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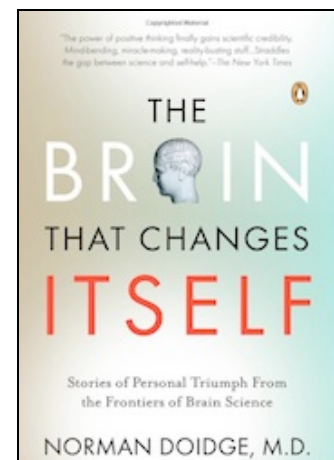
## BOOK REVIEWS

**Norman Doidge. *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science.***

New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd. 2007, p. 13-14.

I found it hard to put this book down. It contradicts much of what I learned in medical school about the brain. I was taught that nerve cells grow in childhood, but that after the teen years it is all downhill for the nervous system from there. Nerves degenerate as we age, lose much of the complexities of their interconnections with other nerve cells, and die in increasing numbers.

This was the explanation we were given for loss of memory and senility in old age. This was the explanation for why people did not recover mental and physical functions after brain damage from injuries or strokes.



I was taught that various areas of the brain specialized in motor and sensory functions, and that if one of these areas was damaged, then that function was lost forever.

Norman Doidge has collected a marvelous mass of information on neuroplasticity which demonstrates that all of the above is wrong. He presents his data in clear, concise summaries of exciting research, followed by the stories of how pioneering researchers discovered and developed the proof that our brain continues to grow and evolve throughout our life.

Paul Bach-y-Rita

Our senses have an unexpectedly plastic nature, he discovered, and if one is damaged, another can sometimes take over for it, a process he calls “sensory substitution.” He developed ways of triggering sensory substitution and devices that give us “supersenses.” By discovering that the nervous system can adapt to seeing with cameras instead of retinas. Bach-y-Rita laid the groundwork for the greatest hope for the blind: retinal implants, which can be surgically inserted into the eye. (p. 13-14)

Bach-y-Rita began to think that the localizationist idea of “one function, on location” couldn’t be right. The “visual” part of the cat’s brain was processing at least two other functions, touch and sound. He began to conceive of much of the brain as “polysensory” – that its sensory areas were able to process signals from more than one sense. (p. 17)

Masses of new research confirm that when a function is lost due to brain damage, other areas of the brain can take over and restore that function. Conventional rehabilitation efforts show that modest function can be regained, but has not invested enough time in such training. Various clinics are now proving that with intensive retraining – even years after a disabling brain injury – much if not all of the lost functions can be restored in many people.

The Taub clinic always uses the behavioral technique of “shaping,” taking an incremental approach to all tasks.

Taub patients drill six hours a day, for ten to fifteen days straight. They get exhausted and often have to nap. Patients do ten to twelve tasks a day, repeating each task ten times apiece. Improvement begins rapidly, then lessens progressively.

Treatment works for virtually all stroke survivors who are left with some ability to move their fingers – about half of patients who have had chronic strokes. The Taub clinic has since learned how to train people to use completely paralyzed hands. Taub began by treating people who had had milder strokes, but he has now shown, using control studies, that 80 percent of stroke patients who have lost arm function can improve substantially. Many of these people have had severe chronic strokes and showed very large improvements. Even patients who had had their strokes, on average, more than four years before beginning CI therapy benefited significantly. (p. 147)

Taub, Joachim Liepert, and colleagues from the University of Jena, Germany, have demonstrated that after a stroke the brain map for an affected arm shrinks by about half, so a stroke patient has only half the original number of neurons to work with. Taub believes that this is why stroke patients report that using the affected arm requires more effort. It is not only muscle atrophy that makes movement harder but also brain atrophy. When CI therapy restores the motor area of the brain to its normal size, using the arm becomes less tiring. (p. 149)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) has been very difficult to treat within conventional medicine, psychiatry and psychology. Using principles that accept neuroplasticity, it has been found that relabeling obsessive thoughts can produce dramatic improvements in people with OCD.

