



# Ride The Elephant

*Understanding trauma and nervous system physiology  
so you can transform The Big Bad into an Awesome Ally*

What if you could move through life with confidence and vision, clear in your life purpose and full of the energy you need to carry it out?

What if you were free of the debilitating mental, emotional and physical blocks that you keep you feeling unwell, burnt out, playing small, or stuck?

Wouldn't you want to know how?

Reading this guide is the very first step. And while it won't solve all your problems right away, many of my clients report that just understanding what is happening inside them makes a positive difference in their lives.

The first thing you have to do is recognize the Trauma Elephant.

I call him the Trauma Elephant because the mental, emotional and physical harm done by unresolved trauma and chronic stress is the biggest “invisible elephant in the room” of our time.

We evolved as homo sapiens over hundreds of thousands of years, living deeply connected to nature in small hunter-gatherer communities.

We were supported by our tribe and nourished by clean air, water and food, food that we had to exercise vigorously to obtain. We ran, crawled, squatted, twisted, bent and walked our way across the soft living ground of Earth.

The slice of time we are living in now is a hair's breadth in comparison to this formative time we collectively grew up in as a species, and yet the amount of change to our world couldn't be more drastic.

Our culture supports disconnection from both nature and others; as well as overwork, overwhelm and repression which gives you anxiety, road rage and depression.

We walk very little and when we do it is in the same way over the same hard, unyielding surfaces. Some of us exercise, but even that has become industrialized and regimented and is often more about aesthetic beauty and fashion than it is about creative and vigorous movement.

In short, our current culture is toxic and, unless we are extremely fortunate, it sets us up to fail in one way or another - either in health, relationships, knowing our purpose and being able to carry it out, or all of the above.

So what can be done?

We must start by understanding exactly what is going on inside of us.

We must look at that big, invisible elephant.

We must befriend him and the wisdom he brings.

Start here. Take the reins of your health and your life into your own hands by taking a few moments to read and really grok what is in the next few pages.

Ride the Elephant.

**Note:** *The teachings in this guide are incredibly important and also potentially upsetting. Keep your feet on the ground and make sure to hang in there until the end... that's when you will find out how to address all these issues.*

## What is Liferforce?

“Liferforce” isn’t a word you’ll find in the dictionary. Yet my brand is Liferforce Liberation, and you’ll hear me talking about how liferforce gets stuck, etc... so let me first clarify what I mean by “liferforce”.

I am referring to our vital life energy - the energy which runs through our autonomic nervous system and powers all of our organs, glands, bones, muscles and cells; in short the energy that runs our body and makes it possible to carry out all of its many processes with harmony and efficiency.

## What is Trauma?

Liferforce gets stuck and misdirected when we go through overwhelming events, or become “traumatized”, so it’s really important to clearly understand what is meant by the word, “trauma”, from a nervous system perspective.

The other day I overheard a conversation between a couple of young women, one of whom said. “So we went to Starbucks and my mom was like, totally flirting with the barista! I was SO traumatized.”

Trauma is a word that sometimes gets thrown around quite loosely like in this conversation, which makes sense as we often use humor as a way to deal with things that make us uncomfortable, and trauma has some pretty heavy connotations – things like war, rape, torture and severe abuse – all of which definitely can lead to trauma, but thinking of these events still doesn't give us a clear picture of what trauma actually is.

The first thing to understand is that trauma is not an external thing that happens *to* us, it is something that occurs *within* us - an internal experience that is catalyzed by an overwhelming external event, or series of events.

Fundamentally, trauma arises when the autonomic nervous system (ANS), the part of our body that governs all of our automatic functions, like digestion and heart rate variability, immune function and hormonal balance, etc... goes out of whack.

The ANS also governs the survival energies - fight, flight and freeze - which are very powerful indeed.

When these potent forces aren't allowed to go through their full cycle of activation and deactivation we become traumatized and the life force gets stuck. I'll talk about exactly how this happens in a bit.

The other really important thing to understand about trauma is that it exists along a continuum.

The range of the symptoms can vary from something mild, like fear of public speaking, or slight anxiety around getting on an elevator, to really severe conditions like clinical depression, severe anxiety, or any number of autoimmune disorders like IBS or Fibromyalgia.

