

INNER CIRCLE INSIGHTS

Jenga! What the Tower Building Game Teaches Us About Healing



Get treated by a skilled Myofascial Release (MFR) therapist and you'll quickly become acquainted with the phenomenon of "things getting worse before they get better." This is what MFR therapists refer to as the Healing Crisis. This may seem counterintuitive, as we seek out professional help to rid ourselves of pain and dysfunction. However, this is what the self-corrective ability of the human body looks like: Not a car or computer to be "fixed" but, rather, an organism that adapts towards balance. To that end, I would like to share a personal story of my own experience in healing while studying with John F. Barnes, the developer of MFR, that helps to illustrate this concept of the Healing Crisis.

"Healing is messy," John said. As it was with most of his "John-ism's," this one was all too true. As I studied with John over the years, attending his Myofascial Release seminars, I realized many things that seemed to be pre-planned. One of these was the way in which John structured the teaching of techniques over the multiple days of the seminar.

It was the second day of the seminar, and my head was starting to hurt. Really hurt. I had noticed it that morning, waking with a slight headache that increased as the day went on. Some of the techniques that we were practicing that day seemed to increase my symptoms while some, even if the technique was for other regions of the body, seemed to decrease them. I kept drinking water. John had explained that when the fascial system began to soften and melt, it was able to absorb the needed hydration. "When restrictions are present, it's like pouring water onto a rock. The outside just gets really wet," he had said.

"Before we break for today, I want to explain something to you," John began, as we were finishing for the day. I was getting ready to pack up and head back to my hotel room.

"Wherever that internal spider web of the fascial system is attached, it can produce symptoms. Even memories or emotions can surface, for all is embedded in the myofascial system. This is never injurious pain; this is therapeutic pain. You will be experiencing your own Healing Crisis. Healing is a process of two steps forward, then one step back. In other words, things have to get a little worse before they get better. See you tomorrow."

The final morning of the seminar began, and I started to glean what John had been trying to accomplish. For two days, we had applied these MFR techniques throughout the entire body – legs, lower back, trunk, upper back, shoulders, arms and chest – and the whole time, my headache grew. The entire beginning of the third day was cranial work, literally applying techniques to the muscles and soft tissue of the skull, utilizing the bones of the skull as handles and levers to access deeper into the system.

It's like playing the tower-building game *Jenga*. Turn by turn, the players remove one of the blocks from the tower and place it on top, making the tower both taller *and* unstable. The winner is the last person to be able to successfully place a block on the top. The loser? *CRASH!* The lesson I had to learn was that to heal my body, to take back my life, to discover the sculpture hidden inside – I had to tumble and fall, scattering my own wooden blocks across the table. Over two days, John had begun entering chaos into our systems. He was removing the blocks in my own personal game of *Jenga*, bringing me closer and closer to the needed crash.

We all felt it differently, we all experienced our own unique Healing Crisis. As I would find at every single seminar I attended, John would guide me through my body, step by step, unlocking doors and allowing my awareness to begin to peek into the dark and dusty corners of myself, beginning the process of unpacking my pain.

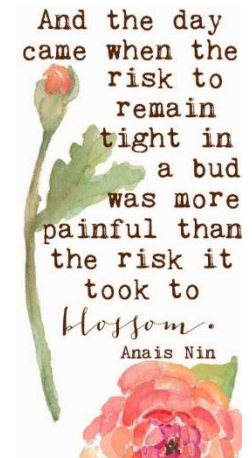
This was not a linear process, but one built from his own experience and the incredible gift of his intuitive side – seeing where we had stagnated and gently beginning to wake those areas, allowing our bodies to do the rest.

“Healing is messy,” he said again and again. I have come to find that statement to be true. Thankfully true. If healing was linear, if it was a fix, the way that we can fix our cars and our computers, would we ever pay attention? My pain had been communicating to me for decades, trying in the only way it knew and the only way in which I would truly listen to alert me that something was wrong. But when the alarms had gone off in my house, I had woken up only long enough to turn the alarm off and go back to bed, mumbling curses at the alarm for disturbing my slumber. The intruder was still ransacking my home. “Symptoms are nothing more than signs,” John instructed. “They only serve to point to something. Find the pain, look elsewhere for the cause.”

My pain was not my enemy, and my traumas were not my jailors – they were my assistants, my servants, my friends. Reminding me again and again to pay attention. To wake up. To open my heart and heal. But John had shown me over and over that the escape hatch was to be found in the darkness and then through the flames.

John has said on many occasions that it takes courage to do this work. He doesn’t mean to learn the work as a therapist, but to get onto the table and begin the process of discovering our unique traumas and hurts, our bumps and bruises, our heartbreak and grief. To remove these blocks one by one until the tower of our “status quo” and our “dealing with it” comes crashing down, only to be built back again: tall, strong, and stable.

This is, arguably, the factor that truly separates the therapists at Inner Circle Physical Therapy & Myofascial Release Centers – not the books we have read, classes we have taken, education that we have received, or even the patients we have treated – but the simple fact that we have walked into our own darkness, braved the heat of our own fires and brought that wisdom back. With whatever you may be going through, realize that we are on that journey with you. We can’t do the work of healing for you, but we can use all our knowledge, wisdom and skills to hold open those doors for when you are ready to walk through.



Professionally Yours,

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“The Natural Force Within Each of Us is the Greatest Healer of Disease.”

-Hippocrates