

*Many people live with chronic physical problems like insomnia, anxiety and migrene. According to Erika Bea Thorkildsen this is often due to traumatic experiences that have been stored in our nervous system. She claims that it is not enough to talk about the traumatic experience to solve the problem, we need to work directly with our body.*

Bea teaches traumahealing, a method based on NASAs stress research that has been used to train astronauts to go through extremely stressful situations. Traumahealing or “Somatic experiencing®” is based on the fact that humans have the same autonomic nervous system as animals and we can learn to use the same mechanisms to heal trauma. Traumas are experiences that have been too overwhelming for the body to handle. Too much happened too fast.

Bea explains that animals experience these kinds of situations all the time, but they don't become traumatized. They instinctively know how to release a traumatic experience so it is not stored in the nervous system. Humans have the same autonomic nervous system, but we have not learned how to go through the process of releasing the energy of traumatic events, so we hold on to this energy, sometimes for years after the actual event. This causes symptoms in the body. The symptoms can be depression, physical pain, insomnia, anxiety, panic attacks, migrene, muscle tensions and so on. In traumahealing we learn how to go through the process of discharging the energy of the traumatic event and integrating this in the body so that this energy is available for us.



To understand how a shock affects the nervous system, you can look at an animal. The three available responses to a threatening situation is “fight”, “flight” and “freeze”. A mouse that sees a cat will first freeze, sometimes the cat will then lose interest. Then the mouse will go to the “flight” response and run. After an experience like that you will see an animal shake their body to shake off the experience.

Bea explains that what happens with human beings is that we often do not get past the freeze response and that the energy of the experience gets frozen in our system and stays there. To release this energy we need to get in contact with the energy and with the fight or flight response.

Many therapeutic treatments are based on talking about your problems and memories. For the body this can actually be retraumatizing. While you are talking, the body will go through the memory as if it was happening right now. You can talk and talk and your physical symptoms will stay the same. Talk can help to create understanding and meaning, but the frozen energy needs to be discharged and worked out of the body.

*Can you give an example of this?* “I can tell you about my experience. For years I had insomnia. The consequences of this was that I was exhausted and had concentration problems. I had no idea why I could not sleep and I tried everything. Only when I started working with the body to release the underlying feelings, I got in touch with a traumatic event that caused the fear and tension that kept me up at night.

Then I remembered that I as a kid had been stuck in an elevator for half a day. In this situation I could not fight or fly. I felt scared and helpless and these feelings were not released afterwards. I carried this fear with me in my belly. It affected me both physically and emotionally. The feeling of helplessness was with me and made me often feel stupid and that there was something wrong with me. A traumatic experience can be an event where you felt

you did not have control, when something happened too fast for you to handle. People fear changes. If something changes too fast it can be traumatic. Examples can be a car accident, falling, violence, parents getting a divorce.



To release this kind of “frozen” energy – the fear, we need to work with the body. As we release one traumatic event, we also release other traumas, so we do not need to go through them one by one. We can learn how to regulate our system the way animals do so that experiences don’t get stuck in our system and we are able to embrace the energy of a stressful event.

When we learn to integrate this in our body we embrace more of our selves, we get more energy. If you look at a child playing, you can see how they freely express their energy through their body. You see joy and curiosity. The opposite of this might be an old woman you see sitting on the bus holding on to her purse, afraid of people.”

“Somatic experiencing or trauma healing is a method developed by Dr. Peter Levine to release stress and anxiety caused by traumatic events. I am organizing a three year long training in Oslo and Stockholm for therapists and health workers that want to use traumahealing in their work. You are welcome even if you are not a professional, but have some experience from you own personal

processes.”

Erika Bea Thorkildsen is coming to Ängsbacka to hold a weekend course in TRE – trauma healing excercises where you will be guided through excercises to release stress and anxiety. Read about the course: <http://angsbacka.se/event.asp?i=469&ev=Traumahealing> or go to Bea’s website: <http://www.se-terapi.se/> .