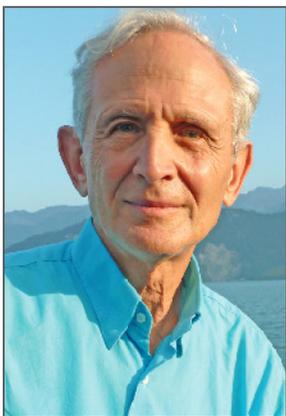


A Shaman's Scientific Journey

Conversation with Peter Levine

Aline LaPierre



Peter Levine recently received the eminent Psychotherapy Network Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. Now in his eighth decade, he reminisces about the personal journey that led him to develop Somatic Experiencing, a body-based revolutionary approach to trauma treatment now used worldwide by some 50,000 practitioners in 42 countries. This conversation gives us insight into the creative process of a man whose visionary curiosity has opened hopeful healing possibilities beyond what he ever imagined. Peter reads excerpts from the autobiography he is currently writing, and marvels at the synchronicity of events that have guided his life.

— **Aline:** *Peter, you have raised global awareness of the profound impact of trauma. I thought I'd start with an obvious question by asking you how your amazing journey began. What were your early roots? How did you come to somatic psychotherapy, because it wasn't an obvious choice in the 1960s when you were at the starting point of your career?*

Peter: Where to begin? In the mid-1960s, I was interested in what at that time was the fledgling field of mind-body. I worked with a group of people who had high blood pressure, and I discovered that by doing exercises and helping them relax their jaw and neck muscles, that sometimes their blood pressure would drop by 10, 20, 30 and even 40 points, so I knew that something important was going on. I think in a way that was my beginning, but I have so many different possible beginnings.

During that time, after the Nancy story, in '69, as relayed in my book *In An Unspoken Voice*, I started to do more work with people who had different symptoms. As you pointed out, the idea of trauma didn't really exist. It certainly didn't exist as PTSD, which arrived as a diagnosis a decade and a half later. As I started working with more people and seeing what kinds of things were underlying their symptoms, it became pretty clear that it had something to do with accumulated stress and trauma.

The other thing I realized around this time was that if animals in the wild, in their natural environments, were traumatized the way people become traumatized, they wouldn't survive, and their species wouldn't survive. I

realized that there was something that animals did, that other mammals did, that we humans weren't doing, or were somehow interfering with, so that we became much more susceptible to traumatization. I recognized that an event where we're very frightened, or feel helpless and overwhelmed, can leave a permanent imprint on a person's body-mind. Working with that, in 1973 I think it was, I came across three ethologists – scientists who study wild animals in their natural environments – Nikolaas Tinbergen, Konrad Lorenz, and Karl von Frisch. I was particularly taken by the work of Tinbergen.

I came across a transcript of his Nobel acceptance speech in which he described some treatments that he and his family were undergoing that made a big change in their sleep and in their posture and blood pressure. I thought, "My God, that's just what I'm observing." I was able to make contact with Tinbergen. He was then at Oxford, and we corresponded by snail mail. We also had some conversations on the transatlantic cables. Basically, my conversations with him cost me much of my graduate student's stipend. He was very encouraging and strongly supported what I was doing in my practice.

I continued to develop more healing tools, and also began exploring the antecedents of becoming overwhelmed beyond our capacity to rebound, to restore. This was what I was observing with the animals. They could restore after they experienced threat – very often more than once a day. In fact, life threats could happen many times a day. If they were to lose their competitive edge, each time they

barely escaped, they would not survive the next time, certainly not the next, or next. What, I wondered, prevented people from having the same kind of resilience? That's when I got into "the body thing".

■ **A:** *You were in a creative process.*

Peter: Yes. That's right!

■ **A:** *The way you questioned, and the way you tracked and followed signs, and how you experienced it in yourself; you are describing a deep, alive, creative process.*

Peter: Yes, indeed. When I received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the USABP in 2010, in the address, I mentioned something about creativity and my urge, my drive, my desire to explore anything that was in front of me. I mentioned that my creativity came from my hunger to explore, to ask questions.