V.S. Ramachandran... believes that individual cases have everything to contribute to science... Ramachandran uses plasticity to reconfigure the content of our minds. (p. 178)

“Pain is an opinion on the organism’s state of health rather than a mere reflexive response to injury.” The brain gathers evidence from many sources before triggering pain. He has also said that “pain is an illusion” and that “our mind is a virtual reality machine,” which experiences the world indirectly and processes it at one remove, constructing a model in our head. So pain, like the body image, is a construct of our brain. (p. 192)

This is entirely consistent with my own explorations of pain through a method I developed, called WHEE: Wholistic Hybrid derived from EMDR and EFT. Going further than Ramachandran, I find that pain serves an important function: it is a messenger from our wise, inner self – alerting us to disharmonies in our lives and inviting us to address them. When we invite our unconscious mind to tell us what it wants us to know, the pain is decreased. This is the cognitive aspect of pain. The habit aspect of pain can be released as well with bilateral body stimulation combined with affirmations that are tailored to people's personal needs (Benor, 2009).

Doidge extends his hypotheses about brain functions to mental control over genetic expression.

When we learn, we alter which genes in our neurons are “expressed,” or turned on...

The “transcription function” Each cell in our body contains all our genes, but not all those genes are turned on, or expressed. When a gene is turned on, it makes a new protein that alters the structure and function of the cell. This is called the transcription function because when the gene is turned on, information about how to make these proteins is “transcribed” or read from the individual gene. This transcription function is influenced by what we do and think. (p. 220)

I very highly recommend this book to anyone working in the mental health field and to anyone interested in understanding how your mind can work to maximal potential. It will change your understanding about the brain and will change your life.

Reference:

Benor, Daniel J. *Seven Minutes to Natural Pain Release: Pain is a Choice and Suffering is Optional - WHEE for Tapping Your Pain Away*. Bellmawr, NJ: Wholistic Healing Publications 2009 (2nd Ed.)

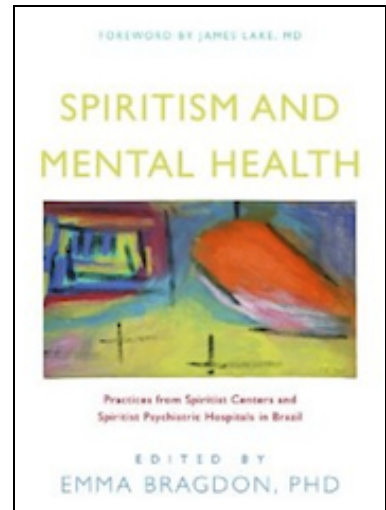
Review by Daniel Benor, MD

Editor in Chief IJHC

**Emma Bragdon, PhD (Editor). *Spiritism and Mental Health: Practices from Spiritist Centers and Spiritist Psychiatric Hospitals in Brazil***. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley 2011. 352 pp. \$99.95

Emma Bragdon, PhD, has been studying Brazilian’s Spiritist treatments for enhancing health for the past decade. She has brought together a very interesting collection of essays that explore these fascinating alternative views on treating mental health issues.

Many Spiritists are highly trained as mediums and can communicate with spirits that have attached themselves to living people, causing various physical and psychological symptoms. Through varieties of interventions addressing the spirit possession (subjugating communications that express the will of the spirit through the person being possessed) or spirit obsession (adversely influencing the mind and body of the person), the mediums are able to help free people of their problems.



While Spiritists can be found in many countries around the world, Brazil is unique in integrating Spiritist treatments with conventional hospital and clinic care in their Spiritist Hospitals. This integrative care appears to hold great promise for improving treatment outcomes, while reducing the need for reliance on psychiatric medications. In Brazil, Spiritist mediums and healers work without compensation. They come from all walks of life, giving of their time and healing presence to help others through difficult times in their life journeys.

This book is well organized. An introductory section introduces readers to concepts of Spiritist healing. The settings and procedures of Spiritist healings are described in the second section. A third section shares views and experiences of a variety of clinicians and researchers exploring how Spiritist healings are in line with current clinical practices and research in consciousness and bio-physics. This includes a review of the research validating the existence of survival of consciousness after death and of spirit communications. The fourth section discusses extensions and implications of

Spiritist healings in many countries around the world. The last section considers issues of research in this fascinating frontier field of treatments and explorations of these aspects of the human condition.

