

TRANSFORMING PAIN AND HEALING PHYSICAL INJURY WITH WHOLE BODY FOCUSING: A Memoir

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When I was thirty-three I suffered a debilitating spinal injury requiring eventual corrective surgery. Bed-ridden during those first three years of chronic pain, I lost everything meaningful in my life. I lost the pleasure of living inside of my warm, young, strong body. I lost the ability to do meaningful work. I lost the ability to live independently. By the end of the third year, I lost my will to live. This healing process has been a circuitous journey and continues to this day.

Ordinarily I do not share my ongoing struggle with chronic pain in a public way. Being given the invitation to share a meaningful experience of the Focusing process by the Folio editors, I have decided to share how the process of Wholebody Focusing has impacted my personal experience of physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. As I look back on those first years of relentless pain, I recognize today that an essentially spiritual problem lay at the very core of my suffering: *Who am I after having lost everything I thought I was, did, thought and believed?* My everyday ordinary experience of self, let's call it the personality or conditioned self, had no more ground to stand on. The self I thought I was, was dying. Reigniting the will to live meant finding a way to connect to a larger, deeper, and perhaps, truer self. Larger than my chronic pain. Larger than my physical limitations. Larger than my experience of emotional and energetic fatigue, depression, and sorrow.

Wholebody Focusing opened up an inner doorway to a more subtle, larger, and wiser experience of myself. This process continues to offer me a daily inner resource for transforming my experiences of chronic pain and subtler forms of suffering. When I contact my larger self directly, in a conscious bodily way, I discover that my physical sensations of pain and fatigue are not as solid as I thought. I discover a way to connect to the life in the suffering which knows how to transform the body's experience of pain.

Focusing and Wholebody Focusing reconnected me to the will to continue living despite the daily challenges of debilitating pain and subtler forms of human suffering.

I bow in thanks to my first Focusing teacher, Bala Jaison. Several years later I met Kevin McEvenue and began to practice Wholebody Focusing. I began to contact the subtler spiritual dimensions of self awakened by my precise consciousness of the body as a whole. A far larger, deeper, and more transpersonal connection to my own innate Body Wisdom was being ignited, a knowing that is larger than me and still includes me. Out of this larger heartfelt connection to self arose a very natural opening up to connecting to others in the very same way. I no longer needed to suffer alone, a belief unconsciously held in very complex ways in my family history. This awareness of interconnectedness and interdependence, explored in a wholebody way, gave birth to a new and more whole way of being a self.

Everything in me and in my life began to transform itself from the inside. I had found a way to continue thriving inside of my daily experience of acute pain.

I will briefly lay out the experiential relational process of Wholebody Focusing as it continues to transform my body's experience of pain and suffering. Once activated by my wholebody-environment-situation awareness, a sophisticated evolutionary process of organismic intelligence (bodily consciousness) begins to reorganize my whole living body at all levels of function. How does this larger Body Wisdom impact my daily experience of chronic pain?

EXPERIENTIAL ANECDOTE:

My chronic back pain recently flared up. From years of experience, I know that it doesn't really matter what kind of activity I engage in during its acute phase of expression. This time, the acute phase is lasting longer than usual. The whole nervous system feels weaker, as do my legs, arms and neck. My body is fatigued and levels of vitality are markedly reduced. It is as though the entire system is being traumatized by constant pain. If I notice only the low back region, my subjective experience of pain will increase in that area. I have been busy and stressed and not taken the time to practice Wholebody Focusing with this familiar suffering called lumbago.

Now I choose to notice that my feet are connected to the floor, that my whole body is supported by the chair, that the space of my office holds me in place. Within the context of this whole situation, I notice the sharpness and soreness of low back pain. But I also notice the warmth of my hands on my thighs. My thighs tingle and stretch in response to me noticing my hands touching them. I notice for the first time how I have been holding on tightly to my diaphragm, shoulders, and neck muscles. Simply my noticing this holding protective pattern that has been in place for a couple of weeks, my breathing begins to free itself and deepen. I have been frustrated and angry with my pain for several days. I acknowledge the truth of this structural and reactive emotional holding pattern.

Somehow, my noticing the whole Living Body as it relates to the very specific source point of my back pain creates a shift in the left lumbar back's own experience of itself. The tight sharp heat and pain have transformed into a diffuse warmth that spreads right through the whole lumbar region and then begins flowing down both legs and up into belly. My choice to be aware in a whole body way has shifted my subjective experience of lumbago into one which is almost pleasant and certainly less painful. This subtle inner directed movement is of the body's own making, with the body functioning as a Whole.

