

## Ushering in a Century of Integration

by Ilana Rubenfeld

New Discoveries from the last part of the 20th century point toward interconnections between many fields of science and the arts. Research in each separate field demonstrates interrelationships which acknowledge that people must be treated through an integrative (not specialized) approach as whole human beings. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, Neil Bohr's theory of complementarity, Ilya Prigogine's ideas of dissipative structures, and Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's general systems theory all suggest that the parts of a system affect each other through their interactions, constantly changing the equilibrium of the entire system. The Heisenberg principle that you cannot observe something without affecting its outcome is well known and acknowledged. Dare we ask the questions, "Are the body, mind, spirit, and emotions of a person interconnected?" and "What is the consequence for the field of somatic education?"

These questions challenged me throughout the past thirty years as I studied, trained, and taught music conducting, the F.M. Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Gestalt Therapy, and Ericksonian hypnotherapy and then established my own integrative therapeutic and educational paradigm called Rubenfeld Synergy Method (RSM).

Many somatic therapists and educators deal with the body-mind as it relates to "inner" and "outer" body image. Most use touch to reclaim physical functioning, to improve posture and balance in relationship to gravity, to change thinking patterns through movement, and to translate their teachings. However, they bypass the limbic brain, the home of the emotions, and concentrate instead on the neocortical brain, the site of the thinking process.

The amount of manipulation varies from one method to another along a touch continuum. Some use stronger, deeper and constant touch contact, which I classify as "outside to in" therapies, where clients are more dependent on the manipulation to accomplish change. At the other end are methods that use a minimum light touch, which I classify as "inside to out." In these therapies the degree of activity from the client varies from being very still (almost in a meditative stance) to actively moving.

In the center of this continuum we have methods that combine both of the above - the F.M. Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method. They are "outside to in" and "inside to out" paradigms and use a gentle touch to reeducate the nervous system.

In the Alexander Technique, educated touch accompanies a series of verbal directions designed to take the client from thinking to movement. Thought sends a message to the muscles and bones. Moshe Feldenkrais encouraged me not to think during a session, but to surrender to the gentle manipulations which he used in a very specific way to open neural pathways to the brain and create greater freedom of movement.

Both F.M. Alexander and Moshe Feldenkrais were products of the late 19th and early 20th century and come from the age of rationality: "If we can think things out rationally, we can solve all the problems of the world" and "Movement is life, and life without movement is unthinkable!"

For many years, I taught each of these modalities individually; but ultimately, even these gentle, middle ground methods were not sufficient for me. Many somatic methods did not address the limbic system directly and did not intentionally integrate and process the emotional material that emerged during a session. I felt a need to see how emotions participated in this process of reeducation and choice. While dysfunctional alignment and posture can be traced back to problems of structure and function, what I burned to know was the emotional history and connection. That curiosity led me to train and collaborate with the late Fritz and Laura Perls (cofounders of Gestalt Therapy) and to experiment with the integration of somatic methods with Gestalt Therapy.

Most psychotherapies intentionally do not use touch to access emotional memories. Wilhelm Reich was an exception. Practicing in the 1930's, he was the first Western psychoanalyst to show that the manipulation of a muscle could bring into consciousness past memories of experiences held somatically in the unconscious. He also explored and validated the ancient Eastern concept of energy fields that emanate from the human body.

Since the sixties, we have witnessed the flowering of neuroscience, cognitive science, and psychoneuroimmunology. Now that the concept of the body-mind has firmly taken hold, "energy" medicine is emerging as the next frontier.

I have come from the body to psychotherapy, utilizing a gentle approach, one that I believe honors and respects the individual process. Healing is the client's responsibility. I have found that they know what their choices are once their fearful barriers are dissolved in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. After many years of gestation, the Rubenfeld Synergy Method was born and continues to be creatively refined.

I believe that the Rubenfeld Synergy Method is a model for the future and cuts to the heart of how somatic work will evolve in the 21st century. I am convinced that the integration of methods I have drawn together provides a highly effective, holistic model for bringing body, mind, spirit and psyche together in a present, trusting whole.

This synergistic multimodal approach is a key to sustained change and helps clients integrate previously unassimilated traumatic experiences which are still active in subtly destructive ways.

Painful memories, no matter how old, are still alive in the body. In fact, our somatic system organizes itself to express the unexpressed. Some believe that this happens on a cellular level, and that each cell has an emotional memory.

