The modern vitalistic principle was introduced in the nineteenth century when Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) maintained that there is an “innate” impulse in living creatures toward self-development. This principle of vitalism holds that life cannot be explained fully in terms of chemical and physical forces alone. It propounds that there is a third, separate and distinct, “vital force” (élan vitale) necessary to any explanation of life. The life of the organism and its functions then depend on this vital force, which differs in kind from all physical, biochemical and electrical forces. This vital force is always a part of, and never apart from, physical processes, as the immaterial expression evolves alongside physical structure.

The early vitalists in the nineteenth century proposed that this vital force was the very source not only of life, but health and healing, as well. However, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw science become more quantified, in an age where objective measurement meant everything. This period also witnessed the expansion of electrical and mechanical therapies, which not only led to a decline in true healing arts, but the dismissal of the idea of vital energy. “Scientific” medical doctors in the early 1900s utilized bio-science to explain life and treat disease, and subsequently discredited vitalism. However, the latter part of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century have witnessed a resurgence of the true healing arts and the vitalistic philosophy at their foundations.

Medicine is a “curing” art, with a different objective than a “healing” art. Dorland’s Medical Dictionary defines “medicine” as the art and science of the diagnosis and treatment of disease by any drug or non-surgical remedy. The goal of medical intervention is to reduce or eliminate symptoms of body dysfunction or malfunction (sickness or disease) so that we feel our symptoms or condition less. The goal of healing is to bring about a closer holistic connection in mind, body and spirit so that we can feel our life experience more. There is no cure for healing, because curing and healing are separate and distinct paradigms.
The Vitalistic Healing Model

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In order to heal, we must be willing to feel the emotions that are the underlying cause of the sickness. Physical symptoms are not the cause of these emotions, but rather the effect of not feeling them. They are simply the body's way of getting our attention to bring about the necessary change to heal holistically.

To heal holistically is to recognize that the body as a whole is composed of interdependent and interrelated parts. The physical body is one component of the whole, which includes the emotional body (the limbic system and related structures) and the spiritual body (the chakras and nadis). When the Wisdom Within signals the emotional body via emotional symptoms to initiate change, and the “message” goes unheeded, we experience signals of physical symptoms of pain and discomfort.

Central to modern vitalistic philosophy is the principle that a benign source of well-being supports life, and that organisms tend to self-regulate, neither building up nor breaking down too much. This homeostatic balance depends on the flow of life force—energy called chi in China, ki in Japan, and prana in India—which, if unimpeded, can continually reestablish equilibrium. The modern theory of homeostasis, or physiological adaptation, emerged with the French scientist Claude Bernard (1813–1878). An “experimental” vitalist, he stressed that the fluids and cells in the human body abide in an essentially constant state, despite varied and endless changes in their external environment. Bernard’s declaration that the constancy of the internal environment is a condition paramount to the independent life of higher animals is one of the most famous phrases of biological sciences. He also proposed that the maintenance of stable conditions within the body is somehow dependent upon neural and hormonal control, which was a new concept in the nineteenth century.

Almost 100 years later, American physiologist Walter B. Cannon (1871–1945) expanded on Bernard’s theories of physiological adaptation in his renowned book, The Wisdom of the Body. In this publication, Cannon popularized the term “homeostasis,” which he described as the fact that under normal conditions, the human body maintains its internal processes in a state of equilibrium by continually compensating for the disturbing effects of external forces.

Today the principle of vitalism is based on the holistic concept that the human body is greater than the sum of its parts, while emphasizing the interdependence of the parts and processes. Its basic assumption is that there is an intelligent force which creates and sustains all living organisms, and that this inherent vital principle is distinct from all internal physical and chemical forces. Vitalism assumes that life is self-determining and self-evolving. The basic principle of vitalism is that the body has an inherent (or inborn) intelligence which animates, motivates, heals, coordinates and inspires living beings. This Wisdom Within guides and directs our lives on our individual paths of healing, to be restored to wholeness in mind, body and spirit.

Healing is a process of personal evolution, growth, self-development and self-discovery. As a person heals, his mind, body and spirit forge a closer connection. Healing gives us the opportunity to see ourselves more clearly, and get more in touch with ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. True healing is a process of feeling more, by increasing our awareness of what we’re feeling in the present moment.

Sometimes when we feel more, the experience is joyful and blissful; other times, we face a very challenging healing experience. Both experiences represent an opportunity for personal growth. For as we fully experience that awareness, we become more in touch with ourselves, and consequently more vibrant and alive. It is through the willingness to experience all of our feelings that we create the environment for expressing more of the pure, unconditional love at the core of our being.