The materials vary from personal observations, through clinical studies and theoretical discussions on to considerations of the important implications of the continuation of consciousness after physical death, with spirit interactions continuing with those who are still in their physical existence.

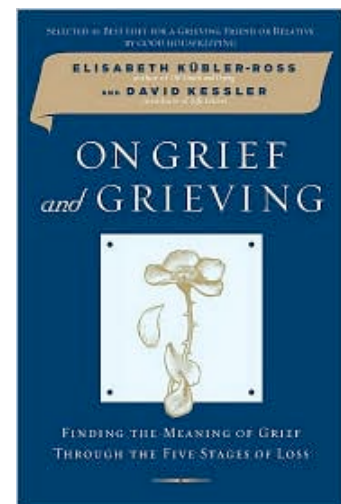
The mental and emotional problems of the living are not all attributed to spirit intrusions. There is clearly a place for psychotherapy, family therapy, medications and social supports. The awareness of spirit involvements adds an enormously important dimension to addressing issues of mental health and illness.

Clinicians who are open to exploring transpersonal aspects of mental health and illness will find this book absolutely fascinating. This book will also be of interest to anyone who is exploring the deeper processes and meanings of life and the human condition.

Review by Daniel Benor, MD  
Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

**Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding The Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss.***  
New York, NY: Scribner 2005. 256 pp \$15.00

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss was the last book Elisabeth Kubler Ross wrote after working for years with patients who were going through the process of dying. She introduced the world to the concept of the five stages of dying – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance – and applied these stages to the process of grieving. The stages, Kubler Ross explained “are merely tools and not everyone goes through all of them nor in a prescribed order.” Page 27 An individual may cycle through all/some of the stages of grief before a person dies. This has been woven together through both professional as well as brief stories, a fitting completion to her lifetime work. Grieving she explained required learning and this book teaches with short, clear and concise stories surrounding circumstances others have faced losing loved ones. I found this in a more tangible humane way to teach relevant insightful advice.



The stages were written with positive rationale in that each stage contains stories to exemplify what grief looks like from a positive perspective. This brings about an understanding, relief to those going through this process with realistic scenarios.

The book was divided into seven chapters, each chapter a unique facet of the grieving process. The book began by explaining how words carry emotions and have unimagined consequences. One concept which stayed with me involved summation of the process of death, “Death viewed as a transition into a higher state of consciousness where you continue to perceive understand and grow “ (p. 111) is a beautiful summation of this process, and I utilize this in my practice. The power of language and how one describes processes can have a profound effect on the healing process.

The Inner World of Grief looks at several emotions that may be experienced including relief, regrets, guilt

and resentment. I found this extremely helpful on a personal level as I have been working through family grief this past month with my partner's sister having a terminal illness. I can now put a face on the wide variety of experiences mentioned. This chapter resonated with me whole heartedly how no two people experience death/grieve in the same way.

The flood of emotions one experiences during grieving are vast and need to be honored. This can present itself as a deep well of emotions occurring at the same time. Putting a name on the emotions honors this and one can then begin the work of healing. This chapter helped with both personal experience as well as crisis work for grief covering both. It also spoke to roles people have in life. Loved ones play many roles and parts in our lives. "These roles won't be lost and will be carried with you for the rest of your life. Grief has a purpose." (p. 76)

The purpose of grief was proposed. "Those who grieve well live well: it is the healing process of the heart, soul and mind and is the path that returns us to wholeness" page 229 "Hardships are an opportunity for growth." (p. 95) Elisabeth Kubler Ross speaks of grief needing to be fully experienced as loss takes an enormous amount of strength, it gives meaning to loss and honors loved ones. This chapter had information on fantasy, dreams and after life as valid emotional venues honoring the spiritual experience of grieving. One important theme recurring throughout this section is finding healthy ways to honor feelings, let self be seen and grief to be externalized (such as letter writing, seeking a healthy therapist).

Following this, a chapter was dedicated to special circumstances where the author touched on grief of children and multiple losses affecting grief such as natural disasters. When one represses grief, it has the potential to surface in adulthood in unhealthy ways. Trauma will often invite us to learn about our strengths. Grief following suicide was touched on as well, noting that healing after such trauma is extremely complicated. According to Kubler Ross, before one can work through grief you need to work through the feelings of grief which often include guilt, and shame.

