

# Body Intelligence Training

craniosacral therapy practitioner program



## Interview with Steve Haines, author of 'Cranial Intelligence' 7th October 2013

Helga, I'm just going to try and answer and record some of these questions. Thanks for putting them together.

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### Can you tell us about the three strongest results you've had using BCST, Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy?

One that really stands out for me is a woman, a stressed lawyer, who'd come with acute/chronic shoulder pain, so bad that she couldn't drive anymore. She could only work part-time, but a very busy, successful lawyer. She'd been around Physiotherapists, a Homeopath, and another manipulative approach. We worked together for ten sessions. The first six sessions, I completely bounced off her. I was still doing a bits of Chiropractic and Shiatsu at the time, and mixing in cranial work. I started by playing with points and manipulated the shoulders, so all my best tricks from my other body work trainings, and nothing really happened.

**'I can't tell you what happened there, it's something worse than death.'**

It was still in my early days of my career, so I revisited the biodynamic approach and did what I was trained to do, which was actually sit down and just listen. Then it got much more interesting. The acute shoulder problem was making me miss all sorts of other things going on in her body. The thing that came up was that there was this big, sort of absent quality in her pelvis. Around sessions six and seven I began to pay attention to this, noticing that there was this lack of movement, a coldness, a quality of "not there" in the pelvis. We approached this and at the end of the session she made this incredible statement: "I can't tell you what happened there, it's something worse than death," and then she left. She had been coming weekly at that stage and I was left with this anxiety around what had happened. She didn't come back for another couple of weeks, so it was a much longer than normal gap.

She came in again, and we started slowly, and then raised this issue of this powerful statement, at the same time holding the abdomen and this quality of not much being there. This amazing story emerged; she'd had an abortion a year ago, two years ago, hadn't really wanted to abort. It was a complex story around her partner and getting married, but for her, this quality of "something worse than death."

That story was upsetting her whole system. She was contracting, and the pain was just being expressed through the shoulder, so her whole system was overloaded and the shoulder was just an indicator; a flag waving saying that she was really distressed and something needed paying attention to

here. The shoulder was like the red light on a dashboard. Originally I was just trying to turn the light off on the dashboard, but the whole system was stressed, the whole system was in a foetal position, the whole system was dissociated, actually. She wasn't able to feel her body completely, and there were all sorts of stress patterns and her behaviour was changed.

Two, three more sessions, supporting a gradual opening her abdomen, she began to feel it, was able to talk about the story and acknowledge its consequence for her. This acute shoulder pain, that had been stopping her working and that had been stopping her driving, resolved. Very cool.

I'm going to stick to one of the strongest results because that was quite a long story.

## What is Craniosacral Therapy?

Craniosacral Therapy is an amazing way of touching people. At its heart, it's an entering into a relationship with another human being, but using touch as the way of exploring that relationship or supporting the body of the other person to move towards health.

Two big ideas are at the core of Craniosacral Therapy, one is that there is an intelligence and self-regulating principle at the heart of the human experience. Our bodies are always striving for health and trying to optimize their balance, and they do that very intelligently. There's millions of years of evolution behind the processes and flows and movements in the body, and we're trying to access that. One of the cranial maxims is the creative forces from within are far more powerful than any blind force that we can apply from the outside. It's really about kind of getting out the way, giving the body a chance to rest and recuperate, holding a mirror up to the body. So putting our hands on areas that are out of relationship, that are tight, painful, and just reminding them they can move differently and not be fragmented, but the whole nervous system, all the control mechanisms in the body, can engage and sort of reignite processes of healing that might have been frozen or overwhelmed due to stress or lack of time.

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the outside.'**

So an intelligent self-regulating system, the other big idea for me is that there's all sorts of rhythms and pulses; we're breathing, our heart's pounding, our fascia actually is contracting, our muscle tone changes when standing as we are constantly swaying to help us deal with gravity, neurons oscillate in the brain, there's flows of lymph and blood and much bigger rhythms; circadian rhythms, rhythms of maturing, and dying, and sexual cycles. We have a whole rhythmic quality in our body and I would say these rhythms coalesce to give us moments of coherence, a deep pulse you can feel expressed throughout the body. That's a profound and defining part of the cranial paradigm; there are subtle rhythms that skilled hands can perceive.

The initial insight in cranial work was that the bones in the skull move. That may or not happen; it's not essential to the paradigm actually, but definitely that there's some accommodation and straining that can happen in the head. There's all sorts of expressions of movement throughout the body; fluid moving around the spinal cord, organs shifting in response to the diaphragm, and occasionally you have

these moments of coherent movement. Sometimes it feels quite tidal, there's a longitudinal quality to the movements, or a streaming, or shifting in the fluid metabolic fields.