Over the years I have worked with many people who experienced the ravages of war as children, and who had to leave their native land at an early age. I can sense and feel the terror and anxiety that is present in their bodies, the stored memories of sudden separations, death, and leaving their homeland. These clients can talk about their past traumas endlessly, but until they have worked through them on the somatic level, the terror continues. Healing their frightened inner child repeatedly emerges as the main theme of their sessions. The story of Martha ( at end of this article) exemplifies the emergence of the separation theme and its connection to other themes as well, such as fear of death and growing old.

Whoever the client and whatever the age or sex, a Rubenfeld Synergist holds a number of key concepts while assisting clients to achieve integration of mind, body, emotions, spirit and simultaneously releasing pain and fears which are held in the body-mind. The following are some of the basic theories and practices of the Rubenfeld Synergy Method:

1. ***Body, mind, emotions and spirit are dynamically interrelated.***  
Each time you introduce change at one level, you change every other level and affect the equilibrium of the whole person.
2. ***Therapists and educators must respect the uniqueness of the individual.***  
I observe that no one method is the answer of the reality for all people at all times. Individuals do not have to fit into a specific system for the system or the person to be valid. Boundaries of both therapist and client are fully respected, no matter how they appear. This is especially crucial in working with incest and abuse survivors.
3. ***Human beings have a natural capacity for self-healing and self-regulation.***  
The work of Candice Pert, Bernie Siegal, and Norman Cousins document the power and existence of self-healing. Rather than "correcting" the client's innate healing ability, this healing potential already exists, waiting to be actualized. A basic axiom in Gestalt psychology is that every organism has the capacity to attain an optimum healing balance within itself and with its environment. Studies from Harvard show us that the simple act of remembering how it feels to care for someone, or be cared for by someone you love, can drive up - and sustain for one hour! - the body's level of antibody immunoglobulin A. Other studies show a link between loneliness and lowered cellular immunity. Candace Pert, in her exploration of neuropeptides (hormones that govern communication between the brain and body cells) found that the parts of the brain responsible for mood and emotions have forty times more neuropeptide receptors than other parts of the brain. The integration of the limbic brain (emotional brain) in somatic work is crucial to the healing process.

4. ***The body tells the truth.***  
No matter what clients communicate verbally, their bodies portray their authentic state. For example, one woman insisted that she forgave her father's abuse, but her body mirrored a steel-like rage.
5. ***Change occurs in the present moment.***  
A client may experience past memory and fantasize the future, but change itself occurs in the present. In RSM, simultaneous touch and verbal communication often link past somatic experiences. With the use of active imagination and visualization, the client relives the experience in real time, reviews the past, resolves unfinished business, and integrates new insights in the present. Thus, the somatic and emotional change that is experienced in the present moment is embedded in the nervous system.
6. ***Awareness is the first step in the change process.***  
Change cannot happen without awareness. By bringing unconsciously held habit patterns to awareness, clients have the opportunity to explore alternate choices and develop possibilities for psychophysical change.  
In RSM, every touch can bring about awareness at all levels. By asking clients to send their awareness to my hands, simultaneously using verbal interventions and various images, they release holding patterns in their somatic system. Clients discover that the power to make changes in their lives can begin in their bodies.
7. ***Experimentation supports heightening the awareness.***  
Participating in an experiment allows clients to experience and exaggerate what they are doing, explore the opposite of their habitual behavior, and experience confusion which leads to integration. Experiencing somatic and emotional confusion is essential to creating the possibility for change. When two opposite truths are held, integration can occur.
8. ***Ultimate responsibility for change rests with the clients.***  
However, the Rubenfeld Synergists do not push, but remain centered and "listen" with their hands for the change to emerge from within the client. This waiting gives the client time to reorganize emotional and physical experience for a self-willed release. While the Synergist does not "fix" the client, both share responsibility for participating fully in the process.
9. ***Touch is a viable, accurate system of communication.***  
It is another language, indeed a very sophisticated way of communicating through our hands, receiving and giving information that we store within us. Touch directly links "cell consciousness" of both client and Synergist. It is as though the knowledge gained on an intuitive level is also stored within our cells. In this way, we invite a learning exchange through the nervous system to the individual cells.
10. ***Touch that "listens" and "talks" serves as an entry point to the whole person.***  
Synergists often begin by touching the head very gently, enabling then to sense where a client is physically and emotionally. This initial touch is used to contact the client's comfort level, giving the client time to establish trust and rapport with the synergist. By palpating muscles lightly these "open and listening" hands can also tell whether the trauma goes back to childhood.  
The hands can also transmit information back to the clients, by teaching them how to distinguish the difference between what they consider to be relaxed and what is genuine relaxation of a body area. Often, pointing out the incongruity leads to the release of body tensions. The client may be invited to carry on a dialogue with the tense area by giving it a voice.  
Emotions in a dream translate directly into muscle responses. Adding the skill of a specific "listening: touch is another entry point into the unconscious world of dreams. The answers and solutions ultimately come from within the clients.

