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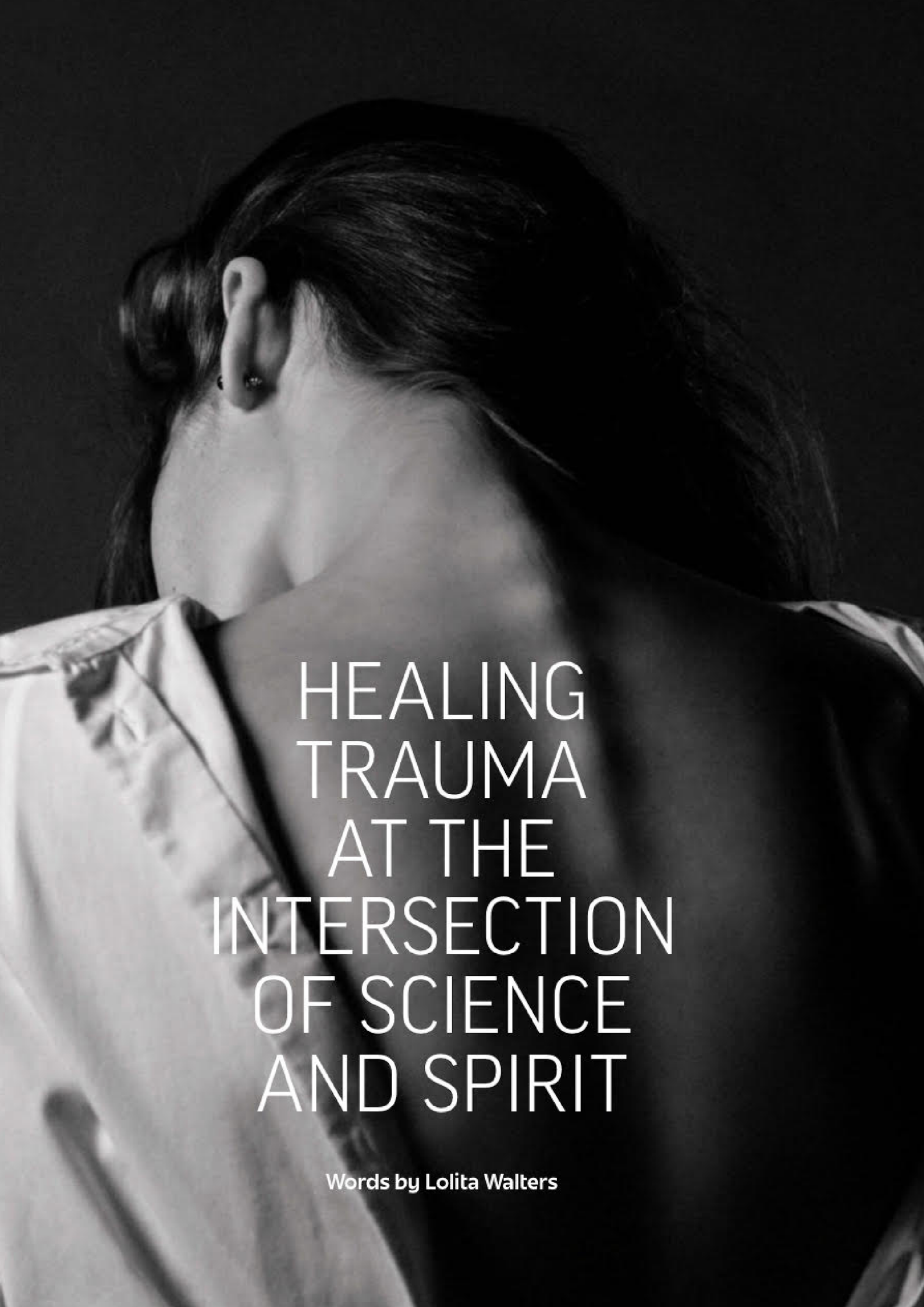


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HEALING
TRAUMA
AT THE
INTERSECTION
OF SCIENCE
AND SPIRIT

Words by Lolita Walters

A delicate dance exists between the spine and the energy field. Bridging ancient wellness traditions and modern neuroscience could help you recalibrate your body, mind and soul – especially when it comes to trauma and the overarching state of your nervous system. Find out why, and how.

 Every living being is not merely a physical entity but also an amalgamation of energy. You vibrate at a certain frequency, which ties in to your physical and mental state of health and how you experience the self and the world. Similarly, your brain is wired in specific ways that become an external and internal compass to navigate with. Whether you look through the lens of Eastern or Western philosophies, age-old belief systems or contemporary inquiry, honouring the interconnectedness between various aspects of your being – from the spine and nervous system to your energy field and neural circuits – may be the key for deep healing.

Bridging the gap

In the Indian tradition, the ancient philosophy of Samkhya translates from Sanskrit as “enumeration, empirical, rational, numbered”, yet can be thought of as “embodied”. It asks: How do the subtlest elements of the forces of nature come together into an embodied form? Essentially, Samkhya is a fundamental foundation for spiritual traditions such as yoga, and also of science, carrying at its heart the search to define truth and reality.

