

One of the things I enjoy doing on Sunday evenings to relax, instead of watching TV is listening to *Insights on the Edge* podcasts produced by Sounds True. We do own a small TV set, but it's been in storage for several years now and is only used when my husband is really keen on watching a game; otherwise we have given up watching TV, which has freed us from the addiction of watching the 10 o'clock news programme every night and has opened up space for other sources of information. Anyway, to get back to Sunday's podcast and the body, in this week's talk Jonathan Foust and Tami Simons talked about the felt sense and a body centred inquiry for emotional healing and dealing with pain. He shared exercises and practices, some of which I will briefly try to describe here. So, for instance, one of the things he suggested is to go inside our body and ask how it feels when we are exploring a particular fear, something that's causing us stress, a problem, or a particular relationship. I know, from personal experience that often what we may think may not be the whole truth or even correct in the present. For instance, I have recently been thinking about a person I have not talked to for a very long time and have harboured a lot of anger, but more recently as I have been focusing more on this and processing it in non-cognitive ways, it has become more obvious that at a deeper level there is also deep grief over the hurt and disappointments I have experienced and regrets for what could have been, but also deep concern, compassion, love and understanding. However, working with the body is not always easy, because our defenses seem to dissolve, and there is less room for minimization, denial or rationalization, for instance, and unless we allow our busy mind to distract us or come up with a story or something, we can tap into a deeper layer of truth, which may not be pleasant, but eventually may be conducive to relief and freedom.

Jonathan Foust suggests we use the **RAIN** approach, which was created by his wife Tara Brach, and which stands for Recognise, Accept, Investigate and Nurture, to facilitate the process. Most of us know what it feels like to have a lump in our throat or a knot in our stomach, so I will describe a recent personal example of how I went about exploring this type of bodily expression. First, I recognised the sensation and chose not to ignore or shake it off, and then, I accepted that it was there and it was what it was. Having done this I moved on to investigating it, exploring the why or when or where or what, etc. This may often bring up memories or trauma or bodily discomfort, which we then need to decide to what extent we are willing to explore or stay with in the particular moment. Often we may explore one layer of experience and in another instance peel off an additional layer of

experience. So, as I remained with the knot in the middle of my chest an image of a clenched fist arose, and as I sat with this an experience from a past yoga class surfaced. One of the exercises our yoga instructor used to ask us to engage in was to place our palm under our breasts and with our thumb apply as much rotating pressure as we could endure on the area between our breasts until we noticed that a small dent had been created. This hurt and it brought about a sense of constriction, but since everyone else seemed to be doing it I carried on as well, hoping to reap the benefits. This was only one layer of experience that surfaced as I sat with this 'clenched fist' sensation. As I remained with the experience and investigated more material surfaced, gradually, allowing the constriction to intensify and then gradually soften. During the last phase (the N of RAIN) we nurture ourselves and provide self-compassion and reassurance, as if we were a loving parent or friend. Right now Chrisitne Neff's great work on self-compassion comes to my mind, but there are many other people who are writing and speaking about the importance and the healing properties of compassion and self-compassion. Jonathan Foust speaks about how sometimes the material may feel distant or difficult to recognise and our felt sense may be vague, which is OK, because that is where we are at that moment. He says that this felt sense or experience may be like a deer at the edge of the wood, which we cannot touch, reach, or speak to, but with which we can still make eye contact and connect with, in the same way we may connect with animals or our pets. His deer metaphor vividly reminded me of an experience I had back in 1994, I think, during an educational trip to England with my students. We were staying on the campus of Merrit Wood College in Guilford. It was surrounded by woodland and beautiful countryside if I recall correctly, so during the first part of the day while the children had classes I had the opportunity to explore London or the surrounding countryside and wood. It was on one of these walks not far from the campus that I caught sight of a beautiful young deer. It was amazingly close to me, but the encounter only lasted a few minutes, even less. Within those few minutes we stared into each others eyes, but the timid animal disappeared as quickly and suddenly as it had appeared leaving me with a sense of awe and a slight fear that I had ventured too far from home and should be getting back.... Sure enough when I got back to the campus, our rooms had been broken into and my students were upset and complaining about personal items or money missing, so by the time we got all that sorted out this encounter with wildlife had moved to the back of my mind. Dan Siegel's acronym **COAL**, which stands for Curious, Open, Accepting and Loving is similar to the RAIN approach. Again when

we are exploring experiences that may be painful or unpleasant, whether bodily experience or negative or internalised critical thoughts and schemata, it is helpful to be curious, keep an open mind and not be judgmental, accept what is there, ask questions and then be nurturing and self-compassionate, for self-compassion does not only ground and heal us, it also gradually opens the door to compassion for others.