11. ***Intentional and noninvasive touch makes the difference.***  
What the Synergist is thinking and feeling is communicated through the hands to the client; likewise, what the client is thinking and feeling is communicated back through the hands to the Synergist. For this reason, the quality of touch in RSM is considered with as much care as the choice of words in verbal therapy. I have developed ways to teach trainees how to use intentional touch, thus creating a dialogue with the unconscious mind. In this altered state, which is often hypnotic in the style of Ericksonian hypnotherapy, clients have access to emotional material that is not available otherwise. Throughout, the client's boundaries are fully respected, no matter how limited they may appear. This is especially crucial when working with incest and abuse survivors. Touch by RSM Synergists is by definition nonviolent.
12. ***Commitment to transform darkness into light is possible through touch.***  
Clients experience pain emotionally and somatically as a dark vestibular pathway. Repetition of pain can become a habit pattern stored in the cells. Touch, humor, and gentleness allow a deeper access level to release the pain.  
Harry A. Klopf, author of "The Hedonistic Neuron: A Theory of Memory, Learning and Intelligence" claims that the nervous system learns from pleasure, not pain. According to his theory, each time we make sense of new information, the brain rewards us by releasing large quantities of endorphins and other pleasure-producing neurochemicals. This hippocampus, a part of the limbic system, has been identified as part of our learning and memory apparatus.
13. ***Sensing the body's energy field is possible through touch.***  
Wilhelm Reich explored a facet of this energy, and called it "orgone." This is the energy of the chakras, the seven centers of consciousness as described in ancient Kundalini yogic texts. Each corresponds to a developmental phase in human experience. The first, for instance, located in the lower spine, governs survival. The seventh, located above the crown of the head, is the center of spiritual enlightenment. In the process of working with thousands of people, I discovered that I could tell where someone's energy pattern was stuck by moving my hands about an inch above the body. The energy had a dense and stationary quality. When clients worked through feelings and memories connected to a part of their body, the quality of energy markedly changed. Now, the affected area was pulsing, and the muscles became soft and relaxed.
14. ***Self-care is the first step in client care.***  
The danger of not taking care of yourself when using touch is that you transmit your problems through your hands. Instead of allowing a release of their tensions, you give the client yours. The reverse is also true. You are vulnerable to the somatic aches and pains of the client. RSM emphasizes the practitioner's self-care during the session by paying attention to posture, breathing, centering, maintaining personal boundaries and the physical environment.
15. ***Interject humor whenever possible.***  
Appropriate humor does not dismiss the importance of pain, but it does make it bearable and assists clients to go deeper into their feelings. "The Anatomy of an Illness" by Norman Cousins beautifully illustrates the power of humor to heal.

To educate practitioners who are capable of doing such integrative work, we need to seriously address the quality of practitioner training. This is a current concern of many of us in the somatic field. We can begin by having longer, more intensive training and closer supervision. In my training program, we have a ratio of six trainees to one teacher. This personalized and high quality supervision helps our trainees learn to take care of themselves, emotionally and physically, while they are practicing the Method. "What are you experiencing now?" is a question often asked of the trainees in order to create a continuum of awareness that helps them keep their boundaries intact.

The personal process of the practitioner is very important. Somatic schools of the future need to underscore compassion, reverence, and caring as well as anatomy, physiology, and movement. We are not just moving people's bodies around. Our clients bring us their souls, trust, and their deepest feelings.

Learning technique is not nearly enough. We need to go beyond technique and develop artistry and intuition, rather than formulaic approaches to healing. To be truly responsive to each person requires us to become improvisational artists. Once practice is refined, somatic work becomes a meditation and a shared adventure in a universal drama.

Another trend I support for the 21st century is the cross-fertilization of somatic and psychological training. I would like to see us "go out on a limbic" and address our emotional nature. The more integrated and integrative we are as healers, the more powerfully we can serve as the agents of positive change in this fragmented world.

Integration is becoming more explicit, more acknowledged, more available to persons working in somatic education. Every touch exists on two levels - physical and emotional. We can be touched by another's words as much as by their hands. Either way, our emotional response is in our body and in our head through language. As long as somatic therapists and psychotherapists have separate domains, we support specialization and do not treat the whole person.

As we complete the 20th century, we are headed toward the integration of psychotherapy and somatic education. It is time to move with this energy, this flow toward integration. It is time to usher in a 21st century of integration.

