

Consciousness, Energy, and the Body

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*In this excerpt from **Change Your Story of Your Health: Using Shamanic and Jungian Techniques for Healing**, Carl Greer, PhD, PsyD, explains how feelings, conscious and unconscious thought, and energy can influence our physical health and that understanding their effects is vital in the process of rewriting our health story...*

Consciousness, Energy, and the Body

As you explore your health story, it will soon become clear that energy, feelings, and thoughts, both conscious and unconscious, are intertwined and can influence your physical health. For example, anxiety can cause heart arrhythmia and hyperventilation, while heart arrhythmia from atrial fibrillation can cause anxiety. Everything is interconnected within the matrix, the larger energy field we are all a part of and woven into energetically, and which is hidden from the conscious mind.

At the core of energy medicine, including shamanic approaches to healing, is the idea that there are energy fields surrounding and pervading the physical body, and that by working with these fields, you can improve your health and your body's functioning.

You might think of the physical body as encased by a mental/emotional body, which in turn is encased by a soul body and, beyond that, a luminous energy body—each body stacked like Russian nesting dolls, one within the other. Energetic messages and archetypal energies present in the matrix may travel through a person's luminous energy body to affect emotions and thoughts as well as cells, tissues, and organs.

If it seems strange to think of your physical body as being encased by what could be called your mind, which is associated with thoughts and emotions, it's probably because most of us were taught that we experience these things within the brain. What if the mind, or personal consciousness, is not contained within this vital organ but instead surrounds it, influencing it? Entertain this concept for now so that you can better understand how shamanic and Jungian traditions might mesh together and even fit well with other traditions, such as the notion of chakras.

Science shows us that when we experience thoughts and feelings, areas in the brain associated with them are more active. You can observe that a person is feeling emotions if you look at a brain scan performed with an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machine because the emotional activity is both chemical and electromagnetic in nature. You might not be able to determine exactly what emotion that person is feeling, or what thoughts the emotion is connected to, however.

One way to think of thoughts and feelings is to imagine them as being energetic in nature and encoded with information. The thought and the feeling are often intertwined. Let's say you experience pleasure as you have the fleeting thought "I love eating chocolate." The pleasurable sensation is associated with a rush of the neurotransmitter dopamine. Your brain's experience of feeling and thinking about pleasure can be detected on an MRI. Although thoughts and feelings are associated with the mind, and therefore the brain, you might also say they are experienced energetically throughout the body and associated with hormones and neurotransmitters produced in the brain (and, in the case of serotonin, in the digestive system as well).

We speak of being happy right down to our toes or having a warm feeling in our heart. Such sayings reflect our awareness that emotions are not simply experienced biochemically in the brain. In fact, emotional stress can lead to excess stomach acid being released, causing a sensation of nausea experienced in the head and in the belly. This possibility is acknowledged in idiomatic expressions such as "I can't stomach this confrontation."

Emotional stressors, such as thoughts that generate feelings of fear and anger, can cause muscle tension in the neck or elsewhere in the body. Massage therapists will often say to a client, "Where in your body do you hold your tension?" Conceivably, you could be holding specific emotions, such as grief or anger, in a particular area of your body, too.

Shamanic practices work with removing and replacing the energy of these emotions. The shaman observes the disturbance in the energy field, removes energetic blockages, and brings healing energy into the empty space. This type of balancing work mirrors the idea of removing toxins from the body and replenishing it with healthy foods. Removing an emotional stressor from your life and bringing in an emotionally replenishing habit might balance your energy and lead to physical healing.

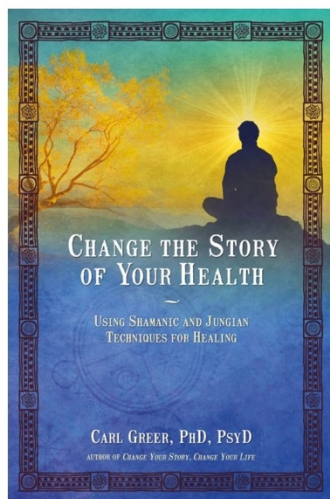
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What happens if we skip removing something energetically and simply try to bring in healing? Once, during a shamanic ceremony I participated in, my intent was to bring in the universal light, the creative light energy from the Quiet. During the ceremony, I realized it was a battle to clear myself and get rid of the things I needed to get rid of energetically in order to have room for that light to enter into. I was aware of how difficult it was for me to clear blockages and create an opening for the light. So while I was eager to bring in healing light, I had to admit that the shamanic notion of an exchange of energies—taking something out before putting something in—had validity for me. See whether it has validity for you as you work with the practices in this book.

Be open to the notions of energy bodies and mental, emotional, and energetic influences on your health. They explain a lot about why energy medicine—and Jungian and shamanic techniques—seem to work.



Carl Greer



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