I was very surprised that my brother Jon was there, because he was a very famous medical researcher who had discovered the mechanisms of the placebo response. My belief was, that he didn't really consider the work I was doing as legitimate because it wasn't scientific enough, so I was very taken when he showed up for the award. When we had dinner afterwards and I mentioned curiosity as being important, Jon said, "I don't know if you remember this..." He told the story of when I was about eight years old; he was about five, and my youngest brother, Bob, was about three and a half. During the summer, we stayed on my grandparents' farm in upstate New York. We would get fruits and vegetables from the farm and take them in our little red wagon up Pine Tree Road to a bungalow colony where people from New York City came to spend the summer in the country.

Here we were, three cute little kids, and people couldn't resist us. We basically sold out every time. This particular time though, we were coming back with one head of cabbage in our red wagon. Tired from the long walk, we stopped for a break. When we started for home again, Jon pulling the wagon forward, I noticed that the cabbage rolled to the back of the wagon. I became enthralled with this, and deeply curious. I sat at the side of the wagon and had him pull the wagon forward over and over again. What I realized was that it wasn't that the cabbage was rolling to the back of the wagon, but rather that the cabbage was staying in place as the wagon lurched forward.

When I got back to the farm, I asked my mother about it. I said, "Every time we did it, the same thing happened. The cabbage stayed where it was while the wagon went forward." She said, "Well Peter, I don't know quite how to tell you this, but you've just discovered Newton's first law." It wasn't till I was in high school that we formally learned that a body at rest tends to stay at rest unless acted on by outside forces. An object in motion tends to stay in motion. From then on, I was constantly in motion. As I continued corresponding

with Tinbergen, he really encouraged my thinking and my creativity.

In the early 70's, I was with a group of about a dozen really bright therapists from Berkeley. We would meet at what they called my tree house. It was out in the country at the end of Wildcat Canyon in Richmond. I would work with people and try to get the right language to explain to them what I was doing, why I was doing it, what outcomes I was expecting, as well as what actually happened. It meant finding a language to explain what I was doing, because, at that time, I didn't have any clear verbal explanation.

As I started working with more and more people, they began to see me as some kind of "a mystical shamanic healer" type. My job was to prove them wrong: To prove that this was something that was scientifically validated such that it was teachable, transmissible, and that people could learn it and then pass the teachings onto others. That was really the basic development of SE. Starting from that small 12-person cabal in Berkeley, it has spread, and by this year of 2020, there are 50 teachers teaching in 42 different countries with, at this point, 50,000 practitioners.

■ **A:** *That is truly extraordinary.*

Peter: It is, and I still can't get it. I still don't get it. I still keep thinking, "Right. I've taught it to 12 people." The idea of how it's caught on, and how the whole field of body psychotherapy, which used to be considered fringe, is now clearly becoming mainstream! This last week, I received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Psychotherapy Network Associates.

■ **A:** *I saw it. I heard your acceptance talk.*

Peter: You did?

■ **A:** *I did. The award was a beautiful acknowledgement and appreciation of your work.*

Peter: At first, I had to think about what I was going to say. I felt awkward, but then it occurred to me that I have always been this rolling stone, traveling around the world like Johnny Appleseed, trying to teach anybody who would listen. It just took off on its own after awhile. Getting this award, not from a body-centered field, but from very traditional talk therapy representatives, made it clear to me that the genie was out of the box; that it was no longer a fringe movement. Embodied psychotherapy is now part of the mainstream. Because again, what I discovered in the late 60's and early 70's was that trauma is something that not only affects the brain; it affects the mind, but I would say that it primarily affects the body.

When we are frightened, our bodies tense into readiness. If we're experiencing overwhelming life-threat, our bodies collapse into helplessness. These are things that go on in the body. As long as they're going on in the body, it's actually sending information from the body to the brain

saying that the threat is still occurring. So, the threat then gets, if you like, embodied. It stays with the person because they're getting that feedback from the body. The key in developing Somatic Experiencing was to find ways to help people find different experiences in their bodies, ones that contradicted those of fear and bracing and overwhelming helplessness. Because when we have new experiences in the body, then those new experiences would be relaying back up to the brain.

That was it. If you could break those feedback loops, I call them positive feedback loops with negative consequences, if I could interrupt those by having people create new experiences in their bodies, then the trauma was gone, as though by magic. I think that's why people saw me as being some kind of "mystical" shamanic healer because I was fiddle-faddling with the experience people were having in their bodies, helping them create new ones. It seemed magical, but of course, it wasn't. It was a very clear, pragmatic approach.

■ **A:** *From early on, you had the capacity to observe very closely.*

Peter: That's right.