Yes, something about an intelligent self-organizing body, something about a rhythmic body, and something about how skilful can we be touching someone to facilitate change in that rhythmic intelligent body.

### **What's so special about the Biodynamic approach?**

I kind of hinted at this, we do less in Biodynamics. This respect for the intelligence is that we allow things to happen rather than force things to happen. It might not sound much, but for example: if you've had a baby whose head got twisted and compressed as it moved through the birth canal, that may have put a little twist or compression into the jaw. Associated with that were also some activations and nervous system patterns; the baby got scared or overwhelmed when it got that little compression at the jaw. We come along in adult life and this person's tooth grinding maybe. They've had lots of other problems in their life, but their jaw seems to be a persistent stressor in their system.

Now, we could come along and just stretch the jaw muscles or yank the jaw to help the jaw move or even strongly invite the jaw and say: "We know the jaw should be aligned as much as possible, and we're going to help your jaw move in a way that is more optimum in our external model." That's good and it can work, but the problem with that is that sometimes you can't really respect the history of the whole story; you have to wait to see all the nuances that are enfolded in that pattern of experience.

**'That's one central feature I think of Biodynamics, this huge reverence and respect for the intelligence of the body.'**

The Biodynamic approach is that we try and include the whole person, we try and allow qualities of safety, and just deeply appreciate that the total history of that person is enfolded in their physiology. If we start forcing things or inviting things too strongly to change from the outside, then you're taking risks. You meet that baby's jaw in the adult and the story that was really, really scary and really, really active. If you ask it to change too quickly, then you might have to pick up the pieces of all that anxiety and fear that are coupled with that pattern of experience.

We work a lot on allowing resources to develop and a sense of things change in their own time. Biodynamics is about respecting that the smartest thing in the room is the intelligence in the body. We are not forcing things from the outside. We ask questions rather than tell the body what to do. I might have a question: "I notice your jaw is tight, and do you want to move?" But I never say: "You have to move," or: "This is the best position for you." That's one central feature I think of Biodynamics, this huge reverence and respect for the intelligence of the body.

## **You are also a Chiropractor and a Shiatsu Practitioner. Can you comment on the effects or indications of different approaches in your experience? Why do you favour BCST training?**

Chiropractic gave me this enormous grounding in the structure of the body and I'm forever grateful for that, a huge amount of skill in touching the spine and assessing the quality of joints, and a lot of skills to adjust. Shiatsu gave me an introduction to Zen actually, I studied Zen Shiatsu, so this idea of "less is more". Shiatsu is this attempt to feel energy - to appreciate what we might call interoception now in the scientific view. I learnt that the movements and streamings inside a body are real and something that you can interact with. Shiatsu gave me an approach of one: non-doing and two: appreciating there is an internal world that is curious and not quite what I thought it was.

However both ways of working were a bit busy really for me. I just found Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy a much more satisfying way of working, partly because with biodynamics, I can treat a wider range of issues from acute pain - I work in Switzerland, I treat ski injuries, for example - to existential angst and long-term problems around anxiety or depression. I work a lot with trauma. I'm entranced by the writing around trauma and the understanding of what happens in our physiology. Cranial work has given me a whole set of skills of creating safety, relating to the whole person, going really slowly, and learning how to pace and allow an overwhelming experience to be modulated or titrated as it is released from the body.

I didn't really get that quality of appreciating a whole body, a body in context, from my other trainings. The skill level of holding and relating to a whole person and being present I only really learnt from Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy. I found that my cranial training gave me more skills around how to stay embodied and the sustained practice of a very still listening and observing without doing anything.

The biodynamic cranial training is a two-year approach, fifty days over ten seminars. We really like people to learn in groups and develop a trust with the tutors and develop a trust with their peers. A lot of the learning comes from exploring your edges and relationships with your peer group, so we don't do a modular teaching. I'm just very lucky I had very inspiring teachers including Ged Sumner, Katherine Ukleja, Sheila Kean, all now Body Intelligence tutors, they are very, very impressive people and have made a huge difference to my worldview and my skillset.

A high-quality of writing also - though to be honest some stodgy writing as well - but there's some really nice theory within cranial work and very elegant attempts to relate it to psychotherapy, to relate it to science, to relate it to spirituality, to really appreciate embryology and an enfolding, living body that's dynamically growing and healing.

## **Where do you experience BCST is increasingly included in mainstream treatment plans?**

I've been very fortunate. Australia, Malaysia, Dubai - Dubai was great, just one seminar in Dubai, but women with head scarves and exploring touching the head, that was great, really raucous, an amazing group of women - and Oslo, Dublin, London, and I had a great time in Vancouver.

