



Touch

The Language of Listening

Whether you are an obstetrical physician, surgeon, physical therapist, nurse, massage therapist, or other...we all share common aspects of feelings related to touch.

If you are a fisherman, you can tell the type and size of the fish that just took the hook by the force of the hit, the pause after the strike, and the drag on the line that ensues. I've felt many of the things spoken about in this book while I was giving a person a massage, or holding a person by the arm or leg to help them move. I've felt people as they tried to initiate active movement, or as they became fatigued. I've felt them as they were about to pass out or start to cry. I've felt them when they were trying with all their might, and after they just let go. We've all felt people who were tense, nervous, scared, sad, angry, and in severe pain. Some of us have felt a person as they have dropped their body and died. Massage therapists, Reiki practitioners, PTs, OTs, nurses holding babies—we've all felt energy shifts, tissues relax, and tone change. We've felt and heard abdominal noise, a sudden rigid shake of spasm or clonus of a muscle. We have felt heart rhythms change, breath change, and craniosacral rhythm variations.

There is a communication of touch that is universal and a common theme in all healthcare where touch occurs. One can tell a lot about a

person with a handshake, and you can sense whether a health care provider has compassion, sincerity, or integrity as well—simply by touch. The intention of the person is apparent after a moment's touch.

I hope this book can bring all touch therapists together to share the mainly common themes that unite us all. Dogs, horses, babies, all learn the difference between a kind and a hostile touch. Just as each of us can be repulsed and retract from negative touch, so too can we be comforted and sedated by compassionate touch. The main theme here is that we need to apply our conscious efforts and awareness of touch as we work helping people. If we can engender comfort, caring compassion, and encouragement in how we touch people, and if we then add that to the modern focus of medicine, then health and healing can prosper.

No matter what language touch comes in, whether it is massage, passive range of motion, Reiki, muscle energy, Shiatsu, CST, water birthing, dentistry, a surgeon's scalpel—the meaning is the same. Therapeutic touch is well-intended concern and encouragement. We all can benefit from staying light, knowing our anatomy, and maintaining good intention as we touch.

As there are many languages in verbal communication, there are many languages of touch.

Language is defined as “any differentiated system used to communicate, such a system adapted to a special purpose, a manner of expressing oneself.” (*Larousse Illustrated International Encyclopedia and Dictionary*)

Touch is a differentiated system of communication. The practice of craniosacral therapy is a system adapted to a special purpose, namely, a system of listening to the body express itself and encouraging the body to change for the better. As one explores the topic of CST and light touch on the body the verb most commonly spoken is “listening”—

the appreciation of what one's senses do when one touches. Listen is defined primarily relating to sound. "To pay attention to speech, music etc." but it is also defined as, "to be influenced by," and "to listen to conversation."

Sound is defined as "the sensation experienced when the brain interprets vibrations within the structure of the ear caused by rapid variations of air pressure. Sound is also defined as a narrow channel of water connecting two seas or a sea and a lake. It also means to measure depth (usually water) to examine with a lead line on the ocean floor.

To sound out is "to ask discreet questions in order to discover how someone feels or thinks, to investigate (feelings or ideas) in this way, to examine (a person's body) with a sound." A sound is "a probe for investigating, especially cavities in the body." I find these interesting; they are all dictionary definitions.

Sounding is defined as, "a measurement or investigation made by sounding," "a part of the bottom of the sea or of a river etc. which can be reached by sounding," as in sonar.

With these definitions in mind I think it is easy to get an appreciation of what we do in light touch manual therapy (especially CST) when we say we listen to the body. We are listening to the influence water (CSF) makes as it channels through the body. We are evaluating the sound it makes (vibration or pulse) and the depth of the influence that pulse makes on the sea of structures that reside inside us all. We are gently probing and investigating by touch and by discreet questions (as in somato-emotional release) in order to show a person how their body is trying to express itself. We sound them out as to how they feel....

In an edition of *Scientific American Mind*, (April/May 2007) Christoph Kayser, a doctor of natural sciences, presents research pointing to

the fact that the auditory cortex has areas of “sensory crossover.” There is a secondary auditory cortex that also processes visual and tactile stimuli. In other words, our eyes and fingers help us listen. This is scientific research that points to the definition of listening we use in CST as the therapist places hands on and “tunes in and listens.”

Listening then, to the craniosacral rhythm, is a marvelous, efficient, powerful, useful and noninvasive method of examining the sea of cerebrospinal fluid as it courses through the body. Listening is an essential part of the conversation and communication of one body to another. The term listening to the soundings of the body seems most appropriate as we gently listen, then hold—wait for the sounding of the rhythm—and again watch for a reaction. This is CST.