

# **Cancer Odyssey**

## **Using Physical Intelligence and Creativity on the Cancer Journey**

**By Andrea Isaacs**

This program is for cancer survivors and others whose lives have been touched by cancer. It is available in a two-hour, half day, full day and a two-day program which includes additional exercises and binding a book of poems and drawings that have been created during the workshop. Neuron pathways are the channels through which information travels between the brain and body. A neuron pathway begins with a message, thought or impulse from the brain. This message travels along nerves, muscles, neurons, neuron peptides, molecules, receptors, pherons, membranes, and connective tissue. They communicate a message to appropriate muscle groups which then engage the body in the desired action.

### **Background**

The diagnosis of cancer ranks as one of life's scariest possibilities and suggests an end to life as we know it. Difficult feelings such as anger, grief, pain, loss and sorrow are a natural part of this process. Finding a way to express these feelings can be very healthy. But many people are understandably afraid of these feelings and feel safer if they can stuff them down, repress them, keep them to themselves, and not let others know what's going on when they're alone and afraid.

After receiving a breast cancer diagnosis in 2002, I had the opportunity to put to use the work I'd been developing. Initially called EnneaMotion, this work was designed as a kinesthetic way to explore different personality styles described by the Enneagram. Now called "Physical Intelligence" (PQ), its parameters have expanded. Based on translating emotional energy into physical energy, this work can carve out new neuron pathways making it easier to access previously elusive emotions. More intriguing to me, this work can guide you in regenerating a disturbing feeling, which by trusting your physical intelligence, you can express, let go of, and develop a physical antidote for in preparation for its possible return.

I was fortunate to have these tools and frequently applied PQ exercises to my healing journey. Each time, I felt stronger, more courageous, more optimistic, more able to see that I could get to the other side of this illness, and more at peace with each phase.

This personal experience solidified my belief that going into difficult emotions offers a release that helps one process these feelings and get beyond them. When I realized the value of this process and how it helped expedite my own emotional and spiritual healing, it became important to offer this to others.

The heart and soul of this program is the full range of emotional polarities, and telling our stories through the creative outlets of moving, writing and drawing with an emphasis on finding joy in your body, and training and trusting your physical intelligence.

The body is intelligent and this series of messages is communicated quickly, fluidly and unconsciously.

### **The Process: Finding Joy in your Body**

After general introductions and a brief explanation of the theory behind this work, a basic movement vocabulary is introduced. If someone can sit, stand and walk, they'll be able to participate. People who couldn't walk (and were using crutches or a wheelchair) have participated. The vocabulary is based on combining sitting, standing and walking with different combinations of space (direct or indirect-straight and linear versus curving and circular), time (fast or slow), and energy (firm and forceful or gentle and light).

This creates a range of movement qualities, each of which has a correlated inner state. For instance, if you move direct, fast and forceful, you might look like you were angry, and it might stir some anger inside you. If you move in a way that is curving, slow and gentle, you might look very peaceful and it might relax you.

This exercise serves three purposes:

- \* introducing the basic movement vocabulary
- \* introducing the process of translating emotions into movement
- \* allowing people to find the joy of simple movement, of being in their bodies, and of letting ideas and feelings flow through them.

### **Emotional Polarities**

There is a high side and a shadow side to every emotion. I call this an emotional polarity. Here are some examples.

If a person who is strong, confident, responsible, heroic, direct and decisive, is under stress and acts unconsciously, those qualities can easily become loud, angry, forceful, controlling, dominating and manipulative.

If a person who is caring, helpful, generous, nurturing, and compassionate is under stress and acts unconsciously, those qualities can easily become heavy-handed, needy, smothering, condescending, blaming and heavy-handed.

Examples of emotional polarities\*:

critical, judging	<->	calm acceptance
needy, smothering	<->	helpful, generous
competitive, back-stabbing	<->	motivated, productive
whiney, melancholic	<->	creative, deep

cut off, detached	<->	observant, astute
doubting, fearful	<->	courageous
impatient, greedy	<->	inspired, vivacious
angry, rageful	<->	confident
unfocused, lethargic	<->	serene, content

In our attempts to avoid the shadow side (often for good reason!), we may "throw the baby out with the bath water." By not engaging the full spectrum of a polarity, we not only avoid its shadow side, but we also disallow our ability to fully engage the high side. In other words, if we are incapable of expressing anger, we also disallow easy access to self-confidence. If we don't understand or have compassion for someone who may smother and blame, we may be less generous and nurturing than we could be.

Familiarity with emotional polarities (through movement, drawing and writing) increases emotional fluency, allowing one to feel more whole.

If we can truly feel, express and let go of anger and rage, we're more available to confidence. If we can truly feel, express and let go of our doubts and fear, we're more available to also feeling courage.

### **Emotional Polarities in Movement**

There are exercises to further demonstrate the range of emotional polarities and how they're translated into movement. These not only teach the process of translating feelings into movement, but begin to create an emotional fluency that allows both the release of the shadow side of the polarity, as well as easier access to the high side of that same polarity.

You can discover and explore an emotional polarity and develop a way to access its high side by allowing yourself to experience its full range in a safe setting where nothing depends on it-i.e., you won't scare anybody with the strength of your feelings, nobody is waiting for your response, the situation is "value neutral" in that it is impersonal, there's nothing you need to do and nobody is expecting anything from you.

As an example, let's use the polarity from rage to confidence.

You first explore the energy of the high side, moving in the way of a confident person: grounded, feet well planted, belly engaged, arms well connected into the back, moving in a way that is direct in space with a firm use of energy. This generates a neuron pathway for confidence. At the end of this part of the exercise, each person establishes a trigger (a particular stance and gesture) that energizes the neuron pathway for confidence. This trigger can be used in the future: by using this stance and gesture, you energize that particular neuron pathway which then brings on its correlated inner state, in this case, a feeling of confidence.

