



From Radical Brokenness to Radical Resilience:

Discovering the Power to Overcome Overwhelming Trauma

BY VICTOR LEE LEWIS

In the summer of 2007, I made a life-changing discovery that brought my decades-long search for a path to deep emotional healing to an abrupt and grateful end. What I discovered is that each of us, in the innate wisdom of our animal bodies, has the power to somehow quickly, thoroughly and gently transform and release the pain of deep emotional traumas. I learned through my own experience that “quickly” can mean a matter of minutes, hours or days, rather than weeks, months or years.

In my search for the right words to describe the human capacity for rapid, transformative adaptation I have settled on the phrase, “radical resilience.” In the following paragraphs, I will share how I discovered the power of

Rad•i•cal adj. [rad-i-kuhl] 1. Arising from or going to a root or source: radical solutions to stress and trauma. 2. Departing markedly from the usual or customary; extreme: radical insights into the human capacity for learning, growth, healing, and renewal. 3. Favoring or effecting fundamental or revolutionary changes in current practices, conditions, or institutions: radical opinions on personal and social healing and transformation.

4. Slang - Excellent; wonderful.

Re•sil•i•ence noun [ri-zil-ee-uhns] 1. The power or ability to return to wholeness or integrity, after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity. 2. The ability to recover readily from emotional stress, illness, depression, adversity, trauma or the like; buoyancy. 3. The Power of Overcoming. 4. The power to Change your Mind, Change your Life and Change your World — in harmony with your deepest dreams and values.

radical resilience in my own life. Detailed exploration of the implications of this notion for personal and social transformation will be the subject of future writings. The current reflections are meant only as an introduction to a part of our lives that is much more important than we might sometimes think.

An Overwhelming Trauma

On October 8, 1961, exactly one week before her 4th birthday, I witnessed the accidental death of my beloved sister Normetta. I had just turned three years old. It happened in the back seat of my daddy's big white Cadillac, with the gigantic tail fins. Moments before her death we were playing, as we often did, the kinds of back seat games that 3- and 4-year-old siblings play with each other. When she stuck her head out the window to squeal at a passing ice cream truck, I figured that if I pushed the button to raise the power window I would get her to bring her head and attention back inside the car to continue playing with me. In 1961, a 3-year-old like I was could operate the power windows in a Cadillac without the need for a key in the ignition with the "accessories" mode turned on. Instead of getting her attention my action brought the window up tight against her throat, pinning her to the top of the window frame where she died of asphyxiation. My attempts to lower the window so she could keep playing with me failed. The mechanism was broken. After a brief, terrifying eternity in which I became more desperate than I had ever felt before or have ever felt since, she died as I watched and emotionally disintegrated. I was alone in the car with my sister's body for what seemed like a long time, but what must have been just a couple of minutes. When my daddy returned to the car with his girlfriend, they were

both horrified and moved to quick saving action. But it was too late. From the beginning of our solo car race to the hospital to a time two years later I have no memories. In a moment of child's play, I was changed forever, and scarred beyond all hope of recovery, or so I thought.

A Transformative and Liberating Discovery

Using EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) one day opened me to a new life. EFT may be thought of as an advanced form of psychological acupuncture that uses light tapping with the fingertips rather than needles to achieve its results. I would like to emphasize here that EFT is not my important personal discovery, but just a tool that I used to arrive at the discovery.

My discovery has to do with the emotional and energetic metabolism of my body and of all of our bodies. There is an always available and readily accessible power of our nervous systems to eliminate all the residual trauma, pain and toxic beliefs that trauma leaves in its wake. Both the body (visible) and the soul or psyche (invisible) are self-regulating, self-healing and self-renewing. They are also, of course, two dimensions of one living system. I am beginning to appreciate that the self-healing capacities of the psyche are as powerful, spontaneous and competent as the body's capacity for healing. Should we cut a finger, the body will instantaneously move itself away from the source of injury, begin stopping blood flow in the wound area and take action against infectious agents or toxins that enter the wound. We never even have to think about it. The psyche can also cope with bleeding, infections and toxicity. When the wound to the body is too deep, we may need sutures or stitches to provide additional

support for the body's wound-healing metabolism. This doesn't mean that the body isn't self-healing, but just that it needs help sometimes to get the best results. When the wound to the psyche is too deep then the psyche may need sutures – “soul” sutures – to support our return to emotional wholeness and integrity. EFT is an extraordinarily simple, safe and effective self-help tool for soothing and suturing wounds to the psyche and opening us to deep, vital powers within us for creating better lives. The following paragraphs describe my introduction to this renewing power within each of us.

