

Our Changing Brain

Our emotional brain governs our stress levels, our capacity to recover from suffering in general and trauma in particular, our ability to relate to others, our self-esteem and confidence, and the degree of happiness and sense of fulfillment we experience in life. The latest research in neuroscience is proving what has been known for ages – that the brain can and does change throughout life, and that we can use certain practices to ensure that our brain remains healthy enough to allow for optimum functioning of the mind, the body, and the nervous system even as we grow older...

Experience shapes and changes the brain... neuroscience knows that now. Experiences that are repeated cause certain tendencies for thinking, perceiving, feeling, acting, reacting, and these can become habitual and automatic. Once on automatic, we no longer think about them or have intention about them... they just happen. For something new to occur, these automatic tendencies must come into consciousness, bringing perception to neuroception, (in Polyvagal language.) This reveals what has been hidden. With InSight it is possible to become conscious of how life experiences have been and of how else they could be.

“The only way to change the emotional brain is through self-attending...” (Bessel Van der Kolk)

Anything that has become habitual happens almost effortlessly. This is how habits can help us to function. They take over many of the activities that don't require conscious thought, so we don't have to waste energy on thinking about them. As long as they contribute to healthy functioning in our lives, there is no need to change them. When they start to interfere with healthy living, we need to take action to change our brain as well as our behaviours. And – good news - this is possible.

One significant practice that contributes to making these changes is “...the capacity to observe one's inner experience in what the ancient texts call a 'fully aware and non-clinging' way.” (*The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force*, Schwartz and Begley)

This is the practice of quieting the mind, turning attention to internal present moment experience, and simply noticing whatever is occurring in awareness, without judgement, without preference, without trying to change anything. The psoma practice of InSight can be cultivated as a daily practice that benefits emotional health, relationships, personal effectiveness, and even your immune system.

Reflecting

You might reflect for a moment on a personal habit you would like to change:

#9 A Simple Noticing Practice:

- - *Pause now, and just notice whatever is happening...*
- - *Simply notice whatever is happening right now...*

InSight practice in this psoma approach only works when someone is willing and able to take a look at how they are unconsciously and habitually reacting to others and to life, and to how experience is being automatically organized according to old embodied habit patterns.

Psoma is a skillful and effective way of assisting someone who is willing and curious to support them on this journey. Along the way to more conscious awareness there is often an emotional healing process that takes place. Emotions can reveal the roots of unnecessary suffering, of old hurts or unfinished business, and uncover previously unknown barriers to various kinds of nourishing experiences.

When someone's emotional expression is witnessed by a partner who is in a state of loving presence, it becomes possible for the emotional person to find comfort and perhaps new meaning in painful experiences, perhaps initiating an end to some unnecessary suffering and opening them up to new sources of nourishment in life.

The basic work of health professionals in general and psychotherapists in particular is to become full human beings and to inspire full human beingness in other people who feel starved about their lives. (Chogyam Trungpa)