People really like this approach and I was lucky to train at some very good schools, who are very influential. There is a network of ten schools now who have signed up to a common set of values. You

can find out about them on the IABT site, the International Affiliation of Biodynamic Trainings. It's nice to be part of a much bigger community, nice to be part of a set of shared values. There's a depth to this approach. We've road-tested the model of teaching it; it's been around for fifteen years. It's very, very important to honour the lineage and the history of cranial work, but also appreciate the trauma model, embryology, birth, and new neuroscience around pain and neuroscience around fascia. It is really a growing, exciting field. It needs to let go of some things; there are some things which probably Sutherland got wrong, but I think there's a core to the model about touching people safely that is wonderful.

**'We've road-tested the model of teaching BCST; it's been around for fifteen years.'**

Not much in mainstream treatment plans, still I don't know many people working in hospitals. People volunteer often, I've supervised people working in old people's homes, known one woman working in a brain trauma clinic – she did some amazing work – people in mental health day centres, places like that. One guy in Israel at the moment, they have a volunteer scheme and people going into cancer wards, there's no attempt to cure, but an attempt to alleviate suffering and support people as much as they can through a wide range of therapies. But very, very isolated integration of this approach. Unfortunately, the evidence base is very poor and some of the theoretical constructs around cranial work, its expansive nature, means that it's going to be hard to develop an evidence base as well. Most Western models are quite suspicious of this work. A lot of midwives like this work, that's what it's famous for: for helping babies be less anxious, have less digestive issues. But unfortunately, no, not much in mainstream medicine that I'm aware of.

### **Would you say BCST is best for treatment or prevention?**

Both really. I work with acute pain and I work with things like heart disease through prevention. The best evidence around prevention is from stress and high levels of cortisol. Robert Sapolsky, for example, is a fantastic author on stress. Embodiment, and presence, and kind of feeling your body, having a complete body schema, having non-tight muscles, helping breathing, helping blood flow. All those are things that I think cranial work can facilitate and would be amazing at helping people come out of stress patterns. We know that stress is implicated in nearly all diseases; heart disease, metabolic disorders such as diabetes, breathing issues, immune failures, chronic inflammatory patterns, issues around joints. By understanding stress and by helping people de-stress through embodiment, and doing that in relationship through this light, gentle touch, will help prevent an enormous range of conditions.

I'm a Chiropractor, I trained to work with acute back pain and acute muscular skeletal issues. As cranial practitioner I certainly think taking the fear out of movement and helping people re-educate their bodies and improve the control of their bodies is amazing at treating acute injuries. I find it very clinically efficient. I do things a few times in cranial work only, I find I do not have to repeat what I'm doing; when it changes, it really changes.



## Your training is based largely on recent scientific findings. How far do you feel science has come in understanding how BCST works?

Well, I think we try and integrate recent scientific findings, but there's also this honouring of the history and lineage of cranial work. There is an attempt for a wider context, including not just an individual, but an individual in relationship to another human being, and an individual in relationship to the environment around them. For many people, this relationship to nature and an order in nature often involves debates around spirituality, and science is limited in its ability to meet those questions.

Some of the really exciting science I would say – I've just put in an amazing weekend with Robert Schleip, one of the main researchers around fascia – is the attempt to understand how information moves through the body through this collagen tensional network and its interaction with the nervous system, that has very rich themes and a deep mine of research. There's an exponential increase in research in fascia over the last ten years. That has huge implications for what happens when we touch people, what the nervous system is doing, how much pressure do you need to induce change in tissues, how can you change the hydration and fluid flow in tissues, and the change in our body maps, our body schema, as it happens through touch. Tactile C-fibres are a newly described receptor, they help generate interoception. You have receptors in the hairy skin that help map out the subjective quality of weight, warmth, heaviness, this internal feeling of body knowing. They're going to be exquisitely responsive to being touched by another person. Fascia research is just fabulous.

Your question is interesting. "How far do you feel science has come in understanding how BCST works?" It's more: "What can we use from science right now?" Science would just kind of ignore most esoteric touch therapies. Our attempt to let go of some of the wilder or more speculative elements of cranial work and use the best of science to enhance our skillset is more how it works. Scientists aren't really interested in cranial work, as far as I know.

There's some very interesting things on rhythm, so the famous protoplasmic streaming, even though that's a video from the 1950's, we don't really know how protoplasm moves, but it does and it's significant, and how things move within a cell and whether that sets up dynamics of communication outside the cell, that is very interesting territory.

Another nice one is this slow rhythmic contraction of fibroblasts. Myofibroblasts have been shown to contract at rates of one of the slow rhythms we orient to in cranial work; long tide. Again, it's hugely speculative and a lot of work to go from observing things contracting in a petri dish to saying that this is a significant effect in the body.