I had just returned from a visit to a former girlfriend's house (I will call her “Bell”). Bell had recently been diagnosed with a form of cancer. I had been exploring EFT as a self-taught, beginning student for about a year. I remembered reading about the benefits of EFT for treating the emotional aspects of serious diseases like cancer as well as the stressful side-effects of chemotherapy. So I offered to visit with her and treat her as an amateur and a friend for whatever non-medical issues she was dealing with related to the cancer. She accepted my offer. I thought our time went pretty well. We worked on a wide range of issues related to limiting beliefs and fears that she had that she thought might limit or sabotage her chances of a full recovery. Bell seemed to feel pretty good after the session, as I recalled. As soon as we finished, I took about an hour-long bike ride to my girlfriend's house. I sat in her living room on the sofa for several minutes feeling increasingly anxious and upset. When I realized that my fears of losing my friend to the cancer were beginning to overtake me, I began to do EFT on myself. I began “tapping.”

The simple, testable “discovery statement” on which EFT is based is that *the experience of all negative emotion is rooted in a disruption in the body's energy system*. The practice of EFT is an easy to learn process that consists of lightly and briefly tapping on a series of acupuncture meridian points on the head, torso and hands while “tuning into” or mindfully focusing on an emotional distress, limiting belief or a current physical pain or tension. This process of meridian tapping can produce remarkable and permanent relief from negative emotions associated with painful events in the past, *regardless of the severity of the trauma that induced it*.

I tapped for 5-10 minutes and watched the intensity of my distress increase rather than decrease, which was the reverse of what I'd grown used to over the 5 years or so of using EFT on lighter issues. “*What in the hell*

is going on here?” I asked myself. The answer came quickly. “Oh, this isn't about Bell at all; this is about my sister.” Immediately, I began to recall EFT training videos featuring Vietnam vets' dramatic healings from post-traumatic stress symptoms – vets who had seen and been through and done things far more devastating than even my horror story. I told myself that if they could find relief, then I could, too. My pain reached an extraordinary level at that point. It was a perfect “10” on a 0-10 intensity scale. I have had many skeptical and agnostic days over the course of my life, but this was not to be one of them. I began to pray, “*Dear God, I have seen this stuff work for other people who have gone through a lot more than me. I now need it to work for me. I cannot bear this pain anymore. It is breaking me. I can't take it.*” I prayed and tapped for about 5 minutes and began to feel some relief. Now, at last, I was able to grieve freely and openly without hindrance or internal resistance. It was an intense flow of emotion, but one which was completely unblocked. This had never happened before. I kept on tapping. I was deeply saddened by the death of my sister and the loss of the gift of all of her life to the world. I was saddened by my own loss of a companion to share the day-to-day adventures, trials, joys and sorrows of childhood. I regretted the dreadful consequences of my father leaving us babies unattended in a car. And, I just kept on tapping.

After about 20 minutes, my partner Riki, who had been napping in her bedroom, got up in response to my weeping sounds. When she came into the living room where I sat I explained to her that the trauma of my sister's death was really “up” for me and I was “tapping it out.” When she offered several supportive comments, I stopped her, asking only for her supportive presence. Not being able to explain why at the time, I knew, somehow, that I was already in the process of realizing my complete emotional freedom on this issue by just tapping.

As I continued tapping, I noticed very quickly that there was no longer any of the familiar guilt that always held me in its grip while I tried to convince myself with intellectual arguments that none of this tragedy was my fault. After about 20 minutes or so, a strange thing happened. Unbidden, the following thought occurred to me: “*I was barely three years old and my sister was a week away from her fourth birthday. Neither one of us was old enough to be responsible for ourselves and*

our own safety, let alone each other's." I have been counseling people on issues large and small for almost 30 years. This is exactly the kind of thing that I would tell clients burdened with a sense of responsibility for things that were beyond their control. These were also words very much like words that I have logically formulated for myself, and which other people have offered over the years to give me comfort. An interesting thing about the words this time is that they came spontaneously, and they triggered no conflicting, opposing, objecting response from my body. There was no more struggle against self-condemning voices, and no effort of will required for me to finally, congruently appreciate the fact that I was not and could not have been responsible for my sister's death—I was simply too young. Instead of trying to forgive myself as I had for 45 years, I simply perceived the obvious.

I continued to tap for another 20 minutes as similar new thoughts continued to float through my mind like clouds. At one point I imagined that I could "see" myself floating above my daddy's car and noticed that I felt compassion for them – the little dead girl and the traumatized little boy. *"Neither of them deserved this pain and devastation."* My awareness then turned to my father and my father's girlfriend, Betty. Again, for the first time in my memory, I felt an unforced wave of compassion over the pain that they must have felt when they returned to the car "after just a few minutes" to find one child dead, and the other inconsolably distraught. I wept for several minutes, feeling how very terrible this was for them and how much regret my daddy must have carried for the remaining 14 years of his life (He eventually drowned trying to save a drowning child, just before my 18th birthday. He'd never learned to swim.).

