

What is rhythmical massage therapy and how is it different from classical forms of massage? What role does the anthroposophic background play in the therapeutic method developed by Ita Wegman MD and decisively influenced also by Margarethe Hauschka MD?

Stefan Härter describes the anthroposophic views of the human being that underlie this approach: touch and the twelve senses, rhythm and the four members or bodily sheaths, the threefold structure and function of the human organism. He also characterizes very specific massage movements and movement qualities, and the perspectives informing their use by therapists. Citing authentic case examples, he offers accessible and vivid insight into the practice of this holistic form of therapy.

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Stefan Härter

**Touch
Rhythm
Healing**

Rhythmical massage therapy according to Ita Wegman MD

Anthrosana

Association for anthroposophically extended medicine and therapy

Rhythmical massage therapy as holistic therapy

In Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia, one finds the following definition of massage:*

Massage is a form of therapy in physical medicine. It involves using the hands to mechanically influence the upper layers of the body, with an effect exerted on the whole organism.

The word massage has origins in various languages. The French word ‘masser’ means to knead, and in Greek ‘massein’ likewise means knead or also touch. In Arab lands the word ‘mass’ means to touch, and in Hebrew ‘maschiach’ means anointing, or also anointed.

Here we have a general, open-ended description of massage. I am particularly interested in the etymological roots of the word massage. In Arabic and Greek the word ‘mass’ indicates touch – which is the starting point for our subsequent observations. But I wonder why the Hebrew word for ‘anointed’ which also may remind us of religious rites, starts with the same three letters as the English word ‘massage’: the same syllable in various languages. Touch connected with religious rite is an idea that I will later return to.

Much of the following account also applies to other types of massage, as well as to the relaxing and reviving form of massage which friends and family give each other. Thus we can see how various forms of massage are all related.

Rhythmical massage therapy can only be understood fully through the foundation it arose from – Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy. It is my intention to explain this foundation a little more. I would like the anthroposophic outlook elaborated here to be seen as a kind of working hypothesis, one I myself have been working with for many years. Both in my therapeutic work and life it has proven fruitful and accurate.

What is rhythmical massage therapy?

Rhythmical massage therapy according to Ita Wegman MD is a classical massage form extended through the insights of anthroposophy.

The basic movements of classical massage are here enhanced by adding to them several further elements. Primarily, this enhancement is as follows:

- Tissue is released and relaxed from the depth to the periphery through soft, flowing, sucking movements.
- The individual form of touch used is adapted to therapeutic viewpoints relating to each type of illness and diagnostic findings – from energetic to delicate, from point-focused to surface-attentive, or from slow through to fast.
- The enlivening rhythmic element informs both the massage movements themselves and the sequence of treatment.
- Self-healing forces are stimulated, and self-regulation of life processes supported.

* Translation into English of the German Wikipedia page

- Special stroking movements – such as phase-delayed or syncopated circular movements and diverse lemniscates – release and connect separate parts of the body.

In rhythmical massage therapy, equal attention is paid to deposits, congestions, tensions and the whole warmth balance of the body. This is also why it has such a pronounced diversity of effects.

Rhythmical massage beneficially influences circulation, stimulates the motion of tissue fluid, regulates misplaced tensions in muscular and connective tissue and especially supports the organism's self-regulation processes. This leads to deepening of the breath, improvement in cardio-vascular function and restoration of a healthy waking-sleeping rhythm.

The rational basis of rhythmical massage therapy is the functional threefold and fourfold human organism, as detailed in the picture of the human being on which anthroposophic medicine is founded. Drawing on these perspectives enables one to enlarge on conventional indications for massage, for example extending it to treatment of venous disorders and tumour illnesses, as well as to social therapy and psychiatric patients. Contra-indications are similar to those for classical massage.

Professional rhythmical massage therapists seek to offer every patient an individual remedy. They have usually trained as physiotherapists or massage therapists. Drawing on anthroposophic insights into the human being and their own schooling of perception, they are able to achieve this aim to the best of their abilities.

Time allocation is geared to the individual needs of the patient and the particular illness. A rest period is needed after therapy. Only by resting can the enlivening effect be properly and individually assimilated.

The history of rhythmical massage therapy

In past centuries, when powders were thought to be more important for personal hygiene than washing in water, massage scarcely had any place in popular awareness.

In the 19th century, after being injured, the Swede Per Henrik Ling 'discovered' the beneficial effect of massage at first hand, and developed a whole system of treatments. In doing so he hearkened back to the experiences of the ancient Greeks, for whom bodily care through gymnastics and massage had been of great importance. The 'Swedish massage' that developed in consequence is basically the foundation of today's 'classical massage'.

Ita Wegman MD was trained in various massage techniques in Holland and Berlin between 1900 and 1905, before undertaking medical training in Zurich and Munich from 1906 to 1911. Anthroposophic insights into the nature of the human being and medical suggestions from Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy, led in 1921 to the founding of today's Ita Wegman Clinic. At the clinic she founded, Ita Wegman extended the techniques of Swedish massage with the new insights of anthroposophy, developing rhythmical massage therapy on this foundation.

Ita Wegman instructed physicians, nurses and other colleagues at the clinic during daily nursing and through verbal teaching. She preferred giving practical demonstrations of massage, and placed great value on her pupils intuitively doing what was right for each individual patient. In 1929 the physician Margarethe Hauschka-Stavenhagen arrived at

the Ita Wegman Clinic, and spent the next 12 years training with Ita Wegman in various therapies, especially painting therapy and rhythmical massage therapy. From then on she taught 'Rhythmical massage therapy according to Dr. Ita Wegman'. Rhythmical massage was developed and further elaborated during this period, and above all taught to nurses.

Later, Margarethe Hauschka taught courses in Stuttgart for physiotherapists and massage therapists. As rhythmical massage therapy became increasingly known, the need grew for a dedicated school, and this was established in 1962 in Bad Boll, Germany, as **The School for Artistic Therapy and Rhythmical Massage**, today known as the **Margarethe Hauschka School**. From then on, regular further training courses were held for physiotherapists and massage therapists. Until the end of her life, Margarethe Hauschka directed the school, supported by Irmgard Marbach and other teaching staff and doctors.

Today, in various countries, schools exist for rhythmical massage training. In Switzerland we are especially grateful that the **School for Rhythmical Massage Therapy** can be based at the Ita Wegman Clinic – the place where rhythmical massage was first developed.

Health aspects derived from the anthroposophic view of the human being

To clarify the significance of this extension of classical massage, I would like to start with some aspects of health arising from Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy and view of the human being, as they manifest in individual biography. My point of departure are the three themes of 'touch, rhythm and healing'. I will look at these from various angles and pose questions for the reader to consider.

Touch

The experience of touch in childhood development

Recently a mother asked me whether I was familiar with the advert which shows a child having Vicks rubbed on his chest. Then she told me about her son who kept saying he had a cough and a cold, and wanted her to rub in Vicks. In fact he didn't have a cold at all, but enjoyed the massage experience so much.

What does this tell us? What kind of need was the boy expressing, and where does it come from?

