



In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness

Peter A. Levine , Gabor Maté (Foreword)

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****Unraveling Trauma in the Body, Brain and Mind—a Revolution in Treatment****

In this culmination of his life's work, Peter A. Levine draws on his broad experience as a clinician, a student of comparative brain research, a stress scientist and a keen observer of the naturalistic animal world to explain the nature and transformation of trauma in the body, brain and psyche. *In an Unspoken Voice* is based on the idea that trauma is neither a disease nor a disorder, but rather an injury caused by fright, helplessness and loss that can be healed by engaging our innate capacity to self-regulate high states of arousal and intense emotions. Enriched with a coherent theoretical framework and compelling case examples, the book elegantly blends the latest findings in biology, neuroscience and body-oriented psychotherapy to show that when we bring together animal instinct and reason, we can become more whole human beings.

In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness Details

Date : Published September 28th 2010 by North Atlantic Books

ISBN : 9781556439438

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Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Psychology, Nonfiction, Health, Mental Health

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Michael says

Peter Levine may just be the greatest thinker in mental health and medicine of our age. This book reveals the process by which Levine made the discoveries about trauma and chronic stress that inspired his approach to healing which he has named "Somatic Experiencing". Levine has PhDs in biology and psychology and has put these to very good use. He was in part inspired by his observations of animals in the wild and how they respond to life threatening adversity. He has incorporated the latest in scientific understanding regarding our autonomic nervous system into his therapeutic approach that uses the attunement of the therapist to the client to build awareness in the client of his own bodily sensations and rhythms. These bodily rhythms are severely impacted by trauma and chronic stress and Levine explains how an attuned therapist can facilitate awareness building and restore the body's natural rhythms and thus restore health and wellness. This is an amazing revelation as we have generally had very poor success in the rest of medicine. The implications of Levine's are nothing short of revolutionary.

Wendy says

It's hard to be brief when it comes to my experience with this book. I picked it up thinking it didn't really apply to me, but I couldn't have been more wrong. Roughly two and a half years ago I took a medication that gave me extreme depression and anxiety. It was a medication I had taken for 5 years, but when they changed the lab that made the generic pills I took, all hell broke loose. One doesn't generally think of that as trauma but it is. In a nutshell, Levine says that immobilization with extreme fear or other negative emotion creates trauma or PTSD. I couldn't outrun my own mind as I spent night after night, for 7 months, curled up in a ball wondering how my life had come to an end. Thanks to a science degree I managed to figure out that the pills had changed and had immediate improvement upon quitting them. Alas I was stuck with a great deal of depression and anxiety and fibromyalgia that had developed during those months. (and yes, for those who follow me as an author this is why I quit writing and never did very much to promote the trilogy I did write that meant so much to me. I'm astonished I ever managed to even release the trilogy considering what I was going through at the time.)

For two years following those pills I lived with the constant sense of being disconnected from everything as if nothing mattered. I couldn't feel joy or motivation or hope. I felt like I had prepared to die at some deep level but didn't. I can't even express how unlike me this was. I was always the person who is obnoxiously upbeat and optimistic and full of joy and wonder.

So I finally read this book that was recommended to me and realized he was saying all the things that I had been feeling. I realized that curling up into a ball unable to outrun my mind IS being immobilized with extreme fear and depression and anxiety. I was suffering from PTSD. Then, as recommended, when I felt the usual sense of needing to shut down (where I usually would go to sleep), I made myself sit with the sensations and calmly watch the fight or flight wash through me. I cried and my body shook and trembled and 20 minutes later I was suddenly still and hit with an extreme calm. Colors were brighter. My mind was clear. That was about 10 days ago, and I've had my life back ever since. I wish I could explain the profound change in me compared to the last two and a half years. Everyone notices it and at least half a dozen people have gone after this book upon seeing the astonishing results. I still feel the fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue

but a body doesn't snap back after two and a half years of shut down in such a short time, and I'm confident that most of those symptoms came from the way my body was unknowingly locked down. I have also done the work from this book in alleviating a number of the specific symptoms of pain in my body. I won't claim this is the easiest book to read for those not coming from a science or psychiatric background but the understanding of the body at this level seems so critical to me for people in this day and age where we tend to try to solve everything by coming at it mentally with talk therapy or positive thinking. This had everything to do with my body. I'd been coming at it top down from the mind all this time when the work needed to be done from the bottom up.