■ **A:** *You were moving bottom-up before neuroscience became popular, before bottom-up became a buzzword. You had somehow entered who we are as human beings from the bottom, from the living body.*

Peter: Yes, that's right. It was also about aliveness in our body, about connecting with the living, sensing body; knowing the experience not just the anatomy.

■ **A:** *The 60's were very much about living in our bodies so I think there must have been some influence there, because I grew up in the 60's as well, and it cued all of us into a different way of being embodied*

Peter: When I came out to Berkeley, I didn't know I had a body.

■ **A:** *[chuckles] Right.*

Peter: This friend of mine, Jack Kaplan, was very much involved with the Green Gulch, Zen Center there. This couple was giving a workshop; it was basically for the monks who were at Green Gulch. It was given by this woman named Charlotte Selver and her husband, Charles Brooks.

■ **A:** *Yes, she developed Sensory Awareness.*

Peter: I went there to that workshop for two days. She had us walk around the room, picking up things, feeling the weight, feeling our feet and our legs as we walked around the room. I remember I saw this one monk and said to him, "How are you doing with this?" He said, "I don't know. I'm getting pain in my head."

After the workshop, I remember it was about sunset. This was at that big church on the top of Geary Street, I for-

get what it's called, a beautiful contemporary church. I walked out and I looked down at San Francisco at night, all the lights were on, and you could see the colors from the sunset and all of a sudden, I realized, "This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

That really flipped my thoughts. What the heck had happened there? Obviously, something profoundly shifted. At that time, I was teaching the class for sophomores in Berkeley on contemporary natural sciences. It was basically a composite of different natural sciences. I had gotten a small grant from the National Institutes of Health to get some physiological measuring equipment. I had this curiosity about some of Charlotte Selver's exercises at the end, when we were breathing in from your feet or breathing in from your groin. I thought, you don't breathe from there, you breathe from your lungs, but I couldn't contradict the results. The results were amazing.

Anyhow, there was this young red-haired Irish girl in the class. I asked her if she'd be willing to do some experiments. After the class, I connected her up to the physiological monitoring, which was an instrument gauge around the chest and belly. Then I also connected an electromyogram muscle activity recording to her feet. I figured I would just get her to do the things that Charlotte Selver taught us to do, and see what happened, see what relationship there was between the breath and these other physiological components. I tried to get her to do the exercises, to relax this, to relax that, but it wasn't working.

I didn't know what I was doing. I totally didn't know what I was doing. Finally, out of frustration, actually, out of her frustration, all of a sudden, I could see that along with her breath, the blood was moving into her extremities. There was activity in the muscles in the feet. Literally, everywhere on the body, you could see indications of the breath. It was literally an embodied experience, but then I realized this is something that is a truly valid phenomenon, even though you don't literally breathe through different parts of your body. The cohesion or the coherence between breath and all of these other physiologic functions was undeniable.

That's when I started developing my techniques to work with people who had high blood pressure, linking it up to the different, what we now call trauma experiences, that people have had through their lives. We then worked to reconnect these people to their physiological coherence. That's what really shifted them out of the trauma.

These experiences added to my exchange with the Nobel laureate, Tinbergen. His field of study, ethology, was about observing animals in their natural environment as they went about their day-to-day functions. In my client encounters, I was starting to use that same skill looking, or let me see now... what's the word I'm looking for? Observing the people that I was working with. Carefully, observing in the way the ethologists observed the animals.

Day after day, I observed these people I was working with, week after week, month after month, and really year after year. I was using those skills pioneered by ethologists in my study of human behavior and human physiology, as related to their internal psychological and spiritual states.

■ **A:** *You're describing the stages you went through in developing SE.*

Peter: That's right. It was by no means a linear process. It was definitely something where I would be going in this direction, and something would steer me in another direction. Then somehow, I was able to gradually put the pieces together. Finally, in my 1972 Berkeley class, I started to teach it to therapists.

■ **A:** *Part of your journey was a deep involvement with your own experience, as well as observing.*

Peter: A friend of mine once said, "Research is me search." I had a lot of tremendously ominous threats throughout my childhood as well as some very traumatic life experiences; hence a likely background for somebody who's going to be studying trauma.

