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A Mind and Body Journey with Asthma

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The following case story illustrates the empowering effect of combining Asian Bodywork with focused self-awareness methods. Knowing how to work effectively with the mind and body interface is an important specialty within the practice of Asian Bodywork. Mental and emotional issues are often primary factors in the health concerns of Westerners. These factors influence not only how we experience illness, but also our capacity for getting well.

When we help our clients explore tension, they discover limiting factors that maintain an illness. When we help them attend to the openings and relaxation, we empower them to discover inner resources and the next step toward healing.

This story is about a young woman's journey with asthma and her discoveries about how her breathing relates to her own expectations and her dance with intimacy. Her bodymind exploration leads her to a quiet inner strength that flows like a river in her belly.

Jane (not her real name) is a very attractive and engaging young woman. She is a graduate student and teacher who just relocated to Eugene after living on the east coast. Jane has had asthma since childhood and has been on medication since age three. Her mother and grandmother also have it. Jane reports that she has many allergies to dust mites and mold. Recently she has had increased problems with facial acne. It is easy for Jane to feel frustrated; she has high expectations of herself. She has a close relationship with her mother, however her relationship with her father is very poor. Her parents divorced when she was three.

The theme of our work together is for Jane to find new ways to nourish herself by releasing expectations and opening her heart to the quiet inner stillness and self-confidence she finds in herself and others. Each week after our session she comes in with new insights, and her breathing keeps improving.

When I palpated Jane's diaphragm it was very tight; her upper chest in the Lung 1 area was sore. Her shoulders and neck were also tight. When I took her pulses, I was tuned in to the relationship between her lung and liver pulses. Her liver pulse was tight and wiry, and her lung pulse was deficient. Because of stress and breathing problems, Jane tenses her diaphragm, tightens her chest and raises her shoulders. I decided to use the entry and exit points for the Liver and Lung meridian and the Lung source point to protect and tonify the Lung meridian.

To free up the energy of the chest and Liver Qi, I started by doing a Shiatsu-like pressure along Jane's diaphragm. I asked her to exhale when I applied pressure and notice the qualities of the tension. As the tension began to release, Jane felt her breathing start to free up. This created a contrast between the way her breathing usually feels and a more open state. I asked Jane to voluntarily explore this contrast by slowly and mindfully letting her diaphragm tense in its usual way, and then slowly let go into the open state and see what she noticed.

After a few moments she became aware that she tightens through her solar plexus in response to internal pressure to perform well and meet expectations. I asked Jane to gently let herself stay with and acknowledge her discovery as we continued our session.

Before she left that day, Jane decided to focus on her exhale to let go of her inner dialogue about deadlines. She would then be able to decide what activity would be most nourishing for her. I also taught her how to release the diaphragm tension herself as we had done. In our second session, Jane reported that the practice of emphasizing her exhale and working with her diaphragm tension was extremely helpful for her. It was an active reminder to reprioritize her activities.

At our third session Jane became aware of an inner strength that manifested as an opening in her belly. The session was about relationship and letting people come and go. When she came in, Jane reported that her breathing was clear and good. "I seem to be doing better and better," she said. This is one of the best times in my life. I'm on a path in my life that I like. Teaching is good and I have a great boyfriend. I do want more women friends, though."

Jane went on to say that in the past week as she continued to emphasize her exhale, she realized that a part of her does not want to fully inhale and exhale. "I associate it with letting people in and letting them go. It's hard for me to let people in close, and once someone is in my heart it's very hard to let them go. I could see that tears were close to the surface.

I asked Jane to stay with her insights and feelings while I held some points and placed some needles. I worked with Metal and Fire points in her neck and chest and Water points in her belly. As we were working Jane said, "There is a part of me that is bubbly, and most people see that. I also have a side that is quiet, but not many people know that part of me." When I asked her to feel where the quiet part of her was in her body, she said, "I feel it in my low abdomen below my navel." I knew that this was an opening to inner resource, and I wanted to support it and help Jane mindfully explore it.

"What's it like?" I asked. "It's deep and peaceful," she replied. I asked her to feel into the qualities of the deep and peaceful experience and see if there were any other words that described it. "It's still, strong, and self-confident. It's a quiet strength." I encouraged her to flow with the quiet river of strength for a while and really let her body and mind savor the experience.

After a while Jane said that she is looking for these qualities in people whom she wants as friends. I asked her how she would recognize them in other people. "It's a light they have that shines in their eyes, and quiet strength that makes me feel calm."

Jane's body, breath and awareness were in a relaxed and flowing place. The transformation from the beginning of our session was very apparent. This inner guidance pointed to the next step in Jane's healing process. When healing messages come, I want to help my clients acknowledge them and find ways to integrate these new insights in their lives. In this session we discovered an in-road to strength and confidence for Jane and identified how she can recognize these qualities in others. At the end of this session, Jane decided to make it her intention to look for new friends with these qualities. She would also practice bringing her awareness and breath to her belly to ground and center herself during her daily activities.

The key to transforming energy with mindfulness and body-centered awareness is to help your clients turn towards their present experience. There are precise, learnable methods to help one do this. These methods can be easily integrated into our Asian Bodywork practices. They empower our clients and make us more effective practitioners.

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