The embryo has initial experiences of touch in the womb. The growing foetus is forming itself within the mother's body, and is enclosed by the various sheaths that give it protection, warmth and nourishment – everything it needs to develop the body. Within these sheaths, floating in the amniotic fluid, it experiences touch at the boundaries of the body: through the waters, the placenta, its own body - when, for example, one small hand finds another. The mother's movements, her breathing rhythm and heartbeat all flow into the first experiences of touch.

Is this where a fundamental human need first develops, the germinal beginning of a longing for touch and closeness?

Further experiences of touch follow for the baby and infant. During washing, nappy-changing and dressing the child again experiences the boundaries of his body, learns to know them more clearly and – through unpleasant experiences – to protect them

better. Thus he develops awareness of his body, his boundaries and his stance and motions in space.

In these learning processes, loving touch is a great help: being held, caressed, perhaps also very gentle massages. Here the quality of touch plays an important role. If it is pleasant, the child will gladly invite it, and be willing to accept it. All the touching, and the words he hears, nourish and provide a soul foundation, helping to develop inner forces. And in response the child also learns to go out towards other people, knowing that he is loved, and reflecting and radiating this back. He thus becomes a 'social' being. The child learns to enjoy a wonderful sense of wellbeing and the encompassed safety of loving and being loved.

The skin's capacity to sense and perceive develops very early and is refined during life. The skin possesses a range of sense organs: for touch, warmth and cold, pressure etc. These perceptions affect all systems of the body, such as breathing heartbeat and circulation, but also digestion, excretion, nerves and glands.

Just as the skin encompasses the whole body, we experience our body as a single entity; and thus what happens at one place works back on the whole. If a stone falls on our toe and causes sudden pain, our whole bodily feeling and even our thinking are affected, in the same way that severe itching can absorb our whole attention.

Experiences of touch serve our whole psychological development. Seeds planted in the soil form roots and seedlings. They need protection and nurturing to unfold in accordance with their nature. In the same way a child needs to be protected so that his development can unfold in a healthy way. Here touch and care of all kinds are essential. Where they are lacking children become lonely and socially ill at ease. Nowadays people are far more aware of the traumatic nature of boundary transgressions and their consequences.

What actually happens when touch occurs, or massage?

Sense-mediated experience of I and the world

The senses are a gateway to the world on the one hand; on the other they are the foundation for body-anchored I consciousness. We experience the body with especial clarity through touch or massage. In scarcely any situation, when awake, do we fail to sense the body. What enables us to sense ourselves in this way?

Anthroposophy describes 12 senses. Rudolf Steiner spoke of three sense realms, indicating the difference between the 'lower', 'higher' and 'highest' senses.

The circle of the 12 senses

Sense of word
Sense of thought
Sense of I
Sense of touch
Sense of life
Sense of movement
Sense of balance
Sense of smell
Sense of taste
Sense of sight
Sense of warmth
Sense of hearing

(Karl König: *Der Kreis der zwölf Sinne*, Verlag Freies Geistesleben)

The 'lower' senses tell us about life, touch, movement and balance in our own body. Consciousness arises through the fact that we have a body into which we are incarnated. Through these lower senses we 'only' experience our own body, its boundaries and position in space. The human being's soul and I, or ego, here experience the world through the body.

The 'higher' senses are the sense of sight, smell, taste and warmth, through which we experience our surroundings: the wealth of colours and forms, of different scents, the taste of food and warmth or cold. Through these four 'higher' senses we become a part of the surrounding world and can perceive it..

The 'highest' senses act quite differently. They are the sense of hearing, word, thought and I.

With our hearing we receive noises, sounds, words or tones. We perceive them, and then, through the sense of word, can distinguish and name them. The sense of thought enables us to recognize the meaning of words and things, so that we can have thoughts about what stands behind the words, or what they refer to. Through the sense of I we experience the other as also being human and possessing an I, thus acquiring both intellectual and emotional understanding of what it is to be human.

The 'lower' senses are vital for our experience of touch and massage. The sense of touch, life, movement and balance are the gateway for the 'conversation' which the 's hands can have with the other's body. As therapist I can allow the patient's tissue and its nature to speak to me. Through my 'lower' senses I can perceive what does him good, inwardly experiencing how he responds to my hands and incorporating this into individual treatment.

Sense of touch

The sense of touch is an originating or archetypal sense that is implicit also in all the other senses. It is active even in taste, or the feeling of warmth or cold.

Many touch sensors are to be found distributed over the whole surface of our skin. In its narrower meaning, the sense of touch only extends to the skin's inner layer. In other words, the surface of our body is sensed from within: the body's boundary marks where the surrounding world begins; but in touching, this boundary shifts as we encounter the world. A child learns to distinguish and also increasingly to name what he touches, depending on the diverse impressions he experiences in the process.

We have all probably had the experience of touching something in the dark without knowing what it is – perhaps stumbling into something soft, moist or cold. It can give us the shivers! But the moment we realize what it is – maybe just a damp cloth – the first fright passes. This initially indeterminate experience is what the sense of touch conveys. We wish to recognize and understand what we meet through touch, and so find our rightful place in the world.

The sense of touch thus gives us a general experience of the boundaries of our own body.

In a lecture on the 12 human senses, Rudolf Steiner spoke of how, when touching, we really only perceive ourselves. When we touch an object, we can feel how, depending on its relative hardness or softness, it presses against us more or less strongly. We do not perceive the object but rather what effect it has on us: the change in the form of our body. A hard object pushes our organs back more strongly, a soft one less so. It is this change or shift in the body that the sense of touch perceives with great subtlety.

However, we see this differently: we project our own experience on the external world and ascribe it to things around us, as their property. We feel the hardness, softness, roughness or smoothness of objects, can tell if they are made of wool or silk, in this way projecting the touch experience into the space around us. Our actual inner experience of the sense of touch remains entirely unconscious, radiating into the soul; and we do not notice how our soul experience is connected with the information our external sense of touch provides.

But what radiates into our inner experience is nothing other than the state of being permeated with the sense of God. If we had no sense of touch we would have no feeling of God either.

Rudolf Steiner

Through touch we feel ourselves permeated by existence itself. We feel ourselves part of the surrounding world. This gives us security in ourselves, a sense of trust in the body and in the earth on which we stand. The sense of touch confirms that something exists – far more than eyesight. The element that permeates everything, bearing it and sustaining it, this all-permeating God substance, enters our awareness; and is reflected inwardly in us as the experience of touch – which never, however, becomes entirely conscious.

When someone is being touched or massaged, something resonates in the soul which gives him a feeling of trust, wellbeing, a calm resting place in the world and in himself. Stillness and peace during rhythmical massage make space for such inner touch experiences that can rise up into awareness. I have repeatedly witnessed how, after treatment, patients try to express such experiences.

Sense of life

The sense of life enables us to experience ourselves as a being who feels his way into the space of the body. The feeling of inner comfort and ease is mediated by the sense of life. If something is hurting, or if we are hungry or thirsty, it is the sense of life that shines up into our awareness and presses for something to change. After a good meal our sense of inner comfort can be increased: we feel at home in our body. If we eat too much, we feel heavy and queasy: our inner wellbeing is diminished and this warns us to be more careful next time. The sense of life thus brings about in us a general capacity to feel what is going on in us.