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The following Rubenfeld Synergy session demonstrates clearly the interrelation of body, mind, and emotion. The somatic movements and verbal interventions are simultaneous, and the integration occurs continuously.

#### Story of Martha

*I ask for a volunteer. Martha, a small, blond, curly-haired woman in her late forties, rushes to the table (which is surrounded by a circle of workshop participants) and lies down on her back. I touch her fragile head very lightly, and it doesn't move to either side. Her eye lids close and begin to flutter. I slide both my hands under her left shoulder blade. Her upper back feels like a tight rope--full of tangled knots.*

*"What is happening in your back?" I ask gently.*

*"I've got to let my son go." Tears well up in her eyes and roll down her cheeks. "He's so young and helpless!"*

*As I listen to her, I picture a very young boy-- about twelve years old.*

*"How old is your son?" I ask curiously. Now, I begin to feel some movement in her back.*

*"Oh, he's twenty-eight years old." There is a slight pause of embarrassment, and she begins to laugh. Her whole body laughs, and her right shoulder releases and softens.*

*"He's leaving the nest, and I'm getting older!"*

*Her forearms begin to tighten and she clenches her fists.*

*"Hold him tighter instead of letting him go," I suggest-- following the language of her arms. She crosses her arms over her chest and squeezes until she can no longer do it. Suddenly, she flings her arms open and lets go of her tension and her son.*

*"I don't want to get older and lose my memory like my father." She tells me about the horrors of his Alzheimer's disease. I ask her to roll onto her left side. I place my hands on her left shoulder and move it slowly up toward her ear and down toward her hip.*

*"Are you willing to do an experiment?" I ask.*

*"Yes," she replies quickly.*

*"If you could talk to your older woman, what would you say to each other?" I ask.*

*"I'm eighty-five years old and I love to dance, pick flowers in the field, and eat ice cream!"*

*Her voice is full of energy, and her shoulder moves easily to and fro.*

*I never had a chance to play," she says in a tiny little three-year-old's voice. Her inner child became old at a very young age.*

*"Now that I'm eighty-five, I don't have to teach and help others in order to be loved!" She says this with great excitement. I ask her to roll over onto her back. I slip my hands under her left shoulder. She winces with great pain as she tells me about a friend who is dying of cancer.*

*"Do you have to get sick and die not to grow old?" I ask, making a leap in the process.*

*"No, No, I don't want to die young, and I don't have to help or teach others all the time in order to be loved," she says, shaking her head from side to side.*

*"Tell that to your little inner child," I suggest with a playful voice.*

*"I love you no matter what you do," she says changing the sentence to suit her.*

"How old are you now?" I ask.

"Forty-eight years old," she says loudly.

"How wonderful! Now look into my eyes and say: I am forty-eight years old and I can be with people without helping or teaching them." My hands are still under her left shoulder which is beginning to soften as she dialogues between her little three-year-old, her wise eighty-five-year-old, and finally comes to her present age. At this moment her shoulder releases all the tension, and energy moves swiftly down her arms and out her fingertips. There is also a great deal of energy streaming through her pelvis, legs, and out her feet. Tears well up, and I encouraged her to let them go. There is no sobbing, only a deep recognition that growing older can be her journey, not her father's. She does not have to have a terminal illness to stay young. She is soft and peaceful as she integrates her new insight physically and emotionally.

I invite her to roll over and sit up. She looks around the room slowly. Her face looks older, wiser, and younger at the same time. She moves her shoulders and smiles as she experiences no pain.

"Say your key sentence to a few people; they'll be your allies," I say, nodding.

"I don't have to help everyone so that they will love me. I can just be with people the way I am right now."

She jumps off the table--full of life and joy. We go for a walk around the room, stopping in front of several workshop participants as she repeats her key sentence--adding and changing it. There is a sacred silence as Martha returns to her seat. Several faces are damp with tears. Others are laughing and applauding. The themes from Martha's session touched everyone in the group: growing old, children leaving home, parents suffering from illnesses, women who have no children, being loved only if you are a helper, and the death of friends you love.

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Underlying this and every session is a four-stage metaprocess. They are awareness, experimentation, integration, and reentry. These occur separately and simultaneously on all four levels of body, mind, emotion, and spirit. This is not a linear process, but rather one which is simultaneous, cyclical, and parallel. At the closure of each session I am moved by the universal themes that emerge, just as I am moved by the universal themes of a great piece of music. At its best, the relationship of trust created between client (student) and synergist (therapist, practitioner) elevates our spirits and breaks through barriers that otherwise seem impenetrable.