My attention then turned to the hospital. How horrible it must have been for the doctors and nurses who met us in the emergency room to cope with such a shocking and tragic loss of life that was my sister's. I imagined them trying to cope with a little dead girl, a shattered little boy, and his two mortified, tortured parents trying to do the right thing in an irreversibly wrong situation. *"Nobody knew how to cope with extreme trauma back then. The literature was very underdeveloped. Of course, there would have been no counseling for any of us, even if we were white. There was probably no counseling for the medical and police personnel that greeted us at the hospital."* Once again, the thoughts came fully-formed

into my mind, with an air of simple truthfulness about them. I didn't reach or stretch to find them. They just bubbled up from my psyche on their own, felt true and became permanent.

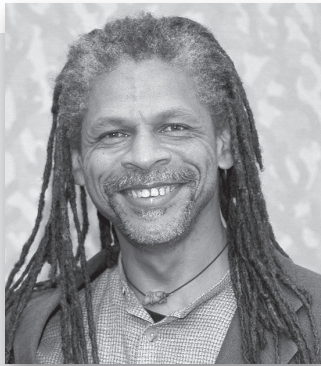
I had become aware over the past couple of years that racism probably played a role in how my family and I were treated at the hospital and in the days and weeks that followed. I concluded that one of the reasons that the trauma of Normetta's death had become such a burden to me was because the white people who were charged with our care didn't put enough value on any of our feelings to tell us what we/I needed in order to heal. Nor did they invest resources afterward, to help us put what was left of our lives back together. All of that analysis of the racial politics of our situation was eclipsed by my compassion for the human drama that had stripped us all to the bare existential facts of our vulnerable, fragile, living/dying existence. Everyone touched by my sister's death on that sunny day in October, was overcome by it. We were all "out of our depth." No matter what anybody did or failed to do in that situation, I had no feeling of judgment, blame or regret. There was simple acceptance of that past event and my role in it, along with a simple acceptance of myself. I felt freed. I somehow "realized" that Death, who eventually overcomes all reasoning and every striving in every creature, had paid all of us a visit, kissing each of our little foreheads, with a promise to return later for another more intimate visit. All of us were touched by the harsh but holy awareness of the fragility of our days in a way that an ordinary death could not accomplish.

In about 45 minutes on that amazing day of healing I cleared up about 80% of a trauma that had dogged me for 45 years. In two 30-minute sessions over the next few weeks I was able to let go of all the toxic grief, terror, guilt, anger, resentment, confusion, dissociation and alienation which had previously stuck to me like a tar baby. I am left now with a sense of the love and friendship between my sister and I, and a kind of wistfulness as I wonder what a lifetime of conversations and shared and contested memories with a sister would have been like. I wonder who I would have been with that kind of mirror of my childhood. But, it does not make me unhappy to think of what might have been. It makes me mindful that there are many people in the world who still suffer because they still don't know what I have only recently learned.

About a year after healing my sibling death trauma, on another warm summer day I found myself overcome by a hateful anger. These feelings had a similar quality to the ones that I had which preceded my breakthrough: intense, persistent and somehow out of place. It actually took me several days of hanging out with my seething cauldron of feelings before I realized, *"I'm dealing with unhealed incest and childhood sexual abuse memories."* For most of my life, I have suffered from the residual effects of incest perpetrated by my grand-daddy and sexual traumas inflicted by family friends and strangers between ages five and seven. With about two hours of tapping I was able to completely wipe out all of the shame, guilt, grief, resentment, embarrassment that had continued to burden me after more than 40 years. I used to have a gagging revulsion towards beets related to the incest. With EFT, I "tapped it away" in 30 minutes. I now know where to get a killer beet salad.

Rapid, Deep Healing of Devastating Trauma Raises Interesting and Important Questions

Since experiencing the permanent benefits of using EFT to heal from the traumas of sibling death and child sexual assault, I have burned with the following simple question: "If EFT can do that, what else can it do? If EFT can open the door to rapid healing of traumas, phobias, hatreds and shame, what else can it do? And, how does it work?" I have learned a lot of answers to my first questions, and a few hints in answer to my second one. Today, I am sharing with others the tapping method that has been so useful in my own healing learning and growth. I am also helping others to discover or appreciate more deeply their own underlying radical resilience and use it to change their minds, change their lives and change their world.



