

# Am I Working, or Is This Just Paradise?

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While I lay here floating in this clear, aqua-blue ocean, four wonderful souls are applying healing hands to my body as I bask in the Bahama sunshine. I look up into the face of the therapist at my head, and she asks me if there is anything I need. I ask myself silently, "Could there possibly be anything I need beyond this?"

Everything in my body, mind and spirit is already attended to lovingly and then, without notice, my mind is quickly whisked away to an imaginary scene. There I am, laying on a cloud in heaven somewhere, and beautiful little cherubs are flying about me, playing music and soothing all my cares into a state of blissful appreciation.

This scene transforms into a memory of my childhood and sadness overcomes me. I remember that this feeling of closeness was missing from my years of growing up. Tears start to leak out from the corners of my eyes, and my therapist asks me what's going on. I try to express this uncomfortable feeling, but instead of words I get a slowly growing knot in my solar plexus. I speak of my mother and the missing closeness, and my body shudders. I ask myself, "Can I really speak of such personal things to these people who I just met two days ago?" I get a sense of trust, and I blurt out feelings that are quite painful — certainly things I wouldn't normally talk about (not necessarily pleasant complaints that make me feel wimpy and weak).

My therapists guide me through an emotional release process that makes my gut wrench as I writhe and fold up in the water. As a group, we let golden yellow light pour into my third chakra region, and I feel my legs and torso move weightlessly in several directions at once. I suddenly come to a state of peace, and I sense my mother smiling at me from her place in the next life. I feel

than before and everything is much more colorful. My equilibrium is a bit off as I am helped to stand, as my feet keep floating up, and I seem resistant to putting them down into the sand.

David Dolan is an instructor for the Upledger Institute and maintains a private practice in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, specializing in CranioSacral Therapy and lifestyle training. He co-teaches ocean therapy with his fiancée, Diane Ellerbe, LMT, a fellow CranioSacral therapist.

Wow! What happened in those 45 minutes is something I still think about two years later. My life feels deeply changed and yet, I can't explain it. I feel much more love in my heart for life in general, and an understanding of my mother that did not exist one hour before that experience in the ocean.

How could these new friends of mine that I just met facilitate such a healing of my attitude? Did I mention that most of these people were not therapists by occupation, but administrative office workers, computer programmers, taxi drivers and schoolteachers? Well, they were therapists that day!

I also forgot to tell you that I was working that day as an instructor for the Upledger Institute, teaching the concept of ocean therapy to a group of massage therapists, health care practitioners and non-therapists. On day two of a four-day experiential workshop, set in the beautiful waters of the Grand Bahama Island on deserted beaches, my group of five willing participants touched my heart in such a lasting way that I still carry the benefits. While I was floating on cloud nine, I asked myself, "Am I working, or is this paradise?"



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The program we were all participating in is called BioAquatic Exploration, Ocean Therapy I. It is offered by the Upledger Institute and conducted in the Bahamas.

Ocean therapy utilizes concepts in CranioSacral Therapy (CST), Somato Emotional Release® (SER), therapeutic subtle energy techniques, and the physiological and psychological benefits of the ocean as a medium for healing and personal growth. We have the ability to heal ourselves and others, and ocean therapy gives therapists and non-therapists alike an opportunity to explore their healing potential. Ocean therapy teaches concepts that are common in many subtle energy healing approaches, and combines those with the healing power of the ocean and nature.

While floating in the tidal rocking of the ocean, therapists/participants apply the multihanded therapeutic approach to one client at a time. Usually three to five therapists lightly touch a "floating" client and blend with that client's nervous system. As the blending becomes successful, the therapists "follow" the direction of the client's inner wisdom as to what areas of the body need attention.

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What the ocean adds to the subtle energy therapy or any light touch format is multifaceted. The ocean provides a healing environment in nature that is unique in that many physiological and psychological benefits may be obtained just from being in it. Simultaneously, the nervous system moves into parasympathetic (relaxation) response. There are many factors that create this benefit. Listed later are some of those benefits that exist as physical, mental, and emotional balancing.

This style of therapy was inspired by the intuitive experiential philosophy of Dr. John E. Upledger, the developer or CranioSacral Therapy. Dr. John's research with CST and dolphins over the years created the Upledger Institute's BioAquatic Exploration program, originally held in the Florida Keys. It was there that I had the opportunity to study in the ocean with Dr. John and Chas Perry, PhD.

