

Physical Intelligence and Will

By Andrea Isaacs

Considering the number of books in print, there has been surprisingly little published about Will. There are different kinds of will, and for the purpose of this article, I'll refer to "lower will" and "higher Will." Lower will, like intention, concerns taking the time to do something that requires effort.

Higher Will is not something we can train, but is something that appears after we've worked to develop lower will. If we have a sense of inner peace and balance, and feel connected to something greater than us, we are aligned to a larger purpose and can easily do the "right" thing.¹

A desire to change encourages us to develop our will. The effort is worth it if we're interested in bettering our lives. After reading Roberto Assagioli's *The Act of Will*², Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*³, and Tara Bennett-Goleman's *Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart*⁴, it seemed to me that a crucial step was missing. It wasn't clear how the lower will could be developed so that it would impact the ability to make lasting changes.

As a kinesthetic learner with a background in professional dance, teaching, choreography, transpersonal psychology and the Enneagram*, I felt compelled to develop "Physical Intelligence"(PQ), a system that translates emotional energy into physical energy and teaches people how to train and trust the body's intelligence. (PQ represents one's Physical Quotient, rather than IQ which represents one's Intelligence [Intellectual] Quotient.)

Common ways to develop lower will include exercising more, eating nutritiously, daily meditation, yoga, or tai chi. Exercises in Physical Intelligence increase the ability to engage the will and develop emotional fluency. Emotional fluency is a form of Emotional Intelligence that gives us the flexibility to respond as each situation demands: in an Eight-like way when the situation requires you to be a leader and in control; in a Nine-like way when the situation requires you to be patient and to just listen.

Applying PQ gives us tools for managing emotional energy so we can express our feelings in a timely manner with the appropriate amount of energy. This makes it easier to make a break between the impulse to take action and the action itself.

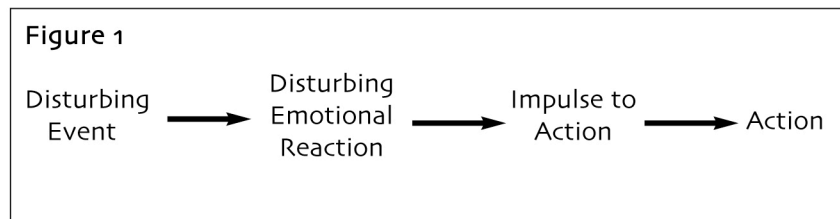
In my experience, the missing link in the development of will is the relationship between personality and the body. Our mental states influence our physical actions as much as physical actions influence our minds and moods. This means that we can make change by not just thinking about it, or wanting to feel differently, but also by training the body to move in ways that are unfamiliar.

My students have reported making leaps in personal growth (from using PQ techniques) that were surprising to them, including a Five who found herself behaving in a very social, amiable way at her three-year old daughter's birthday party, a Two who found a new kind of courage in the face of fear after 9/11 that gave her the strength to support others.

Our Enneagram types (see thumbnail descriptions at end) imply that we have certain strengths that can also be our downfall due to overuse. Strengths become habits from years of experience. Their familiarity becomes a crutch as we react without thinking; the ease of drawing on them becomes a trap. This causes blindness, preventing us from responding to each moment with new eyes. It might serve us better if we could tailor our responses to the circumstances. It may be that when someone is ill, a generous and caring Two-like response would best serve the moment. Or if someone is frozen with anxiety, a courageous Six-like response or a peaceful Nine-like response might be called for.

Mindfulness

When we want to make a change in our lives, we first become mindful of what it is we want to change. This is what allows us to notice our no longer desired behaviors so that we can stop a habitual response before we take action. In our automatic pilot settings, after a disturbing emotion has been triggered, the impulse to take action flows automatically into action. (See Figure 1.)



There are many benefits of mindfulness meditation. Besides relaxation and training the ability to focus attention, it also trains the ability to notice without judging. By noticing the breath, the sounds in the room, the smell of the air, the temperature, without judgment, and then letting the awareness go, we release our attachment to these things or to any story line that might concern us. We can transfer this ability to our emotions, learning how to observe them without judgment, without a story line, and then to let them go, eventually learning we may not have to respond in any set way.