Moving to the shadow side, we'd move fast, directly in space, with a forceful use of energy. The arms, legs and whole body can get involved in moving this way. This might look like someone would be striking, slashing or chopping, and it may stir up the feeling of anger. This is a very high energy state, so much that some are reluctant to express this feeling because they're afraid of this amount of energy.

Experiencing this in a safe setting, participants can learn that they're able to hold this amount of energy in their bodies.

The "Emotional Polarities" exercise is always concluded by returning to the high side to train this muscle memory and neuron pathway.

### **Reactions to a Cancer Diagnosis**

There is a lot of fear and anger associated with a cancer diagnosis. It feels too huge to express, we're afraid it'll alienate whomever we express it to, and we're afraid it would cause us to do something we may later regret, all of which contributes to our not wanting to begin letting it out. We're afraid it's a bottomless pit into which we'll fall, never to return.

Left repressed and unexpressed, this will ultimately make the emotional recovery more challenging and longer-lasting. There could also be health consequences to having so much emotional energy bottled up.

In this program, people first experience the energy of powerful emotions which are not their own, but are hypothetical. This makes us more familiar with the energy of anger and other strong emotions, and we become less afraid of them. We learn we are able to hold the energy of strong feelings, that they don't have to "own" us. Most importantly, we begin to listen to, train and to trust our physical intelligence as we allow the body to find "a way out" of difficult feeling states. In so doing, we find what I call a "trigger," or a physical antidote to each disturbing feeling.

This process makes it easier to express disturbing feelings in a constructive way which lightens our burden and frees us to move on emotionally.

This same process is adapted to one's personal reactions to the diagnosis. A meditation or self-reflection exercise will help one get in touch with these feelings. They are then translated into movement in the same way as the previous exercise. Using repetition and exaggeration, these feelings are regenerated and come to life. As expressed by workshop participants, this frees them to express how they really feel, without any façade, and helps release the grip these powerful feeling have over them.

The next step is the most beautiful part of this process. By giving participants the message to listen to and to trust their bodies, and to allow the body to find a way out of that emotional state, they transform how they're moving, how they've been stuck, and

begin to move into something that could not have been thought of, into a feeling of openness, trust, strength, etc.

The exercise is concluded when there's a sense that everybody has transformed that inner state. The body position they find themselves in becomes a "physical antidote" that can be used the next time this feeling returns and disturbs them. Not as a way to "not feel," but to give it a voice and turn it into something that feeds courage and strength.

The exercise is de-briefed.

### **Emotional Polarities in Drawing**

The movement exercises usually stir up feelings, many of which can't be verbalized right away. The next step is to take the same feelings to paper. This same process of using space, time and energy is used, and the process is introduced in a way that even people who consider themselves unable to draw are able to put feelings to paper. One of the benefits of this is to be able to see "out there," outside yourself, the feelings that have been harbored inside. It helps the feelings detach the firm hold they have had over us.

The drawings are shown and participants say whatever and how much they like.

### **Emotional Polarities in Writing**

Looking at your drawing, and seeing your feelings outside of you and in front of you, can give you an objective perspective or some new insight about the feeling, and helps to further release the grip the feeling has over you. In looking at and listening to the drawing, it can "speak" to you. One then writes down what the drawing is saying.

For myself, after writing extensively about anger, fear and pain, I started to draw and write about gratitude. This represented a huge shift in how I still perceive all my relationships. The kind of love and support I received from family and friends has been beyond description, often moving me to tears. The creative process helped me get in touch with that and express it to those involved.

Some of the pieces will be read and the exercise de-briefed.

### **Physical Antidotes**

In addition to the poems and drawings, this is something participants will have to take home with them, and is the crux of working with Physical Intelligence. Each participant, having gone into the shadow, will have developed a physical antidote that can help stop the plummet into the depths. Not in a way as to stop or repress dark feelings. Rather, in a way that gives the feeling its voice, stops it from clinging, and turns it around so you can keep your head above water.

## **Final Project**

In a program of at least two days, near the end of the session, after the bulk of the writing and drawing exercises have been done, we would give the writings to someone who would type them and have someone take digital photographs of the drawings. The drawings would be re-sized and then all drawings and writings would be photocopied in a quantity to match the number of participants in the program.

A three-hour time block would be needed for participants to follow the steps in binding copies of these pieces into a Japanese binding. Each participant would bring home a handbound book which would include everything that was created during the program, as well as a set of physical antidotes to help address some of their more frequently experienced difficult emotions.

## **Conclusion**

Exploring difficult feelings through movement in a safe setting such as this is a great release, combines body, mind and spirit, opens us to hopeful possibilities and can bring on a sense of acceptance and tranquility.

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\* The emotional polarities are based on the Enneagram ("ennea" means nine in Greek, and "gram" means diagram or drawing), a personality typology system that describes nine different styles of personality, each with different gifts and liabilities.

**Andrea Isaacs** is known for her teaching and original work exploring the relationship between personality and movement in a way that combines body, mind and spirit. She teaches workshops in Physical Intelligence, sees private clients internationally, is a faculty member for the Riso-Hudson Professional Training Program, a Continuing Education faculty member at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California, is co-founding editor/publisher of the Enneagram Monthly, on the board of the International Enneagram Association, and Vice Chair of the 2004 Conference Committee. She's been applying the theories of her work to her own journey of healing through bi-lateral breast cancer.

She has self-published and handbound *Cancer Odyssey: Poems and Drawings on a Cancer Journey*.