

Peeling the Onion

When you decide it is time to start your personal 'journey', what lies ahead?

Jan Trewartha

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When we start to 'wake up', we start to understand that there is more to life than the rules by which most people seem to live, and more to who we are than a body and a mind. An awareness begins to develop of an unexpected, previously unknown dimension to life. The seed is sown and becomes a vague yearning to be more than we have so far been. There is often dissatisfaction with the way we have lived our lives so far and a deep desire to change

There are many ways to effect change within ourselves and when we start looking, the choice can be overwhelming and the options seem, frankly, a bit weird. But we dip our toe in the water and slowly, as we start to open our mind and expand our experience, our understanding grows and the previously laughable becomes the believable and even part of our life. Concepts our logical, left brain rejected beforehand are now comprehended at an instinctual level, empirical knowledge overcoming previous doubt.

This is not to deny the need for discerning logic; we need protection from charlatans, the over-priced and the unsuitable. Blind faith and desperation to change can make us vulnerable. But if we listen to our instinct it will guide us to what is true, what is right for our present needs. Ideally we use logic and instinct in tandem, taking one step at a time, backing up our learning with intuition and vice versa, so that as disbelief and doubt transform into knowledge we are sure and certain of our experience; it becomes a solid and safe foundation for further development.

In this way we move forward, changing slowly, 'peeling away the layers of the onion'. That is to say we are shedding the skins we have acquired over the years, the layers which hide the sweet core of who we really are at our very heart. And it is this purest essence that we yearn to uncover, our very best self we desire to be released in all its beauty, with the joy, happiness and loving heart of the child we once were enhanced by the wisdom we have acquired as adults and unsullied by the 'stuff' we have picked up on the way.

It sounds good, doesn't it? 'Yes!' we cry inside. 'Yes, I know that underneath all this is a better self! This is what I know I must do; get in touch with who I really am, be true to myself at last!'

So the decision is made, but how to start and what to expect as we set out on our journey?

There is no easy, black and white answer to this question. Each of us is a unique combination of personal history and accumulated 'stuff'. By 'stuff' is meant the way in which our more negative experiences in life (or those we perceive as negative) have affected us. Sometimes our 'stuff' is buried so deeply within us because it all happened so long ago and we have learned to hide it from all but the most aware people. Sometimes the emotional rubbish we carry is very obvious and affects our relationships – personal, work and familial.

How do we acquire this 'stuff'? Well, for example one person may come through the loss of a loved one by grieving healthily and, after a time, move on; they never forget the loss but the grief has been released and they can get on and live a relatively normal life. Another may find it impossible to express the grief – perhaps it has not been their family's habit to encourage displays of emotion and so they have a subconscious block to allowing tears to surface. This repression of the sadness will build up within them, casting a shadow around them which is visible to all; they appear to be 'under a cloud'. This cloud will become one of the layers of the onion. In future years, should that person decide to break free of the pain which weighs upon them, to try and recover the lightness of being of who they once were, they will have to at some point go back into that grief and re-experience it, this time probably releasing the tears.

Some people are never able to cry and the therapy they have chosen will bring up the deeply-held emotions only to have them released through tempestuous dreams or manifest as unusual behaviour. Others, having made that decision, release easily and recover their health quite quickly. This is why it is so hard as a therapist to say that a course of treatment for a client will take a certain time. Some people are ready, while others are ready but so deeply bound by a subconscious resistance that they take a long time to release. Others think they are ready, say they want to change, but their subconscious has absolutely no intention of letting anything go; their 'armour' serves a purpose and they cannot remove it despite their conscious desire to do so. For such people it may take many years of work through different therapies to even start to access the problem.

The process of letting go of a layer of the onion is hard to describe. It can be a time of angst, of a feeling as if nothing is going right, as if we are surrounded by mental fog. Or it might manifest as huge bursts of emotion and tears, sleepless nights, wanting to 'get away from it all'; each person's experience is unique. If a physical release is involved – there is often a combined emotional/ bodily release because of the inextricable link between the two – there can be an exacerbation of pain for no apparent reason. It is hard to peel an onion without tears.

One day, we wake up and feel normal, with a renewed mental clarity, a lessening of physical pain, and sometimes an understanding of what has taken place. It is, to employ another common analogy, as if we have been enclosed within a chrysalis which has now been cracked open so that the butterfly within can finally emerge.

The more work we do on ourselves and the more understanding we develop, the easier it is to recognise the clearing process when it starts and to go with it rather than resist it. 'Going with it' would constitute allowing ourselves quiet times and enough sleep, meditating if that is our wish, giving ourselves exercise, fresh air and plenty of water to drink, and not cluttering up our heads with external stimulation such as television. In this way the body and mind are being given the right environment for self healing and they will make the most of it. Going with the process allows it to unfold more quickly and not prolong the agony.

It is the fear of facing ourselves, of accessing and bringing up the past once more, that holds us back. The actual releasing is a huge relief, like shedding a massive burden then looking back and wondering why on earth we were bothering to carry it.

It is also the fear that makes us crave our 'fix', whether that is cigarettes, alcohol or drugs. These substances anaesthetise us, numbing us to what is really going on at an emotional level. As repressed feelings surface we reach for our anaesthetics and push the feelings down again. This is why, when we are trying to clear our rubbish, we need to consciously avoid our usual addictions. It is not easy to totally give up these toxins but one way of helping ourselves is to recognise that an unusually strong craving for them, especially at an odd time of day, can indicate some emotional release on its way. When this happens one way of handling the craving is to stay with the emotions but promise ourselves a cigarette or a drink later, when we have allowed the tears, anger etc. to come and go. In this way we get through the craving and, predictably, once the release has occurred, the craving is usually lessened anyway.