Pain is an extreme expression of the sense of life. There are corresponding pain receptors in the skin. We all know the experience of pain – an unpleasant sensory and feeling experience. This is the body's warning signal that something is wrong. Without pain we would find it very difficult to keep healthy and safe.

People who have the need for massage or also simply touch often have a diminished sense of inner comfort, as mediated by the sense of life. When something is hurting we may rub in an ointment ourselves or ask someone else to do it. We all know how comforting it can be for a crying or hurting child to take him in our arms and soothe him.

Pain is a common reason for people to seek out a treatment such as rhythmical massage.

The sense of life can directly perceive whether something is doing us good, and this can manifest directly in changes to the tissue, so that it becomes softer and more relaxed. Even lines of tension can smooth out.

Sense of movement

The sense of movement enables us to perceive whether we are at rest or in motion, and where our limbs are positioned. In the tendons, muscle fibres and the skin there are receptors which perceive when muscles lengthen, shorten or otherwise change position. Thus we sense whether we are moving and how we are accomplishing a sequence of movement.

Movement, leaping, climbing, dancing can fill us with joy so that we feel lightness of being and inner freedom. Shining into the soul this gives us the sense of freedom which allows us to experience ourselves as soul: the sense of our own, free soul nature. The shortening and lengthening of muscles is borne by the sense of movement into our soul experience so that we know ourselves as free souls.

If, following illness or accident, our capacity for movement is limited, this can have a strong impact on our feeling life. The loss of this sense of freedom experienced through movement may be hard to cope with.

In the scientific literature, the sense organ for the sense of movement is usually designated 'deep sense' or 'muscle sense'.

Sense of balance

The sense of balance gives us spatial orientation. We experience ourselves in the upright position, between gravity and lightness or 'levity'. We become dizzy without spatial orientation. Balance can only be established in a field of gravity and is impossible in a

weightless condition. I need the earth's solidity beneath me to maintain balance, to find my own standpoint upon it.

The sense of balance mediates consciousness of the relationship between body and external world. By means of it we can distinguish whether we are standing or lying down, and perceive how we maintain balance while standing on two legs. Feeling 'in balance' is mediated by the sense of balance, which we perceive inwardly.

How do we feel the experiences of the sense of balance, which radiate into our soul? This is already an entirely inner, soul experience: we experience it as inner calm, such that when we go from one place to another, we do not leave behind the person who dwells in us but take him with us – he calmly stays the same. I might fly through the air, but I'll still be the same person. It is this that makes us seem independent of time. I do not leave myself behind today but take myself with me into tomorrow. Being independent of our corporeality is what the sense of balance shines into the soul. This is feeling oneself as spirit.

Rudolf Steiner

Inner calm, 'feeling oneself as spirit' are inner experiences of the sense of balance.

Being touched in massage

We can practise attentiveness and 'love of small things' in every relationship and encounter with others. Sustained by compassion, this stance and way of being present plays an important role in all therapeutic work, in fact in every human encounter altogether.

Conscious touch, with respect for the other, his being and individuality, is a 'remedy' against much that is unpleasant and painful. The senses are a gateway for this remedy, and lead to individual action and experience. Insight into the senses can help massage therapists to differentiate qualities of movement and also to fully grasp with therapeutic understanding the effect experienced by the recipient.

Through massage we can feel accepted, can once more feel that we rest within ourselves. Or, as patients often put it, we can feel ourselves centred, earthed once more. 'Resting in oneself' in harmony with the world is a primal source of health. Rhythmical massage therapy consciously promotes this.

Our fundamental need for touch goes hand-in-hand with the need for boundary and self-delineation. The desire to avoid touch belongs equally to being human. Our surroundings and sphere of intimacy encounter each other: there is a zone around us which belongs to us, which is at the same time a protective space, and is of different extent in each person; and also different depending on who is touching us and the inner stance he is doing this with.

Care and respect for the patient's private sphere creates the trust necessary for a therapeutic relationship. Here a clear goal is involved, a request for massage, and all necessary related information.

Rhythm

What is rhythm?

Many natural processes are called rhythms – for instance as revealed in the nectar flow in blossoms in the daily life of plants, or the changes from summer to winter pelt in animals through the seasons; and likewise in inbreath and outbreath, or sleeping and waking.

What is common to all these phenomena, and what characterizes rhythm?

In each case polarities arise: for example, open and closed blossoms, or consciousness and unconsciousness in waking and sleeping. These polarities are linked together by an active third element which creates a dynamic transition between them. This recurs repeatedly and yet is new each time: last year's winter pelt is not 'put on again' nor is a new breath exactly the same as the last. There is recurrence but not exact repetition: something similar is repeated but in renewed form. A further aspect of this can be observed especially well in breathing: if I climb a mountain, my breathing will be different from when I'm resting. In each case it adapts elastically to specific conditions to achieve optimum efficiency.

Wilhelm Hoerner aptly defines rhythm as follows in his book 'Time and Rhythm':

**Polarity and rebalance
in continual renewal
with elastic adaptation.**

Rhythm sustains life

All living processes are accompanied by rhythms. Life unfolds in rhythms. Rhythm refreshes and renews and is the real bearer of life and health. Similar phenomena continually recur through time. All physiological processes take a rhythmic course. Living things can always regenerate by invoking repeatedly similar occurrences, and in life nothing ever stops altogether.

In chronobiological research – that is, research into how life processes are structured and organized – many different rhythms have been found in the human body. We all know a larger rhythm that occurs each day, of waking and sleeping. But there are also a large number of other, faster ones: the peristalsis of the intestine, breathing, heartbeat and pulse, and many more.

Temporal patterning is of great significance for living organisms. Rhythmical processes have been discovered in all known living creatures. Many such rhythms are interdependent but do not occur simultaneously. Other processes not only occur within the body but must also be temporally coordinated with the environment. Regularity is an important resource which comes to expression in a broad range of biological rhythms whose duration extends from milliseconds to years. Cell division, respiration and heartbeat are just a few examples.

If we inquire into the mutual relationships between rhythms we can find, for example, the relationship between pulse and breath (pulse-breathing ratio RP/B). On average the heart beats 72 times per minute. If we breathe 18 times during this period, the ratio is 1:4. It has been found that each person has his own, individual ratio, peculiar to himself, and that this adapts during the day, and depending on activity, to whatever is

needed. If one records this ratio in a large number of people during the night, the average comes out at 1:4, but varies considerably between individuals.

Chronobiological research has become more important in recent years since our way of life is increasingly at odds with our 'biological clock'. Why can we not always accomplish what we wish to or what is expected of us? What is the cause of those sudden small collapses when nothing goes properly and we would prefer just to crawl into bed, defeated and exhausted?

Chronobiological research provides a clear answer: processes of recuperation and regeneration unfold in rhythms. The more rhythmically we live, the more harmoniously our bodily rhythms can work together and the quicker and better our exhausted organism can recover. Rhythm gives strength. An arrhythmic life leads quicker to more profound states of exhaustion.

Rhythm is a major factor in recovery and for energy and dynamic activity. Yet we live at a time when more and more is demanded, at a quicker tempo, in all realms of life. What can we do to balance this?