■ **A:** *You could not know this at the time.*

Peter: That's right. One of the first people I worked with in 1969 was Nancy. She was experiencing all kinds of physical problems, which would now be called fibromyalgia, irritable bowel, chronic fatigue, migraines, and so forth. We discovered what was underlying that, plus the panic, anxiety, and agoraphobia that had plagued her since the age of four years old. Doctors and nurses had held her down, and forced an ether mask on her face for a routine tonsillectomy. She was utterly terrified. She went into sheer terrifying shock. She never really recovered, and her body, even 20 years later at the age of 24, was still wanting to escape, but couldn't because she was held down.

In that session in 1969, she was able to muster what her body needed to do. Instead of having the experience of trauma, she had the experience of empowerment, of agency, of flight. I remember at the end of the session, she asked me if I wanted to know what had happened, and I said "Yes." She said, "Well when you told me that there was a tiger chasing me to run and run and escape, when I first tried to run, I couldn't run, my legs were like lead. When you continued to encourage me, I could slowly feel my body starting to move, and I could." And when I told her, "And climb those rocks and escape" she said, "Yes. I could feel myself. I could actually feel my body climbing. When I got to the top, I looked down and I saw the tiger, but the image of the tiger changed to seeing me when I was four years old being held down." She had renegotiated the experience. That's a term that I've used, renegotiating the trauma by instilling an active response where previously there was only the experience of overwhelm and helplessness.

■ **A:** *That was a moment similar to you looking at the cabbage and going, "What's going on here?"*

Peter: Exactly! It was an aha moment.

■ **A:** *An aha that started with a cabbage in a little red wagon.*

Peter: That's right. It started there. I have another friend, Ian, who said, "Well, the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line." My development has definitely not been a straight line. It's been a jiggling and a jaggging. Carl Jung once said, "The right way to wholeness is made up of faithful detours and wrong turnings." Using my curiosity, I basically followed it to wherever it took me to next and put the pieces together, piece by piece by piece, until it was something coherent that could be transmitted to others.

■ **A:** *I'm intrigued by the fact that you had to find the languaging because there wasn't any. There's still a lack of languaging to talk about the deep inner body experience and the energy we experience there. It's still a work in progress.*

Peter: Indeed, it is. That's been, in a way, the motivation for a number of... well, for all the books I've written. In a way, it's to try to get this language and describe this phenomenon in different ways so that lay people could understand it, so that therapists could understand it. Researchers could understand it.

Around this time, when I was beginning to develop things in the 70s, I came in contact with Stephen Porges. He was on sabbatical at UCLA, so I flew down to meet him there. This has been a deep friendship that has lasted throughout our whole lives. I explained to him what I was observing clinically, and he was puzzled by it. Then, come 1992 or 1994, I forget which, I think it was 1994, he published the "polyvagal theory," so that we were able to put the science and the phenomenon together and give it more credibility if you like, with a different language to teach it.

■ **A:** *Grounding the experience of the body in real science validated it, and was crucial because the body has been so maligned and ignored. Between your work with trauma and his work with the polyvagal system, you were putting body psychotherapy on the map.*

Peter: Yes, I think so. The people who I think have made those contributions really are, of course, Stephen, and back in the '80s, when I was living and working in Boulder, Colorado, a neurologist who had heard about my work, Bob Scaer. He was one of my first clients in Boulder. He is fine with me telling the story. He had, I think, a two-year-old or four-year-old child. He was playing with some friends, rough playing. One of the kids took a hanger and threw it, and the hanger went through his eyes and he lost one eye. In our first session, this came up in implicit and in procedural memory. He had had fibro-

myalgia for most of his life, but after that session, it was 80% gone. I didn't know this, but he headed the physical therapy department at the Boulder hospital. After that he went from being a standard neurologist to becoming a traumatologist and wrote two very important books.

■ **A:** Yes, he did.

Peter: One is called *The Body Bears the Burden*, which is about how traumas get locked in the body as disease. Another one is called *The Trauma Spectrum*.

Then there is Bessel, who I met back in...it must have been the early or middle '80s; I'm not sure. He also began to understand the centrality of the body. He had more to lose than I did. I was always considered a maverick while he was a mainstream psychiatrist. First came his research, and then his book, *The Body Keeps the Score*. Again, the work went from being nowhere to now being everywhere. That's it.

■ **A:** Like you say, it's mysterious, and there is so much synchronicity. You talk a lot about synchronicity, that there's a level where things get brought together...