In *Emotional Alchemy*, Bennett-Goleman describes the "magic quarter second" that lies between the intent to take a particular action and the action itself. Within this quarter second, at what I call the "Choice Point," I believe will reside.

In her book, Bennett-Goleman describes the work of neurosurgeon Benjamin Libet. His discovery suggests:

“...why mindfulness can be such a powerful method of bringing intelligence to our emotional lives. Because the brain has no nerve endings-and so feels no pain-and because

neurosurgeons need to be sure they have not inadvertently strayed into the wrong area of the brain, patients do not get a full anesthesia during brain surgery, but remain awake and aware. This allows them to speak or move a part of the body to let the surgeon know that all is well.

“Taking advantage of this unusual opportunity, Dr. Libet did a simple experiment: He would ask patients during surgery to move their finger. He used an ingenious clock face that tracked time in thousandths of a second, allowing the patients to note the time with extraordinary accuracy. This way they could report the precise moment when they became aware of the urge to move the finger.

“In short, it let him separate the moment of intent to move, from the moment of awareness of that intent, from the moment of actual action.

“...the brain begins to activate an impulse prior to the dawning in our awareness of the intent to make that very action. "Once the person is aware of the intent to move, Libet discovered, there is another quarter-second before the movement begins. This window is crucial: it is the moment when we have the capacity to go along with the impulse or to reject it."

— Tara Bennett-Goleman
*Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart*⁵

Once we've developed our mindfulness to a point where we can notice the intent to act, we find ourselves poised at the choice point. We might ask "What do I do instead?" and "How do I do something different?" It's difficult to change a behavior pattern even though it no longer serves us. We can't change our Enneagram type; our emotional and behavior patterns are habituated from a lifetime of use and etched in our psyche. It's much easier to travel a paved path than to forage through uncharted territory:

"Repetition of actions intensifies the urge to further reiteration and renders their execution easier and better, until they come to be performed unconsciously.

In this way, habits are formed. They can be compared to streets and roads; it is so much easier and more convenient to walk along a street than to force one's way through the undergrowth of uncultivated land."

"...Gustave Le Bon, in his book *La Psychologie de l'éducation*, goes so far as to state that 'education is the art of making the conscious pass into the unconscious'."

— Roberto Assagioli
*The Act of Will*⁶

Neuron Pathways

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.

Messages also flow in the opposite direction along the same neuron pathways. A physical sensation, like touching a hot stove, sparks a series of messages. The muscles enervate the nerves, and the nerves send a message to the brain -- pain. The brain returns a message along the same neuron pathway -- remove your hand.

The body is intelligent and this series of messages is communicated quickly, fluidly, and unconsciously. This example is part of the automatic nervous system. Distinct from that, but equally important, are neuron pathways that are trained to perform special actions like chores of daily living, doing sports, and expressing emotion.

An infant learning to drink from a cup demonstrates the laborious development of a neuron pathway. At first unable to grasp the cup, eventually the infant will lift it to his lips, only to miss and dribble the milk all over his face and onto the bib. With repetition, this neuron pathway is trained, and the infant eventually will drink without spilling. By the time we're adults, we've engaged this pattern so many times it has become unconscious, and we can even read the newspaper, hold a conversation, and drink a cup of coffee without spilling.

We have equally well-developed neuron pathways for all our thoughts, feelings and activities; for getting dressed in the morning, cooking, driving, for the way we listen, express emotion, our degree of self-confidence, the way we organize our desks and our lives. The thinking and feeling patterns that we engage in most often have the most well-developed pathways. If we always tell ourselves we're a failure, it creates a pathway that affects our posture and how we function. Believing we are unstoppable in manifesting our dreams creates pathways that are energizing and mobilizing, affecting our postures and how we function.

In the same way the infant learned to drink, we can learn to ride a bike, ski, manage anger, or express affection. We can train emotional as well as physical neuron pathways by "moving in the way of" a thinking or feeling pattern that is new. When we engage that neuron pathway, the correlated inner state will arise.

A simple physical exercise can demonstrate how movement can influence inner states (see "EnneaMotion: The Somatic Enneagram," *EM* Feb.'02 issue).