Those original trainings created such a change in my consciousness that I could not get the ocean out of my mind. Living on the beach in St. Augustine, Fla., with occasional visits from dolphins and the ocean's song in my ear every night, resulted in this approach of looking to the ocean's wisdom and the ocean's message. My co-instructor and life partner, Diane Ellerbe, LMT, and I bring a partner approach to this heart-centered joining with Mother Nature.

Ocean therapy offers a healing medium that reduces gravity and friction where movement becomes almost effortless. Joint range of motion increases as the nervous system moves into a parasympathetic response (relaxed state), muscles lengthen, tensions release and internal natural healing processes work more effectively.

Brain waves are theorized to move into "theta" states of consciousness as brain biochemistry changes (Dr. John Lilly). These states of consciousness facilitate all of the

beneficial effects of the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. The nervous system stimulates the endocrine and immune systems into biochemical changes.

Principles of buoyancy and flotation have been used in health care for centuries to help with rehabilitation and stress reduction. The science of magnetism also suggests many parallels between the earth's changing magnetic fields and its effects on all living systems (Rawls and Davis).

We theorize that the ocean is an excellent choice of environment for changing magnetic fields to gently stimulate these psychological and physiological changes in humans and animals. The saline solution of the seawater is also an excellent mineral bath, as life-giving nutrients are absorbed through the skin. The floating environment also reminds one of the similarities of saline amniotic fluid of our mothers' wombs (our first physical environment).

Emotional healing is facilitated as the relaxed brain state allows the client opportunities to connect within to memories and thoughts that distort perception (tissue memory, Dr. John Upledger/Wilhelm Reich), and to connect with repressed emotions in the subconscious mind. These perceptions in turn influence our daily choices and our common sense. If a new perception comes forth, then old faulty perceptions have the opportunity to change and therefore improve our lives. In this way, healing and personal growth show up together as changes in personality and lifestyle.

Research in cancer and other disease processes suggests that these new corrective ways of looking at life (attitude) enhance the healing process and sometimes make lasting change in the physical dysfunction (true healing, rather than masking or chasing symptoms).

I believe that this ocean aspect offers a provocative insight into autoimmune-related dysfunctions, as well as healing itself. This type of therapeutic session is perfect for chronic and acute pain, most diseases, and spiritual growth.

These four-day seminars in the Bahamas feature daily therapeutic sessions in the ocean, including experiential exercises listed below, designed to enhance the overall training, expand sensory perception, and encourage free dolphin interaction.

cells, and disperses out through our hands if we so direct it. We direct this bioenergy with our intention.

*"All boundaries in the world are illusory...mind and nature form an indivisible unity"* — Gregory Bateson

## Energy Follows Intention

CranioSacral Therapy is useful in different ways, in that structural physiological changes are taking place as the spine, cranium, and all articulating joints mobilize. At the same time, energetic aspects are being delivered to the muscle, membrane, and fascial systems, expanding joint range of motion (ROM), removing restrictions, and promoting fluid exchange.

We focus on basic concepts used in many forms of hands-on healing, as well as CranioSacral Therapy. Knowing these will serve you in your study of healing. Becoming an artist in these concepts is characteristic of many of the best therapists in the bodywork/healing field.

Combining CST with the SER techniques, and more advanced bioaquatic exploration techniques, provides a vehicle for perceptual changes about negative and limiting self-concepts. Potentially life-empowering ideas are brought forward from the client's subconsciousness to promote inner personal growth.

## Dolphins and Dolphin-Assisted Therapy (DAT)

Ocean therapy is complete in itself without dolphin interaction, although when dolphins are present in the area even one or two hundred yards away, most participants feel the energetic presence of these lovely beings.

To ease the anxiety and hopefulness of free dolphin interaction, the first day of the seminar features a "free swim" and contact with domestic dolphins that satiates participants' desires most delightfully. Swimming, touching, and close proximity to this friendly pod gives them all the energy they can handle, and is far superior to chasing dolphins in a boat.

We set up our therapy sessions on lovely deserted beaches in waist-deep water, and set our intention with an open invitation for any dolphins to come and join us and then release our concern about the outcome.

