

The Art of Receiving Massage

By Eli Thompson



Health

There are many different modalities in Massage Therapy, all of which are beneficial. But of all the different styles and techniques, there is one skill which is commonly ignored: The client's.

Many massage clients are unaware of the role they can play, and leave all the work to the therapist. Learning how they can aid the process will ensure better results. This skill has to do with what clients bring to the table and how they affect the quality of the experience.

Both the therapist and client bring something to the table. I try to bring my attention, intuition, and compassion, as well as my professional experience, in order to be as present as I can. I do my best to prepare both mentally and physically before each session. There is much more variety to what my clients bring. Some bring their jobs or traffic jams. Others bring recent arguments, frustrations, or worries. It is always a pleasure when someone brings their curiosity and attention. The healing process becomes unhindered when the client lets go of their struggles and becomes fully present in their body. Awareness is the seed of change. My job as a Massage Therapist is to help clients get there.

The following ideas are ways in which you can help me help you.

Stay Present

Be in the room with the therapist. Be in the moment. In your body. You are not taking the kids to school or planning dinner. You are not with your family, friends, or co-workers. Don't plan for what you will do after the session. Let all that go and join me in *your* session.

But what does it mean to be present? When you park your car at home and have no clear memory of the drive, were you really present? Thinking of past situations or future concerns pulls us out of the "now" and into a dreamy awareness. We're keeping tabs on what's

going on, but we are not fully attentive to the moment. I find that I am most present when I allow my actions and senses to completely fill my attention. Our body and environment are in the moment... Try to be there with them.

Be Attentive

We are living in vibrant bodies which are constantly informing us about what is happening in the present. Most of the time we only half listen. We filter out the essentials from the constant chatter of our sensory nerve endings. During our session, be attentive to your body. What is it saying? At first you may not hear much more than the usual, but listening is a skill that improves with time. Can you hear your pulse? Can you feel your breath as it travels through your whole body? What does your tension feel like? Get to know it personally, not just superficially. It has much to teach.

One benefit of massage is that it makes listening easier. When I challenge a muscle's tension by applying pressure, the volume of its "voice" rises above the body's usual clamor. Use my hands as mirrors into your own body. What is changing and how does it affect the rest of your body? Stay open and focus your attention inward; changes come in all forms.

Look for Patterns

You have a great opportunity to learn about yourself here. Your body is very intelligent and protective. It is constantly doing things on your behalf, most of them very beneficial, if not absolutely essential. But your body is also very habitual. It often uses old, patterned responses in new situations.

During a massage, circumstances often arise that allow you to perceive a habitualized pattern of

Eli Thompson, LNCMT
617-776-9494
Email: BostonMassage@yahoo.com
www.EliThompson.com



response. Whether it is holding your breath, clenching your muscles, or not verbalizing your discomfort, this response is rarely thought through, but unconsciously performed. I will point out these patterns when I find them; you should do the same.

Know Your Limits

Actual pain is counter-productive in a massage, because it increases your instinctive protectiveness. This does not mean you should run away from intensity, but rather be attentive to the experience and know your limits. Tell me when a certain technique gets too much – before it becomes painful. It will not offend me and will ensure a more productive treatment.

Let Go

In our society, we spend much of our time trying to control ourselves and our environment. In time we develop holding patterns that we aren't aware of and never let go. Because massage requires a surrendering of control, we will often find your holding patterns. The more aware you become of your holding patterns, the more you will be able to let them go.

Your role as a client is not strictly passive or observant. You can learn to aid in the release of this habituated tension. It is less an active effort, and more of an allowing it to happen or just not resisting it. Letting go does not require any preparation or effort, it is simply a surrendering of control. Thus, by surrendering control, you regain control.

Use This Time Wisely

I always give a better treatment after I've stretched and meditated. This is how I let go of my daily minutiae and become more presently attentive to the moment. We only have a short time together. If it normally takes you 20 minutes to let go and become present, that's 20 fewer minutes of an effective massage. Give yourself 20 minutes before we begin to get ready. Arrive early and read a book in my waiting room. Take a walk or sit at a café so that we can maximize our time together. If you don't have the time, simply notice what you bring to your session.

Make It Last

How long do the effects of a massage usually last for you? An evening? A few days? With a little extra effort, you can learn to retain the benefits longer. Notice what tenses you. Can you bring the same attentive presence to these situations and find the habituated response pattern? Experiment with letting go and allowing a new response to appear: one that is healthier and less burdensome. This is the beginning of change at a deeper level.

Through Deep Tissue Massage and Structural Integration, I work to achieve long term solutions to chronic problems for my clients: aches, pains, and limitations that are so entrenched they are not only part of that person's body, but part of their personality. My teacher, Tom Myers, has a saying: "Change your body about your mind." Personal transformation is available to us all and massage is a powerful tool for that growth.

Eli Thompson is a licensed massage therapist, a certified KMI practitioner, and a certified teacher of the School of Kinesis. He offers Massage Therapy, KMI Structural Integration, and private Instructional Yoga classes at 15 St. Mary's Court in Brookline. You can learn more at www.EliThompson.com or contact Eli at 617-776-9494 or BostonMassage@yahoo.com.

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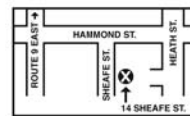
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