Are there outer and inner rhythm-givers that can help us to swing back and forth between stress and relaxation? Trials have shown how one can stimulate and enhance larger rhythms in the organism such as the sleeping-waking rhythm by establishing and nurturing smaller rhythms – for instance through rhythmical movement or speech exercises. Once we recognize the power of rhythm, we will find ways of introducing small rhythms into our daily life, so that they gradually strengthen our life forces.

The different rhythms arise through both outward and inner time factors. External factors are, for example, the change from day to night, from week to week, month to month and from year to year, while inner ones are such things as the menstrual cycle. The action and interaction of these factors are repeatedly the subject of research. In the anthroposophic view of the human being we can examine these rhythms from the perspective of the so-called members or bodily sheaths. Their diverse qualities and interplay regulate physiological processes. Below I would like to briefly describe these members so that it becomes easier to understand how rhythmical massage therapy works.

Bodily sheaths

In the anthroposophic view of the human being and approach to medicine, we use the term '**bodily sheaths**'. The four bodily sheaths enable us to describe the body's whole context. Through the actions and interplay of the bodily sheaths, we can explain not only molecular interactions and physical structures, but also the mutual influences of material and immaterial forces, of spirit and soul. These forces manifest both in our physical configuration and constitution as well as in temporally ordered life processes through to chemical reactions.

To understand the bodily sheaths it can be helpful to examine nature around us. In the four kingdoms of nature we can discover, re-experience and distinguish qualities that exist in similar form in the human being.

Earth: Everything earthly is subject to gravity. For instance, an earth-slide will always move downwards, towards a valley; and after a volcanic eruption, magma will flow downwards with huge force – never upwards.

The nature of earth is motionless, resting in itself: it provides the ground on which we stand. We count as earth everything existing as physical substance in nature.

In us this corresponds to the physical body.

Plant: In plants we find a new principle, that of life. Dead earth substance is absorbed by life and thus raised out of weight. The tree with its proud crown, the grass with its delicate form, are examples of this. As long as the plant lives it has the capacity to overcome weight and live in 'levity'. A fading flower bends back down in an earthward direction.

In us this is the biological principle: the life or etheric body

Animal: Free capacity for movement, respiration and the ability to receive sensory stimuli and to respond to them are the attributes we find in the animal. These capacities show that animals are endowed with a soul or astral body, and live with their soul body in a dynamic physical body.

We acquire corresponding capacities through the astral body.

Human being:

The human being has an ensouled and vital physical body. To this is added an entirely new, central principle, the spirit, the core of our being, as I with its capacity for self-knowledge, self-development and conscious configuration of our own life.

The body-related aspect of this principle is the I-organization.

Schematically we can represent this as follows:

Mineral	Plant	Animal	Human
			I-organization
		Soul body	Soul body
	Life body	Life body	Life body
Physical body	Physical body	Physical body	Physical body

Examples where the bodily sheaths work as temporal impulses can be found in the day-to-day rhythm which the I-organization helps configure. The rhythm of the soul body works from week to week and that of the life body from month to month, while that of the physical body works from one year to another.

Small differences always awaken the attention of the I-organization and can act as a stimulus on rhythm: for example, intentionally putting a key down at a different place each evening so that we have to remember where it is next morning. In former times, the ever-recurring shape of the week was a very sustaining rhythm for families: washing on Monday, bath-day on Saturday, going for a walk on Sunday. Such patterning introduces calm and equanimity into life and liberates us from hectic changes and the need to re-adapt at a moment's notice. 'I'll just do this quickly...' stimulates and excites the soul body but also has a tiring and energy-reducing effect.

Medicinal cures used never to take less than a month. People noticed the health-enhancing effect of this period of time: the monthly rhythm of the life body. A broken bone is only really stable again after mending for a year; and here we find the rhythm of the physical body.

Effect of the bodily sheaths

How do the different bodily sheaths work in the human being?

The spirit, the I or I-organization, has a relationship to the element of fire. It organizes warmth in the organism in a balanced way in a healthy person, differentiating it in various parts of the body. When the tissue is too hot or too cool, this equilibrium is disturbed. When we touch the patient we can sense these differences of warmth and address them through rhythm.

The soul being or soul body relates to the element of air. In the healthy organism it leads to tone in tissue and musculature that is always adapted to whatever is needed at any moment. Sometimes there is lack of tone or excess tension, but each of us, basically has a basic state of tone that belongs to our constitution. Tension and tone can be calmed or stimulated through touch.

Our biological being, the life body, is connected with the element of water and works in growth and regeneration. It helps preserve our living form and prevents deterioration. Changes involving poorly nourished, swollen or congested tissue can be brought back into flow through movement.

Our mineral being, the physical body, gives us structure and stability through its connection with the element of earth. Conditions can arise of hardening and excess accumulation of deposits, but equally also of tissue dissolution and disintegration.

The I-organization, the spiritual principle that overarches everything and can establish harmony, works through warmth. The astral, soul principle works through air, the etheric life principle through water and the physical body through the element of earth.

Bodily sheath	Element	Task	Changes
Principle			
Spiritual being I-organization	Fire	Organizes the body's own warmth	Tissue becomes too hot or cold
Soul being Astral body	Air	Regulates tension and tone in tissue and musculature	Too much or too little tension in the tissue
Biological being Etheric body	Water	Works in growth and to maintain the form of the body, inhibits disintegration	Poorly nourished, swollen or congested tissue
Mineral being Physical body	Earth	Gives us structure and stability	Hardening, deposits, tissue dissolution

These principles or bodily sheaths do not work independently of each other but interact and interpenetrate. This interplay is different in the three major functional areas of the nerve-sense system, the rhythmic system and the metabolic-limb system.

Functional threefold system

Insight into the functional threefold system originates with Rudolf Steiner, who characterized three distinct domains of the human being. In particular, he perceived and explained the laws underlying each of these three systems.

- The first system involves everything connected with the nerve and sense organization: for example, perceiving, ordering, being awake and elucidating.
- The second system comprises the rhythmic processes, in other words everything connected with breathing, blood circulation and also with the rhythmic aspect of digestion: for example, mediating, feeling, sympathizing, balancing, harmonizing, adapting.
- The third system includes everything that belongs to metabolism proper, and to the movement organization: for example, strengthening, invigorating, building up, excreting, being active, moving and recreating or synthesizing.

Thus we can distinguish three systems within us: the nerve-sense system, primarily localized in the head; the rhythmic system, chiefly in the chest, around the heart; and the metabolic-limb system which is mainly focused in the limbs and the metabolic organs connected with these. However, all three systems permeate the whole body and are active everywhere.

Now two of the systems, the first and the third, the nerve-sense system and the metabolic-limb system, are in polar opposition to each other. What the first engenders is destroyed by the other; what the first destroys is engendered by the other. Thus they work absolutely contrary to each other. And the middle, mediating system, the rhythmic system, creates the relationship between them. Here, as it were, an oscillation between these two develops, so that harmony can continually arise between the destroying activity of the one system and the building up activity of the other. If for example we examine the metabolic system, this naturally works with greatest intensity in the human abdomen. But what occurs there will, if we are to be healthy, inevitably invoke a polar opposite activity in our human head, in the nerve-sense system.