For example, a type One who is overly critical, constantly judging and pointing out what's wrong with others and himself, may not have a neuron pathway for a calm acceptance. A PQ exercise for this inner state includes: walking with less rigidity, less directness, with a lighter use of energy, with gestures that are open, calm and accepting. Repetition trains a neuron pathway for calm acceptance.

Or consider someone who'd like to be authentically generous with their time as they care for a loved one who is ill. This person could do the PQ exercise for Enneagram type Two, the exercise for loving generosity, which includes gestures with an open, embracing quality, moving gently in a curving path through space. Repetition of these movements will start to generate a sense of loving generosity.

We also have neuron pathways that are too developed with over-use. A person with a highly developed pathway for the expression of anger won't notice he's angry and raises his voice at the least provocation-this response is on-call, always ready, often used and is effortless; a remedy could be found in training the opposite quality of tolerance and listening.

There is a time and place for the expression of all emotions; but to do this smoothly, we need to have presence of mind (or mindfulness) and emotional fluency-the ability to respond in whichever way best serves each moment.

The following is an example of a Two whose work with PQ exercises, most notably moving with the courage of the Six, impacted her coaching and counseling practice:

"Your work has helped in my executive coaching and private counseling practice. Now more able to "step into" the various types, I can more closely "feel" in my own body what others are experiencing. This added level of insight has increased my ability to understand more deeply and more quickly.

"One other thing happened for which I can't thank you enough. I have been an optimistic person with a positive outlook most of my life; the events of 9/11 and the fear that followed moved me to an emotional place that I had little experience with. In your training, we translated the high side for each type into movement and developed a physical stance to peg the memory into the body.

Through this exercise, I was able to get in touch with the courage of the Six. I hadn't understood it from an intellectual perspective, but the movement exercise allowed me to truly feel courage. It is not courage because you think things will be fine...it is courage in the face of fear. That experience has helped me stay engaged in my work and be a support to others. On the 12th, I was called in by a corporation to train their managers and employees in handling the stress while supporting their clients. By tapping into Six energy, I was able to help people in the face of tragedy.

— L.S., type Two

Emotional Alchemy: Effecting Change

"In each of us there are, potentially, all the elements and qualities of the human being, the germs of all virtues and of all vices. In each of us there are the potential criminal and the potential saint or hero. It is a question of different development, valuation, choice, control, and expression."

— Roberto Assagioli
*The Act of Will*⁷

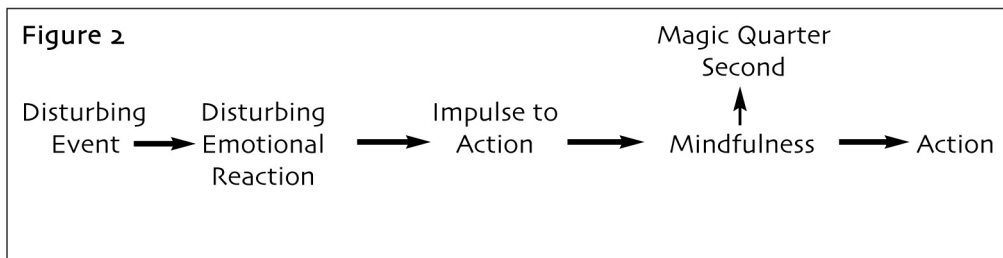
Part of the work of will, and of PQ, is developing alternative responses. This can loosen the fixation of our Enneagram type, making us more balanced and responsive to life's situations.

We can expand our palette of options to give us easier access to the virtues of all Enneagram styles. At different times, we might benefit from having the drive and motivating passion of a Three, the observation skills of a Five, the peacemaking ability of a Nine, etc. Once you identify a desired state, PQ exercises translate its attributes into corresponding movement. With repetition, you train the neuron pathways for that state, establishing a muscle memory for recall. This eases your access to that inner state, and you become more emotionally fluent.

Hoping to learn something about the alchemy that transforms emotions, I attended a course on "Emotional Alchemy," co-taught by Tara Bennett-Goleman (author of the book by the same title), and her husband, Daniel Goleman, who has popularized the term, "Emotional Intelligence." The workshop included lectures about the brain, about the amygdala being the source of our gut response and call to action, and most memorably, about the "magic quarter second" described earlier, a time for the "thought to be caught" when you can, in fact, stop yourself from doing something you may later regret. We learned about the difference between brain time and real time, and that the neocortex in front of the amygdala can actually stop the "call to action" before we act.