I feel hope again. I feel joy again. I feel motivation. I FEEL. Thank you Dr Levine from the bottom of my heart. From me, from my husband, and from that 12 year old boy who got his mother back. Words will never be enough.

Claire says

Definitely the most comprehensive of Peter Levine's books (Waking the Tiger being the most basic introduction to our instinctual nature and it's role in trauma). Indeed, he starts the Epilogue with: "too much or too little?" - clearly he has more to say on the matter.

That said, I found the first third of the book ('Roots') too much in volume or bland, but I think only because I'd already read *Waking the Tiger*. I always find clinical case examples helpful, and Levine's story-teller skill is great in illustrating how therapy based on his understanding of trauma plays out. He returns to his own traumatic experience of an accident also throughout the book, which helps weave the finer points together.

I was most engaged by the last section in the book more directly addressing the importance of embodiment is in more general terms for our livelihood. The exercises in there are also fruitful and simple for anyone to increase their awareness of inner sensations (feelings). Levine throws in a chapter on Trauma and Spirituality which I found confirming and was thankful for. I definitely wanted more on this and luckily he writes in the Epilogue he has a whole book on Trauma and Spirituality he is working on.

A highlight in those last sections for me is his comment that he came to this understanding of trauma and approach to therapy through keen observation of individual's experiences - he "didn't have a formulated set of pathological criteria to unduly distract" him i.e. the DSM . Funny that! That someone could come to an understanding of health and suffering, and an approach to deeply guide people to liberation from the latter without needing to categorize, label, drug, define... I won't go on (I'm not the biggest DSM fan, clearly). He states: **"I realized that my clients' reactions manifested what was right and normal-rather than what was wrong and pathological. In other words, they exhibited innate self-regulating and self-healing processes.** (p. 348). If only all mental health professionals had this understanding of our hurts.

In an Unspoken Voice was definitely a dense read for me. I felt there was something light, soothing and alluring about the Levine's writing though - much like the man himself I say, if anyone's met him or watched his videos. My summation is that it's a forerunner in the increasing number of trauma therapy books out there. Somatics is the way to go...

Lexie says

Peter Levine is a wise, kindly, and gentle sage, scholar, and clinician who understands trauma like few other writers. He offers, through the therapeutic method he has created -- Somatic Experiencing -- a most persuasive passage from the ruination of extreme shock to the restoration of vibrancy and presence. His work is gentle, graduated, moderate, quiet, based in our body's wisdom ... Safe.

He begins the first chapter with his own experience of being hit by a car while crossing a street. Later in the book, he offers the same story again, now annotated/augmented with his later perceptions about how he was **not** traumatized emotionally by the event. He was able to bring his shocked consciousness back to full awareness and presence ... and he could also both receive and help direct his care from a witness to the accident (she was a doctor!), the EMTs, and (if memory serves) a nurse at the hospital he was taken to. Through this annotated story, he shows us, intricately, what steps he and others took right away to reduce the possibility of later emotional trauma. Assurance of safety; gentle contact through touch and gaze; slow pacing (outside of any necessary emergency interventions) of actions and speech; sharing of information and expertise between patient and helpers (Peter had been a trauma sage for 30+ years at the time).

Peter Levine is the real deal for humanely told stories, guiding the reader into gentle and thorough explorations of trauma, neuroscience, our mammalian heritage and resilience, and mindful guidance for safe passage beyond injury. Peter makes utterly clear what trauma is -- and from how many sources it can strike; he normalizes the experience by writing so lucidly about it (it's been said that what we call 'PTSD' is an entirely normal/natural reaction to a wildly abnormal, overwhelming event), and makes clear, repeatedly, that there are sane and soothing ways to return from the entrapment of terror. For some, this is a lifetime's work ... and it's well, well worth the effort.