Knowing, now, that our journey to self-discovery is not going to be achieved by a wave of the magic wand without any real effort on our part, the idea could seem a lot less attractive. After all, it was bad enough going through the misery of certain experiences without re-living them as the residual emotional energy leaves us. It is exactly this fear, however, which stops us from taking the step forward. Or, if we are already engaging in the therapeutic process, it is fear that digs its heels in like a stubborn mule and stops us – against our conscious will – from clearing certain painful layers. If the trauma has been particularly terrible there is a part of us that says 'No way! I'm not going back there again!' and despite our desire to move out of our present damaged self into a new way of being, our subconscious will always, in the end, rule and can hold us back for many years until some kind of internal shift permits us access.

In such cases we can only work on a deep 'surrendering' within ourselves. This is reminiscent of the old story of a couple of soldiers found in hiding many years after the war is over, still hiding, surviving, suffering because they did not know that there was no need to fight any more. The inner self that has been traumatised carries on living within that trauma patterning because nobody has told it that the war is finished. We need to start feeding that message to our inner survivor, getting through the understanding that it is time to give up the fight.

Time is one of the best catalysts for this relinquishing of the internal struggle, but we are all too young to be carrying this stuff and how long are we willing to wait? Persistent chipping away through whichever therapy we choose will help to access the pain. Put aside the fear of facing it if you can. On the other side of the pain is nothing but a better, happier existence.

As a Bodyworker my passion lies in releasing trauma via the body. The inextricable linking of mind and body is fascinating and the therapy I practice, Body Realignment, unknots and straightens out the body, releasing repressed emotions with their associated muscle holding patterns. Through light touch at key points and gentle movement of the body, the environment is created for it to replay the position it was in when damage occurred, whether that was during an accident (for example causing Neck Whiplash), or due to long-term poor posture or even Repetitive Strain Injury. The body will use this assistance to realign itself, releasing congestion in the tissues and restoring the circulation of blood, lymph and energy. If the damage is emotional, whether it is from a particular trauma or simply long-term stress, there will still be areas of 'holding' within the body and blockage of energy.

Gentle unwinding of the body and clearance of the energy meridians also facilitates deep emotional release. For example, a woman may have given birth with great difficulty and pain 20 years ago and this may have led to long-term back pain, the cause of which nobody has been able to fathom. Where there is pain causing a restriction of movement, there will have been compensation by other muscle groups in order to allow her to function normally. The end result of this, after 20 years, will probably be distortion of posture, blocked energy which will affect the functioning of certain organs, and pain in other areas of the body. Body Realignment will gently peel away the layers of compensation and go back to the original injury. As we go back – and this can obviously take a while as it has taken 20 years to build up - this client will experience the result of energy restoration to the organs, allowing their normal functioning. She will feel very strange as her body starts to be straightened out and released, enabling her to walk correctly once more. If her feet and hands had been permanently cold due to energy blockage, she will eventually feel them recover normal temperature. When we get back through the layers to the original damage she will probably re-experience the emotions of that difficult birth and of any associated happenings around that time. If, for example, her husband had left her around that time, the unwanted pain of that memory will probably surface; once surfaced, however, it will be gone forever.

Body Realignment facilitates, as you can see, the peeling of the onion. Just one method amongst many, but an effective one and generally not intimidating to clients because it is massage-based and therefore feels familiar as well as being deeply relaxing. Body Realignment works very well alongside Chiropractic or Osteopathy as in some cases the therapy exposes an underlying need for structural correction. It is also used in conjunction with counselling if, for example, the memories return of a particularly traumatic situation, such as sexual abuse; counselling is then recommended to provide emotional support and help the client get through the surfacing trauma.

As with any treatment worth its salt, Body Realignment is no quick fix and, indeed, anyone on a journey of self-development should beware of anything that promises instant results. It has taken us many years to build up our defences and it takes a while to persuade the subconscious to let them down. There are different ways of accessing what needs to be dealt with and the choice is individual, but here are a few points to remember as you set off on your journey:

- Mind and Body are inescapably linked. Release of physical damage/tension will aid emotional clarity. Conversely, stilling the mind and facing your emotional issues will help release areas of congestion within your body.
- You cannot force the process to go quicker than it will. In the end it is your subconscious which controls the rate at which you release; when you are ready you are ready, and not before.
- Energy follows thought, so having the strong intention to face yourself and your past is a powerful start and will in fact initiate the process.
- Use your instinct to choose a Teacher or Therapist – do what feels absolutely right for you, not what other people think you should do.
- A person truly at peace with his/herself is someone who has faced their darker side. Dark and Light = Balance. Welcome and accept your dark side – we all have one.
- Never compare yourself with others – we all travel at different speeds and this is not a competition. We all have our own purpose in life so concentrate on finding yours.
- Feel the fear and remember that this is what holds us back. Just keep looking forward to what lies ahead for you on the other side of the pain.

Starting to peel the onion is one of the most courageous things we can do in life but if we can just start the process then continuing it becomes addictive; we fall more in love with life, with the spiritual dimension that is revealed to us, and with the beauty in others. We also, most importantly, learn to love ourselves, warts and all. Be kind to yourself.

About the author:

Jan Trewartha is Principal of the Body in Harmony School of Massage & Bodywork.
07724 027 748 • jan@bodyinharmony.org.uk • www.bodyinharmony.org.uk