It all depends on how much a person has been through and how much capacity they have to deal with life's stressors.

To sum up, trauma is a dysregulation of the autonomic nervous system that results from the survival energy that is mobilized during an overwhelming event, or series of events, not being allowed to complete; it presents a wide range of symptoms from mild to severe.

### How does it happen?

I grew up as a child of divorce living in two-week increments in one household, then the other. In one household I always felt frozen under potential threat, never knowing when my caregiver might erupt in rage. In the other house I learned a behavior of collapse and depression – the flip side of the ever-vigilant, anxious state.

The cumulative experience of this, along with many other adverse experiences (such as being under stress while in-utero, premature birth and lack of secure attachment, the death of a sibling, and many falls and accidents) completely discombobulated my nervous system and left me with a case of PTSD just as real, though admittedly not as outwardly severe, as in someone who had been through a war.

How did this happen?

Since animals in the wild don't become traumatized, it's helpful to look to them as an example and see what it is that they do, that we *don't* do.

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Think of a zebra.

There he is - peacefully grazing away on the Savannah, when all of a sudden a lion streaks out of the bushes running straight at him.

His flight response immediately kicks into gear, mobilizing all the life force available to RUN!

Our lion is too quick though and she swipes the zebra's legs out from under him. The zebra goes down.

The zebra kicks and tries to fight, as the sympathetic nervous system throws all of its energy into a last ditch effort to survive, but the lion grabs him by the throat.

A part of his brainstem then comes on line and mercifully puts our zebra into a freeze state so that he will not have to experience the pain of being eaten.

But..... just then, some hyenas appear.

Our lion gets distracted from her catch and, because the zebra has become immobilized by his freeze response, she leaves him for a moment to drive off the hyenas.

The zebra's nervous system, sensing that a life-threatening danger is no longer imminent, comes out of freeze and back into the flight response; he scrambles to his feet and manages to escape and runs until he gets to a safe place

At that point, if there is still survival energy coursing through his system, he may shake and tremble all over, which discharges that energy.

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In this little story the ANS has done its job beautifully and our zebra's system has had a chance to complete its stress response cycle.

This is where we, as mammalian creatures living in an industrialized society, get into trouble.

Our nervous systems are identical to the lion's and zebra's, and we have the same needs for safety, completion and regulation. However, most of us no longer live in the wild, so the threats that we encounter are often a lot more subtle, pervasive and trickier to deal with than a hungry predator, and hundreds of thousands of years of evolution as a hunter/gatherer culture has not prepared us for them.

Instead of lions, tigers and bears we are now threatened by war, crime, poverty, abuse, bullying and pollution just to name a few things.

The subtler threats of neglect, indifference, poor attachment with primary caregivers, and the insensitivity of a go-go-go culture that doesn't understand or value our needs as either mammalian creatures or as spiritual beings can feel just as threatening and oppressive to our nervous system as a predator does.

Our nervous system responds with the same fight or flight energy to a parent that is spanking us, as a gazelle's nervous system does to a tiger that is chasing it; and the fact that we as young ones are often helpless to either fight or flee in that situation leaves our body with only one more option – shut down, or freeze.

Take a moment now to check out this [Illustrated Tutorial](#) which clearly shows how a socially acceptable behavior such as spanking can seriously screw us up. [Click Here](#)

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**Intense stuff I know. Hang in there.**

**Riding the elephant is hard, but we're almost to the good news.**

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How many kids are told “don't talk back” , “don't cry” , “be a big girl” , “you're ok” , “that's unacceptable” - these are all messages to our nervous system to clamp down on our authentic mammalian experience.

How many have been medicated just for being rambunctious, when being rambunctious and “freaking out” may be exactly what their body needs to do in order to let go of some accumulated stress?

We are generally not encouraged as children, or as adults, to shake, twitch, cry and moan, which may be exactly what our body needs to do to discharge held survival energy.

The repression of the beautiful animal instincts we all possess is part and parcel of polite and civilized industrial society; the socioeconomic structure we live in depends on it – one can't easily work 10 hours for minimum wage every day, day after day, under stress to complete deadlines, pay the bills, get to the meeting, maintain a relationship, feed the kids, etc... without being in denial of their body and soul.

