how to manage her life differently now.

Another case history that illustrates the body/mind/emotion connection is that of a 47-year-old woman who came for Bowen treatment for wheezing and tightness in her upper chest. She had never had a full blown asthma attack but went to the doctor who told her she had asthma and put her on an inhaler to ease the tightness and wheezing when they occurred. The inhaler was helpful for these symptoms.

During her 3rd Bowen treatment, just after the asthma moves were completed, there was a very interesting simultaneous occurrence: she felt the tightness come on in the

same instant as a very vivid memory of a counselling session with her former husband which had been very emotional and full of anger and fear, recalling her feelings about the relationship being over. During that time her former husband told her repeatedly that, because she had not expressed her feelings when her mother died not too long before, that she was now transferring all the grief and of that time onto him leaving and the relationship ending. It was during this time of the relationship ending that her wheezing and tightness in the chest began.

She often catches herself holding her breath and realises this is connected with a fear that she won't be able to breath which she sees as a symbol connected with trust and faith that she will be all right and able to care for her child and manage all right.

It is wonderful that such a strong connection was made between the chest tightness and the memory that provoked fear and grief. She is in an excellent position now to work through the effects of the loss of her relationship and its consequences and not have it sabotage her with a physical focus.

In my experience and observation, Bowen is so often able to make the connection between physical symptoms and their non-physical roots, integrating the body and spirit which creates a wholeness in which a person can constructively deal with things such as loss and fear and anger rather than leaving them locked up in the body.

Janie Godfrey is a fully accredited Bowen Technique therapist practicing in Frome, Somerset and is a full member of the professional Bowen practitioners' organisation, the Bowen Therapists' European Register (B.T.E.R.) For more information or to book an appointment, ring her on: 01373 451 558 or visit www.janiegodfrey.co.uk