Peter: That's right, and you never know where it's going to come from or how it's going to come in. Let me give you one little example here [picks up some typed pages]. Here, I thank Tinbergen as well as Hans Selye, Ernst Gellhorn, and Raymond Dart, who were important supports for me, because when doing my doctoral work in biophysics, the head of my committee said that my work was so outlandish that he would never permit me to get my PhD.

■ **A:** You were ahead of your time.

Peter: He threatened to discredit my dissertation. Fortunately, there was somebody on the committee who knew me and liked me, and suggested to Richard Strohmman (the chairperson) that it be sent out to specialists in different fields, including mathematics, physics, animal behavior, and anthropology. Thankfully, they congratulated him for the work I had been doing. So he got a little mud on his face with that one. Around that time, still in the early 70's, I received support from another person, but this was a person who was no longer alive. I'll just briefly read you this.

■ **A:** I am intrigued!

Peter: [Reads from his typed pages] "During the early 1970s, I received a visit from an unexpected and uninvited guest. I had been working both on my theoretical biophysics doctoral dissertation on accumulated stress, as well as on my body-mind approach to resolving stress and healing trauma. After long workdays, I would frequently have dinner at my favorite restaurant in Berkeley, the Beggar's Banquet on San Pablo Avenue. I was always greeted warmly by name by the friendly waitresses there. My habitual dinner started with their homemade

soup and warm crispy French bread.

Early one evening, I was sitting alone at my usual table for two. I was savoring my vegetable soup and I saw a momentary shadow. I looked up from my dinner and there, across from me, sat an elderly man with wild unkempt curly hair and wearing a completely disheveled sports jacket. At first, I was just startled by this apparition, but when I accepted its presence or even welcomed it, I recognized that it was Albert Einstein."

■ **A:** Oh! Really?

Peter: Yes. Exactly. [He continues to read] "So began a year of weekly visits with this entity. Indeed, at the beginning, so real was the apparition, that I actually ordered soup for him and fortunately, the staff didn't ask. Actually they said, "Wouldn't you rather I brought the soup later so it'll still be warm?" "No," I replied, "that's okay, now."

His visitations seemed to be completely real. Part of me, of course, knew that they weren't real. Some kind of a creative synchronistic process was going on. On the other hand, it seemed completely real. Even to this day, when I talk about it, I feel both. It came from some unconscious process which I entertained with enthusiasm.

■ **A:** Or some other dimension...

Peter: Exactly.

■ **A:** Somehow your vibrations were in alignment.

Peter: That's just the beginning of the story. This went on for over a year, and we had many encounters. One day, I was visiting my parents in New York and happened to notice on the bookshelf a book I had read in my bed when I was about 12 years old. It was Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*. That prompted me to tell my parents about my encounter with Einstein in Berkeley. My mother, who is amazingly intuitive said, "Peter, I know why that happened." My jaw dropped.

■ **A:** Goodness!

Peter: She said: "When I was eight months pregnant with you, your father and I were in a canoe on a lake, and a strong wind came up that capsized our canoe. We could not right it and get back in, and surely we would have died and you wouldn't be here. Then a small sailboat came by. It had an old man and a young woman on board and they pulled us to safety. They introduced themselves as Albert Einstein and his daughter."

My mother said that he had saved my life, and believed that at that moment of life threat, I had bonded with Einstein through her placental fetal "blood web." Again, I have to say that this wasn't really about me. I was being led by these synchronous awakenings.

I'll tell you one more non-ordinary reality story. I had a dream many, many years ago. In the dream, I was met by



Stone Age obelisk with two vortices spinning in opposite directions.

a man in a black robe with purple sashes. I think at that time, I recognized that he must've been some kind of a monk, and later realized it was a Tibetan Lama. He handed me a box, clearly a treasure chest, but a small one. He said, "Here, I give this to you. Take it into the other room." I opened the door and noticed there was a safety deposit box there. I opened the safe and put the treasure chest in there, and locked it. I returned to the first room and the Lama nodded to me. That was the end of the dream. Many, many years later, I met a Tibetan Lama and I told him about Somatic Experiencing, and asked him if that was consistent with any of the Tibetan healing traditions. He said, "Yes, definitely. There's a lot of things that are in common with the Kum Nye tradition," which is an embodiment-centered approach. I didn't know it at the time.