**'So pain is a perception and over time, the experience of chronic pain is increasingly divorced from what's happening in the tissues.'**

Science around touch and science around the vagal nerve is fantastic on how the perception of safety, largely mediated through the social nervous system of which the vagus nerve is a big part, will switch off stress responses. That has implications for your immune system, your endocrine system. If we can trigger the vagus somehow, people will be less depressed, their immune system and their endocrine

systems will be working better. We would offer that facilitating these warm fuzzy feelings of interoception through skilful touch is going to have wide-ranging implications for the stress response.

Neuroscience and the art of perception. The biggest insight around pain right now is that pain really is not around what's happening in the tissues. Chronic pain is much more a habit, a bias, a sort of learned pattern in the nervous system. So pain is a perception and over time, the experience of chronic pain is increasingly divorced from what's happening in the tissues. That means, as therapists, we don't really need to spend that much time aligning tissues – though that can be useful and important particularly at the start of a problem – but long term it's much better to help people reframe and embody and creatively retrain their nervous system. That's a very individual approach. It works well when done in relationship to a skilled therapist who constantly challenges you to re-examine your experience of your body, and tries to explore new ways of inhabiting your body.

Embryology is an essential feature of biodynamics, there are lots of insights from embryology, how bodies grow is also important to the healing process. This sense of a streaming embryo with concentration gradients of fluids and chemicals and growth directions that lead processes of change. Again, speculation that that's happening in an adult, but that would be our experience. Our bodies are continually being recreated. The first experience of creation, the first experience of form emerging, if we understand that more clearly, that may give us strong clues about how to interact with the processes of change in an adult body.

## **What have you gained on a personal level by becoming a Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapist?**

I argue less with my wife would be one. Just an increased sense of myself and a much clearer relationship to my body and the ability to not be thrown off track by events and staying more with my centre and a sense of a coherent body. When I lose relationship to that, things don't work so well. I become much more reactive, I tend to collapse into old patterns and they tend to generate pain. I was always reasonably healthy, but low level niggles don't tend to hang around anymore for me.

I was with the same therapist for ten years, so cranial two times a month for long sustained periods. Very interesting to explore my development and growth as a human being in relationship to a therapist. Experiencing a therapeutic relationship has been a very profound thing for me. Learning to be much stiller and to realize how my own anxieties and sometimes my need to go quite quickly, how I can slow those things down and how I can embody who I am.

To help me earn a living, it's a wonderful way of working and I've seen many people change through very simple processes of paying attention to what's happening in their body.

Teaching, clearly through teaching. Finding that trying to answer a lot of these questions it has been useful to share the answers I have found with other people. And to be part of a field that's growing and exciting, and has a real integrity in its attempt to deeply meet the human condition and help relieve suffering. How to touch people with respect and how to teach other people to touch people with respect is very satisfying work. I love being a one-to-one therapist.



## What is “dynamic stillness” in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy?

That’s a big question. The sense that there is a foaming dynamic emptiness – apparently a contradiction, but not really – Physics would say the same thing: there’s a void, but the void is teeming with potential, and every so often things pop up or they pop out of the void; these particles that coalesce and become matter.

Dynamic stillness is a lovely phrase that holds a sense of stillness, emptiness, but also something that’s potent and has movement. Often we find in cranial sessions, there’s a time when things go quiet, then it goes a little bit quieter still and then really, really quiet. Dynamic stillness is an attempt to describe the ultimate quietness, the sense of non-separateness between you and the client, between you and the environment, between you and all that’s not you. Stillness is a defining link in that relationship.

‘The stillness in the client is no different from the stillness in the practitioner, and there’s no difference in the stillness of the surrounding environment.’

It’s a tricky thing, dynamic stillness, ‘the ground from which form emerges’. A cranial cosmology might be; there is stillness, dynamic stillness, there’s movement, out of the movement there’s a sort of coalescing into what we call potency or energy, the potency coalesces into fluid, fluid coalesces into form. Sutherland, the founder of cranial work used the concept of ‘transmutation’ to describe this process, that’s an interesting model.

Really for me, it’s just this experience that when things are still, when I have this perception of quietness or silence as I treat, that can keep going and is a very rewarding place. When people enter stillness, their physiology works differently afterwards, as though there’s been a deep rest, and a pause, and a reorganization, and a coming back into a relationship to the intelligence of the body.

There’s a nice phrase in cranial work: “The stillness in the client is no different from the stillness in the practitioner, and there’s no difference in the stillness of the surrounding environment.” We might say that stillness meets itself, stillness meets itself again. That’s kind of endless really. When you’ve tasted that or felt it or been in stillness, it becomes a very attractive place and something you’re continually trying to support, something that you generally try to help emerge in the therapeutic relationship, and it’s a very profound place where things change.

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