

A Conversation with Naomi Lubin-Alpert:
The Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Levels of Illness
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Interviewed by Jenny Honen

Jenny: I wanted to have a conversation with you about whatever feels like foreground for you; something that you've been thinking about, whatever feels important to you lately.

Naomi: What I have been thinking about a lot and working with is spirituality and illness and healing.

J: That's funny because I wanted to ask you, what is illness?

Naomi: Illness and disease happen at a physical, emotional and spiritual level. One doesn't occur without the other, although in this society we are very much focused on the physical. One never really happens without the other two levels of existence happening. In fact disease and illness are created when energy doesn't flow through your body, it doesn't ground, it doesn't center. Where there is a chronic block, too much energy in one area or too little energy, those are the areas in which disease manifest. And then, just as we talked about with addiction last night [in Training Program lecture], disease is an expression of an assault that happened to you, to that area of your body.

J: So, what layer is disease in, impasse?

Naomi: Well, that's very good, because disease happens when role layer breaks down and you don't have enough supports to get all the way to the ground, all the way to life layer. What happens is disease becomes an expression of impasse and death layer. It is a statement that you don't have enough supports to come all the way to the ground. It's also the place where addictions can happen and eating disorders can happen.

So let's say you are blocked in a certain part of your body because chronically that's where you had to block to survive certain kinds of abuse in your childhood. That area will have enough tension so that pretty soon you don't even feel the tension, it becomes frozen. Then there is no energy flowing through. Where energy flows through, healing takes place, where energy is stagnant and tense, disease takes place.

J: If you look at it anatomically, when you talk about energy that flows through you I think about blood flowing. If there is a place of chronic tension, and you are constricted there, your blood vessels are constricted, have you thought further about the physical impact?

Naomi: Oh yes, the muscles are constricted in order to produce tension. When the muscles constrict, they constrict every other system including your chemistry in that area. It feels dangerous to have energy flow through the area of your body because when a child has energy flowing in a part of their body where their parent is blocked, the parent may feel threatened by the child's greater aliveness and become abusive. For instance, let's say I am a very gutsy kid, and my parents aren't. They've had their guts destroyed by

their parents. My being a very gutsy kid touches the assault around their will, their spirit, their guts. Then they assault me. So I have a chronic problem with my guts. We have all sorts of terminology and language about body things that happen that we just live as though they are not literal statements. Like "a splitting headache" or "putting your back out" or "you don't stand your ground". I could go on and on about common things we have in our language that are indicative of where tension is, where disease will happen.

For instance, recently after falling and having a concussion I developed a case of shingles, which they say is common after an accident if you haven't had a severe case of chicken pox when you a child. At a physical level, that was the doctor's explanation. At an emotional and spiritual level, I felt like something else entirely was going on. I mean, I thought the doctor was accurate at the physical level, but at an emotional level, I had assaults from childhood locked in my nervous system that surfaced as I focused on retrieving messages and images from the shingles.

J: What is shingles?

Naomi: Shingles is an irritation of the nerve endings and it produces a rash and most people have a lot of pain with it. I had no pain whatsoever. The doctor kept saying, "I'm sure you have pain," and I kept saying I didn't have any pain. But I had intense itching, and I felt like that was significant. The area was near my right kidney coming around to the front of my right side. What I did was I went into the illness and asked for an image to come out, using spiritual layer imagery to support working to uncover the emotions that were locked in the illness. What came out was an image of a squirrel who was very agitated. He was very busy gathering food for the winter, but he was in a very agitated frantic state, as were my nerves. I asked him about his condition, and what he said is, "I have to stay one step ahead of them, I have to stay one step ahead of them, I'm staying ahead of death."

So in my imagery I brought the squirrel to a healing circle where he could relax, where healers would take care of him. And he didn't just relax, he collapsed. But I left him there to take in the healing energy and that was the first session I did. I don't know how many days later, but the itching became far worse. So I did another session and this time I formed the victimizer, the introjected abusive parent. While forming the victimizer I had flashes of memory that came from my body, not from my mind, of being tortured in my crib by my older brother. Before I did the session the itching was so bad that I thought I would go out of my mind. I was very aware that the itching was energetic and emotional as well as physical. As soon as I did the session the itching released about 90%, but there was still 10%.

J: So, in doing the victimizer, were you the energy of the torturer?

Naomi: Yes, as soon as I formed the torturer the itching let up. Which told me that what was happening was happening on a physical and emotional level, and I was using a spiritual connection, imagery, to really support myself to form the victimizing, and release the old abuse from my body.