It is made clearly evident in this book what trauma is, and what trauma is not. We tend to toss around the words 'trauma' and 'PTSD' like catalogic frisbees -- in my own travels I've heard bad hair days, lousy (but harm-free) dates, and favourite book-series endings described as 'traumatic.' (Later note, March 2017: an entertainment journalist who was at the recent Oscars award ceremony wrote -- in jest, one hopes -- of how "everyone we spoke with" experienced "a shocked, dazed, almost PTSD-ish memory-fragmentation" in the wake of learning that the winner for Best Picture award *wasn't* the Best Picture.)

Trauma is a life-threatening event (Levine's definition of traumatic injury: Mortal threat + immobilization/entrapment + helplessness/being unable to act) that destroys agency and ability; trauma overtakes us and renders us inert, unable to move on our own behalf. Trauma can last for an instant, or go on for years, and its aftermath can be just as devastating -- survivors are left at a breach in the very foundation of their lives. Trauma is an existential injury -- a blow to one's sense of ground, placement, being. One is hurled over the edge of existence -- then yanked back. The abyss remains, cleft into the psyche, regardless of how thoroughly any physical injury may heal.

Peter Levine shows a way through the aftermath, and expands this way gradually (there's a lot of information to absorb) from the first, vital steps into the shock of survival through the long, patient work of recalibrating one's central nervous system from constant alarm and reactivity ('DEFCON 5!') to softened, moderate regulation. No matter what trauma one has suffered -- military combat, natural disaster, war and displacement, domestic and personal assault, grave illness, shattering injury, premature birth, invasive though life-saving medical intervention, sudden/violent death of a loved one, etc. -- this book will rivet your attention with its engaging prose, its hard science made articulate (and fascinating!), its stories of gradual, pervasive healing step by step.

Most of all, Peter Levine is actively *hopeful* -- Never in the book does he suggest that a survivor of trauma is a 'hopeless case' (my words). He is certainly mindful that people can be broken beyond repair ... and his manner of understanding and treating the aftermath (trauma's effects) is safe, profoundly respectful, and exquisitely paced. The gift of his wisdom has profoundly softened my existential stance in life ... allowed me to soften my own traumatic defenses, and make some trusting sense of the world again. You know the phrase, "His work is cutting-edge"? Peter's work is softening-edge.

Heidi Crockett says

I found this after loving his "Freedom from Pain" book. (Side comment: another fantastic book that may be better [more practical exercises] than this book for the non-clinician).

The book's theory and techniques can be used immediately to release trauma. One example: I did circular breathing for five minutes [exercise is on the CD that comes with the Freedom from Pain book][It is doing an in-breath following up my chest/front with my mind scanning my body, out-breath tracing down my neck, spinal cord, to my coccyx--actually feeling the places in my body, so cultivating body awareness as well as the full deep breathing]. Then I would revisit a specific painful memory and imagine myself FLEEING the scene--would feel my feet physically pounding the pavement, my slamming the door as I leave, etc. One has to FEEL the fleeing in one's BODY to get the results. That exercise alone has released a tremendous amount of energy in me.

The book deepened my understanding of how past pain gets locked in the body. When the brain experiences extreme emotions (and trauma) where a fight or flight response is not able to be achieved, then the fear becomes LOCKED to immobility. Even though the trauma event ends it becomes like a locked entity in the body that hasn't released and it remains trapped there--there is either FEAR that in thinking about the trauma event again I will be trapped in HELPLESSNESS or else there is FEAR that if I escape the trauma memory that I will find myself in UNCONTROLLABLE RAGE. Levine uses animals to explain how these two fear responses play out in nature. The "ah ha" moment for me was how the problem isn't the trauma itself but the fight flight response not completed and the stuck fear. When this fear is UNLOCKED from immobility (has to be slowly titrated) eventually the fear vanishes, (it's being recreated in the mind/brain, the fear isn't even REAL anymore). By breathing and reliving my past pain in my mind but reprogramming it like by yelling back when I couldn't as a kid or imagining fleeing, I think I'm doing some Somatic Experiencing and have found releases. I used to always feel angry when I would think about my primary caregiver from childhood but that has recently released. Now I'm having lots more memories come up. It's been amazing. I guess what I would say is to examine your past don't run away from it. I always thought that I had suffered so much as a kid that the last thing I wanted to do was REVISIT it all in the present day, but now I see that it was still living inside me in my body as a felt-sense of fear. Doing the breathing and pendulation SE techniques really work.