Rudolf Steiner

In the metabolic-limb system we find metabolic processes on the one hand – synthesis, transformation and excretion - which remain unconscious while we are healthy. On the other hand, all movement processes are connected with these functions, as a basis for activity in the world.

The polarity to this can be found in the nerve-sense system: perception and ordering activity, with scarcely any metabolism, little blood flow but all the more

formative, body-shaping power. Here breaking-down processes prevail and thereby make consciousness possible. All sense impressions and thinking processes have their foundation here.

The rhythmic system with breathing and pulse creates the balance between these two polar activities. Here we can imagine that this realm works as a buffer zone to keep the activities of nerve-sense and metabolic systems apart. Thus neither can work directly into the other's sphere – or only insofar as this is compatible with the whole human organization. In fact, strictly speaking, we find all three systems everywhere in the body, in every bodily structure.

Here too every person has their own state of equilibrium, that is not always so evenly balanced. For instance, if the rhythmic system is too weak compared with metabolic processes, these latter can radiate up into the nerve-sense system where they do not belong, leading to headaches.

Summary of threefold functions:

Nerve-sense processes	Rhythmic functions	Metabolic processes
Forming and configuring processes	Breathing/circulation	Upbuilding and dissolving processes
Breaking down and thus engendering consciousness	Balancing between the poles	Occur unconsciously

The individual

Balancing between all these factors, each person has a state of equilibrium which is entirely unique to himself, with a temporal organization of his rhythms. We ourselves can observe how at different times we respond differently to outer or inner demands, how our rhythms adapt. Everything is in continual flux.

One might compare this to a walk. When walking on a broad path I can easily cope with hindrances or gusts of wind without this being problematic. I can keep coming back to the centre, to a state of balance. But if I'm walking on a narrow ridge it's much harder, and a sudden gust can unbalance me. Or, to take the metaphor of a boat, a stable boat with strong sails can cope with a range of winds and waves, whereas it is much harder on a small skiff to keep a steady course. There are many possible such pictures – it's fun to make up one's own!

And here the question arises as to whether all this is inevitable or whether I myself can help to make my own path 'broader'? Must I always just balance on a slender, swaying rope?

This question relates, I think, to the whole field of healthcare: a way of life that can be consciously configured to include regular moments of quiet reflection, supported perhaps through external aids such as massage and movement exercises. Self-regulation of life processes is thus stimulated – and a more stable equilibrium can develop.

Another picture: out of a small, white egg, firmly adhering to a carrot leaf, creeps a small black caterpillar and immediately starts eating the fresh, tender green. Then it pauses – although there is still so much left. Much happens in this pause, for suddenly its

skin splits open and a somewhat larger caterpillar crawls out and again begins to eat. Then another pause and another change. And then the same thing again. But then something quite new happens: the caterpillar, which has meanwhile grown colourful and a proper, good size, builds itself a 'hammock' and takes itself off to rest. Finally, if we have the good fortune to be present when this happens, one morning something colourful starts shining through the pupa skin, which begins to split open to let the butterfly swiftly – one might almost say hastily – emerge. As soon as it has done so, it hangs on to the pupa case or a grass stalk and stays there quietly for some time. Only after a certain period, once its wings have hardened, does the swallow-tail butterfly release itself, to fly off weightlessly...

Here we see a rhythm of activity and (active) calm, the interplay of 'work and rest'. Could one conceive of the caterpillar eating on without pause until it becomes a butterfly? How is it in our case? How do we structure our time?

In rhythmical massage therapy the alternation between tension, structuring and release – of letting go at moments of pause – is an important element.

Healing

Rhythm sustains life. It is the real bearer of health. This approach to stimulating the processes of healing is the foundation of rhythmical massage therapy.

Healing and recovery cannot be considered without the opposite process, of falling ill.

Do you know anyone who lives in inner and outer harmony for years on end or decades, in a continual state of balance and well-being?

Do you know people who, through repeated hindrances and difficulties, are compelled to stabilize their forces and redevelop them, or to change habits that have become entrenched?

People are always on a path of development. Standstill leads no further.

Once we lose our balance, and find ourselves in a crisis or illness, we try to see how to re-establish equilibrium. The first step, no doubt, is to accept that this has happened, and to seek its meaning. Out of this stance arises one's own will to change, which is decisive for healing. Usually we also need external help, whether from a doctor, medicines or therapies. In the process of healing we try to regain a state of balance.

In rhythmical massage therapy, healing means stimulating the all-permeating warmth organization, and to bring back into flow what has become too fixed so that the I and the soul can properly take hold of the body once more and regulate it. This approach goes beyond merely combating symptoms to trying to support the healing process and help the patient regain the greatest possible well-being.

The patient's own engagement and activity here is a major factor: whether through active movement, or through efforts to live in harmony with one's surroundings and other people. Negative thoughts have a direct effect on our physical state. By pursuing a 'personal path' we can better come to terms with our life; for with many illnesses and sufferings it is a question of learning to live with them.

The metaphor of a puppet play can tell us something about life: the play itself is life's narrative, and the stage shows the environmental circumstances within which we develop. The puppets, moved by threads, are people amongst other people. Everything

unfolds until the flow of the play is disrupted and the puppets no longer move in harmony with the whole.

The puppets' movements can be disrupted by three possible problems:

- a mechanical problem
- a problem with the threads connecting the puppet to the cross-bar
- or a problem which the puppeteer has in manipulating the puppet.

These three factors of disruption may manifest in the same way but require correspondingly different remedies.

In the case of a mechanical problem the puppeteer behind the stage can for instance tighten a screw to correct the positions of the limbs, or replace the faulty part. All puppets have similar mechanisms, and the puppeteer has to become familiar with their mechanical laws.

If there is something wrong with the connecting threads, the puppeteer has to check and correct them. Are they too weak or knotted? Are the puppeteer's movements not being properly passed on?

If the puppeteer himself is having problems, quite different remedies are needed. Perhaps he must attend more to what the puppet is doing. Or perhaps he needs more practice in guiding the strings from the cross bar.

In the therapeutic task of healing, one is focused primarily on the body, but does not start there. What forces have formed it, or continue to work upon it? How can I see it as the expression of an entirely individual personality?

There are two ways of approaching the impulse for change or remedy:

- Seeking the immediate locus of disturbance and discovering the cause.
This leads to a problem-related treatment.
- Or asking what the phenomenon of disturbance is 'telling' us about both the body and the person. Where do his resources lie, his potential to change?
We then support the patient's organization of forces in such a way that he can change himself.

Thus there is both a direct and an indirect approach: either problem- or resource-oriented. Both can be right and mutually enhance each other. It is important that the patient and the therapist have the same aims. For this one needs some kind of therapy agreement which formulates the specific aim of healing that both therapist and patient will try to achieve together.