So there was about 10% left and I waited for my next session. When that session came, I formed two victimizers. I went in and used my imagery again to ask for a vision of the victimizer that needed to be done to heal the shingles. The victimizer that appeared was my dad. As I took on his body I became him. I felt like I needed to go to the lower part of my body. That part of my body had an entirely different victimizer that in all these years of therapy I had never done before. He was wheedling and complaining and in the wheedling and complaining he was invasive and incestuous and sodomizing. When I finished that session the itching ended completely and the shingles disappeared.

So, to appreciate that illness happens at three levels of consciousness - physical, emotional and spiritual - is very important in healing the illness or disease. It is important to believe that illness is a part of process, so that we don't need that disease again to express unfinished death layer trauma. When I work with women with breast masses, very few have a recurrence if they work through the issue that produces the breast mass and allow energy to flow through the area.

J: I have two comments. One is that when you were talking about your concussion during a lecture in the training program you were saying how you felt like you didn't have your memory and your mind, and I just noticed that when you talked about the itching you said that you felt like it was going to drive you out of your mind.

Naomi: I'm sure there is a connection there.

J: The second thing, is that, I know I always ask you questions like this.... do you have to get to the point of disease? I mean, you are saying that the disease is a way of getting your attention about something. What can we do to catch these things in an earlier place, or do you really have to wait until it manifests itself in the form of disease or illness?

Naomi: No, I'm sure I have escaped many diseases by continuing to be in therapy, working through death layer material, standing in the center of my darkness and owning my darkness and taking light into my darkness. Before I started therapy, I was in a cycle of having surgeries, I wore glasses from the time I was 16. I was very overweight, and it looked like I was heading for more surgeries. Given the fact that there was so much abuse in my childhood, that made sense to me. Once I entered therapy, the next time I had a surgery coming up, my therapist said not to have the surgery, that we would fix it. I had a huge cyst on my ovary. My therapist gave me an experiment to do. I did the experiment and I was in the hospital when I did it. I told the surgeon the next morning to just do the laparoscopy, not to do the surgery because the cyst was gone. He listened to me, he did the laparoscope and it was gone.

He asked me how I did it. I didn't have the words back then for imagery or spirituality, so I just said I did it psychically. He didn't quite get it. But he is a dear sweet man who has the ability to listen and make room for things that happen that he may not understand or believe in. That was the beginning of me changing a pattern of needing disease and surgery. I'm sure by now I would have had many surgeries or perhaps would have died of some illness.

J: What do you think it was that enabled you to step into that first bit of faith? And on the flip side, where's your contempt and doubt?

Naomi: Actually, faith is a funny thing. The process of maintaining faith is a process of going through doubt and cynicism and contempt. Faith is an experience in your body that is broken through abuse. And every time you hit one of those breaks, you feel doubtful, cynical, contemptuous, because you can't feel your faith. But hitting the break in your faith is important in mending the break in your energetic body where your faith has been broken by disappointment, abuse, rejection. It is important to go through the doubt and contempt that exists between the two parts of your energetic wiring that have been broken. To re-experience a loss of faith in your body is to allow the old abuse that broke your faith to appear so that it might be healed. So I went through lots of doubt, cynicism, contempt, disbelief and disappointment about faith as a process of maintaining and fixing the breaks in my faith, so that my faith would hold at some point. But I went through years of having faith and being faithless. I realized that is the process that everybody needs to go through to have embodied faith, not faith that is ungrounded and defensive.

J: I always go to, ok, what is the step before that? Let's say I am able to feel a little bit of faith and experience it, then I hit the place where my faith feels broken. But I don't have an awareness that it is an experience of my faith being broken. Because I'm in it, and when I'm in it, I don't have faith, there never was faith, and for a million miles around me all I see is no faith. What your saying is that you still need a certain amount of faith to live life like it is a process. You know what I'm saying? If we could all be aware of what's going on in us that would be great. But what happens with me is that I am just in that place and that is where I am. I don't have the faith to live it like it is an experience and not the whole reality of my life.

Naomi: I think that what happened for me is the first time I walked into my therapist's office, I had absolutely no faith whatsoever, someone else brought me. It was a training group and therapy group combined. I walked in thinking, "I can't imagine why I'm here. I don't know what this woman has for me." In fact I came to watch her work one time and I thought she just got people to cry after one sentence just to impress me. I was so arrogant. But I went, and she threw me totally off my structure in the first session. She said to me, "What's your biggest fear?" I said, " Falling on my face." At the time that was my biggest fear, big shift! [laughter] She said, "What are you going to do if you fall on your face?" I waited and waited and finally said, "I guess I'm going to pick myself up." She said, "Your session is over."