Another exercise suggested by Jonathan Foust, which I found really useful and practical, was that of working with the body when trying to reach a decision, whenever we are conflicted, unsure or in two minds about something. We can simply choose one of the two or three possible options and explore how a particular option may feel at a physical level and then explore further until we reach a helpful level of insight. Jonathan Foust also talked about physical pain and his own experience with migraines since the age of six and also described the relationship between the mind and pain and the experience of pain in relation to our present reality only. I think that we can relate to this or understand it if we experiment or think about it next time we feel physical pain or discomfort. I have found that when we hurt physically or we feel intense discomfort, if we think about it we can get more revved up and our anxiety can create a vicious cycle, trigger fight-flight responses and severely increase the intensity or volume of the pain. However, if we manage to focus our attention on the pain or physical sensations without judging or evaluating we can often decrease the intensity or end the process. We may also distract ourselves by thinking about something pleasant, for instance, in other words we can get our mind off the often localised pain, which can also decrease the intensity. However, during this talk Jonathan Foust described how we can take our mind off the pain or the pain zone, as he describes it, by shifting our attention to other parts of our body, to another zone, or to the rest 95% of our body which may not be in pain. I know that this process may be more demanding than immediately popping a pain killer into our mouth, but it may decrease our pain levels, increase our insight and resilience and do less harm to our body and microbiome than pills. At this point I need to say that I am not in any way against seeking relief from pain and suffering through medication, but I believe that there are diverse ways we can approach pain, always depending on the severity and the level and our own makeup and pain threshold. He describes how through his work with his body and many years of experience in this area he has come to realize that we can learn to be with suffering with practice and that when we live in corporation with our body and we can abandon our comparative,

judging or anxious cognitions for a while, we may experience a sense of flow and peace.

As I mentioned above, my posts often reflect what I've been up to or what has reached me in terms of knowledge and information, so, I need to say that I am really grateful for some of the e-mails that arrive. I am also sharing a talk by Peter Osborne (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccrzFXxm_bE&inf_contact_key=b92fc695a3e28977dcbf1cf8619da....), which is on Y tube, which I found worth listening to and considering, since I have recently changed my diet and mostly eliminated gluten, with positive results, while trying to improve my health and increase energy levels and also engage in more informed choices. In recent posts I have referred to and quoted people in the health field that support a functional approach to exploring health issues and treating the root cause instead of the manifestation of this, the symptom/s and aches. One reason for this is because it is part of my own journey as I deconstruct trauma, health experiences across time and choices. More or less the people I have referenced or referred to all advocate a more in depth exploration of several factors, like genes, epigenetics, trauma and environmental toxicity. They all stress the significance of our lifestyle, including nutrition and stress levels, and the direct link between ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) and health. They do not focus only on the single ache, virus or bacteria, in order to selectively treat it with a drug designed to target it, but look at the body from a holistic perspective. Dr Susan Benigas (Reset Revolution hosted by Dr Mary Clifton) claims that 'you are not victim to your genetic predisposition' and suggests that this is one of the biggest lies disseminated in our cultures. She also supports that the allopathic approach which is based on diagnosing and treating with drugs has its strengths and its limitations and advocates for a synergy between health practitioners from all fields and a functional approach to health care, highlighting the importance of a healthy organic diet. If we stop to think about it, it would seem reasonable and rational to approach all problems or issues from various perspectives and to strive for holistic - functional understanding as much as possible, yet for multiple reasons we humans so often miss the bigger picture, rely on others' biased or limited views or approaches or are simply unable to grasp it due to the lack of the correct information and the tonnes of misleading information out there, but also our own blind spots and unprocessed material and experiences, our fears, conditioning and learning experiences, which so often erect a brick wall between us and the

truth or between us and the right resources and knowledge or between us and those who share similar values or a similar outlook on life.

Finally, I would like to end this post, by saying that it is part of my gratitude practice today. I am specifically, referring to my gratitude for the kindness of strangers and for the important work that many people are doing in all areas all around the world, as well as, their efforts to disseminate this knowledge. Several years ago, I read a memoir type book by a contemporary Greek writer, Petros Tatsopoulos, which was a story about his adoption and journey to discovering his biological mother, contextualised in time and space and seen through the lens of the social and historical reality of the period he describes. Now the reason I am referring to this book today is its title, *The Kindness of Strangers*, which deeply resonates with me at the moment and I think was also the reason I initially picked it from the store shelf. So one reason the book has remained with me over the years, even though I do not remember it in detail, is probably the title, which I find powerful and very true, and the idea that (this may simply be my own projection or my reading too much into the story) we are connected and that strangers impact our lives positively (of course, the opposite is true as well) in various subtle and/ or more obvious ways, whether that is through our sending a small amount of money to a child in Africa or liberating a family in slavery in India or supporting an environmental group or doing something more difficult like adopting and taking care of a child previously unknown to us or through the impact that our values and their implementation and expression through our work and life stance have on others' lives. We are deeply connected in many ways and division and separation undermine both our individual and collective well-being. Agapi Stasinopoulos (Αγάπη Στασινοπούλου) claims that 'separation happens in so many different dimensions. We see it everywhere. I believe we are all part of the spiritual heart. We all come from that place of oneness, so that place in us that knows love, that knows connection, hurts. It's a challenge that we also feel more than any other time because it's in the news and social media. It's in our families. There is division with people in our lives, as well as political division and religious division'.