Soon, my subjective experience of acute low back pain has shifted into an experience of tender soreness and a feeling of vulnerability. My lower back's experience of itself changed when my wholebody awareness supported the emergence of the Living Body working as one piece. This entire process of coming into my own grounded Presence and practicing Wholebody Focusing has taken five minutes out of my day. In contrast, when I am in the more habitual unconscious and automatic default mode, the possibilities of whole functioning are greatly restricted. Typically, I would not notice my connection to

my body or its environment. Then the body functions according to its limited conditioned response patterns, without the support of my awareness and connection to it. Often, the body's unconscious response patterns revert to the stress response mode. At a cellular level, the organism experiences the stress of my disconnection from it. Cellular firing becomes disorganized as the organism tries to return to equilibrium but is overrun by the incoherent firing patterns of the nervous system's habitual responses. In the case of my lumbago, the cells of the low back and entire nervous system were firing constantly in their attempt to reestablish equilibrium. I live this chaotic firing pattern as the subjective experience of sharp hot pain.

Discussion of Experiential Anecdote:

When I embody a sense of Me Here, connected to the support of the whole environment, the ground, the chair, other living beings, and the gravitational space around me, the parts of me that are suffering and need my attention have a knowing within them of how to carry my life forward. The way that I suffered lumbago and the way that my body suffered lumbago were dramatically different. However, the part that is trying to move itself forward needs me to invite it to explore its own experience of itself, to become conscious of itself, in its own right way. Further, my back needed me to be aware of the larger context of my whole body connected to both the back and the whole environment, so that it could get the support it needed to resolve and reorganize its own firing pattern. The biological life activity of my whole self-aware living body, as a vibratory presence, entrains the biological life activity of my back to explore a new and more coherent firing pattern. Because my back is alive and has evolved as part of the whole living body for millions of years, my back knows how to explore and embody new and more life forward moving ways of being in a way that my adult consciousness cannot.

My low back pain does not suffer itself in the same way that I do. When I separate my personal experiencing of the back from the direct experiencing of the back itself, my back pain transformed itself into a pleasurable felt experience of more life flowing through my whole living body. It can take me and my smaller sense of self, my everyday ego identity, some time to separate itself from intensely focusing on, or running away from, acute episodes of physical and emotional suffering. It is helpful for me to remember that the body itself does not suffer its suffering to the same degree that I do. The body can show me, if I invite it to, that it has the wisdom and very precise knowing to sort itself out and resolve the suffering part once it reconnects with the functioning whole living body. Something much larger than my ordinary self directs this whole body reorganization process from a cellular tissue consciousness which impacts me by changing my emotional, psychological and energetic states of being. I must feel by bodily living of the pain and suffering in a physical way to change it: *I must consciously feel it in order to heal it.*

My role in this enlivening and transformative whole body experience of self is simply to say yes to it by offering my conscious wholebody consent, and then to observe and receive what comes inside my field of awareness. While I give my permission to the Body Wisdom activation process, I am clearly **not** directing its movement. I let go of my need to control

my life situation in some way and open up to an inner directed en-livening and reorganizing process. It is not new to the Focusing world to experience the spacious softening effects of accepting things as they are. However, it is new to invite a larger intelligence to move my whole organism forward into a more right way of being and functioning in the world. The most healing effect of WBF on my life situation of chronic pain is that I can discern a vitality and life direction to the suffering itself. The life inside the suffering has its own knowing of what my back pain needs to continue thriving and feeling great. As the personal sufferer of my chronic pain, I experience a fresh delight and aliveness of self which emerges out of this more spacious self aware suffering bodily consciousness.

I sometimes feel like I am turning in circles as I try to describe this ordinary yet profound experience of daily pain. I step back inside of my expanded bodily awareness of self. I invite the life in these words I am writing and the life that is touched in the reader to meet and take stock of what is here, right now, for all of us, as we navigate the challenges and complexities of daily life from a more interconnected experience of WE. There is something deeply moving and inspiring in truly meeting myself in the presence of another human being who is connected in the very same way. It occurs to me that this powerful inspiriting process of WBF creates a timeless space where my limited ordinary self can safely and wisely meet my infinite transpersonal self. My ordinary and extraordinary selves need one another to live through me in the way Nature (God) intended. Wholebody Focusing offers me a doorway to this more subtle, more alive, and perhaps spiritual dimension, of my ordinary humanity. When the life in my suffering feels touched by the life in you, and vice versa, we meet inside of a mutuality of connection that transforms my experience of pain into one of pure whole body joy.

My acute and chronic suffering of daily pain bows now to me, the conscious willing participant of this ongoing life transforming and evolving process. I bow to Wholebody Focusing, this reliable and living inner resource, which has allowed me to thrive in ways I could never have imagined. A process which Kevin Mcevenue embodied and offered to the Focusing community. A process of inner life direction which continues to live through me and my suffering in ways that are just right for me. A process of inner life direction which continues to live through others in ways that are just right for them, carrying the process itself forward in the service of a shared uncertain future.

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