Distinctive aspects of rhythmical massage therapy

These preparatory thoughts on the three concepts of 'touch, rhythm and healing' lead us to the distinctive qualities of rhythmical massage therapy. The quality of touch is founded on schooled professional capacities of the therapist in perceiving and treating the patient. Therapists practise the massage technique in a 'clean', clearly focused way, and additionally study the human being to acquire corresponding insights. Drawing on anthroposophic knowledge of the human being and on medical findings, the aim of every

treatment is to touch each individual in the deepest core of their being, and there initiate healing impulses. Therapists form an inner picture of the illness and medical symptoms of the individual patient. Through his tissue they grasp the whole human being who, with his configuration of bodily sheaths and their interplay, regulates and differently patterns each location of the body with warmth, tension, depth and density. The hands act and 'listen' to the answers which the other gives via his tissue. The tissue expresses something, and the hand responds to it. This dual activity of the hands is simultaneous: during treatment, therapists perceive changes in the patient and continually adapt treatment correspondingly. Patient and therapists are equally engaged in this quiet, non-verbal conversation, engendering the quality of the rhythm. The patient experiences himself as perceived, acknowledged and understood in the touch contact, and also receives the impulse to change. He acquires the freedom to change or not. The impulses for change serve the patient's development; but they are only effective if he perceives them within his organism as supportive, and takes them up himself.

Every massage movement echoes and is informed by the laws of the living organism. In every movement a suction dynamic is created which overcomes weight and leads towards lightness. Strong inward-delving pressure is avoided. The patient experiences the widening of his inner space. His forces of uplift and buoyancy are addressed. With a good, warm hand contact and sensitive, perceiving movements, the tissue fluid can be brought into movement. Careful directing of the movements in the three spatial dimensions gently invokes awareness at the place of massage.

In addition to the well-known basic movements of classical massage, the tissue can be enlivened through various forms of lemniscate and phase-delayed or syncopated circles. Both these are strokes with a distinctive rhythmic form, undergoing continual transformation – rather as Venus draws its loops in the heavens (as seen from earth). Only by performing them calmly and attentively can the stillness arise that is needed for effective therapeutic action and perception.

Circles turning in the same direction, whose phases are delayed in syncopated alternation and move towards each other with a maximum degree of intensity where they encounter one another.

Accentuating at the periphery and connecting.

Properly guided and apportioned, the rhythmical configuration of movement and treatment shows a range of effects: it enlivens, forms, calms, and adapts in an entirely individual way to each patient. At every moment it is corrected and quantified according to the nature of the tissue and the immediate findings. This is repeated continually and occurs anew all the time, at each instant a little differently and adapted to what is found. Rhythm works on individual self-regulation through its living principle, which we can sum up as ‘polarity and rebalance in continual renewal with elastic adaptation’.

Growing and fading, breathing in and out, touching and releasing – these polar phenomena are balanced through rhythm as a connecting third element. The equilibrium-creating element is a moving, living principle that is active in all of us. Every massage movement tries to speak to this living principle through connecting, releasing and leaving free. It is launched like a balance wheel, but then it needs time to reverberate onwards on its own, in its own rhythm. The effect of this living, active principle can be seen, for example, at the turning point from illness to recuperation, in deepened breathing, warm feet – although they have not been massaged at all – or being able to sleep all the way through the night again. Recovery of health depends on continual renewal of this process.

In this way, healing takes effect through stimulation of an individual process that is allowed to unfold freely: a developmental process that leads to a new, holistic equilibrium. The aim of therapy is not to get rid of an illness but to support the patient’s self-regenerative powers as he undergoes an illness, and help him regain his state of balance.. By overcoming the illness, the patient emerges strengthened from the process of healing. His own powers grow, and he can fulfil or recognize the task of his destiny.

In summary, the aim of rhythmical massage therapy is:

To support each person individually on his path of development, to stimulate his self-healing powers, to redress imbalances in the organism and bring his functions back into harmonious mutual relationship. In particular, it involves stimulating and harmonizing the rhythmic system, since the starting point for many healing processes lies in the breathing and circulation.

Effects

A patient gives the following account: ‘I feel that my head is back where it should be. I feel I’m more upright. Actually, the most important effect has been psychological: I always thought I was upright in myself but now something has changed. Memories surface in a conversation; and I experienced something similar during massage. When you touch certain places, memories arise.’

The effects are both local, where touch happens, but also general, and often psychological. Every area of the body is a part of the whole, and touch in one place always also affects everything else. The aim and inner picture determine the particular emphasis in each case.

We can describe the following effects of massage:

- General warming of the body
- Deepening and calming of the breathing
- Local effects on the skin and connective tissue:

Circulation and metabolism in skin and connective tissue are stimulated.

- Effect on the musculature:
Tensions (hypertonus) are released through soft, warming movements.
Lack of tone (hypotonus) is stimulated with the same but stronger movements.
- Effect on the blood and lymph vessels:
The flow of blood and lymph (tissue fluid) is stimulated and the periphery is strengthened through flushing and kneading.
- Effect on sensory and vegetative regulation:
Nerve signals are sensitized and harmonized. Parasympathetic responsiveness is calmed and relaxed. Pain can be soothed.
- Effect on the metabolism:
The whole metabolism can be influenced, by supporting both its upbuilding action – through arm treatments – and its break-down and excretion functions – through treatment of legs and hips.
- Effect on the inner organs:
The human being is a whole; what approaches him from without works inwards, producing an ‘answer’. The inner organs’ specific tasks can be strengthened.
- Effect on the psyche:
Every properly conducted work on the body has an effect on the psyche and can trigger emotional/psychological reactions.

The experience of attention from another, of ‘being treated’ contributes much to the healing process, as we saw in the section on **touch**.

Thus the movement qualities of rhythmical massage therapy, applied in a differentiated way, exert among other things an upbuilding, enlivening, calming, formative, blockage-releasing and above all warmth-permeating effect. Since treatment is adapted individually and apportioned without pressure, the massage supports processes of healing.

Threefold perspective of the effects of rhythmical massage therapy

Knowledge of the human bodily sheaths offers us perspectives upon which to base our understanding of rhythmical massage therapy. We need to see how these bodily sheaths interact in different ways in the three major functional areas of the nerve-sense system, the rhythmic system and the metabolic-limb system.

The rhythmic system creates a healthy equilibrium between the catabolic or life-degrading nerve-sense processes and the anabolic or life-building metabolic processes. Thus the rhythmic system is the foundation of health in the whole functional domain. Breathing and the pulsing circulation result from a rhythmical interplay of the higher human members with the lower, whereby the soul body, anchored in the air organism, immerses itself more deeply in the life body, which penetrates and enlivens all bodily fluids. Thus the soul body alternately connects and releases itself. Rhythmical massage therapy initially exerts an invigorating effect on the whole, intrinsically healing rhythmical system, by stimulating the patient’s own capacity to return irregularities to a state of harmony.

Case history of a patient with back pain:

A 60-year-old hotel manageress, the mother of two grown-up children, had been running the business for many years when she began to complain of back aches. These began slowly and were aggravated in demanding or stressful situations – something she had never experienced before. Her physical flexibility and agility became severely limited. Pain fluctuated in intensity but kept returning at the same place: across the small of the back and pelvis. She gave a clear account of her stress, especially caused by many different and changing demands upon her in the form of phone calls, emails and in direct contact with hotel guests. She was not getting enough respite during the day, and was finding it hard to cope with tasks she always used to manage. However, she expected herself to cope with all the increased demands, and thus got caught up in a vicious circle of pressure and stress. The back aches were the last thing she needed – for they compelled her to go and lie down now and then, or to go for a walk, which somewhat alleviated them; but then the work wasn't getting done.