Everyone feels the depth of loss. We are challenged to find closure quickly and the reality is "Everyone grieves, you simply don't get over the loss of a loved one, but you learn how to live with it." page 230 "One person's dying touches many people in many different ways and everyone feels that loss individually: to see it as only you can." (p. 30).

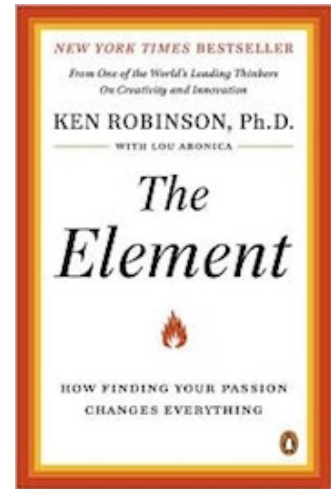
This book closes with an after thought putting closure on grief as a gift. "Grief always works, grief alone has the power to heal." (p 227). Indeed many problems in our lives stem from grief, unresolved and unhealed. We need to teach from an early age how to cope with loss.

This book I found to be written in a humane and compassionate way with relevant advice. It ends on a hopeful level teaching us what we can learn when our individual timetable suggests. Indeed understanding grieving and the plethora of emotions it entails is an important tool. [Arguably the greatest meta fear is the fear of death. Loss is inevitable, we all will grieve. Now with WHEE (taught in the WTT course) we have an additional tool to heal. This book served as a wonderful resource emphasizing the uniqueness of one's journey. Grief does heal but everyone heals in their own way. To be able to assist in the grieving process (for healing, installing new patterns) is the ultimate gift. This is perhaps one of the greatest understanding in preparing ourselves of grief/dying is ultimately how we will live.

Book review by Pam Fages, RN/RPN  
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**Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica. *The Element*.** New York: Penguin Books 2009. 288 pp. \$15.00

Ken Robinson uses the term *the Element* to describe the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at come together. The Element is a different way of defining our potential. Robinson believes that it is essential for each of us to discover his or her natural capacities. We will not only be more fulfilled but as the world evolves, the future of our communities and institutions will depend upon it. The Element offers us life altering insights about the discovery of our true best self. Being in the zone allows us to tap into a primal source of energy and we feel more alive and energized because of it.



The Element gives us many examples of how talents express themselves differently in every individual. It analyzes the traits that people who have found the Element have, the circumstances and conditions that bring them closer to it and identifies the deterrents. It shows the importance of creating environments in our homes, our schools, and in our work places where every person is inspired to grow creatively and have the chance to discover the Element in them selves and in their own way.

We are all born with tremendous natural capacities. Many of us [lose sight of our true talents over time WHY? HOW?]. Many of us do not understand our powers of imagination, intelligence, feeling, intuition, spirituality and physical and sensory awareness. Many of us do not understand our ability to relate to each other holistically. We think that our minds, our bodies and our feelings and relationships operate independently of each other like separate systems. We may be limited by our understanding of how much potential we have for growth and change. This limited view of our capacities can be compounded by our peers, our culture and our own expectations of ourselves.

Robinson claims that a major factor for all of us is our education system. There is usually a preoccupation with different types of academic abilities. There is a hierarchy of subjects, with math, science and language skills at the top. And there is an increasing reliance on standardized testing. Schools place a greater than ever emphasis on conformity and finding the right answers. The current system puts severe limitations on how teachers teach and how students learn. These approaches stifle some of the most important capacities that students need to make their way in a changing world.

We are in an era of unprecedented global change. Technology is developing at a rate that most of us cannot grasp. It is contributing to a huge generational gap. The Element encourages us to take a different view of ourselves. The only way to prepare for the future is to make the most out of ourselves on the assumption that doing so will make us more flexible and productive as possible. Robinson shows us that we have a huge capacity for growth no matter what our age or stage of growth is. By being in the Element, we can connect with something fundamental to our sense of identity, purpose, and well being. It offers hope that we can all make a significant contribution to our future world when we are in our Element.

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