

Influencing the Process of Personal Evolution

To me, the word *process* means two things. On one level it means "a course or method of action of operations in the production of something." This is the pre-programmed way of doing something that has been used over time. For example, there is a process to baking a cake.

At another level it means "an outgrowth of an organism." This is the natural course that something takes to transform into something else or to expand. If you leave a glass of juice out for several days it will begin to ferment. If you allow something to ferment in a certain way, it can become wine or vodka or you can allow yeast to ferment in flour and become bread.

Both of these meanings are applicable when we use the word process to promote change.

I'd like to discuss the processes that occur as a course or method of *action*. When the body has an experience it stores information on an emotional level in the amygdala. Some people call this the "Animal Brain" or the *unconscious* part of our brain. Physically, it is an almond shaped mass in the front part of the temporal lobe in the cerebrum, and is involved in the processing and expression of emotions.

On a physical level we store the information in the cells that are *affected* by the experience. For example if you eat something that you enjoy, such as chocolate, the cells in your mouth *and* in your amygdala store this information. Then when you see or smell or think about chocolate the amygdala releases the pleasurable emotions that are connected to

the experience. This works the same way in the case of eating something that is not pleasurable or even harmful such as oven cleaner. It helps us to effectively store this information and automatically protect ourselves.

The amygdala governs our sympathetic nervous system and its language is *emotion* which comes from the root word *motion*. Our emotions prepare us for action. So when we think about chocolate we begin to salivate and anticipate the joy of eating it.

Now let's say that you see a rich dark bar of chocolate in grandma's kitchen. Your amygdala sends out the signal and prepares you for action. You pick it up and sink your teeth in only to find that it is unsweetened cocoa. We now have a new amygdala response but the old one is still there. We now know the difference between the two, and can use this information to avoid an unpleasant experience.

The senses are only one way to retrieve or jar a memory. Stimulating the cells themselves can also lead to an emotional response.

Stress

When stress levels are elevated memory is enhanced. Most people can recall in great detail where they were when they first learned of the airplanes flying into the World Trade Center. They can remember what the weather was like, who they were with, and what time of day it was. Sometimes this information gets stored through pairing into specific cells in the body that are not related to the trauma.

For example, if you were driving your car and you heard about 911 on the radio, the palms of your hands which were wrapped around the steering wheel may have tensed up which would activate the amygdala to associate the World Trade Center memory with your palms. Consequently, 4 years later, on a day with similar weather and at about the same time of day you may be driving someplace and suddenly start thinking about the events of 911.

To take this concept to an even higher level, when there is too much stress the amygdala will delay sending this information to the frontal cortex (the thinking or conscious part of the brain) until it feels that the person can effectively process the information. This is why when people get in car accidents they remember it in great detail or they remember nothing.

Now, even though there may not be a conscious memory, there is an emotional memory. Repressed emotional memories often manifest in anxiety, depression or anger. People are aware of these uncomfortable emotions but feel powerless to process the information and release it so they can feel better. This is when the preprogrammed responses or reactions to stressors or events are not healthy. The default that the amygdala uses for reaction is painful in this circumstance, which creates a feedback loop of raising anxiety. So the amygdala does not pass the information on to the frontal cortex, or conscious part of the brain, so that you can think of a new way to process the information.

By Jean Kadkbodaian

That's why we need the other form of process. This is the opportunity to recognize that your current processes are not working or could be working better. *This is evolution.*

When we needed the energy of adrenaline to run away from tigers it was a perfectly functioning process. But when you have a release of adrenaline giving you extra energy while you are stuck in traffic then you have anxiety and a faulty process.

So what can you do to effect change? I have found that it helps to work within the current process. If you keep your stress levels low enough, the amygdala will believe that you can handle the information and send it to your conscious mind to be analyzed—and then come up with a plan of action instead of reaction.

Biofeedback, Lomi Lomi massage, Hypnosis, and Yoga are some of the tools that can help you learn how to minimize your reaction to stress and allow the information to become conscious. For example, Lomi Lomi works by using a gentle nurturing process of therapeutic touch to release subconscious cellular memories. When the body feels calm and relaxed, the memories are released, and the amygdala response is suppressed. The information will then be allowed to enter the conscious mind where it can be analyzed, processed and the healing process can begin. Of course, the amygdala's only concern is to keep you safe— so it will only allow memories to come up that you are truly ready to heal.

It is usually easier for us to see this in someone else than it is for us to see it in ourselves. That is when having a

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good coach or counselor is so helpful. Someone who is not emotionally attached to the outcome of your change will usually be able to notice any inconsistencies and help you create a new amygdala response by having you try new behaviors after you have the conscious awareness.

I've found that the process for truly making a permanent and lasting change where you can begin managing emotions consists of 3 steps, which help create a new automatic response process.

Step one is to identify that there is a problem with the current response.

Step two is to suppress the amygdala response through relaxation and breathing techniques so that the information will be sent to the frontal cortex. Or to work with a mentor, counselor or coach so that they can evaluate your

responses and teach you how you act in a new way.

And finally, *Step three is to practice new behaviors* and evaluate them until a more desired response has been created. Then consciously practice this response until it becomes automatic which means it is being governed by the amygdala and frees you from having to think about it. ✖

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