Jeff Hrusko says

I don't say this lightly, but this book has changed my life, and I'm truly not a person that 'buys-into' things lightly. Dr. Levine describes the behaviors, adaptations and thoughts of a people detailing with unresolved trauma with uncanny precision and intimacy that it was like seeing oneself in the mirror for the first time.

My only criticism is that there's a lack of criticism concerning the somatic experiencing approach. I would

like to see some clinical studies addressing the efficacy of this approach, but with the proof being in the eating, it tastes very good.

Tamra says

Insightful guide for therapists working with clients having PTSD.

"Trauma sufferers, in their healing journeys, learn to dissolve their rigid defenses. In this surrender they move from frozen fixity to gently thawing and, finally, free flow. In healing the divided self from its habitual mode of dissociation, they move from fragmentation to wholeness..."

Harrison says

There is so much useful information in this book, it's hard to decide where to start. In a nutshell, Levine covers the physiology of trauma - the nervous systems involved in why and how it happens, the ways in which the body 'holds' intense emotions - and the steps required to actually "release trauma and restore goodness", as the subtitle puts it. Of prime importance is the vagus nerve, part of the parasympathetic system. Different branches of this nerve are responsible both for relaxation and rejuvenation, as well as the 'freeze response' when confronted with a no-win, life-threatening situation. (A program like [[ASIN:B0037ZAKDM Éiriú Eolas]] uses breathing exercises to stimulate the former branch, fostering emotional and physical health and relaxation.) By understanding the body's defense programs, you can understand the steps taken by the body to protect the self, and the ways this can store trauma and cause all kinds of problems in normal life functioning.

Levine talks us through his own experience of trauma - getting hit by a car while crossing the street - and shows how body awareness, and knowledge of how the body initiates certain self-protective movements (which are often halted or blocked during the traumatic experiencing) and how to complete these movements to avoid that 'energy' getting stuck in place, are the key to staving off the development of problems like PTSD. When that energy does get stuck, learning body awareness, learning how to experience painful emotions one degree at a time, and letting the body complete the actions it originally initiated can release the body back to its healthy state of homeostasis.

After the first section, which includes the revolutionary theory and research on trauma, Levine has a section of case studies showing the theory in action, and then gets deeper into the topics of instinct, emotion, sensation, and feeling, parsing out the concepts with reference to many other researchers. He rounds this off with a section on the implications of all of the above with spirituality as well as some exercises to increase one's body awareness - something which most people could benefit from.

What struck me throughout was the correlation with the work of philosopher George Gurdjieff. While Levine doesn't cite Gurdjieff, the overlap with his work (from the 1920s to 1940s) is remarkable. Most of the cutting-edge and modern research discussed in the book was either hinted at or talked about directly by Gurdjieff, which surprised me. I'd recommend reading P.D. Ouspensky's account of Gurdjieff's teachings (which touch on emotion, sensation, posture, self-observation, self-awareness, and a whole lot more), [[ASIN:0156007460 In Search of the Miraculous]].

In *An Unspoken Voice* (****1/2) is a superb book, bringing new (and rediscovered) information on the body, mind and emotions together in a format that is easy to follow and directly applicable to everyday life. I look forward to a day when Levine's work is widely practiced.

Kirsten says

Excellent book! Very good and very useful for understanding how the body works through trauma. Invaluable experiences and insights shared. I don't think this Author can write a bad book. I highly recommend this one for anyone suffering from any type of trauma, big or small. It is like a guide to releasing and letting go in unexpected and "unconventional" ways that really work.

