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*The only thing to be done,
now that the waves of our
unfolding have begun to strike on
us is to contain ourselves.*

*To keep still, and let the wreckage
of ourselves go,
let everything go, as the wave
smashes us, yet keep still,
and hold the tiny grain of
something
that no wave can wash away,
not even the most massive wave of
destiny.*

-D.H. Lawrence

I have often said that it takes the courage of a warrior to embark on the long and difficult journey of healing our trauma. For those of us who have survived trauma and abuse, the idea of living in a body full of feelings, full of sensations, memories, thoughts and pictures, can be terrifying. Simple acts of touch, movement and breath can produce a heightened level of activity in the body's nervous system, this activity is coupled with feelings of terror; these feelings are, in turn, a reminder of the trauma.

And so we numb ourselves, sometimes for years and years, until we resemble empty shells. No feelings, no aliveness, no ability to find joy in watching a beautiful sunset or to respond to the touch of a loved one. Judith Herman, MD has noted in her book *Trauma and Recovery* that a major life transition such as the birth of a child or the death of a parent, often precipitates the long journey of

Trauma Touch Therapy

by Chris Smith, CMT, Colorado

unraveling our past. Once, as D. H. Lawrence states, "the waves of our unfolding have begun to strike on us", it is as if we don't even have a choice as to whether or not we are going to start this process. The process has chosen us!

Psychotherapy provides one important avenue of self discovery and understanding; however there

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seems to be limitations as to the distance one singular approach can take someone on their journey towards healing. It can be frustrating to discover just how many layers there are to our wounds. Many of my clients report that after all the years of working with their trauma on a cognitive level, their minds feel more at peace but their bodies now

want some resolution as well. One woman in particular had felt she "had it all figured out...I even did my Master's thesis on recovery from trauma. Imagine my surprise when I realized that despite all this, my body was still numb from the neck down!"

This is where having the spirit of a warrior is so important. We must fearlessly embrace the totality of the transformative pilgrimage. This entails a devout commitment to moving beyond our limitations, letting go of blame, and taking responsibility for our lives. Our souls, those "tiny grains of something that no wave can wash away" want to claim their birthright of full human-beingness.

Trauma Touch Therapy™ is an innovative, somatic approach toward healing trauma and abuse. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, witnessing or being the victim of a violent crime, war trauma, battering, and surgical traumas. The intent of TTTM is to create a safe and nurturing environment to slowly explore healthy touch and to investigate sensation and feeling in the body. To arrive at the place where this is possible takes time and a great deal of patience. It also requires an enormous amount of trust on the part of the client.

Foundational to the TTTM work is the Intake Process. This is a time when client and therapist get to know each other and discover if the client is ready for this type of work;

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if the client feels comfortable enough with the therapist to agree to work together; and if the therapist feels comfortable having this individual as a client. This last piece is extremely important because I have seen far too many individuals take on clients who were clearly beyond the scope and abilities of a massage therapist.

Knowing our boundaries is crucial if we are to be working with trauma and abuse. To maintain integrity, we request that all our clients be involved in some sort of psychotherapeutic process at the time they are receiving TTT™. This ensures that the therapist doesn't become psychotherapist as well as massage therapist.

This is not to say that there isn't room for some dialogue within the TTT™ session. However, when a client does begin to talk or share some part of their story, the therapist gently directs them back to their body. For example, we might say to the client "so, as you share this memory with me, what is happening to this place under my hands?" The body is our area of expertise, and we get curious as to what the client is experiencing on a purely somatic level. Are they sensing expansion or contraction? What is happening to the tissues as we work? Can they feel breath in this place?

The therapist should never assume that just because a client says they are ready for bodywork, that they are ready for a massage. In the TTT™ approach, great care and time is spent on developing trust between the client and therapist. I often tell my clients that I don't expect them to trust me immediately. Trust is a process that happens over time, and I will honor the time it takes for each

client to move into the place where touch becomes a part of our sessions. Many of our initial sessions may be spent in doing boundary exercises, working with the breath, movement exercises as well as talking to the client about what they need to feel safer with the work.

Of prime importance is the degree to which the client remains present with touch. To work while the client is dissociated, or to be unaware that the client has dissociated, sets the stage for retraumatization. Much class time is spent learning how to recognize dissociation and how to make agreements with clients who have this tendency.

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In TTT™ the therapist takes exquisite measures to let go of any agenda or expectations they may have regarding progress of a client or the outcome of a session. The work progresses slowly and carefully; exploring, sensing, staying with a place, hanging out, letting whatever wants to arise to do so on its own accord.

This may be the most difficult aspect of the TTT™ work to teach: how to "undo" all that we were taught to "do" in massage school. The work of a TTT™ therapist is to form an equal partnership with their client, to discover a place that wants some

attention in the body, and to simply "be" with that area and wait until something presents itself. Trust that something will arise...a memory, a feeling, a sensation. The client always has complete control to the degree that any particular area is explored. The therapist is there to hold the space, to insure that there is containment, to be a witness and to track what is happening in the body. It is within this consciously applied touch that clients can slowly "let the wreckage of themselves go", yet at the same time find a place of stillness and watchfulness with their process.

This is sacred territory. It is important that any one doing this kind of work understand and appreciate the profound implications this kind of relationship entails: We are being asked to touch into our clients deepest fears and terrors, to caress their despair and to cradle their grief in our hands.

As we touch, so we are touched ourselves, and the risk of vicarious traumatization is great. To maintain equilibrium and integrity, TTT™ therapists are required to get consistent support from a licensed psychotherapist or person of equal expertise: This work is never to be done in isolation, and in this way, the TTT™ therapist models healthy behavior.. It is in isolation that our fears overwhelm us. When we have support we are assured that there is always a kind hand to reach out to and insight to be gained by someone with perspective.

It is essential that we are comfortable being in our truth. Authenticity is a welcomed trait in a therapist. I am personally very

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comfortable saying to a client, 'I'm really stuck here, any ideas of where we should go next?' I don't have to be perfect or have all the answers. In this manner, the power differential which is inherent in any client/therapist relationship becomes equalized and a true balance of power is achieved. We are two fellow human beings, moving hand in hand, through some pretty scary stuff.

We now have TTT™ graduates all across the country as well as in Hawaii, Australia, South Africa, and Alaska. Graduates not only have personal support, but the support of a large community of other TTT™ practitioners who can lend each other feedback and understanding. All Students in the 100 hour TTT™ training engage in a 50 hour integrative bodywork class as well as a 50 hour supervised Externship where they work with three clients with varying trauma histories for a series of ten sessions each. They

also receive approximately 20 hours of support from a psychotherapist of their choice. This aspect of the training is unique and essential. I feel that this is where I can ascertain if the therapist can apply the techniques learned in the class in an appropriate therapeutic manner. It is also important that the therapist apply these new techniques as soon as possible under supervision so that they can be confident in their own approach.

To learn to work effectively in this arena takes more than a weekend course, good intentions, lofty ideals and even more than a 100 hour course. What is required is enormous dedication to continued study, self growth and exploration, a willingness to let go of the ego and ask for help, devotion to exquisitely good self care and the courage to listen to our hearts. For it is within our raw and tender hearts that real fearlessness lies, the place that helps us to be a

warrior for our lives and for those others who are courageous enough to join us on this journey. Wholeness is our birthright, let us journey together, hand in hand toward our destiny. As Nelson Mandela so aptly said in his 1994 Inaugural Speech: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us..."

For a current brochure and course schedule on TTT™ call the Colorado School of Healing Arts, Inc. at 1-800-233-7114.

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