

A Journey into Bio dynamics

Life, living
organisms

The forces which stimulate growth, development
or change within a system or process

My journey into healing and biodynamic craniosacral therapy started along a far more conventional route – with my early working life as a physiotherapist in the NHS. Having trained at the Royal London Hospital, I worked my basic grade rotations through various medical and surgical specialities, and remain grateful for the excellent grounding in practice this provided. As I worked with countless people over the years, applying physical/mechanical techniques to ease pain, retrain movement and aid recovery from illness and surgery, I became increasingly aware of social and psychological contributing factors. The need for human contact and relationship seemed to be

at least as important as the body's physical needs in recovery. I initiated a number of projects aimed at addressing perceived needs amongst both NHS staff and patients for a more holistic model of health care, including Tai Chi classes on a mental health ward and a walk-in clinic for NHS staff. It frustrated me that the medical model insisted on dividing care into areas of medical specialism – e.g orthopaedics – rather than being centred on the wellbeing of the whole person. In my quest to improve this, I took a position within the Directorate of Modernisation and later also worked at the University of Plymouth, where physiotherapists were being trained using a progressive model of enquiry-based learning. Although I enjoyed these roles, they took me away from hands-on clinical work, which I missed greatly.

Tanya Desfontaines
Senior Tutor, Karuna Institute

However, my life was set to change when in 2003, I met and, shortly afterwards, became apprenticed to a Toltec and Native American teacher, Sue 'Moondragon' Jamieson. Sue introduced, named and mapped out a landscape to vast seen and unseen worlds and dreamscapes, which both fascinated and challenged me as I explored the teachings through ceremony, song, artistic creativity and community.

These experiences spoke to my spirit, and reawakened a passion and love for life and the creative forces of nature. I rediscovered connections to all of life and the beings – seen and unseen – with whom we share this planet. I worked hard to free myself from much of my painful personal history and conditioning, whilst re-establishing a sense of place and purpose in life. After five years of apprenticeship, I began to think about my next direction. Although I enjoyed the work I was doing with NHS staff and students, I felt that I could no longer work within the constraints of the NHS and the Western medical system as my understanding of health, disease and healing – and our very nature as human beings – had shifted so radically. I was now thinking in terms of a holographic system of interconnected universe. I longed to return to a clinical role, as I felt my vocation and calling in life was to work with people in a hands-on manner, but I wanted to offer more than a simple, physical therapeutic input.

Having spoken to my teacher about this, she suggested I look at cranial work as a therapy that could build on my bodywork background whilst integrating the shamanic experience and understanding I had gained, both of myself and the nature of the universe. Sue had seen an advertisement for training at the Karuna Institute, and felt that here I would find the support in learning to work with mind, body and spirit. I trusted her instinct, applied for the CST training and handed in my notice with the NHS, simultaneously opening my private practice as a physiotherapist.

So in 2007, I found myself at Karuna, studying Craniosacral Biodynamics under Franklyn Sills. At first I wondered what exactly I had got myself into, as the teachings were so far removed from anything I had encountered thus far in my healing work. I had a good understanding of biomechanics from my physiotherapy background and I had learned about subtle realms and the energetic body in my shamanic work, but didn't yet know how to bring that understanding into my work as a body worker.

I began to feel an increasing edge of excitement as I started to recognise resonances with the shamanic work. Biodynamics is the study of the energy or forces at work within living organisms. It seemed to me that I had discovered a place where my shamanic understanding of the world, and the more subtle realms of reality, was recognised and acknowledged. I particularly enjoyed the references to such diverse fields of scientific research as cosmology, fluid dynamics and developmental biology, which demonstrated the action of underlying forces and innate intelligence within living systems. These are the same biodynamic forces and the very same Intelligence I had encountered throughout my shamanic training and was now delighted to witness at work in my biodynamic craniosacral practice sessions. I experienced a return to my 'hard science' roots, but with a significant shift of perspective.

The biomechanical concepts and constructs from my physiotherapy background were turned inside out, and I had to let go of my previously-held thoughts of 'truth' – my conditioned belief systems and orientation to my experience of the world around me. I experienced the shift from a biomechanical, structural orientation to a biodynamic one as largely a shift in mindset, as well as a training in perceptual awareness.

Orientation to Health

Our cultural conditioning here in the West is to focus our attention, usually on the 'problems' and with a relatively narrow field of awareness. The natural, subtle, perceptual abilities we are born with are mostly socialised out of us by the time we start school. In the majority of our educational systems, children are taught to 'pay attention', to narrow their focus to the page in front of them, the teacher's words, or writings on the board. In most forms of Western health/medical education, we are taught to focus on the problems, symptoms and complaints of our clients, and to respond with some kind of analysis, forming a treatment plan and applying techniques to fix the problems.