Clearly, this patient had fallen out of rhythm. Her life had become breathless and she had lost her equilibrium. Her nerve-system was irritated, her inner state of stress was too high, and she was no longer able to cope with this and regain her inner composure. Her sleep also grew ever worse. She lacked the metabolic energy, and also the calm and strength to manage her tasks and maintain her balance.

I treated this patient with massage that alternated between back, arms and stomach. The movement quality was upbuilding, calming and warming. After the very first session she was able to sleep properly again, and felt lighter and more agile than she had done for ages. This relief only lasted a day but gave her the clear sense that her body could improve again and she could regain her wellbeing. Five further sessions were needed, with varying results, until she stayed well and was able to find and maintain her energy balance. At the same time she put some ideas into practice for keeping her health robust, ensuring that she was clearer about her boundaries, and building pauses and regular walks into her schedule. Extra stress still repeatedly threatens her equilibrium, and then the back aches return – though not as severely as before. She has now learned to regard this as a warning sign. She continually makes efforts to re-establish her own state of balance between sensory and nerve stimuli, with their more debilitating effect, and her metabolic and movement capacities, which are weaker due to her age. She has learned that she must nurture and support the latter before things get too bad. Her back aches gave the impetus for this change in her lifestyle. Rhythmical massage therapy brought about the necessary enhancement of her energy and thus helped her regulate the vegetative nervous system and her sleep patterns.

Description of these effects from the perspective of the bodily sheaths

The quality of movements used in rhythmical massage therapy is primarily focused on suction action, so as to work upon living processes in the fluid realm. Here the etheric or life body is primarily active. The force of uplift or levity works in fluids, and this is stimulated through sucking movements. Our sense of enhanced well-being after treatment confirms this effect.

Pressure, on the other hand, intensifies consciousness and break-down activity. We need this effect where metabolic processes gain too much of an upper hand, and catabolism or excretion must be stimulated.

The astral or soul body is the cause of illness wherever it is too loosely connected or too deeply immersed – either throughout the body or in specific places. Treatment that properly takes account of this binding and releasing can therefore make a major contribution to healing and is an effective means to reactivate both soul and physical energies.

Case history of a patient with knee pain after a fall

A 74-year-old housewife had had a fall a month previously, and was suffering from pains in her knee. She is a woman with an active life of soul, and physically strong. She takes medication to support her circulation, and often suffers from back pain. The patient described her knee pain as a pressure encircling the knee like a strap, as though constraining it and allowing it no room. After the fall initially only her right knee was hurting; then, after a month, the left knee felt equally painful. She rested the knees, applied ointment and made gentle movements with them, but there was no improvement.

To start with I treated the patient with rhythmical massage twice a week, and then once a week. Every day she went for a short walk and started swimming once a week again, as she had done previously. I massaged her back in sitting, so as to strengthen exhalation and subtly enliven the tissue and back fluids. After this she said that she felt her back was ‘wider’, as though she had inner space again. As she lay on her back I then brought the fluid stream in her upper thighs into flow with fine suction, stimulating secretion. To conclude, a local, light knee treatment was applied, with releasing movements at the muscle bases and in the hollow of the knee, followed by encompassing circles over the knee. Following the rest period, the patient told me that she was feeling lighter, could walk more easily, and no longer felt any knee pain.

After the initial sessions the pain returned within about 2-3 days. Now, after ten sessions, the patient has altogether recovered. If the pain returns occasionally, she is able to help herself by going for a walk or putting her legs up, at which the pain fades and the blockage in the fluid stream and metabolic processes regulates itself. The patient is once again able to live her daily life as befits her age.

In the last section we saw that each bodily sheath or member works through the element it has an affinity with:

- the overarching, harmonizing spiritual principle through warmth;
- the astral, soul principle through air;
- the etheric life principle through water.

The human hand can imitate the movement forms of the elements, working ‘warmly’, ‘airily’ or ‘fluidly’. It can form the movement qualities in such a way that the patient’s bodily sheaths can respond to the therapist’s outward actions with inner activity. The movements respond entirely to the body, taking account and paying regard to each individual’s tissue. A central aspect here is the enlivening effect of massage, which is why purely mechanical or ‘technical’ movements are avoided. These would distance

what is happening in the body from a living context, and draw it into a lifeless and purely physical realm.

Case history of a patient with breast cancer following surgery and subsequent radiotherapy:

The patient described her suffering from all the traumas that had occurred in such quick succession: the cancer diagnosis, surgery and radiotherapy. She herself, she said, was exhausted and under duress, but she did not want to let it all pull her down. She wasn't giving up, but her moods kept fluctuating from 'ecstatic' to 'deeply downcast' as long as she could not see any hope of recovery. As the mother of two school-age children she had previously been working part-time and was hoping to go back to work soon. The scar and the irradiated area of skin, she said, were itching and tensing, limiting her arm flexibility. A lymph oedema had formed.

I made it my aim to re-incorporate this isolated, thickened tissue into a healthy, living context – to transform the tissue's passivity into activity through engendering subtle warmth and full tissue respiration. The massaging hand sought to show the tissue, and stimulate, what the organism alone was no longer able to do. In preparation I treated the patient's back, and not immediately the affected area. In rhythmical massage treatment, the diseased area is not of sole importance since the human organism is embedded in a multiplicity of interconnections. Far from the site of illness, greater life and formative forces were still available, and these could be drawn on to affect the irradiated area from a distance through gentle, directing, and suction motions, thus stimulating the whole organism. After several preparatory sessions of this nature, the lymph oedema on the patient's arm likewise responded with a flow of lymph fluid, so that I was able to direct the lymph streams over the torso with very fine, circling movements. It was necessary for the patient to once again feel the activity of the nerve-sense system through touch in 'self-sensing and perceiving' – so that she could once more activate her own ordering and regulating capacity via warmth. At the same time, the patient's breathing deepened, and she became more emotionally harmonious. The treatment lasted for several weeks, stimulated regeneration of the irradiated tissue, the lymph flow and the overall energy situation. It also helped re-establish psychological equilibrium.

Giving a treatment

One patient, who had experienced rhythmical massage therapy in the past, recalled that it was like having signs made on her back.

She now came for further treatment, and after the first session related that the movement sequences seemed familiar, and asked whether there was a fixed order in which they were performed. On this occasion though, she said, she had felt something like 'currents of water', which reminded her of flow-forms for enlivening water. And now she felt much more upright, and more stable on the ground.

Sometimes new patients ask such things as, 'I've never experienced rhythmical massage therapy; is this accompanied by music, singing or drumming?'

No, the term rhythmical massage therapy refers to the conscious, rhythmic work of the 's hands, on the one hand; and on the other, to stimulus of the patient's rhythmic system, which is regarded as the foundation for processes of healing.

In every movement and every touch, the 's hands work rhythmically on the patient. This means that we find varying qualities in every movement which follow a repeating sequence: this begins with 'immersion', 'consolidation', 'structuring' and 'releasing', followed once again by 'immersion'. This alternation between binding and releasing is an important part of rhythmical massage therapy.

Rhythm must mediate as balancing process.

