

SHEN[®] Therapy:

The Role of Emotions in Your Health & Recovery

by Russell Fox, Certified SHEN Therapist & Instructor



Having just walked into her local market, Rachel became immediately aware of the onset of what by this time had become an all too common spiral of sensations: increased perspiration, an accelerating heart rate, shortness of breath, gripping of the abdominal muscles, impending explosive diarrhea, and a crushing feeling of terror. Unfortunately, in recent months these unexpected attacks had been increasing in both frequency and severity. Something had to be done, but what?

There is no need to run outside
For better seeing.
Nor to peer from a window.
Rather abide
At the center of your being...
Search your heart and see -
The way to do is to be.

– Lao Tse

Overwhelming anxiety and/or panic attacks are a living nightmare. Although most of us do not regularly have to deal with this experience, the very existence of anxiety/panic attacks brings up important questions that directly affect us all:

1. How is it that we actually "feel" emotions in our bodies?
2. Why do we all feel the same emotions in the same specific body areas?
3. What is it that allows painful, often deeply repressed emotions to be converted into troubling and, at times, crippling psychological and physical dysfunction?

For those who have experienced only traditional medical and psychological models, these are actually quite difficult questions to answer. There just doesn't seem to be an observable bodily mechanism that would account for the site-specific somatic (physical) reactions we all have to specific emotions. Yet, there must be some previously undetected system that could explain why people from all cultures and historical periods all sense their emotions in the same specific regions of the torso.

What's happening, and why . . .

For example, anyone who has ever experienced a deep sense of loss can accurately point to the mid-chest area of the heart as the place where sadness and grief are felt. Likewise, almost everyone has felt the sickening grip of guilt and shame in the specific area of their lower abdomen. Anger and fear are always centered in "the pit of the stomach," near the solar plexus.

Because these difficult emotions are painful, and because we learn that it is not socially appropriate to express them, we usually repress them. However, repressing them does not make them go away. They remain inside affecting everything we do. At some point, many of us come to realize that controlling all our social behaviors are these deeply repressed, long-term troubling emotions. Held long enough, these unresolved emotions contribute to depression, chemical dependency, anxiety, codependency, sleep disorders and phobias.

Physically, we know that our bodies "act up" when we become emotionally upset. Our stomachs often refuse to function properly, our hearts may be in pain, we may have unexplained constipation, or lose normal sexual interest and function.

Emotions become trapped in our bodies by a process called 'Auto-Contractile Pain Reflex' - the body's natural tendency to involuntarily contract around sites of pain. When these contractions are held for long periods, they eventually begin depriving the affected tissues of much needed nutrients, as well as interrupting the normal elimination of toxic metabolic waste. In this way, painful emotions can gradually convert into such disruptive physio-emotional disorders as digestive and bowel irregularities, debilitating migraines, elevated premenstrual distress, ulcers, non-biological chronic back pain, and psychogenic sexual dysfunction, just to name a few.

The next step . . .

Rather than a long-term administering of drugs to mask the symptoms of these physio-emotional disorders, what is needed is a non-invasive therapy which works to release these troubling held emotions, thereby accessing the deeper beneficial and life-affirming emotions of confidence, joy and love which are so necessary for satisfying productive human functioning.

The brightest hope and most encouraging development in recent years has been the emergence of 'SHEN Physio-Emotional Release Therapy' - a new concept for the hands-on treatment of emotionally-rooted disorders. The name SHEN is an acronym for Specific Human Emotional Nexus, a reference to the site specific qualities of felt human emotions referred to earlier.

When the pressureless touch relaxation procedures comprising SHEN are applied to the body, the involuntary contractions that surround sites of either physical or emotional pain are dissolved. Their damaging effects on the local body regions also end. The glands and organs in that region become free to function normally. Dramatic reductions in chronic pain and the other primary symptoms often occur quite rapidly.

SHEN's beginnings . . .

In the mid-1970's Richard R. Pavek, a physicist, engineer and the developer of SHEN Therapy, found himself in a loosely styled workshop on "subtle energies." What that actually meant, he had no idea, but he was determined to find out.

At one point, the participants were instructed to "run energy" through a partner to see if they could balance the temperature in different parts of the body. Pavek did not expect much to happen, but shortly after placing his hands across the abdomen of his partner, he saw her begin to sob, and then noticed her pelvis go into contractions.

Pavek relates, "At the same time, my arms and hands got extremely hot as sweat broke out on my forehead and the hair on my arms began to stand up. When the episode ended, the woman said, 'I feel like I just gave birth to myself.' Over the next few days of the workshop, it became clear that something about her had changed. An emotional weight seemed to have lifted, and life seemed different to her."

