

Holistic therapies: the Grinberg Method

Still almost unknown in Britain, the Grinberg Method is the ultimate in holistic therapies – curing chronic pain, heavy scarring and deep emotional wounds.



Victoria Oldham is one of only six Grinberg Method practitioners in this country Photo: GABBY LAURENT

By Anna Murphy

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Victoria Oldham is telling me how she too used to be a sceptic. 'When I first went and saw a Grinberg Method practitioner I wasn't into that sort of thing at all. I was incredibly sceptical, but I was also curious. I went because I had had neck ache for a long time and then one morning I couldn't turn my head one way. I was in Switzerland at the time, and someone told me to try the Grinberg Method, which is very well known over there. And I went and saw this person, and she gave me a foot analysis, and I was quite blown away by the things she said to me and the insight she had into my life.'

After two sessions Oldham's neck pain had disappeared, and then she 'carried on going because my whole life started to take a different shape. I found myself seeing things differently. I found myself more aware of what I wanted in my life.' Which meant abandoning her career as an artist and retraining as a Grinberg practitioner herself.

A decade on and it was I who was in the position of sceptic, with Oldham the practitioner. I had never heard of the Grinberg Method, and when I learnt that it was based, at its simplest, on 'reading' the feet, not in the same way as reflexology but holistically – identifying patterns of tension or of energy rather than the state of specific organs – I was prepared to be unimpressed. But I went along to see Oldham anyway, and like her and many

others before me was 'blown away'. She did indeed examine and manipulate my feet while asking me questions about physical symptoms and my more general wellbeing. Quickly she was pinpointing exact periods in my life when a significant event had happened – not the event itself but the impact it had had on me; she was disentangling assorted different versions of 'me', some intrinsic to my character, some constructed and therefore unhelpful; she was identifying destructive patterns of behaviour and relationships. And on a practical level she was diagnosing how all these tendencies were being played out within my body – how physical and emotional experiences from my past were being held, locked almost, inside me. Then, over the course of the ensuing sessions, she showed me how we could work together – through breathing, through exercises, through her manipulations of my body – in order to unlock these long-held patterns.

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Or, as the 35-year-old Oldham puts it, talking to me a year and a half after our first session, 'What I am doing is teaching you how to pay better attention to your own body, to what it needs and to what you may be doing that could be damaging it in some way. If someone comes in with a physical symptom I work with them to show them how, through their behavioural patterns, their patterns of thinking, their posture, they themselves could be producing the symptoms they are struggling with.

If someone suffers from indigestion, for example, it could be that when they get stressed they tense up their belly. If someone has sinusitis it may be because they scrunch up their face when they are working on their computer.'

And that is the thing about the Grinberg Method. It may initially sound rather intangible, airy-fairy even, when you try to describe it to someone who has never experienced it, yet it is at heart almost humdrum in its practicality. Quite simply it identifies what you are unconsciously doing to yourself to make yourself feel less than top-notch, and teaches you how not to.

The method was first developed in the 1970s by Avi Grinberg, an Israeli former paramedic who then worked as a therapist and healer, and published an influential book called *Holistic Reflexology*. As Grinberg himself now puts it, 'Many years of therapeutic work proved to me that there is no use in trying to cure people. I had to face the fact that the best healer a person could have is himself. At that point I started to move from being a therapist to being a trainer.'

His method – which has grown away from its roots in reflexology into an entirely separate discipline – is now widely practised in Switzerland, Germany and Italy. There it is often used in tandem with conventional medicine, particularly in aiding recovery after surgery or broken limbs.

Some of the most remarkable results Oldham has achieved have come many years after an original trauma. She tells me about one woman who had had a brain tumour as a child. 'She had a big scar right down the middle of her forehead, which had healed badly and was very bumpy, and she had bald areas on her hairline. By the time we had finished, her forehead was smooth, with only a faint line on it, and the hair had regrown.'

Another case seems more remarkable still. 'One client had had part of his lung cut away because of a tumour. He came to me soon after surgery and had a 15cm scar across his back. After seven sessions there was a fine white line, as if someone had drawn on him with a pencil. When he went back to the surgeon for a check-up to see whether the tumour had returned, the surgeon was amazed to see part of his lung had actually grown back.'

And then there is the man crippled by psoriasis, which has now almost entirely gone, or the man with terrible burns, which, having flared up so as to look almost fresh after early treatments (a sign of the body restarting the healing process), promptly disappeared.

Such stories may appear so miraculous as to be almost unbelievable. (Oldham herself describes what she witnessed on these occasions as 'magical'.) Certainly, they test the boundaries of modern scepticism. I can only vouch for my own experience, because the focus of my sessions with Oldham was an abdominal scar from a childhood operation. In each session Oldham combined intense, sometimes painful periods of massage around the scarring with exercises to release tension in that area, and also in other areas, which unbeknown to me had been affected by the surgery – from under my ribs to down into my hip and thigh.

Some sessions were gruelling: to my amazement, when she worked on the scar for the first time my whole body was flooded with a feeling of fear, and my temperature plummeted. In later sessions this fear would occasionally return, but mixed with a euphoric sense of release. How I could feel two such contradictory emotions at once was only one of the mysteries of what Oldham was doing to me. More mysterious was how the appearance of my scar was dramatically improving and my long-standing digestive problems easing.

'People do things around a wound not to feel the old pain or the fear,' Oldham offers now, by way of explanation. 'Grinberg is about teaching them that it is OK, and that the body can finally heal. I get the body to feel the fear again, but in a safe environment. The body then learns it is safe to let it go and to heal.'

Not surprisingly the Grinberg Method can be an empowering and addictive experience. My sessions have turned into something of a project, with myself as the work in progress. And Oldham tells me that I am far from alone in having the next stage of that project already lined up in my mind. 'People who find Grinberg works for them tend to get quite into it and want to develop and work on other things,' she says.

Oldham herself currently has a rather bigger project to work on, that of making the Grinberg Method widely available in Britain. At the moment there are just five other practitioners – two in Scotland, two in London and one in Yorkshire – with Oldham herself making only monthly visits from Geneva, where she has her main practice. Starting in November she will be running a training course for would-be practitioners – four week-long residential courses a year over a three-year period – and is currently on the lookout for recruits.

Oldham believes that with more practitioners the therapy will catch on as quickly here as it has done elsewhere. 'There is a lot of openness to the Grinberg Method in Britain,' she says. 'People who come to me immediately see what is special about what I am doing. They love it because it is very down to earth, and it works. Their main question to me is, "Why on earth haven't I heard about this before?"' If Oldham has her way, that won't be a question that will be asked for much longer.

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