Communications from Inner Wisdom

Communications from Inner Wisdom

Symptoms, in the vitalistic healing model, are viewed as agents of change and a communication from the Inner Wisdom. A symptom, whether physical or mental-emotional, is an awareness that change is needed at some level in our life. Judging the symptom as good or bad is a subjective interpretation rather than an objective fact. Symptoms are neither good nor bad—they are simply an awareness of a need for change.

Change is an integral part of the healing process. In order to heal, we must be open to change. This willingness to change enables us to become free of past behaviors, attitudes and belief systems that are obstacles to personal development and spiritual growth. If we do what we’ve always done, we will be what we’ve always been, and get what we’ve always gotten. Resisting change means we will continue to be who we are not, which keeps us from the freedom inherent in becoming who we truly are: pure, unconditional love.

True healing involves a willingness to transform our lives physically, emotionally and spiritually. The process of healing and transformation are guided by our Inner Wisdom, which
communicates to the mind via the body’s energy systems. When this communication is unimpeded, we can choose to listen, and thereby transform our life. In order for this healing transformation to take place, the body’s energy systems must be clear of interference so that the Inner Wisdom can fully express itself.

In a vitalistic healing model, symptoms may indicate an impediment to the flow of energy. Severe impedance of the flow can result in an imbalance in our energy systems, which can express itself as a physical, mental or emotional condition.

When the educated mind listens to the innate communication and chooses to undergo a process of change, it brings about healing—a closer connection of body, mind and spirit. The symptom or condition can be a wake-up call, communicating a need to initiate the change necessary to heal. To intervene in the symptom also intervenes in the awareness the symptom is trying to create. An attempt to stimulate or inhibit the body to achieve a specific symptomatic change could interfere with the process of healing. Inhibiting the innate healing process in an attempt to change feelings of awareness by “curing” ourselves of our symptoms is impossible. There is no cure for healing.

Clearing the Way for Innate Intelligence

Healing is greatly facilitated when the Innate Intelligence is able to communicate clearly over the body’s energy systems to the conscious mind. Techniques that eliminate interference to the free flow of healing energy can greatly aid the healing process. However, it is important to understand that the procedure does not do the healing itself; it is the vehicle to facilitate healing. Ultimately, all anyone can do is arrange the conditions so God can do the healing, at which point the healing facilitator becomes the observer, and assumes the viewpoint of the conduit for healing.

The healing facilitator helps create an environment for healing by encouraging us to affirm and claim our own inner power in the healing process. Healing is empowering, and involves taking responsibility for our own lives, which then empowers us to accept responsibility for all our life experiences. We might have previously had our condition diagnosed and named, but naming a
condition has its risks. Naming the condition might empower it, and shift our reliance away from our own innate capacity to heal. It can also remove our feeling of responsibility for our healing experience, if we choose to see ourselves as a condition with a person, rather than a person with a condition.

Naming the condition also gives more attention to the condition, as does dwelling on the symptom or condition. This can exacerbate the problem, because where the attention goes, the mental/emotional energy flows, and anything one gives more energy to may expand. However, in situations of severe acute or chronic symptoms, or where a crisis intervention or lifesaving emergency procedures are involved, naming the condition might help us recognize where we are in that moment in time. This can give us insight about that life experience so that we can move ahead and initiate healing. Recognizing where we are in the healing process can help us make the changes necessary to heal.

Trust and Love: Guides to Wholeness

Trust and love are the foundations of vitalism and the healing process. In order to heal, we must trust the Innate Intelligence of the body as the active agent of our emotions, mind and spirit. The Wisdom Within communicates by way of energy systems in the body, guiding and directing our physical, emotional and spiritual development. Trust is inherent in our own inner potential for growth in the healing process.

Trusting the Wisdom Within involves the assurance and acknowledgement that it will express itself for our highest good. Trust requires an awareness that all the healing power and force of the universe dwells in the Innate Intelligence. For example, although taken for granted by most of us most of the time, the body’s innate ability to acclimate to environmental changes in natural light is truly remarkable. Photopic vision is the body’s capacity to accommodate moving from darkness to light—a.k.a. light adaptation, or day vision. Scotopic vision is the ability to adapt to moving from light to darkness—a.k.a. dark adaptation, or night vision.