In Craniosacral Biodynamics, we learn to cultivate presence in relationship, and our focus shifts to the biodynamic forces and blueprint energy – which can be thought of as a person's primal energy pattern – as much larger fields within which the conditional forces of life are met. As Cherionna Menzam-Sills

has expressed it, we learn to shift focus from the 'presenting figure to a wider orientation, to more of the background including the underlying forces.'¹ When we hold the conditions of life within the wider context of the biodynamic field, within the context of health, the overwhelming resource of universal support becomes accessible and healing processes can unfold in a way that isn't available when we narrow our field to focus only on the 'problem'.

'Problems' are also typically seen differently, with a biodynamic viewpoint finding the solution within the 'problem'. The exact 'thing' that needs to happen – which I could never work out from my analytical mind – can be seen as enfolded within the struggle. Inertial fulcrums, which in turn give rise to patterns within the tissues of the physical body, are seen as expressions of health, where potency is acting to contain externally derived forces in the best way possible, to limit the impact of such forces, or conditions, on the wellbeing of the system as a whole. In this way, potency acts intelligently to protect us and

There is a wild beauty to Dartmoor which surrounds and infuses the Karuna Institute. The granite beneath us, which cracks the surface and emerges in the highest places as tors, the ancient landscape of stone circles, sparkling clear water, wide open sky, the gnarled and wind-sculpted trees and the many birds and animals which populate this unique environment: these all became my teachers as I grappled with a new paradigm of biodynamics.

I learnt to orient to the wholeness of my own system, suspended in the universe between heaven and earth, supported by fields within fields of biodynamic forces. I then learnt to come into relationship with another human being in their wholeness, and to trust and allow the Intelligent life force to lead me. As I increasingly surrendered into trusting something far greater than my human mentality, I found my awe and wonder grow at what is possible through remaining present and staying out of the way, and not interfering with what is unfolding before my very eyes and under my hands.

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consequently expressions of this protective function in the body are not seen as problems to be fixed.

My teachers encouraged me to put everything I thought I knew 'behind the curtain' and stand in 'bare receptivity and presence' as Dr. William Garner Sutherland had once urged his students.² Slowly, the deeper tides and biodynamic forces of potency began to reveal themselves. Glimpsing this power and intelligence at work, at first I tried to grasp it, which proved a frustrating and fruitless process. It seemed as if I was trying to hold onto a cloud, something nebulous and intangible, which melted away as I attempted to keep hold of it. After years of practise, under the kind and patient instruction of Franklyn and others, I gradually settled into a new way of being and relating to what I was experiencing. I learnt to settle under the waveforms and maintain a steady, grounded and receptive listening presence whereby in the stillness I could hear and respond to the great teachings of the Breath of Life itself. The depth of stillness that enters the space transforms it – it becomes like a dojo, a sacred space within which this divine presence dwells and the majesty of life is revealed.

This came as a huge relief as well as a revelation, that left me humbled and trusting the belief that we are created and held in love, that our human systems are self-healing and always supported to be the best possible under the current conditions of life.

This orientation to health was a revelation in itself. It went against my social and cultural conditioning to see that whilst we are alive and breath is given to us, health is never lost, although it may become obscured by the conditions we have met and the need to protect under some of those conditions. In the safety of the biodynamic holding field, it still touches me that the intelligent potency at work within my clients' systems responds to my presence and receptivity, revealing the radiant core of 'freedom and luminosity'. The 'Health that is never lost' illuminates our being even in the midst of pain and suffering. As Franklyn would say, 'the Long Tide is never conditioned; yet it supports all the conditions of life'.

Biodynamic Forces

Nearing the end of his working life, Dr. William Garner Sutherland urged his students to 'use no force from

without, let the unerring potency do the work'. Our work adheres strictly to this maxim, orienting to what Dr. Sutherland called 'primary respiration' (tidal expressions of the most fundamental ordering forces of life), and its embodied life force, which Dr. Sutherland called 'potency' or 'liquid light.' These fundamental life forces interact with the conditional forces met in life from our earliest moments, maintaining both our form and function in the best possible state of health, given the conditions present.

Dr. Rollin Becker, who was a student of Dr. Sutherland, furthered Sutherland's line of enquiry and coined the term 'biodynamic'. He emphasised the importance of being guided by a 'listening' approach, recognising and harnessing the potential of self-corrective mechanisms within the body. It was Dr. Becker who described the intrinsic, formative forces of life as biodynamic forces, distinct from what he called 'biokinetic' or conditional, externally derived forces.³

Franklyn Sills has further refined and clarified essential biodynamic concepts and processes, and with his tutors, has developed a coherent and dynamically evolving curriculum for learning this biodynamic craniosacral work outside the context of osteopathy.

As biodynamic practitioners, we learn to orient to what is known as the three bodies, or three fields: the physical, fluid and tidal bodies. These are three interactive suspensory fields, with each field suspended within the others. The most dense field of physical body (cells and tissues, is suspended in a less dense field of fluid body (fluids and potency), which is suspended in the least dense, but most potent tidal field of Long Tide. These fields are all sensed as being suspended in the vast field of dynamic stillness and centred by our original ordering matrix of light and vibration. In our work, we orient to embryological forces and ignition processes that continue to express throughout life. Our orientation to the deeper tides of primary respiration, the field of dynamic stillness and the underlying health constitutes a paradigm shift of great significance in that there is always health at work, even in the dying process.

