

With the lightest touch, the most powerful healing

By ANGELA JEFFS

Craniosacral therapist Lionel Gougne lays his hands palm down over my feet with the lightest touch imaginable. He asks me to relax, and so I do, stretch out fully clothed, warm and comfortable on a couch seven floors above Shibuya on a cold damp spring morning.

"I'm monitoring the rhythm of your craniosacral system to detect any restrictions and imbalances," he says quietly.

He finds one. Seems I have a blockage. The rhythm flowing from my cranium down my spine to my sacrum has met an obstacle, a kind a hiccup. As he begins to seek out the source of the problem, he meets another problem, acute pain in arthritic knees, at which point he embarks upon what is called a somatoemotional release, and I begin journeying into old deep-seated trauma.

Lionel spent 17 years on the French Cote d'Azur before he began his own journey. As he explains later, "I was in Paris seven years and then moved to New York to practice international dispute resolution -- arbitration."

His family is full of lawyers. Four generations' worth. "At high school I had what seemed at the time to be the natural choice of medicine, law or architecture." Graduating from Yale Law School, he worked for four years and then hit an obstacle of his own while traveling in Pakistan. "I hit a car, or the car hit me. I'd not been very happy with my lifestyle, found my work uninspiring, so this was a wakeup call."

Then came Sept. 11, followed by the death of a friend from breast cancer, leaving behind two small children. From these points on he saw life differently.

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Reading Dr. John Upledger's book on craniosacral therapy resonated hugely. "I learned that with the lightest touch you can awaken life in the body and see results almost immediately. That's when I began to study, and can say without bragging that I was found to have the touch. I've since learned that my great-grandmother was a healer, so it makes sense."

Upledger advocates using the rhythm of the craniosacral system to enhance body function and help alleviate pain and discomfort. His research began in the 1970s when he noticed the rhythmic movement of the craniosacral system during a spinal surgery. Surprisingly, he discovered that the bones of the skull are not fused together, as taught in medical school, but continue to move during a person's life.

"Putting this new information together with the odd pulsing rhythm he had observed before, Upledger theorized that there was some kind of hydraulic system operating inside the craniosacral system, and then set out to confirm this was so."

Upledger also found what he termed energy cysts, imprints of old emotional and physical trauma, which over the years would begin to manifest symptoms and dysfunctions. "Using somatoemotional release techniques, craniosacral therapists engage in imaging and dialoguing techniques that help the patient through encounters with old emotions."

As a body spontaneously returns to its original position, he can feel tissues relaxing, Lionel adds.

A long-term practitioner of the martial art aikido, Lionel came to Japan to study "seitai" (a therapeutic method meaning to reorder the body), but found the system of teaching too rigid. "No one asked any questions."

He finds Japan very responsive to his techniques, however, "and as everywhere the need is enormous." The therapies he combines are especially effective with migraines and back pain -- two common problems. "My youngest patient is a baby and the oldest in their 60s. Recently I helped a 4-year-old with attention deficit disorder; his right temporal bone was stuck, so his nervous system was unable to function properly."

Unlike many therapies, Lionel does not want to lock people into dependency. "I work to get results in just a few sessions. This means, however, that I need a constant inflow of new patients. Mostly people hear about me through word of mouth."

Right now his clientele is 70 percent to 80 percent non-Japanese. Language is a problem, he says: "I need to learn Nihongo." Noting that this is hard work in someone's native language, let alone a second language, Lionel shakes his head. "Actually this kind of work is easier in English than French. I'm not sure why. There seem to more verbs, more flexibility."

He recalls working three or four years ago with a male patient who felt "as if he had an iron rod piercing his brain for some 15 years, suffering excruciating headaches."

After the second session, the patient understood that he was hurting himself -- holding on to the pain in order to prevent himself from being happy. In the third, he acknowledged that his father had never been happy, and that with two mentally disabled sisters, he had felt too guilty to remain unaffected.

"The patient thought that if he was happy, he was betraying his father. Instead, to show love to his father, he took a job that his father had always wanted but never dared to do. Enabled to say that he thought his father would want him to do this, the patient's migraines and headaches disappeared."

An hour plus later, Lionel has found my own blockage: the natural motion of the small sphenoid bone close to the side of my left eye is restricted. "This means that fluid does not circulate properly up and down your spine and around your brain, and it adversely affects the functioning of your central nervous system and possibly of other major physiological systems."

He also found an energy cyst in my large colon, which he says is dispersed -- and judging from the behavior of my bowels on the train ride home, he is 100 percent right. As for the knees, there's more work to be done.

The day after I am very very tired, but soon feel ready for

more. Not yet though, he says; maybe leave it a few weeks for the body to properly process what it has learned and find a new equilibrium. Which is good: I can wait. The journey is back on track; the way ahead is clearing . . .

To make an appointment, call (090) 3435-6320 or send an e-mail message to lionel@craniosacral-therapy.net. Web site: www.craniosacral-therapy.net. Lionel Gougne is a member of the American CranioSacral Therapy Association. For more on the therapy, see the Web site www.upledger.com.

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