



# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

Trending somatic practices influencing our field today

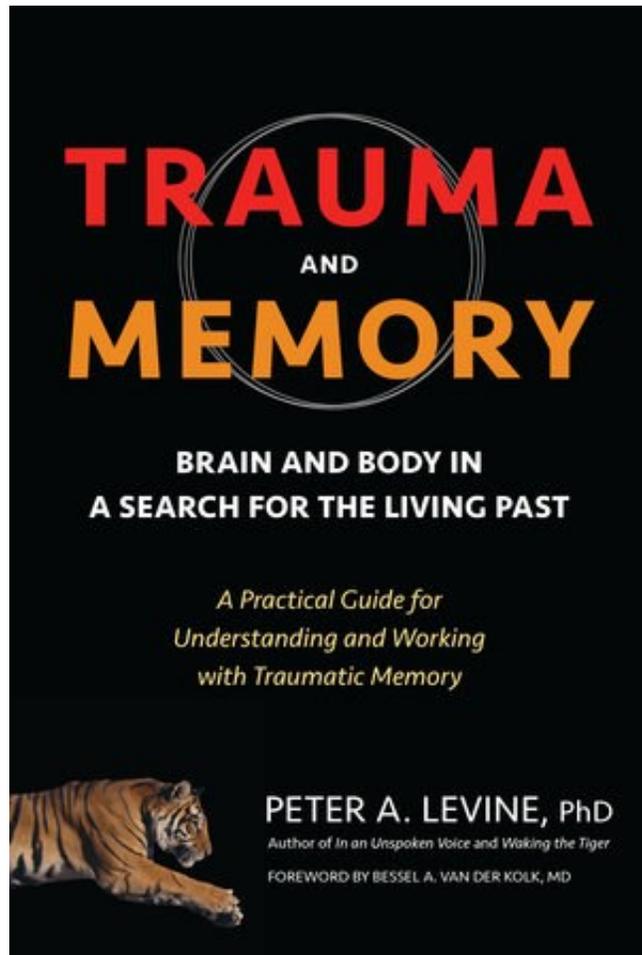
## What's new on our blog?

### Since our fall issue went live, we've added:

- ⇒ A call for articles and poster presentations/podium presentations for the USABP 2016 conference in Providence, Rhode Island, on Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Body: The Art and Science of Somatic Psychology
- ⇒ A Call for articles for the EABP 2016 Congress in Athens, Greece, on The Embodied Self in a Dis-embodied Society
- ⇒ We've shared an upcoming conference on Somatic Psychology at Kripalu Institute
- ⇒ And we've announced the publication of the newest *International Body Psychotherapy Journal* along with Dr. Carleton's departure as the Editor-in-Chief after 15 years leading this peer reviewed journal from conception to birth to acceptance in database search engines.
- ⇒ And we've shared book reviews and author interviews:
  - ⇒ *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters Most in the End*, by Atwal Gawande, MD
  - ⇒ *How We Heal and Grow: The Power of Feeling Your Feelings*, by Jeffery Smith, MD
- ⇒ And today, as a thank you to our subscribers, we offer a review of Peter Levine's newest book,

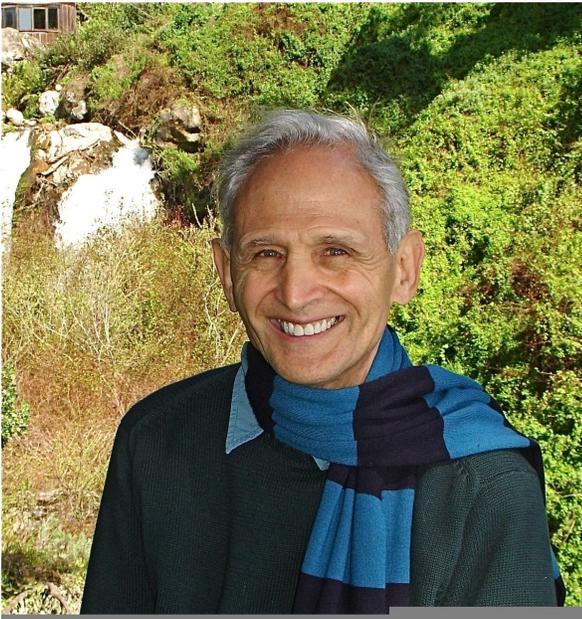
*Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory*

before it goes online!



Reviewed by Antigone Phili, New York University

**Known for developing Somatic Experiencing,** Peter Levine applies its principles to the realm of traumatic memory in *Trauma and Memory*, and elaborates on the Sensation Image Behavior Affect and Meaning (SIBAM) model that he first introduced in his book *In an Unspoken Voice*. Proposed as a “practical guide for understanding and working with traumatic memory,” *Trauma and Memory* moves through the history of uncovering memory and its mechanisms, to the fragility of memory and the bodily sensations that accompany recollection. Geared toward mental health care practitioners and trauma sufferers, Levine’s coverage of the basics makes *Trauma and Memory* an easy read that is also welcoming to the simply curious. A variety of predominantly original graphics throughout the text offer helpful representations of the complexity of memory and somatic components.



