Autogenic Therapy: life force management for health

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The orthodox medical model shows disease to be a complex interaction of the host, his behaviour and his environment. Sophisticated biochemical engineering has led to major advances in the treatment of acute illnesses and some chronic ones, but we are left with a large number of disorders for which modern medicine appears to have no satisfactory solutions. In the area of chronic disease, applied technology, surgery, drugs and remedial therapies all have their place. But they are expensive, particularly drugs.

We are increasingly finding that no medicine, however sophisticated, can adequately control the amazing complexity of our mental and physical processes by artificial external means – without a price. We have to learn once again how to turn within to release our own self-generative healing power in mind and body by restoring natural balance to the autonomic nervous system.

Whereas many other strategies of preventative medicine often work with fear as the main motivating factor, undermining self-responsibility and determination with statistics, and removing joy and trust in oneself with images of impending disease, (1) by empowering individuals to help themselves, the opposite is true. Autogenic Therapy allows access to our natural self healing powers by deepening levels of rest, allowing concordance of the brain hemispheres and a balancing of the body’s autonomic nervous system.

What is Autogenic Therapy?
Autogenic therapy is a complete mind/body therapy in which Autogenic Training forms the core which the patient carries out by his or herself, using very simple regular mental exercises supported, encouraged and supervised by the Autogenic Therapist. The term ‘autogenic’ refers to the self-generated therapeutic aspects which distinguish this method from others.

The practice of these core exercises leads to the Autogenic State, in which the EEG changes show an increase in alpha waves, balancing of right and left brain hemispheres, with an upward shift into the Theta region. (2) The many clinical observations noted on the improvement of symptoms and behaviour in clients using AT is supported by this evidence of greater brain hemispheric concordance. All kinds of brain-directed, self-regulatory processes occur which promote and support desirable mental and physical homoeostasis.

Clinical and experimental evidence suggests that the key factor in this approach lies in the self-induced autogenic modification of cortico-diencephalic inter-relations in the brain which enables natural forces to regain their otherwise restricted capacity for self regulation, and that the function of the entire neurohumoral axis is directly involved; and that the therapeutic mechanism is not unilaterally restricted to either bodily or mental functioning alone. This neutralises the consequences of exposure to harmful emotional or physical
injury by the gradual off-loading of accumulated painful material, leading to better emotional balance and mood. Certain complementary exercises (which focus on methods of safe emotional discharge within the unfolding autogenic process) support and promote psycho-therapeutically desirable mental functions. This can be an insightful and empowering experience.

Clients have reported: significant anxiety reduction, less inhibited and more natural social contact; warmer and more intimate interpersonal relationships; spontaneously increased intellectual efficiency and creativity; an increase in functional adaptation, and resistance to all kinds of stress.

Careful initial assessment of the client’s physical and psychological state is mandatory to all practising therapists to allow modifications of the therapy to suit individual needs because of the unique simultaneous body/mind approach. Non-medical therapists are required to have a source of medical referral if in any doubt about differentiating autogenic discharge patterns from disease symptoms.

Autogenic Therapy was developed some seventy five years ago by the psychiatrist and neurologist, Dr. Johannes Schultz (1844-1970). Schultz systematically pursued the question of whether a person could, without hypnosis, induce a deep psychophysio-logic relaxation by merely directing the attention to heaviness and warmth in the limbs. His successful findings constitute the actual beginning of ‘Autogenic Therapy’ which he published in 1932. Schultz collaborated with Dr. Luthe in five further volumes on ‘Autogenic Therapy’ (3) - Medical Applications, Applications in Psychotherapy, Research and Theory, The Dynamics of Autogenic Neutralisation and Treatment with Autogenic Neutralisation. Editions have appeared in German, Spanish, Italian, Norwegian, French, Swedish, Japanese, Russian and English.

During the last five decades, Autogenic Therapy spread to many countries around the world as a valuable form of treatment in the various fields of medicine, psychiatry and psychotherapy, and the steady interest is reflected in the numerous clinical and experimental publications in many languages. (4, 5) The British Autogenic Society was founded in 1984 and one NHS Hospital Outpatient Department has offered Autogenic Therapy to patients for over a decade with very positive results. (6)

Clinical applications of Autogenic Therapy
Autogenic Therapy can provide a flexible approach to a wide variety of organic, psychosomatic and psychiatric disorders with surprisingly favourable results, and when used by well people (in sports, education, and industry) improvements observed in peak performance, creative output, intellectual work and interpersonal relationships have all been reported. (8) Suitable for individual or small group work in most age groups, it may be used as the treatment of choice or an adjunct to other interventions.

People who regularly use Autogenic Therapy as part of their ongoing approach to living, find their own peaceful centre within - a valuable resource to face the
trials and uncertainties of life from a more relaxed and balanced perspective.

References


Selye H., Selye's Guide to Stress Research, Vol. 2, 'Stress and Autogenic Therapy' - Summary of 100 publications of AT related Observations concerning Educational Activities (Elementary School levels to Postgraduate Studies), and 'Summary of Medical and Psychosomatic Applications of Autogenic Methods'