Marsmannix says

Extremely dense book, and you have to realllly concentrate. Not a book written for a lay audience, i'd say and "upper level" lay audience. Therapists, social workers, those in helping professions will find the most use of this. I personally don't get a lot out of anecdotes, but most people find them helpful. There are a number of patients stories in this book.

that said, it is a very important contribution to the body of work on PTSD and C-PTSD and any sort of trauma

Abdulrhman Alhalabi says

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Ameena Higgins says

this is one of my favorite books of all time! it's so informative, & i'd say essential if you work with traumatized populations (i.e. the whole world, in this day and age)

Vishnu says

This book is pretty phenomenal, but I'm not sure if it's necessary after reading Levine's seminal "Waking the Tiger." A LOT of content is redundant, if not copied in its exact form. That said, I really found Waking the Tiger transformative, so it was helpful to hear the messages reinforced! I'm getting the feeling that, with many spiritual books, the point might not be to cover new content, but to remind us of the gems we already know.

Lisa Campbell says

This book was instrumental in making the connection between trauma, animal instincts, and how we can heal and transform trauma in the body and brain.

Andy says

Great view of trauma as a dysregulation of nervous system function. Levine gives a clear model for understanding the biological basis of trauma being held in the body & a great rationale for using his method to discharge & allow the nervous system to come back into balance. This book, and Somatic Experiencing, have changed the way I see trauma. In working with groups, it has tuned me in to ways people dissociate that I would not have considered before & ways to better work with them.

kris.m.o says

At first I thought this book was too in depth for what I was looking for at the time. I picked it up only because Gabor Mate wrote the forward! What I did find was an enlightening read full of good anecdotes and interesting science all packaged into a book that I think all psychologists and health practitioners should read. It was most likely aimed at health professionals but easy to understand for someone not in the field. I recommend it if you have ever questioned the autonomic processes of your brain and body, have dealt with trauma, or if you are at all interested in the field of psychotherapy.

Corvus says

This is my second DNF book in a row in the Psychology subject realm. This is a new behavior for me as someone who generally slogs through everything I pick up. I think I'm just getting too tired of spending my time with books that cause stress without much reward. I made it about 70% through this before I decided to throw in the towel.

I really enjoyed Waking the Tiger, though I read that many years ago and am now wondering how I would feel about it today having read this book. This book is not without its merits. There are some good and interesting anecdotes about trauma and recovery in here. I posted several quotes from the chapters that interested me- specifically ones that talk about the long term effects of traumatic stress on the health and body. It also has some good suggestions for therapists and probably anyone looking to delve into helping clients or themselves get back into their skin so to speak. There are some good things in here, which is why I rated it in the middle.

What has made me crawl through this book slowly and eventually put it down are two tropes that are common in mainstream psychological and scientific literature:

1. The idea that the author's technique of [Insert methodology here] is practically magical. Levine comes

very close to suggesting that he cures patients with long-term, severe traumatic stress in one somatic experiencing session. He may hint that everyone's different or that people may need more than one session. But, there's a bit of an air of "When these people finally came to me for help when nothing else worked, and I told them to shake and feel their body, they were magically better and so grateful to me." He also uses his own car accident as an indepth analytic case study to prove his theories which most people know is bad form. I think Levine is very knowledgeable, does care about his patients and does mean well, but this kind of stuff always sets off red flags for me. And, it can send a message that if somatic therapy doesn't work for you, it's because you are bad and wrong rather than the therapy being imperfect or not one-size-fits-all.

I did not completely hate the case studies. I actually rather enjoyed a lot of them. But, the delivery lacked critical analysis in my opinion. And he never should have analyzed himself.

2. Levine traumatized nonhuman animals and supports others traumatizing nonhuman animals- and even suggests retroactive nobel prizes for them. He devotes entire sections of the book to calling out the cognitive sciences for their refusal to see humans as animals, then he directly contradicts much of that by acting and speaking in completely anthropocentric terms. He even uses an example of an elephant resuscitating her baby as a show of how an elephant's mind is "useless" and instinct is the only reason she did this. It is well know that Elephants show a wide range of expression, (human valued) intelligence, and have rituals around death and funeral like processions. He argues that other animals either don't have consciousness or only have consciousness that basically involves responding to stimuli. He will then contradict again claiming animals have something to offer when he can use their qualities to explain part of human behavior. Then it becomes time for him to exert anthropocentric human superiority again in order to excuse exploitation of nonhuman animals, so the animals become "less than" in another contradictory way. I put the book down when I got to the part where he is praising and fauning over the Triune brain model which is reductive and inaccurate (birds, alone, throw a wrench in it,) and gave up.