Margarethe Hauschka

Classical massage uses five basic movements:

Effleurage is a form of **stroking** movement. Stroking movements exert a calming and warming effect on the affected areas of the skin. They are suitable primarily for the start and end of a massage session. In rhythmical massage therapy, the back is stroked lightly and warmly, in a particular direction. These stroking movements are breathing motions on the surface of the skin, with diverse forms and dynamics.

Increasing
intensity
towards
encounter in
the middle.

Petrissage or kneading. Here the skin is taken hold of between thumb, index and middle finger, and kneaded. Kneading is primarily used to release tensions. This works on the musculature and the subcutaneous connective tissue, enhancing circulation. In rhythmical massage therapy the tissue is 'sucked up' with the hands without pressing into it, but instead releasing it in circling loop movements and rhythmically recurring impulses.

Airy kneading. This develops from kneading with two hands. Here we sink softly into the tissue with both hands and compress it, then release it again with circular friction. It is airier than ordinary kneading, and the 'muscle bulge' is widened through sucking and led back to harmonious rest.

In **Friction**, the massage therapist strokes the patient's skin with his fingertips, or the side or heel of his hand, or circles his fist over the skin with increasing and decreasing pressure. This enhances circulation and relaxes the muscles. Rhythmical massage therapy also uses frictions, in the form of small, vortex-like movements. These engender more

focused awareness at particular places, and the small, spiralling movements work into the depths. This kind of movement can be pictured as water in a funnel.

Tapotements or **tapping** with the fingertips, sides of the hand or palm of the hand enlivens and regulates skin tone. Tapping can enliven broad areas and bring them into resonance, though this is only seldom used in rhythmical massage therapy.

Vibration or **shaking** is used primarily in the case of electrically operated vibration massage equipment. The vibrations relax and release tense muscles and also support psychological relaxation.

The rhythmic element lives in all these movements. Pressure, rubbing and wringing of tissue – as classical massage uses it – is enhanced with soft, flowing, sucking movements which release tension from the depths to the periphery. The forms of the movements, with all their many variations and living circular forms, entirely correspond to and are derived from the movements of water.

The hand is a reflection of the whole human being: it has surface and point, palm and finger tips, whose polarity corresponds to the point-focused, differentiated nerve-sense system and the metabolic system working in etheric planes. Thus we can work in a very differentiated way, depending on what sphere we wish to stimulate in order to help re-establish the equilibrium between the two opposite poles.

The separate parts of the human organism are interrelated in a multitude of ways. In asking where treatment should be applied, the specific site of illness is therefore not the only decisive aspect. An excess of astral activity, which causes cramps, pain or inflammation at a particular place, can be assuaged by treating a region of the body that is in polar opposition to it. Rhythmical massage therapy is always a holistic treatment which aims to re-establish balance in the interplay of forces.

In all processes that seek to heal, care of the warmth organism is given particular attention, since the individual spiritual principle, the I, must be involved through warmth.

Each rhythmical massage session is structured in an intrinsically complete way, just like a piece of music with its various movements. There are certain basic forms – such as arm massage in sitting, front leg massage when lying on the back, hip treatment lying on the side, back treatment lying on the stomach, and also shoulder and neck decongestion in sitting. While the whole body is not massaged in any one session, the whole human being is nevertheless addressed. Beginners keep to the basic forms and tend to observe the differing qualities, whereas more advanced massage therapists draw on the most diverse possibilities available to them, freely adapting the elements of massage to the individual patient. The gentle, flowing movements are in mutual harmony throughout treatment, which can be compared with the creation of a work of art.

The right movement at the right place at the right time in the right degree.

Margarethe Hauschka

The organ embrocations (einreibungen) occupy a special place within rhythmical massage therapy. These are rhythmically patterned embrocations over an organ (liver,

pancreas, kidneys, bladder, heart) which lead to a more conscious perception of the organ region, stimulating it gently to better warmth-permeation and function. These embrocations are brief in duration and are carried out in a concentrated and rhythmic way. It is as if the organ is resonating or responding from the depths. Organ embrocations have a very wide field of application, since organs are involved in almost all illnesses.

Pure, natural oils are used in rhythmical massage therapy, and each oil is chosen in correspondence with a particular clinical picture. For organ embrocations, metal ointments corresponding to each organ are used.

Rhythmical massage therapy is carried out as individualized therapy, the length of treatment being adapted to the patient's individual needs and clinical picture, followed by a rest period. Treatment usually extends over several weeks (nine to twelve sessions).

Everything connected with healing is much closer to the artistic than to the technological realm. And yet all art must be founded on sure technique.

Margarethe Hauschka

Areas of application

Rhythmical massage therapy is prescribed by a physician for movement system disorders, diverse inner complaints, post-surgery recovery and for psychological disorders.

Anthroposophic perspectives on the process of illness lead to specific or specialized prescriptions.

Patients come for rhythmical massage treatments either at their own initiative or in discussion with a physician – whether in order to enhance health, recuperate at times of stress or to maintain or improve quality of life.

Margarethe Hauschka said: 'Massage has a great task ahead of it in the future, and this exists already in germinal form in rhythmical massage therapy.'

Indications

- Movement organism disorders
- Following accidents
- Stress-related disorders
- Insomnia, dietary deficiencies, cardiovascular disorders
- A range of physical and psychological illnesses
- Supporting clients in curative education and social therapy

Contra-indications

- Inflammations caused by pathogenic germs
- Feverish illnesses
- Skin diseases: eczema, boils/furuncles, fungal conditions
- Close to burn sites, open wounds
- First days of menstruation
- Pregnancy before the fourth month

Integration with anthroposophic medicine

From the beginning, due to the history of its development, rhythmical massage therapy was an intrinsic part of anthroposophic medicine. Today collaboration continues with the Medical Section at the Goetheanum and anthroposophic medical associations in diverse countries.

Movement is a means whereby the soul can feel at home in the body. Eurythmy therapy, another form of movement founded on the same anthroposophic medical principles as rhythmical massage, involves the whole person in movement. In rhythmical massage therapy, tissue and fluids are moved, and the aim is to conduct movements on the body which make it easier for the individual's higher bodily sheaths to intervene actively in the sick organism and find new orientation. Thus, as far as possible, the individual can regain mastery over the organism.

We can say that rhythmical massage therapy is an intrinsic part of the regularly prescribed therapies in an anthroposophic medical practice.

The following types of therapy belong to anthroposophic medicine:

- **Eurythmy therapy**
- **Artistic therapies: music therapy, therapeutic speech, therapeutic painting and modelling**
- **Rhythmical massage therapy**

By taking full account of body, soul and spirit, anthroposophic medicine acquires a holistic aspect which seeks to understand the whole context of a human being and his illnesses.

In summary

If, in concluding all this knowledge, I think away the foundations or background of rhythmical massage therapy, what can we say remains of it?

From the patient's point of view – for his direct experience of rhythmical massage therapy and its effect – no such knowledge is needed.

For the therapist, this background context is study material which he can work with over a long period to arrive at ever deeper insight.

For valuable suggestions and active help in writing this text, I wish especially to thank Liliane Ammann Albertin, president of the Swiss Association for Rhythmical Massage Therapy, and Unda Niedermann, executive board member of the School for Rhythmic Massage.