

## The Trager® Approach and Mentastics® Movement Explorations:

The *Trager®* Approach helps release deep-seated physical and mental patterns and facilitates deep relaxation, increased mobility and mental clarity. Many people seek *Trager®* sessions for personal growth or increased feelings of joy and wellness. The *Trager®* Approach has also been reported to ease or manage a wide range of conditions including:

- stress
- back and neck pain
- limited movement
- everyday aches and pains
- back pain
- muscle spasms
- depression
- headaches
- multiple sclerosis
- physical/ emotional trauma
- post-polio syndrome
- cerebral palsy
- sports and other injuries
- Parkinson's disease
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- fibromyalgia

The second aspect of the *Trager®* Approach, called *Mentastics®*, involves instruction in the use of self-care movements. *Mentastics®* is taught both in private sessions and in group classes.

Dr. Trager developed these simple, effortless movements to encourage playful exploration of "what could be freer" for your body. As an ongoing way to "re-remember" the body, integrating *Mentastics®* into your daily life will allow you to enhance and recall feelings of ease, freedom, flexibility and joy. *Mentastics®* can become part of the way you take care of yourself and relieve stress and tension. Imagine turning every gesture into an opportunity to feel something different, and transform the world around you into a perpetual rehabilitation and wellness environment.

As an example, most dancers use visualization to help embody the role that they need to assume to convey an emotion and to initiate a gesture the "speaks" or expresses a particular energy. You can do the same by bringing inquiry into your day to day activities and exploring new qualities of movement. Often these concepts are explored in subsequent *Trager®* sessions.

The questions below are similar to a biofeedback/autogenic training model. Through open ended inquiry you're inviting the body/mind to assemble a different way of being --- to reinvent itself; to interpolate the mental suggestion into a physiological response.

During any activity ask....

What could be softer?

What could be freer?

What could be easier?

What could be more fluid?

What could be more balanced, restful?

Perhaps the most profound of questions is, "What is half the effort?"

When you think your body has arrived at a different feeling, ask again..."Well what is softer, lighter than that or half of that effort?" And so on.

Another thought to keep in mind is that there are rests in music that are as significant as the notes, sometimes even more powerful. Further, periods are used in diction, to provide meaning. Throughout your day, take micro---breaks, breathe, pause and soften, lengthen, open..... 15---30 second breaks are all that are necessary to interrupt and discharge the accumulation of patterned tensions, and to access a lighter way of being. (especially when you are using your hands --- typing etc).

It is also important to focus on and grow what is feeling "good" rather than what is not feeling its best. Movement exploration is an excellent way to cultivate self awareness and stay within your comfort zone.

### **Specifically for your neck and shoulders:**

#### **Neck:**

Imagine writing your name with your nose to initiate and explore the dexterity of the neck. Turn the head to one side to a comfortable degree and perform the exercise again to set up different muscular relationships for the exploration. To free up holding patterns deeper in the occiput (base of the skull) you may even explore flexion and extension gently (looking up or down) and writing your name again.

#### **Shoulder Blades**

Below are some exercise to free up the shoulder blades. Explore making circles with each shoulder, bringing the shoulder forward and the backward (like a ferris wheel) and after a few rotations, change directions. Use the questions above to guide this exploration. You may also envision a painter at the easel. They paint from the shoulder blade, gracefully guiding the brush on the canvas.

#### **Arms and Shoulders**

"Remember the feeling in your shoulders (thoracic spine) after the session. Ask "How did it feel?" "It felt like.....hmmmm --- just let the feeling come back. We also gestured with our hands and forearms circularly looking for what was easy, graceful. The image of shimmering tassels on the shoulder blades/ the cowboy jacket --- was used to initiate movement of the scapula on the back....

**Shifting Weight** (in addition to exploring this while standing --- try this at your desk while seated)

When standing, keep your knees "soft," slightly and imperceptibly bent. This will allow you to more easily shift your weight from side to side and to provide a feeling of fluidity in the ankle, knee and hip joints, and the sacrum helping to keep your hip rotators free --- lengthening contracting lengthening contracting.

As you shift your weight see if you can experience the following: 50%/50% weight in each foot. Then find 60%/40%, 70%/30%, 80%/20 etc. and then back again. This process of feeling "transfer of weight" from side to side will bring you in to more of what is happening from the ground up. Notice where the weight is in each foot as well as side to side and front to back.

