

Psychotherapy Guidebook

# BODY ENERGY THERAPY

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# Body Energy Therapy

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## DEFINITION

Body Energy Therapy is a somato-psychic approach to evolutionary blocks in any given personality structure. It is based on the premise that during growth, not only are psychological adaptations made to various stressing forces but also physical compensations are produced. It is on these physical compensations that Body Energy Therapy focuses attention. In short, the body is a physical template reflecting the interactions of our whole self in its entire historical perspective. Certain generalizations in terms of body structure allow for a typology to be produced that may be exemplified as that of a needy person, an overburdened person, a rigid person, or an overblown person. It would be simplistic to consider that only the above four adaptations suffice to describe every human personality. In fact, the physical modes of adaptation are far more complex and have been summarized elsewhere (Kurtz and Presterá, 1977). The central notion of Body Energy Therapy is that a person's physical stance in the world is a direct statement of his emotional stance.

## HISTORY

The concepts included in Body Energy Therapy are a product of some ten years of personal work by the author in private practice as well as at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. This work summarizes the antecedent and pioneering conceptualizations elaborated by Wilhelm Reich, Ida P. Rolf, and Fritz Perls. These pioneering geniuses established the unquestionable validity of the theoretical framework that sees the mind-body as a functional whole. In their work they make repeated references to organismic functioning. The duality that Western culture has produced, separating consciousness into functions of the mind or head from that of the instincts or body, was refuted by their work, which integrates the two. The principle to be underscored is that our life at any given moment is a function of all our awarenesses, be they mental or physical.

## TECHNIQUE

Knowing that our expression at any given moment reflects the posture of our entire being, it becomes possible — through observation, looking without attachment, and listening for what surfaces — to contact those areas in the total body and mind that are obstructed from free flow. The therapist may then intervene in several ways. In any case the therapist aids in the resolution of an energy impasse by the addition of his energy. This may take the form of energy directed at the site of a block, for example, at the jaw, if it is clenched and held in anger (remembering that this is in reference to a fixed

posture of anger, not simply a transient expression). To release this holding, the therapist may directly manipulate the held musculature or, on the other hand, the therapist may encourage verbalizations or energetic sound releases on the part of the subject. Both of these approaches have been incorporated from the aforementioned therapies of Reich, Rolf, and Perls. More unique to Body Energy Therapy is the addition of the therapist's energy in still another direction. In this latter case, the therapist recognizes that within the total being there exists a force that is expansive and directed toward self-healing equal to that which is obstructing life growth. It is apparent that if a block exists, then it exists in opposition to a flow. Behind the anger of a clenched jaw, which expresses striking out and hence separation, there exists an equal force that reaches out toward inclusion rather than separation. The therapist is then in a position to feed energy into the force that wants to be included. For example, in group therapy an individual may sit rigid and unyielding outside the circle, only to become pliable, flexible, and joyous when openly invited within.

## APPLICATIONS

The applications of this technique include both those directed at diagnosis through body analysis and those directed at therapy for resolutions of intrabeing conflicts. Often, simply bringing awareness — this being the therapist's only energetic contribution — will allow the subject to heal

himself from within. This was alluded to above as the inner life self-healing force, which is always present.