



## **The Body Feels and Remembers**

The biggest advantage of humans on this planet can also be its most significant downfall. Our ability to put a man on the moon, have the knowledge to save lives, and to get our hands on everything we want by the push of a button, cause us to completely ignore a very important component in our lives – our body. We still hear cases of chronic pain and physiological problems, which in spite of technological advances cannot be explained medically.

In the era of social media, researchers have a tendency for instant gratification, grandstanding and avoiding the real answers to what causes our pain. We live in an era when people want everything right here, right now. Instead of being curious as to why we ask ourselves questions like: “why do I have a stomachache? Why do I suffer from migraines?”, we avoid the answers. We tend to focus on symptoms and not the root of the problem.

Studies published recently focus on the physiological changes COVID-19 creates in the brain, which leads to mental health issues. This is not a new phenomenon. The relationship between our body and mind has been researched for dozens of years and presents various treatment options.

Our nervous system is more sophisticated than any technology we have invented to date. It is autonomic and in charge of procedures that keep us alive, for example; breathing, digestion and hormone production. It includes two subsystems – one that acts in times of “rest” and another in “danger”. It responds to threats and takes care of our survival needs. Sometimes we interfere with this process by using the frontal lobe in our brain – the same part that functions when making complex decisions is also being used to suppress emotions and lose connection with our body.



In times of danger and fear, the body responds in either fight, flight or freeze – automatic responses we cannot control, and meant for our survival. However, we do not always view these responses as positive (i.e. a soldier freezes during combat, while he is expected to fight). As a result, we may experience a flood of emotions, including shame and guilt, and it can lead to trauma. Another example of this is when a few people can watch the same horrible accident; only a select few will develop trauma symptoms. The event is the same, but the body's response to it is different, which is the main reason for this distinction.

In times of existential fear to our own lives or our loved ones, there is a significant interference with the nervous system. Here we may develop trauma or post-trauma. Something in our body is “stuck” in this process and the energy remains in the body. For example, animals respond similarly to danger, yet they are less intelligent and sophisticated, and the result is more instinctual, allowing the nervous system to do its work. Hence, there is no indication of trauma among animals in their natural habitat, without human-beings' intervention. Humans have the same ability, yet we disconnected from it throughout the years. In body-mind focused treatments, such as Somatic Experiencing, this trauma can be released.

Trauma does not pass with time. People just adapt, in other words, they live with it (i.e. becoming more suspicious after infidelity). This type of response initially makes sense for survival reasons, yet over time can become destructive resulting in self-harm, suicide ideation, aggressiveness, or addictive behaviors.

Post-traumatic symptoms are familiar to society, for example from movies, we get nightmares, flashback and rage. Yet these are not the only responses, the body may experience chronic pain, depression, stress and panic attacks, stuttering, Tourette syndrome, repeated relationship problems, and unexplained medical and physiological problems. The human brain re-experiences the traumatic event over and over again in an attempt to



successfully release it, yet it does not know how. As a result, overtime the symptoms may worsen by the fear of reoccurrence, and there will be a tendency to stay hyper-alert, or in the danger mode of our nervous system. The state our body creates feels hostile and unsafe, even if this is not the case.

So how do you treat trauma somatically? According to Somatic Experiencing, which was developed by Dr. Peter Levine, the details of the traumatic event matter less than the way they affect us. For instance, when thinking of an exciting event we may get “butterflies” in our stomach, and when there is a scary event, the reaction may include muscle tension and shallow breathing. The goal in treatment is to re-experience the physiological response of the traumatic event, yet this time successfully releasing the trauma. The body’s sensation is added to the feelings and thoughts, which are the focus of most treatment modalities. It is important to note that in case of severe symptoms, there is a need for supportive medication in order to have a higher tolerance to treatment. This is similar to other therapy approaches.

After the earthquakes and Tsunami in Thailand in 2004 and Japan in 2011, Somatic Experiencing was found to resolve trauma symptoms in 90% of the cases. During the times of COVID-19, many countries have declared national emergencies. As we have learned from previous crises, we can already make a prediction, that after a vaccination is successfully created, many will still struggle with mental health issues long after due to health, economic, social and personal concerns. It is possible to treat and prevent trauma effectively, not all approaches are the same, but the relationship between body and mind is essential to this process.