Victor Lee Lewis *is the founder and director of the Radical Resilience Institute and Radical Resilience Coaching and Consulting. He is a Progressive Life Coach and hypnotherapist, and a certified trainer in Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Victor provides practitioner training, mentoring and certification in EFT, backed by advanced NLP skills. In his private*

*practice, helps people increase their personal resilience, public effectiveness, and overall well-being. Victor is a nationally respected diversity and social justice educator with more than 25 years of experience, best known for his leadership in the award-winning race relations documentary, **The Color of Fear**. Victor holds an MA in Culture and Spirituality from Holy Names University, Oakland, CA, He is a father, a barefoot dance machine and a resilient and thriving trauma survivor.*

(510) 204-9567

Victor@RadicalResilience.com

EFT Basic Tapping Recipe

The Setup

1) Focus on a SPECIFIC Issue, and rate the intensity on a 0-10 scale.

2) Repeat Three Times: “Even though I have this *[insert statement of a specific issue here]*, I deeply & completely accept myself.”

3) While continuously tapping the “Side of the Hand” point.

The Sequence

4) Tap 8-10X on each point

5) Focus on the ORIGINAL specific issue and rate the intensity again. If not yet at a zero, apply the Basic Recipe again.

To learn more about EFT coaching or training contact:

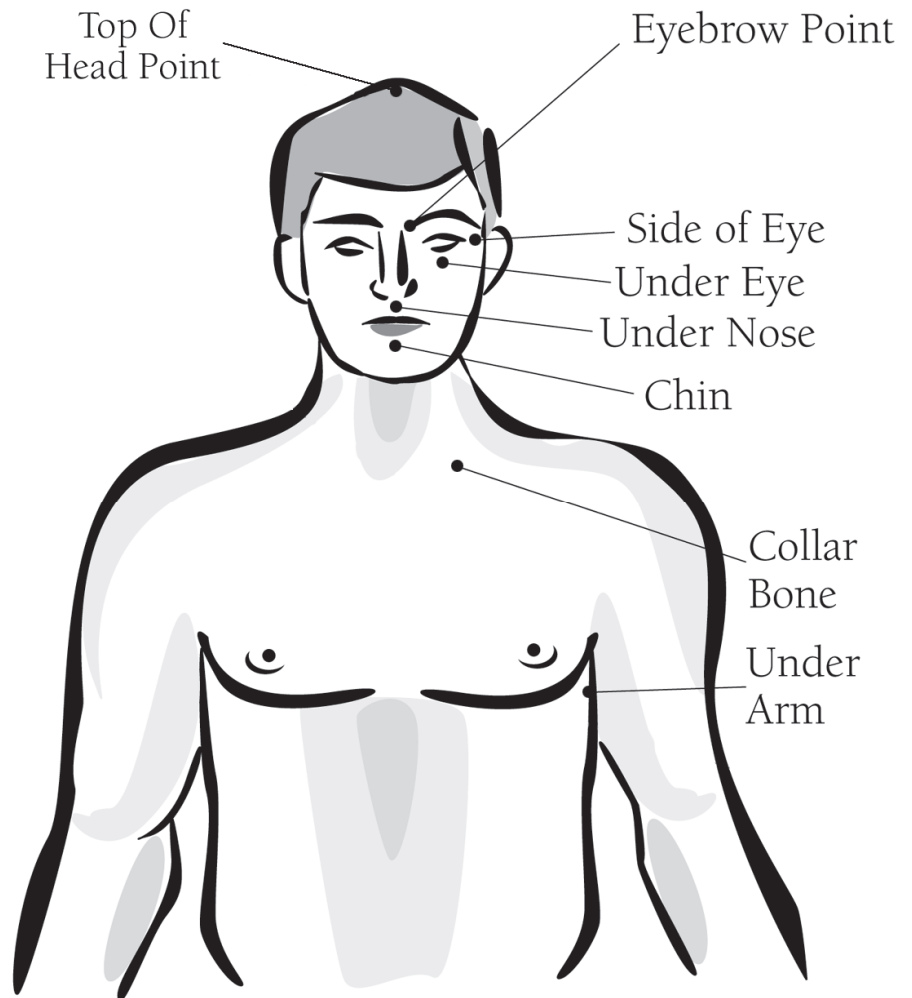
Victor Lee Lewis, MA
EFT Advanced Practitioner, Trainer

510-204-9567 or Victor@RadicalResilience.com

Facebook & Twitter:
“Victor Lee Lewis”

830 Bancroft Way, Suite 113A
Berkeley, CA 94710

Tapping Points Diagram



Hand Points Diagram

