

Fields and Levels

'Perception and Knowledge'

An Exploration of Tissue 'Fields and Levels' of Function By Gez Lamb

Tissue Fields

The concept that every tissue-type of the body creates a field of action, has fascinated me for many years. I cannot remember whether I heard of it somewhere or dreamed it or it just came to me but once the idea had formed it would not let me go. I then had to find a way of palpating each field and even more challengingly to find ways to teach it to undergraduate students.

In essence each tissue field has a distinctive 'feel' to it and this quality is a product of the form of the tissue and the manner of its function. So, for example, fascia may be palpated for the distinctive quality of its fibre make-up, its essential structure, or it may be palpated for its function in the sense of its contractile quality and its inherent motility. We could say that both structure and function are equally palpable.

The tissues of the body may be perceived as a continuum of relative density with bone being the most dense to fluid being the least dense and as one traverses from denser to next less dense, it becomes clear that one is in the space in which the tissue exists and functions. The very distinction between one tissue and the next gives evidence of the existence of its 'field' of action. It is as if the tissues belong to a club or organisation and every member of the club knows itself to be in the club. So every bone of the body knows itself to belong to the bony club, and every fascia knows it belongs to the fascial club, and so on.

There are other fields of action that are not tissue specific but they are equally important as a manifestation of united function within a field of action. Examples of these would be the visceral system, the nervous systems (psns, ans, cns), the vascular system and so on. Even the manifestation of the primary respiratory mechanism could be viewed as a field of action.

From a therapeutic point of view I have found that an acknowledgement of where the body is most focussed, which tissue field it is most expressing through or engaged in, at the outset of the treatment, is essential for the success of the treatment. It is a starting point that enables the practitioner to let the body know that he or she knows just where the patient is in relationship to their body, and that this evidence of knowingness is paramount in the formation of the treatment relationship and the consequent therapeutic response from the body. I have long been convinced that relationship is as important as technique in the healing outcome.

Once established in the field of action most favoured by the body at the start of a treatment it is then a matter of method to treat within the presenting field, or to move between fields as the body requires, in order to achieve a therapeutic resolution.

There is a supreme intelligence within the body but there are limitations due to the reflex nature of the body whereby it can be 'stuck' in a loop and needs an external 'fulcrum' (in the form of the practitioner's hands) to be enabled to move out of the loop towards its optimum function. Once the starting point has been acknowledged and engaged then the supreme intelligence guides the treatment and it behoves the practitioner to honour and follow the changes until resolution has been achieved. Toward this end the practitioner's awareness of the fields acts as a witness so that the body knows that the practitioner knows, and that the practitioner's knowing facilitates the treatment and enables choices to be made to encourage field change where needed.

Levels of Function

Allied to, but distinct from the tissue fields, is the palpable presence of levels of function within the body. These levels may be conceived of as levels within the primary respiratory mechanism (prm) or within the central nervous system (cns) or just within the body as a whole, but however one conceptualises these levels they are clearly present and highly effective when used as a therapeutic tool.

The sense of level is most readily palpated with the practitioner's hands placed under the patient's body. The hands are placed where the system is most readily available for change and in many cases requires a strongly present hand under the sacrum with the second hand placed where the potency for change is most evident. The practitioner then assesses the level that is most evident and facilitates a fulcrum by which the inner intelligence may reorganise.

The levels are evidenced by how they feel and may be described as expanding and deepening as one moves from the most superficial to the sense of the deepest one may go. At first the sense of depth was all I had to go on until one day it became apparent that each level in fact is an expression of one of the five elements. So that the progression is from earth through fire, water, air and space (ether). It is hardly surprising that the elements exist in the body, as they do in nature, but what is more sublime is that they are present in their subtle form rather than their literal elemental form. Thus what is being experienced is more akin to the earthiness of earth and the fieriness of fire and the fluidity of water and the airiness of air and the spaciousness of space. In fact these qualities are very present in the language when we speak of the qualities a person possesses such as describing someone as being fiery or airy or indeed wet. If indeed we are sensitive to these qualities in another person's make-up, then how much more should we be capable of palpating these qualities in the functioning of the body?

Furthermore, these levels and the respective 'elemental' quality that each expresses, relate to the functioning not only of the body physical and physiological but to the functioning of the personality as evidenced through emotions, intuition and insight. We could say that the musculo-skeletal system functions in the earth quality, the nervous system in fire, the emotions in fluid, the intuition in air, and insight in space. Each quality functions because the subtle element exists and provides the medium in which the function is made possible and is sustained. It gives a whole new insight into the saying that someone is in their element when they are most enjoying themselves. How much better would our lives function if we were true to our natures and functioned in our predominant element and had that element present and organised within the reflexes of our body.

These levels give us as osteopaths an opportunity to understand what is manifesting in the patient's body as a reflection of their adaptation to life and the means to provide a way of bringing the body into balance to help the person's inner life to also balance. As in the treatment of tissue fields, it is more the fact that the body knows that it is known that facilitates the change, but without the practitioner's witness the body is less able to adapt to the presence of the practitioner's hands. Once a level is acknowledged, then the process of change can begin and the supreme inner intelligence once more conducts the treatment with the practitioner's willing cooperation.

Gez Lamb