The result of this repression, of these vital processes not being allowed to complete, is a nervous system that has all sorts of conflicting messages going through it, like a car with the gas and the brake both pressed to the floor, and this energy does not just go away on its own.

Time does not heal this kind of wound, it only reinforces it, and the body and psyche break down more and more as the stress stays in the system.

If all of us knew what was happening inside us, if we all understood our nervous system and it's needs, if we all took the time to care for and nurture ourselves so that we could be self-regulated instead of relying on coping strategies and medications, I believe the world would be very different.

Also, these understandings of how the stress response gets aroused and thwarted in our culture, although very well researched and documented by now, are still very new in the scheme of things. Most of us don't know what is happening inside of us, much less how to deal with it.

**And now.....**



## The Good News!

*“Trauma is hell on Earth, trauma resolved is a gift from the Gods”*

– Dr. Peter Levine, creator of Somatic Experiencing

It's not too late to get better!

It's never too late to learn how to engage with this stuck and misdirected life force in a new way.

*More good news* - when the stuck places get released, when the misdirected survival energy starts flowing in a beneficial way, not only does our anxiety, depression, aches, pains and woes start to disappear, we also have more vitality, more creative energy and a greater capacity to process future stressful events, so that life force doesn't get stuck in the first place.

It's truly amazing how my clients have been able to start to shed old personality traits and coping mechanisms that have been blocking out their authentic, powerful self, sometimes for decades. I want the same for you!

*The best good news* – if you start this process, if you get curious and learn to engage with your biology in a different way, you will be giving a gift of tremendous value not only to yourself, but to the entire world, for as we reach more wholeness and health within ourselves so are we free to shine that light out for others.

### How does it work?

Somatic Experiencing (SE) is a highly refined and intricate approach to renegotiating and healing trauma at the level of the nervous system.

When I see a client, one of the core SE principles I always keep in mind is the need to attune to and respond, moment by moment, to the unique needs of the person and nervous system in front of me. Because of this, it's impossible to give you a run down of the exact process that is used, because it's different with every individual. However, here is a very good, if somewhat technical, description of how SE approaches the resolution of trauma, taken from the paper,

"Somatic Experiencing: Using interoception and proprioception as core elements of trauma therapy" by the creator of SE, Peter Levine, along with Peter Payne and Mardi Crane-Godreau...

*"SE differs from cognitive therapies in that its major interventional strategy involves bottom-up processing by directing the client's attention to internal sensations, both visceral (interoception) and musculo-skeletal (proprioception and kinesthesia), rather than primarily cognitive or emotional experiences. SE is not a form of exposure therapy; it specifically avoids direct and intense evocation of traumatic memories, instead approaching the charged memories indirectly and very gradually, as well as facilitating the generation of new corrective interoceptive experiences that physically contradict those of overwhelm and helplessness."*

Basically what this means is that we spend more time tracking and transforming bodily sensation, through many varied and nuanced interventions, and much less time figuring out mental coping strategies, rehashing the story of the events, or reliving the overwhelming emotions.

I use mainly this modality which includes a form of healing touch, as well as many other practices which I've absorbed over the course of 20 years of devoted self-inquiry - such as various forms of meditation and visualization, sound therapy, energy work.... as well as my own unique mojo..

If this process intrigues you, if you want to know more, If you are ready to address the foundational root of your health issues and solve them from the ground up, and if you are in the Vancouver, BC area, then please [contact me](#) for a 30-minute consultation (\$100 CAD) or to sign up on my waiting list: [seth@sethlyon.com](mailto:seth@sethlyon.com)

If you're not in the area, then definitely check out my wife, [Irene Lyon](#), she has a couple online courses and other resources that can help you start to work with your nervous system right away.

Read more about Irene [here](#) - <http://irenelyon.com/>

Check out her 21-Day course [here](#) - <http://irenelyon.com/tuneup/>

Or to find an SEP in your area, click [here](#) -

<http://traumahealing.org/find-se-practitioner.php>