In the photochemistry of vision, both the rods and cones of the eyes contain chemicals that change with exposure to light. These chemicals stimulate nerve fibers that lead from the eye to the brain.
The light-sensitive chemicals in the rods, called rhodopsin, are a combination of the protein scotopsin and the carotenoid pigment retinal. The chemicals in the cones, called cone pigments, are very similar in chemical composition to rhodopsin. Vitamin A, found in the cytoplasm of the rods, is also essential to this process, forming new retinal when needed. The actual chemical process is very complex, but, simply stated, these chemicals decompose in response to light. Other mechanisms of light and dark adaptation include the change in pupillary size and neuronal changes in the retina and in the brain itself.

The eye can actually change its sensitivity to light as much as 500,000 to 1 million times within the outer limits of maximal dark and light adaptation. For example, although the intensity of sunlight is 10 billion times that of starlight, the eye can adapt equally to bright sunlight and to starlight.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the body’s ability to adapt to darkness and light is the amount of time each process takes. In photopic vision, the chemicals in the rods and cones adapt from total darkness to light in about five to 10 minutes. However, in scotopic vision, as the same chemicals alter to adapt from light to total darkness, it takes anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes for the eyes to see completely clearly. This distinct difference in adaptation time is so striking because the time differential is in harmony with the cycles of the sun and the earth.

When we wake up in the morning from the total darkness of sleep, with eyes closed, it takes only five to 10 minutes to see completely clearly in the brightness of the morning light. On the other hand, the period of dusk in the evening from sunlight to total darkness takes about 20 to 30 minutes, which is exactly the time it takes for our eyes to accommodate for this cyclical environmental change. Our eyes are in coordinated harmony with the cycles of the sun and the earth. Given this example, we can intrinsically trust that the power that made the body can heal the body, for as above, so below. The microcosm reflects the macrocosm.

Agent of Divine Love

Trust is knowing that at our deepest level of our being, we are pure expressions of divine love. The osteopath Robert Fulford, whom Andrew Weil devoted almost an entire chapter to in his
bestselling book, Spontaneous Healing, shared this perspective on the role of love in the healing process: “You the [practitioner] stand neutral, acting as a conduit for the flow of divine love. As you learn to use love properly in healing work your body vibrations increase and it becomes easier to handle the potency of the love energy. Unconditional love and the intention to serve can correct defects in the patient’s bio-energetic fields.”

At the essence of our being we live by divine love, which animates the physical body. The experience of divine love connects us to all other beings and to all of life. When we experience pure, unconditional love, we realize our oneness and our wholeness, and feel complete in and of ourselves. It is pure, unconditional love which gives rise to the resonant bond between the healing facilitator and the healing recipient. It is the real sensation of pure, unconditional love between agent and recipient which creates the environment for true healing.

In fact, a great Indian master asserted that absolute, unquestioning faith in God is the greatest method of instantaneous healing. And this pure, unqualified faith must be held by both the healing facilitator and the recipient. The healing environment is further brought about through the compassion of the healing facilitator, and his or her ability to empathize with the recipient. Empathy is the ability to identify with the personal needs and life challenges of another person on their healing path. It is through this sharing in the healing process that true healing takes place.

The facilitator then feels for the healing recipient, rather than feeling sorry for him in his healing challenge. Feeling sorry for someone puts him in the role of a victim of sympathetic pity, not empathetic rapport. Growth and change in the healing process can only take place when we accept responsibility for our own life experience and the healing process. When we see ourselves as victims of either outside or inside forces, it makes it very difficult for us to heal holistically. Therefore, in order for the healing facilitator to empower us to grow and change, he or she must come from a place of empathy, not sympathy. Sympathy is rooted in fear: fear that the healing challenge of another may become our life experience. It is through empathy, then, that the healing facilitator can act as a guide, walking through the healing process with us, sharing the potential paths to wholeness. He or she also encourages us to follow our own trail, directed in the healing experience by our own Inner Intelligence.

Ultimately, everything we experience in life defines our perceptions and reactions to the healing process. The healing facilitator initiates a process whereby our Innate Intelligence evaluates our needs and facilitates growth and development. The vitalistic practitioner encourages us to listen to our own Inner Wisdom, facilitating a process of self-healing and self-discovery.
This encouragement allows us to trust our Innate Intelligence, which further inspires their growth and development. Healing then becomes a lifelong journey of self-discovery, self-empowerment and transformation for both the facilitator and the recipient. Both heal, and both are healed—one cannot facilitate healing without being healed. When we give, we receive.