The other part of the course included guided mindfulness practice. Finally, we asked the question, "How do you effect change?" The answer was: "Become mindful, and then do something different." With mindfulness, we're able to break the chain of events and make a change. I agree with their conclusion, but think that for most people, a more concrete tool is required to make lasting change. Oftentimes, a response other than the one we've always had doesn't even occur to us. We may not know what that "something different" would even be. Or perhaps we know what we want to do, but not how to do it. In fact, if we haven't "done" this "something different" before, there's not a neuron pathway to engage in order to do it.

My suggestion would be to explore a range of alternatives by doing the PQ practices when we are not at a choice point; do the training when there is no decision to be made. That way, we are less pressed, can practice responses at leisure, then, in a moment of need we have a neuron pathway already developed. (See Figure 2.)



Thinking, Feeling and the Body (Movement and Behaviors)

This is an "imagination" exercise which illustrates the relationship between thinking, feeling and the body.⁸

Your thoughts affect your feelings and your body: Close your eyes for a moment, and imagine that you've run into somebody you care a great deal about, whom you haven't seen in a long time. Notice your body. Notice your breathing, notice your posture, your energy. Notice your feelings. Stay with this for a moment, and then let it go.

Now imagine a time when you received a bad critique, were hurt or rejected. Notice your body; notice your breathing and the tension in your muscles. You may feel tense, heavy and sluggish.

Did you notice how choosing to hold onto different thoughts or memories brought on either a sense of elation, or a depression and an inability to function?

Your feelings affect your thoughts and your body. Close your eyes and remember a time when you fell in love. And notice your body and the tension (or lack of tension) in your muscles. Notice your breath. Notice the thoughts, images and memories that may surface.

Did you notice how these feelings had an impact on both your thoughts and energy?

Your body (movement and behaviors) affects your thoughts and your feelings. Close your eyes again, and take a deep breath. Take a few moments to simply focus on deep breathing. Allow other thoughts to come and go, always returning to the breath. If you were running around all day forever multi-tasking or trying to catch up, your thoughts could become anxious and nervous, your feelings short-tempered and high strung. Keep your mind on just the breath.

Did you notice an impact on your thoughts and feelings?

These principles have been used for thousands of years in such practices as meditation, yoga, tai chi, and chi gong which are based on the recognition that the body, thoughts and feels are inextricably connected.

Triggers

The example of touching a hot stove and then removing your hand illustrates that information travels along the neuron pathways in two directions: from the inside out, and from the outside in.

Inside out: When we're angry, our thoughts and our energy are heavy; if we're happy, our thoughts and energy are light. Another kind of example is when your mind says, "Drive to work," and your body knows what to do. Our thoughts and feelings impact our bodies (actions and behaviors).

Outside in: Sinking into a hot bathtub can have a calming effect on thoughts and feelings. Our physical actions impact our inner states.

The "missing link" in developing will is based on the fact that information travels along neuron pathways from the outside in. This means that we can broaden our palette of emotions and thoughts by training the body to "move in the way of" a variety of inner states, and establishing and training a neuron pathway we can call upon when needed. We etch that particular pathway into physical memory by dedicating a "trigger" to activate it.

The trigger is made up of a physical stance and a word or short phrase.

The stance, similar to a mudra (Sanskrit for a gesture designed to elicit a particular inner state), is a body position with a particular gesture that represents the inner quality you're training.

The word or short phrase, similar to a mantra (Sanskrit for a sound designed to elicit a particular inner state), represents the essence of the inner quality you're training.

Every neuron pathway has its own trigger.

The useful application of triggers is well-expressed in the following quote:

I learned that physical postures can change my emotions. I noticed being more able to capture the stability of type Eight when I came home and had to deal with my Six mother. I felt the strength in my body and just didn't react much. I found the Eight postures were helpful in finding my personal power, which I really appreciate. The triggers are helping me find physical integrity within myself when under attack, instead of feeling so vulnerable.