And in each case, sitting or standing --- it does not need to be only side to side! --- figure eights, circles --- all of this will engage your hips differently and invite more possibility of movement.

**For your feet:**

Standing on a tennis ball is a great way to massage each foot. You can just roll it under each foot as you stand. The tennis ball has enough integrity to support your weight but also enough give so that it doesn't "poke" too hard into the foot. As you apply weight onto the ball the bones of your foot will separate and "melt" over it, opening all the joint spaces. Another suggestion that can offset the repetitive nature of standing on a hard surface is to go hiking or on short walks outside (on grass) to provide more random challenge to the muscles of the feet, legs and hips.

**Gait Alignment:**

Also align your feet straight ahead to suggest length to the hip rotators --- it may feel unusual at first, like your pigeon toed --- but his feeling will diminish and the straight gait will become the norm. In the process the "set point/resting length of the rotators while standing will be opened. You may even practice bending the knees slightly, with feet straight ahead, to integrate the ankles, knees, and hips in this position.

**Heel to Toe:**

To whatever degree is possible and above all most comfortable, take some time each day (5---10 min.) to walk heel to toe to remind the body of the flexion that is available in the ankle. Imagine the bottoms of the feet as curved like the base of a rocking horse. After some conscious daily practice --- let it go and walk normally. Over time, with regular practice, this will find its way into all of your walking.

**Finding length:**

When walking, bring awareness into your torso --- What could be more length here? Imagining a "sky hook" at the sternum, allow your breath to give you a "lift" to rise out of the pelvic bowl. This may help create space above the hips and low back. You may also wish to explore this while driving or riding on a plane or bus where there is a tendency to sink into the seat.

**Recall:**

This is an interesting and quite efficacious component of this work. We tend to recall only stressful moments....like in the afternoon recalling an argument in the morning and in the process getting mad and experiencing the same feeling. In essence we "recreated" the feeling just from thinking about it. Rarely do we think about what is relaxing, positive, empowering, like sunsets, being at the beach etc...

If there were any times during the session that you felt relaxed or experience movement that was easy and pain free --- recall that --- let that memory expand into your feeling that way again. Recall the session before bed and or just after awakening. Ask "how did it feel?" and allow the body to find the feeling. This will help anchor a relaxed feeling before bed and also provide a nice to wake up and start the day from an "easy place."

Much like piano lessons, the benefits of Trager build upon the previous session, and coupled with your daily personal practice of movement exploration throughout your day, you will begin to expand into greater movement possibilities and comfort. It is the continuity of practice that is the key. Doing a little something each day is where the action is.

## **Movement Explorations Cont'd:**

SELECT TWO WORDS AND ALLOW THESE TO BE THE THEME FOR THE DAY OR JUST THE ACTIVITY IN WHICH YOU'RE ENGAGED. NOTICE WHEN YOU ARE PRESENT WITH THE WORDS (EMBODYING THE CONCEPT) AND ALLOWING YOUR MOVEMENT AND GESTURES TO EXPRESS THEIR MEANING, AND NOTICE WHEN YOU DRIFT OFF. HAVE FUN! FEEL FREE TO ADD – COLORS, TIMES OF DAY, NATURE REFERENCES....ETC.

### **EFFORTLESS – WHAT IS HALF THE EFFORT?**

SOFT  
ORIGINAL  
STRONG  
KIND  
WEIGHT  
LIGHT  
GROUNDED  
EASY  
JOYFUL  
PLAYFUL  
ALIVE  
SPACIOUS  
FLUID  
LIQUID  
FREE  
RESTFUL  
BALANCE  
NATURAL  
SWING  
NO---THING  
EMPTY  
AWAKE  
ELONGATION  
CARE---FREE  
CONNECTED  
BEAUTIFUL  
PEACEFUL  
GRACEFUL  
NOT KNOWING  
INNOCENT  
INTEGRATED  
CONFIDENT  
BELONGING  
INTEGRITY  
WARMTH  
AUTHENTIC  
GRATEFUL  
WITH GRATITUDE  
THANKFUL  
CURIOUS  
PRESENT  
JUICY

EXPANDED  
STILL