Relational Presence

Influenced by the work of early British analysts such as Frank Lake, Donald Winnicott and Ronald

Fairbairn, biodynamic craniosacral therapy is fundamentally relational in nature and demands the cultivation of practitioner presence. The careful negotiation of a safe, heart-centred holding field is taught through the ritual of contact, which creates a space where the emergence and healing of our earliest needs of being is possible.

The term 'relational field' as used in Craniosacral Biodynamics is derived from Core Process Psychotherapy, which was developed by Maura Sills at the Karuna Institute. As such, Karuna's biodynamic curriculum also has a strong emphasis on establishing a safe relational field. This involves generating a heart-centred field of unconditional acceptance of the other at a being-to-being level. As we settle under the waveforms of our ego-personality self, our conditioning and life experiences, we open to the vast forces of creation. The universe moves from simply maintaining our constantly changing order and structure into the mystery of healing, whereby healing intentions and processes can unfold as we sit in service and witness. But we are not merely passive observers – our very presence and orientation becomes a kind of catalyst or channel through which the dance is expressed.

The ritual of contact provides a series of steps to follow, whereby practitioners establish a safe and negotiated relational holding field. Slowing ourselves down, matching the inner pacing of our client, ensuring that our attention is not experienced as intrusive and negotiating a clear and comfortable quality of relational touch are all factors in establishing a sense of safety within which our clients' systems can settle into the deeper expressions of primary respiration. Our facial expressions and eye contact, voice and gesture, as well as direct heart-to-heart communication through our hearts' huge bioelectric field⁴ all stimulate the social engagement system. Modern neuroscience now recognises the transformative power of feeling safe,⁵ particularly in the field of trauma work. Within the safety of the relational field, trauma held in the body may emerge for healing and resolution, and can be met with relational touch, orientation to resource and expressions of health, appropriate pacing and skilful use of mindfulness-based enquiry.

Theravada Buddhism remains a strong influence in the work taught at Karuna. In fact 'Karuna', in

both Sanskrit and Pali, is translated as 'compassion' – the desire to remove harm and suffering. It is one of the four brahmaviharas or 'divine abodes', which are virtuous mental states the Buddha encouraged both monks and lay people to cultivate and radiate.

The Buddha was often called 'the great physician' because he was more interested in addressing the human condition of suffering, rather than speculating about metaphysics. We can think of it like being injured by a poisoned arrow. Speculating on the metaphysics of how it happened won't help in removing the arrow and alleviating the suffering caused by the wound. Biodynamic craniosacral therapy, in common with other systems of natural medicine and healing, doesn't fixate on the 'story' or the nature of the conditions present. Instead, it works with the suffering that we have created for ourselves in reaction or response to the issue. We see that at the heart of every inertial fulcrum there is health at work, containing and centring the conditional forces, the impacts of conditions we have met since our earliest origins.

I find the work both profound and elegant. The experience of being present with another and witnessing these universal forces at work leaves me in awe and often deeply moved.

Biography

Tanya has always been fascinated by the workings of the physical and energetic bodies, entranced by the beauty of the patterns, form and movements of nature as revealed in the fields of biology, chemistry and physics. She has studied martial arts since age 11, training in the dojo each morning and, courtesy of a Zen-influenced sensei, also learning the mental discipline of meditation.

Tanya was a senior physiotherapist at the North Middlesex Hospital in London, before relocating to Devon to raise her children. Trained and mentored by Franklyn Sills at the Karuna Institute since 2007, she is currently senior tutor/course co-ordinator for the foundation training in Craniosacral Biodynamics at Karuna. She also teaches at post-graduate level internationally.

Tanya lives with her family near Totnes, South Devon, where she maintains a thriving clinic.

About Karuna

Franklyn Sills has been a pioneer in the development and refinement of biodynamic work in CST over the last 40 years. Hundreds of students have trained at his school in Devon, the Karuna Institute, on Dartmoor, and he has also established a biodynamic school in his native New York, USA. Franklyn has written two definitive Biodynamic Craniosacral textbooks,^{6,7} while Cherionna Menzam-Sills, a respected international teacher of Craniosacral Biodynamics, has recently published a new introductory book.¹

The foundation curriculum taught at Karuna has been developed and refined over many years, and forms a comprehensive training for new practitioners. The work is taught in a residential setting, in ten seminars spread over two years.



Our next intake will be for 2020 and, although we are not yet processing applications, prospective students can register their interest by emailing:

office@karuna-institute.co.uk

Post-graduate courses are also offered to qualified CST practitioners. For details, please visit: www.karuna-institute.co.uk 🌱

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