He said, "But this knowledge comes from many, many different places in the world. The original place where this knowledge was born is in the ancient Celtic Stone Age religions." Of course, I started doing research, and found some pictures. I found a photograph of a Stone Age temple and in front of the temple was an obelisk with two vortices spinning in opposite directions. In order to pass into the Holy of Holies, one had to go through these double vortices. This image became a big part in the SE model, as a metaphor that I used to help teach about trauma. Again, when I thought back about the dream, I won-

dered, "What in the world was that? That is just really weird." Sometimes, you have a profound dream you think doesn't make any sense at all. Well, the next day, or in the next years, I realized that this was indeed the task that I had been assigned: to protect this ancient knowledge from the Celtic Stone Age temples, and the Tibetan tradition, and to bring it to the scientific Western way of looking at things, of viewing things.

Again, I can only conclude that these were not personal gifts, that I was guided in this direction, and hopefully continue to be guided – and supported in guiding others.

— **A:** Yes. Isn't that amazing! Your mission, slowly being revealed.

Peter: Yes, and I don't think that I realized it at the time.

— **A:** Your life was in alignment for that revelation to present itself.

Peter: Yes, the right place at the right time. Again, when I think about it, going back to Einstein, when we had our discussions at the Beggar's Banquet, I would talk to him about something that I was seeing, either from my doctoral work or about the body-mind work I was developing. How he would reply was by not answering, but instead would give me yet another question. It was a Socratic way of dialogue.

— **A:** *With metaphors, perhaps?*

Peter: Exactly. I would think about it, and then I would meet him the next week and tell him what had come about, and he would nod his head, and I would ask him another question... and then he would ask me another question the following week.

— **A:** *That's the best way to teach, isn't it?*

Peter: It is. I try to embody that when I am teaching.

— **A:** *He was guiding your curiosity.*

Peter: Exactly, and that's what we shared in common, this curiosity. In his life, he actually was somewhat of a real jerk. I can relate to that myself. I'm also in some ways a weird jerk. We share a lot in common.

— **A:** *[chuckles] Yet, on this other level, is a beautiful, spiritual, soulful capacity to bring in new knowledge. You are updating the ancient knowledge to fit a modern mind.*

Peter: Exactly. I was, for whatever reason, chosen to fill that role.

— **A:** *Right, and you did it.*

Peter: I have no idea why, except for the one thing that I can grab onto being my curiosity. I was the annoying curious kid. "Why, why, how, why, why is the sky blue? Why does it deflect light in this way?" I was always asking those questions, and I was preparing and preparing...

— **A:** *From this perspective that you have helped, we could say, reintroduce old knowledge into today's world for the modern mind, what do you see the next steps being? Especially speaking now to a new generation of somatic therapists eager to build on your work.*

Peter: Right. Well, at the risk of sounding self-serving, there are other trainings, different trainings in body psychotherapy for sure, but I think the Somatic Experiencing training is one of the most comprehensive ones around trauma, the most embodied one around healing trauma. Of course, I recommend my books, Stephen Porges', Bob Scaer's and Bessel's books. That's really an interesting question you're asking. What would I say to them? I would say, "You're on the right track!"

— **A:** *I have to tell you that I am immensely grateful to you because the larger proportion of students who come to my touch trainings have an SE background, and those are the students who really understand what it is to tend to the body.*

Peter: Right, I think so. I think, in a way, Somatic Experiencing is a backbone for body psychotherapy, not just an approach for healing trauma. Again, to the younger people coming in, I would say, "Hey, you're on the right track. Keep following it. Follow your curiosity, follow your passion." In Campbell's terms, follow your bliss, but it's really your

passion. I think most people are attracted to this kind of therapy because of a passion. In CBT, they may not be attracted so much because of passion, but because it's an evidence-based treatment program. By the way, I'm a fan of things like CBT or mindfulness. I think these are really valuable tools, but they're all about top-down processing.

— **A:** *Yes, but they prepare the mind to be receptive to the body.*

Peter: Exactly. That's right.

— **A:** *That's really important.*

Peter: I think so, and in my view, that's really their value. It really is saying, "Okay, here's a tool, but if you're just going hierarchically from the top down, from the thoughts, the emotions, and so forth... consider adding in the bottom up experience, and explore what's going on in the sensations and bodily feelings when you bring them together, then you really have a comprehensive way of dealing not just with trauma, but with all kinds of symptomatology.

— **A:** *Preparing the body as well as preparing the mind to be in a different kind of relationship with each other. Sometimes I think that mind and body are like a couple in a bad marriage.*

Peter: Right. There's this great Peanuts cartoon where Lucy is throwing the football to him and it hits him in the head and he's stunned, and she says, "You know, Charlie, your problem is your mind and your body aren't communicating with each other."