I sat down and I was massively confused and stayed massively confused with this woman for the first year. I thought, as long as I am massively confused, she must be doing something. It wasn't easy to make me massively confused back then because I had a very good intellectual defense. I could feel that things were shifting in my body and that what she said about process was really happening inside me. So I started to have absolute faith in process, in layers. I could see how they worked over and over again. In my body I was hooked at that moment, that she could throw me so far off my usual way of being when very few people could affect me in this way.

J: And that you didn't react defensively about it is what is interesting to me.

Naomi: I didn't react defensively because I believed that the child inside me heard her and that my spirit heard her. I believe that my spirit actually brought me there and that it took over. The message from some deep place inside me was that if I stayed with this, ahead of me is freedom and life, and if I didn't stay with it, I would probably die. I didn't know where the message came from because I didn't know about spirituality back then. I now know it was my spirit guide talking to me. And for some reason I believed it. I could feel it in my body and what I feel, I believe. What I experience I believe, not just what I know in my head, but what I experience in my body is my reality.

It wasn't like I was a great client for the first couple of years. She would hardly talk to me, she would hardly look at me. Later on she told me that I was probably the biggest bitch that had walked through her door. I said, "Me?" I had no idea about my dark side back then so I didn't comprehend what she was saying. But after a couple of years we got along very well, and we stayed close for many years after I left training. I think she must be in her 80's now. She was a brilliant woman for her time. I could feel that what she was saying was true for my body, and that way I developed total faith in process, even when I lost faith in spirit, I had total faith in process. I think there have only been a couple of times since starting therapy in 1972 that I have lost faith in process, and that had been during the severest reliving of abuse. Other than that, I could feel that if I believed in process, I could form a victimizer and I could through whatever bad feeling I was experiencing. You do that long enough and you can have absolute faith.

J: When you talk about your therapist, you have such a look of love in your eyes.

Naomi: Really, she saved my life. She taught me how to save my life. Her name is Marilyn Rosannes-Barrett. She started the New York Gestalt Center.

J: I wanted to ask you one more question. This came up in my small group last night and I wanted to ask you but I was too embarrassed. How do you define process?

Naomi: Process is the movement through the layers. So when you move from role layer to impasse, or you move from spirituality to death layer, your movement through the layers is your process.

J: So last night in my small group, the supervisor said to the therapist to stick to process and not get involved or fused in the relationship. What does that mean, to stick with process with the client?

Naomi: It means to look at the client in terms of the layer they are in, in terms of the character structure that they are in. Instead of dealing constantly with the relationship between the therapist and the client, to start to understand what the client is saying and what the client is feeling energetically behind the content. And then to form experiments for them to take in and accept where they are or move from that acceptance to a deeper place inside of themselves. Constantly being aware of what layer the client is in while they are talking -- so don't just focus on the content but the energy behind it.

J: If we take an example of a client in total resistance, and the client sees how they want to resist and just say, screw you. So if the therapist deals with that in a process way?

Naomi: If you deal with that in a process way, you would see that the client is in revenge, or spite (depending on how high up their energy is in their body). If the therapist just deals with it as though it is just about the therapist, they are missing the point of this person's childhood, missing the point that there is a kid in the client who was driven to this place. And that this kid doesn't see any other options but to stay in revenge. To read process is to stay separate from the revenge and to say to the client, "I see that revenge was the only place left to you, and you don't have to give it up, but if you want your life, you have to step into the center of it and take in a connection for being in revenge." Now I am reading the process instead of getting defensive or getting insulted that the client is saying "screw you." Reading the process helps the therapist to stay separate and helps the client know what to do with where they are at. So you are confronting the victimizer and having compassion for the child all at the same time. That is hard to do when you deal with only the therapist-client relationship in a session.

J: So bringing that back to what we were talking about before, about illness, what comes up for me is that somehow illness is the place that this person was driven to.

Naomi: Absolutely.

J: This is the response to abuse. This was the only place to go. So in a way, even though it is an illness, it is also protection, in that the person is trying to stay away from something.

Naomi: Illness is the expression of the impact of unfinished abuse. Illness is a message from spirit about the abuse, and illness sometimes is the messenger from the other side that takes people and moves them into the afterlife. So illness is an expression of many things. To look at it in a spiritual way and to get messages from the illness is to honor and respect your illness for the enlightenment it is trying to bring you.

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