Past interaction with domestic dolphins by Dr. Upledger and UI staff demonstrated unusual bonds between humans and dolphins. In a thera-

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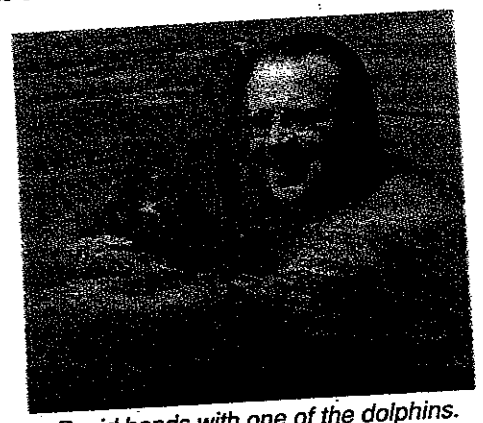
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*"Presence... be here now... focus your attention in the present moment with clear intention"*

Ocean therapy provides a conceptual therapeutic procedure that can be used anywhere in water and utilizes subtle energy techniques. A pool, lake, or even a large hot tub will work as a body of water to perform ocean therapy.

With water-based therapy, we utilize all the characteristics that weightlessness, buoyancy; a wet medium; a "theta" or deeper state of consciousness; improved circulation and immune response; and freedom of movement provides. We add multi-handed therapy (more than one hands-on therapist) to address many parts of the body at one time and couple that with the direction of energy (DOE) concept. The DOE concept acknowledges that we as organic beings are intimately connected with the organic subatomic flow of *orgone, chi, prana*, or universal energy substance of all life and the universe. We experience this through conscious breathing of the flow of the oxygen matrix as it pervades our body and all our

ies that the therapists were working to resolve. At times the dolphins would touch their rostrums (tip of the nose) on the patients at points needing another set of hands, and at other times would touch the backs of the therapists, the same way we would do to boost the amplitude of that therapist.



*David bonds with one of the dolphins.*

The dolphins' ability to understand the intuitive placement of therapy suggests a "knowing," and at the very least, an

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interspecies communication. Potential for this area of study is unlimited.

This training when in the Grand Bahama Island location starts with the interaction of the domestic dolphins on the first day at the "Dolphin Experience" in Port Lucaya. After a 20-minute boat ride, we arrive at Sanctuary Bay, the natural seawater lagoon where our friendly pod of dolphins awaits us.

Six people at a time have personal contact and free swim with two of the pod. The session lasts about one hour (weather permitting). During this swim you may experience the energetic presence of these mag-

nificent beings, touch them, communicate with them, and learn from them. Each time I am with them I feel happily educated. Many participants report being permanently changed by this energetic exchange.

### The Therapeutic Sessions

In the original Upledger Institute Dolphin Educational Workshops in the Florida Keys, many participants, including myself, felt a dolphin "presence" during our floating sessions even though they were not seen at the time. I was fortunate to have Dr. John Upledger applying CST to my head, and five UI staff therapists working on my body,

for over one hour. I was spinning in the water like a compass needle, searching for true north while my therapists willingly spun with me.

As I stood on the deck of the boat post-session, I felt changes to my equilibrium and personality that have lasted since 1998. Many of us experienced a tumbling, rotating unwinding of the whole body during our CST floating sessions that seemed to remind us of a more fluid time, possibly in our mother's womb.

Certainly these activities would be much more difficult under the influence of gravity on a table. I suspect that the ocean and its counterparts are stimulants

of these memories as we are immersed in this kinesthetic medium.

Ocean therapy is an experience that connects physical treatment, altered states of consciousness, the joy of nature and dolphins, and personal transformation. Treatment of most dysfunctions is indicated especially where physical movement is difficult and often restrictive. Add the playfulness of the water activity; buoyancy; the gift of giving and receiving; negative ions; a sense of fluid unity; and the potential for free dolphin interaction, and we have a great way to take our practice out into Mother Nature.

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*"Natural forces are the healers of disease" – Hippocrates*

## Ocean Ecstasy

The collective opinion of those experiencing ocean therapy is actually difficult to put into words. Stanislav Grof, MD, in his book *The Holotropic Mind*, describes his ideas of ocean ecstasy that refer to a state of consciousness that is indescribable, similar to Abraham Maslow's "peak experience."

Maslow characterized this peak experience as "feeling whole, unified and

integrated; effortless and at ease; completely yourself; free of blocks, inhibitions, and fears; in the here and now; being pure psyche and spirit; with no wants and needs; simultaneously childlike and mature; and graced in a way that is beyond words." We agree.

I decided it's not work — it's paradise.

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