— C.K., type Six

The Five alluded to earlier most often embraced the neuron pathway for withdrawing during social occasions. Not wanting to do that at a special event, she employed her triggers.

Last night I did my triggers before I gave a dinner party, and again before the 3rd birthday party I gave for my daughter. As you know, social occasions can feel very awkward to me, especially when one is the "mom" or the "little woman" expected to see to everyone else's needs. However, instead of escaping to my bedroom to hide, I engaged myself in the preparations slowly and methodically and in the obligatory small talk without any resentment or "checking out." I was interested to observe the sound of my voice and the expression on my face were "sweet." There's no other word for it. I just felt really sweet, like a Two, in relation to my guests, both the toddlers and the adults. I don't think I've ever explored that particular quality in myself, and it was completely spontaneous. Consider this is a testimonial to this work!

— G.H., type Five

In summary, the ability to engage our will includes the following steps:

- develop mindfulness
- expand our palette of options (when not at a choice point) by developing neuron pathways and their triggers which represent alternative inner states
- notice when we're at a choice point
- make a decision about how to respond
- do the trigger (the stance and word or short phrase) for that inner state which will energize the corresponding neuron pathway

This series of steps will elicit the desired inner state.

With the desire to change, enough mindfulness to catch yourself during the "magic quarter second," and the use of triggers to develop emotional fluency, it becomes easier to engage your will and make positive change. Expansion of our choices brings us out of contraction and towards wholeness which is a key to living a joyful life.

* **Enneagram types.** The Enneagram (ennea = nine in Greek) describes nine different personality styles, each with a different set of strengths and challenges.

Below are thumbnail descriptions of the nine styles to assist in understanding some of the language in this article.

Type One: The Perfectionist, The Reformer

Excellent detail and organizational skills, logic and reasoning...may be too serious or critical under stress.

Type Two: The Giver, Helper, Nurturer

Excellent people skills, supportive and cheerful...may be intrusive or too needy under stress.

Type Three: The Achiever, Performer

Motivated, action-oriented and efficient...may be too competitive or image-conscious under stress.

Type Four: The Individualist, Artist, Romantic

Creative, intuitive and tactful...may be too hypersensitive under stress.

Type Five: The Investigator, Thinker, Researcher

Perceptive, innovative and focused...may be too abstract or slow to take action under stress.

Type Six: The Loyalist, Trooper

Reliable, cooperative and committed...may be insecure or defensive under stress.

Type Seven: The Enthusiast, Idea Person

Positive, practical and accomplished...may be too pleasure-oriented or outspoken under stress.

Type Eight: The Challenger, Leader, Boss

Resourceful, self-confident and decisive...may be too no-nonsense or controlling under stress.

Type Nine: The Peacemaker, Mediator

Natural mediator, optimistic and level-headed...may be too accommodating or unresponsive under stress.

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Special thanks to Don Riso and Russ Hudson who gave me a context in which to develop my ideas, and to Tom Condon for the several conversations we've had about Physical Intelligence which were always an inspiration.

Andrea Isaacs, founding co-editor and co-publisher of the Enneagram Monthly, combined her background in dance and psychology to develop "Physical Intelligence." She is a faculty member for Continuing Education at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, for the Riso-Hudson Training Program, is an IEA Board member, and teaches workshops internationally. She can be reached at info@EnneaMotion.com or (518) 265-5058.

¹My thoughts about lower will and higher will have been inspired by a conversation with Robert Frager, one of the founders of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

²Assagioli, Roberto, M.D., *The Act of Will* (Penguin Books, NY), 1973.

³Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Bantam Books, NY), 1995.

⁴Bennett-Goleman, Tara, *Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart* (forward by the Dalai Lama) (Harmony Books, New York), 2001.

⁵Bennett-Goleman, pages 144-145.

⁶Assagioli, page 57.

⁷Ibid, page 89.

⁸The Thinking-Feeling-Body connection has been inspired by numerous conversations with Jack Labanauskas, editor of the *Enneagram Monthly*, about the "three-legged stool." In terms of making change, he was fond of saying, "If you can't move the stool by grabbing one of its legs, grab a different leg."

Since the publication of this article, Andrea has advanced her thinking on developing Will which is reflected in the Figure below.