Bringing Emotion into Science . . .

Three conclusions were now obvious to Pavek: first, that humans do, indeed, have a natural field of energy dynamically associated with their emotional perceptions and responses; secondly, that the emotions held in this field can have dramatic affects on both the body and mind; and third, that the proper interplay of two persons' fields can produce profound healing affects.

Since most of his training had been in chemistry, electronics and aeronautics, Pavek viewed the phenomenon as having something to do with the concept of "fields" in physics. So, to more fully understand the flows of the human energy field and their

therapeutic implications, Pavek decided to follow the 'principles of apparent motion' that apply to all other field systems in physics, such as the formative currents of weather systems, water currents and magnetism.

Once SHEN's hands-on procedures were determined, Pavek began an investigation into the dynamics of emotion. SHEN Physio-Emotional Release Therapy is the combined result of his research.

During more than three decades of clinical research and professional application, SHEN techniques have been thoroughly tested in a number of hospitals, clinics, chemical dependency treatment centers, chronic pain units and mental health facilities. Without exception, SHEN has been found to be a valid and powerful treatment method for a wide variety of emotionally rooted disorders.

Biofield Qi Therapies . . .

While SHEN is a new development and does not derive from older methods, there are several medically-oriented antecedents. Notable among these are Polarity Therapy, developed earlier in the 20th century by Randolph Stone, D.C., D.D., and Therapeutic Touch, developed more recently by Dolores Krieger, Ph.D., RN. While there are major differences between SHEN and these two disciplines in theory, approach and application, each recognizes the reality of the human energy field, and relies on the utilization of this field for therapeutic results. This flow of human energy is often referred to by the Chinese term Qi (pronounced "chee").

During a SHEN session . . .

SHEN sessions last about an hour, during which you lie fully clothed on a padded table while the practitioner gently lays his/her hands on your body in a series of specific placements designed to stimulate and balance the natural flow of Qi energy within your body's physio-emotional centers. You may feel tingles, warmth or other body sensations, but generally, there is no pain associated with SHEN.

You will relax deeply. You may even fall asleep. It is common for clients to enter a meditation-like state of awareness where problems become identified and resolved. Often SHEN sessions release beneficial emotions that have not been experienced in years, as well as uncovering previously hidden pivotal memories.

Is SHEN medical, psychiatric or psychological treatment? "No" to each, nor does it replace or interfere with such treatments. The practice of medicine deals with biological

disorders, psychiatry deals with mental disorders, and psychology deals with behavioral disorders. SHEN is used to release debilitating emotions from the body, allowing us to feel and be governed by the underlying emotions of confidence, joy and love.

Rachel's SHEN experience . . .

And what about poor Rachel whom we left at her local market in the grip of a debilitating anxiety/panic attack? On her first visit, we discussed the situations which seemed to trigger her attacks, and the specific sensations and manifestations she experienced during them. We determined that specific work in the areas of the solar plexus and the abdomen were indicated.

She quickly fell asleep at the beginning of the session, during which her feet and legs jerked. These are common reactions indicating the restoration of a more normal energy flow. This was also accompanied by some intestinal rumblings and a few quick contractions of the abdominal muscles.

In Rachel's case, she reported having no memories come up during her sessions, but was astounded by the profound sense of relaxation felt during and following her five SHEN sessions. To date, there have been no re-occurrences of her once debilitating attacks.

SHEN Therapy Now . . .

SHEN is an intensive, short-term process. The number of sessions needed depends upon the client's current physio-emotional state and his/her goals. SHEN practitioners do not foster dependence. Their aim is to have their clients function normally and independently, without constant help or support.

Certified SHEN Therapists and Supervised SHEN Interns offer SHEN as a stand alone therapy, while many body-workers and other health professionals have incorporated SHEN techniques into their primary practice.

SHEN Emotional Empowerment Workshops are held frequently in various parts of the U.S., U.K., Canada, New Zealand and Europe. These seven-day personal discovery and growth intensives are also the first vital training step for those wishing to become certified in SHEN Therapy.



Author, Russell Fox is director of The SHEN Wellness Center of Sedona, Arizona. Coming to SHEN Therapy in the late 1980s via Therapeutic Massage, Polarity Therapy and Reiki, he is SHEN's longest serving certified instructor. In addition to seeing clients at his Sedona, AZ office, Russ has taught SHEN Workshops and training sessions throughout the Western USA.