On the other hand, the advancements in modern understanding of the human body and brain have resulted in leaps and bounds in evidence-based research. Before diving into an exploration of approaching healing where science and spirit collide, it is important to note that it is possible to understand the body in ways that the scientific intellect is yet to comprehend. At the same time, scientific developments – especially in the areas of the nervous system and neuroscience – are clearly elucidating and explaining truths in previously thought-of “mystical” ideas from traditional modalities and philosophies through an empirical understanding. Bridging the gap allows for a holistic approach to healing.

How does the body store experience?

Think of it as if your body carries an innate map marked by every physical and emotional experience you’ve had in your life – a set of co-ordinates that create the blueprint for your current state of wellbeing. On the one hand, some experiences can be great teachers, while others can leave an emotional imprint akin to a wound or scar, impacting how your brain and nervous system function.

In Indian philosophy and the yogic tradition, this idea is illustrated through the concept of *samskaras*, which refer to imprints or impressions left on the mind by past experiences, actions and thought patterns. These imprints influence an individual’s current behaviour, thoughts and emotional responses. Essentially, they are the energetic and emotional wounds from traumatic moments that were too overwhelming for the resources available at the time to process and release. Samskaras play a significant role in understanding your own mental and emotional state, and are considered important in the pursuit of self-awareness and self-transformation in yoga and other spiritual practices.

What happens with trauma in the body?

From the point of view of modern science, trauma is stored in a retroactively active fear network. “When we feel threatened, perhaps by a loud sound, a shockwave of signals alerts the brain and we immediately orient towards the threat,” explains neuroscientist Dr Kaushik Ram. “When we realise it was a false alarm, the heart rate drops back to baseline and we are released from the paralysing grip of fear.” However, in the case of trauma the system essentially malfunctions. “Traumatic memories deceive the body to ‘re-act’ to the past and debilitates our ability to respond in the present. The false alarm the brain generates remains as a shockwave that never passes and autonomic resources continue to be diverted to a threat that doesn’t exist.” The result is that this severely impairs activity in the nervous system.

“When trauma leads to dysregulation in the nervous system, then the body’s natural response to a traumatic event – such as fight, flight or freeze – may become ‘trapped’ or incomplete,” says chiropractor and counsellor Dr Sarah Jane. The flow-on from this is often what is known as the dorsal vagal response, where the nervous system adopts a stance of self-preservation.

“The nervous system is easily agitated,” says Ram. “The traumatic memories trigger panic attacks at inconvenient times and the chronic state of fear alters the posture of the patient from open and friendly to withdrawn, suspicious and lacking trust.” These unresolved responses can alter the functioning of the nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis that controls the body’s

A closer look at Spinal Energetics

Positioned at the forefront of contemporary wellness modalities that unites traditional and modern methods of healing, the innovative Spinal Energetics is a newer modality that has gained significant attention due to the transformational results that it has been reported to deliver. It has even been described by some as being akin to having years of therapy in under an hour.

What is Spinal Energetics?

The practice draws upon and seamlessly combines both Eastern and Western thought, interacting with a person's spine, nervous system and energetic field, to harness one's own innate wisdom to know and heal oneself.

At its core is the belief that we are beings of energy. "Energy encompasses each of our aspects: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and soul. It is woven together with our ancestry, experiences, stories, personality and character," explains Jane. "Energy is a spectrum from underactive to overactive. As Spinal Energetics practitioners, we intend to support our clients in meeting the middle path of homeostasis – balance, as we believe that wellbeing is each person's birthright."

What conditions can it assist with?

Spinal Energetics attracts an array of clients, from all walks of life. Typically, it can assist with emotional and mental wellbeing, as well as chronic pain conditions. Trauma that has manifested as physical and mental ailments can be addressed.

What happens in a Spinal Energetics session?

It's important to note that each session is unique to the patient; however, generally it will begin with a chat between the practitioner and you, after which you lie down on a bed specifically made for Spinal Energetics and the practitioner will begin to assess your spine to identify tension patterns and then access it through the layer of the energetic field.

A sharp tug of each arm is used to assess how far the electrical current travels along either side of the body (the left relates to emotions,

and the right to the physical) in order to give feedback on how much "baggage" is being held onto or stored. The sensation feels almost like an electric shock through the arm, which helps activate the emotional energetic centres that help facilitate the session.

Over around 45 minutes, numerous nervous system and spinal contacts throughout the body, as well as off the body within the energetic field, are made, which are represented by referral points in different areas of the body that represent particular parts of the spine ("minor spines") and the actual spine and vertebra ("major spine").

Engaging a variety of techniques such as light yet powerful touch (though often there is also no physical touch at all), an organic flow of movement and frequency of sound allows the practitioner to begin to shift and release tension and unravel narratives that may have been stored in the body. The breathwork, movements and sounds woven into the session are described as "natural and primordial" which are treatment-responsive, meaning that they are guided by an individual's energy and intuition.

How does this work to facilitate healing of trauma?

In Spinal Energetics, practitioners work with chakras that are recognised as the energy centres within the body, thus interacting with the physical and influencing the nervous system. The nervous system and the energetic field are seen as intricately related through the mind-body connection. Based on this, mental and emotional states can influence the body and balance within it. During the session, three flows of energy are possible: smooth flow (freedom), flow resistance (confrontation/avoidance) and trauma vibration (release).

By working with the being as a whole, practitioners aim to bring a patient back to a parasympathetic state of equilibrium where body, mind and spirit are in alignment, which is where true healing from trauma can be observed.