[laughter]

— **A:** *So where is your passion taking you now?*

Peter: Well, synchronistically, we're mostly in the house, so I'm trying to catch up with things that I've been putting off for a long time. With my partner's encouragement, I'm working on an autobiography. If nobody else reads it except me and her and some friends, that's okay, but it might be my next book. For me, writing is a meditation. It really is a meditation.

— **A:** *As you've described it today, the journey, the synchronicity, the encounter with the numinous, we could say that every level of your being was coming together for you to do what you did.*

Peter: That's right. Again, synchronicity, the right place at the right time, the fact that I had the traumas I've had, the fact that I was doing my doctoral dissertation on stress and persevered, even though I was blocked at every turn. Yes, perseverance, that's another of my characteristics... perseverance. I usually don't give up, not readily, not easily. I keep at it. I'm dogged that way.

— **A:** *In this journey, you encountered roadblocks that could have been discouraging.*

Peter: Well, they were. At one time when I was giving lec-

tures, psychologists and psychiatrists would come up or talk to their colleagues and say, "This person needs to be stopped. What he's teaching is dangerous. This goes against psychiatry and psychology." Even as I talk about it, I get this gnawing feeling in my gut. It was scary. It's scary, because I know people can hurt you.

■ **A:** *People can hurt you, yes, and they can spread harmful destructive rumors.*

Peter: Exactly.

■ **A:** *The mission that you came in with was sacred, and somewhere in you, you knew that.*

Peter: I think so. I think I knew that I was being guided, and I knew that this was difficult, and I knew it was going to be more and more painful for me. But I think I also had the sense, at least a little bit, that after some years, I would look back and I would be able to see this with a modicum of humor. Was it Bernard Shaw who said, "The best revenge is success."

I have been successful, and that's wonderful. I've been able to support myself by following my passion. Not many people have had that gift given to them, and it's a gift... a great gift.

■ **A:** *It is a gift. You have brought forth a gift of profound healing for our deeply suffering human nature.*

Peter: Speaking of that, so much fear and uncertainty are being spread around now. There's no better time than right now for the tools that body psychotherapy has to offer, and the role that body psychotherapists can play to help people learn skills to calm themselves, to help calm their families, to help calm their communities. That's what we need right now.

This was one of the reasons why I wrote the book *Trauma-Proofing Your Kids*, to give parents tools so that when kids have their mishaps, fall off bicycles, or go through a plate glass window, wind up in the emergency room, what can they do with the kids to help them not become traumatized. What I discovered is not only did it help them not become traumatized, but also these are the kids who became much more resilient as toddlers, as adolescents, and as adults.

■ **A:** *Would you say that you are teaching them emotional intelligence?*

Peter: I'm tapping into their emotional intelligence, yes, but it's even more than emotional intelligence. It's *sensorial intelligence*, and I think that's what's been missing. Daniel Goleman did a real service in talking about emotional intelligence.

■ **A:** *But sensorial intelligence!*

Peter: Emotional intelligence is only part of the story. The big other part is about the body's sensibility, what we can learn from our bodies, what kind of messages it holds. The body holds a tremendous amount of wisdom, not just for healing from trauma, but tremendous wisdom, because when we connect to our visceral self, to our primary instinctual centers, we connect with source.

■ **A:** *The intelligence of the life force.*

Peter: Exactly. The intelligence of the life force. That's exactly the terms I would use, because it's about reconnecting to our life force. It's not just about erasing traumatic memories or changing our thoughts. It's about reconnecting to our life energy, our life force. The French call it *élan vital*, the vital force, the vital energy. Prana, the breath of life. It's all about this life force!

■ **A:** *The language for talking about life force is still quite primitive.*

Peter: It is, yes. That's one that's still on the fringe. What is life force? How can energy have wisdom? But it's changing. People, not just therapists, but people are getting an understanding that they do have a life force. That when they are connecting with it, this is the greatest gift they can give to themselves.

■ **A:** *Well, Peter, this is a great place to end. Thank you, this was wonderful.*

Peter: We hadn't seen each other for many years, and now we're seeing each other all over the place.

■ **A:** *I know. It's delightful.*

Peter: Synchronicity.

■ **A:** *Synchronicity. Thank you so much, Peter.*