I do not recall Levine mentioning torturing animals in *Waking the Tiger*- I thought all animal studies mentioned were wildlife observation. Perhaps I blocked it out. But, I find it appalling when people who claim to seek out a better world for the traumatized are willing to cause trauma, pain, suffering, and death in others to do so. They put curiosity ahead of actually preventing or healing post traumatic stress. I also find it frustratingly convenient when scientists highlight all of the ways that other animals underperform humans at certain tasks, but leave out the great number of ways other animals are better than humans at tasks- including things like cooperation, organization, preserving and caring for their habitats and environments, memory tasks, math tasks, and other such gems.

Basically, the whole thing is a mess and also needed better editing as I am pretty sure I read several parts two or three times. I am so exhausted with these tropes in psychological literature. I love psychology and don't mind pushing through some garbage here and there. But, dominating the entire book with this stuff is just disappointing, insulting, and even triggering for those of us who have been exposed to the torture of nonhuman animals for the curiosities scientists. Levine really let me down with this, he was someone I had up on a pedestal.

Katie says

This is the second book that I've read recently that has reminded me of my old 8th grade science teacher. Cheesy dad jokes for days. But, scientific dad jokes. Don't get me wrong, I love it. This made the book even more approachable. And, really, I found it just generally approachable. The 3 stars just boils down to my

personal experience of the book. It wasn't material that I am in a position to readily use and incorporate yet, so I was only moderately engaged with the text. For those in a position to really implement this stuff, then the book will surely be a great read.

Rush2ady says

I bought this thinking it would be something of a self-help book in body based therapy. There is some of that, but mostly it explains the research and theory (with case study examples) of Peter Levine's lifetime of work. He is a brilliant psychotherapist, no doubt. The book itself is heavy on the science, and quite dense. It's not a quick easy read. I felt it was directed more towards psychologists and others in this field.

By halfway through the book I was inspired to find a psychologist who practices using Dr. Levine's techniques. Absolutely life changing in the way this work has allowed me to release long held traumas. It is both simpler, yet far more dramatic and life-changing than I ever imagined. It is odd to experience physical sensations which are rooted in experiences several years back. Sensations I had long forgotten, but the body memory got stuck in it and still held on to the trauma. If I hadn't read the book, I might be really confused about what I was experiencing.

edited to add After a few months of therapy, things are going well, but it has opened cans of worms and totally made me reassess myself and my relationships. It's work!

**A couple years later, since therapy I've left my lifelong religion (cult!). My therapy was key to realizing the harm it was doing me.

I've continued learning about body-based therapies and am convinced it's the best approach to dealing with trauma. The speech center of the brain shuts down during trauma, making talk therapy ineffective in reaching into that trauma. If you can calm the body down, you can calm the mind. Diaphragmatic slow breathing, QiGong, taking a walk after emotional moments, and physically reconnecting through hugs and touch with my partner have all been helpful in this journey.

Lubinka Dimitrova says

This book is considered something like a bible in psychotherapy research, and it obviously contains a ton of useful information, but for me personally the author's style was not as clear as I could have wished for, and his insistence to re-tell the story of his accident ended up a bit annoying by the n-th time he mentioned it. I gained a lot of knowledge from his insights, but it's a dense book, which a person with no previous mental health training will have difficulty to work through alone. Still, it's a good starting point, if one is interested in this kind of trauma healing. His main points (becoming aware of the physical body, feeling safe in the physical body, knowing (through experience) that all feelings and sensations are temporary, being aware of yourself and knowing how to pace yourself, feeling uncomfortable sensations without being overwhelmed by them, letting go and allowing your body to do what it needs to do - whatever it wants to do at the time of the traumatic event) are eye-opening for many people who suffer from unreleased trauma, but without the help and assistance of a professional therapist, I'm not sure how applicable they could be for all those who decide to rely on this approach.