**Traumatic memories are distinct from other memories** as they are fixed, deeply engrained in one's body and psyche, and consequently extremely difficult to overcome. However, remembering is a reconstructive process in which memories are often altered and prone to mutations. The fragility of memory during recollection serves an adaptive function that the therapist can capitalize on during treatment. By introducing novel, empowered bodily experiences during recall, the memory may be transformed rather than reconsolidated in its original trauma-associated form.

**Levine aims to fill** what he believes to be a gap in the clinical field with regard to uncovering how our current mood and somatic experience influence what we are remembering. Emotional memories present as a somatic pattern in the body, and thereby undeniably interact with procedural memories. Emphasizing the manner in which emotional memories manifest as physical sensations, a figure depicts primary emotions and the somatic patterns that accompany them with 14 "Bodily Maps of Emotions" (Nummenmaa, L., et al, 2014). A multitude of physical sensations accompany traumatic memories—bodily components such as holding one's breath and tensing muscles that need to be dealt with in order to recover from trauma.

**When approaching traumatic memories,** one must consider the therapeutic implications of the timing of evoking a memory, which can produce widely different outcomes. Levine argues against therapies that have clients repeatedly relive their traumas as this may lead to reinforcement of the traumatic memory and may adversely strengthen the distress. Thus, in contrast to therapies that focus on explicit memories, Levine hopes to shift the focus to implicit procedural memories, the "action blueprints of all living organisms."

**Embedded deep within our minds,** procedural memories are generally thought of as the "how to" memories, such as riding a bike. Levine notes two other categories within procedural memory: emergency responses and approach or avoidance tendencies. Pertinent to the formation and resolution of traumatic memories, emergency responses consist of fixed action patterns such as fighting, fleeing, and the maintenance of territorial boundaries. Avoidance tendencies are also frequently used by trauma sufferers, and contribute to difficulty in daily functioning. Levine argues that these "persistent maladaptive procedural and emotional memories form the core mechanism that underlies all traumas." Conversely, these memories can be utilized in the therapeutic process as they are the most persistent above all other memory system subtypes, particularly in threatening situations.

**Levine suggests increasing levels of** threat lead to traumatic stress and emotional arousal that exist on a continuum. Within this continuum is a series of emotions and their associated motor patterns, from hyper-arousal/overwhelm or hypo-arousal/helplessness to relaxed alertness and equilibrium. Renegotiation aims to restore the active responses associated with the procedural memories by gradually revisiting the memories linked to the hyper- or hypo-arousal; to illustrate the process of renegotiating threat, a figure accompanies this explanation. In Levine's terms, renegotiation allows for progression

'upwards' towards equilibrium, and reverses the biological response to threat—one may move from scared stiff, to fight or flight, to approach or avoid, to assessing, to stiffening and orienting, to the point that is closest to equilibrium: arrest and alert, associated with curiosity.

**Bringing the reader one step closer** to getting a sense of the role of procedural memories in resolving trauma, Levine details the sessions of two clients accompanied by photos of each step of the process.

Interestingly, the two cases are vastly different as one is a fourteen-month-old toddler and the other is a Marine; yet, Levine successfully facilitated a long-lasting recovery for both clients. The process is entirely moment-to-moment, depending not only on what the client is saying, but perhaps even more importantly the client's level of arousal and body language such as jaw and eye movements. The sessions are predominantly based on somatic experience, with eye tracking as one of the critical components for gauging the response of the client.

**Trauma and Memory illuminates** the relationship between the body, memory and emotions. Levine brings hope to trauma sufferers with somatic techniques, but also highlights the complexity of combating traumatic memory. One may wish to delete

traumatic memories entirely, yet Levine sides against memory erasure—not only do we simply not know enough, or even know if a differentiation between implicit and explicit memories exists, but we also wouldn't benefit from such a thing as it makes us prone to making the same mistakes in the future. As simply put by George Santayana, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Rather, we must take the time to better comprehend the connection between our bodies and emotions, and work towards transforming the responses associated with traumatic memories. Ultimately, *Trauma and Memory* is a stepping-stone towards a better understanding of the mechanisms of memory through its application of the Somatic Experiencing approach.

Levine, P.A. (2015). *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books. ISBN 9781583949948. Available in paperback and eBook. Paperback. 181 pages. Includes index.

Nummenmaa, Lauri, et al. "Bodily maps of emotions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111.2 (2014): 646-651.

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