

neurosculpting

A Whole-Brain Approach
to Heal Trauma,
Rewrite Limiting Beliefs,
and Find Wholeness

Lisa Wimberger



sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

contents

Acknowledgments . . .	ix
INTRODUCTION Death Doesn't Get the Last Word . . .	xi
CHAPTER 1 A Quest for Free Will . . .	1
CHAPTER 2 The Nature of Resilience . . .	27
CHAPTER 3 Balance in the Body-World . . .	47
CHAPTER 4 Cultivating Self-Nurture . . .	63
CHAPTER 5 The Search for Enough . . .	91
CHAPTER 6 Memory, An Attempt to Make Me Believe . . .	109
CHAPTER 7 Love versus Fear . . .	129
CHAPTER 8 The Nature of Consciousness: What a Plant Told Me . . .	151
CHAPTER 9 Judgment . . .	165
CHAPTER 10 Grace . . .	177

CHAPTER 11	Putting It All Together . . .	189
APPENDIX A	Daily Plan and Meditations . . .	195
APPENDIX B	Daily Mantras and Weekly Brain Changers . . .	201
APPENDIX C	Inquiry Exercises . . .	207
APPENDIX D	Brain Basics 101 . . .	225
	Notes . . .	229
	Index . . .	237
	About the Author . . .	241

a quest for free will

And so castles made of sand melts into the sea, eventually.

JIMI HENDRIX, "Castles Made of Sand"

I was at the entrance of a quaint garden, slowly opening the creaky wooden gate to what looked like a cottage, vibrantly colored against a backdrop of space and stars. There was lush greenery and a lawn full of mushrooms. A small dark figure walked out of the cottage, approaching me although it had no feet to touch the ground. One moment he was there, at the door, and the next he was directly in front of me, close enough for me to see the riveted seams of his black leather face. Had I ever encountered Anubis (the Egyptian God of the afterlife), I imagine he'd look similar. The small creature's lupine face was not at all threatening. It was mostly welcoming and expectant, as he told me they'd been waiting for me. I didn't know how I got here, but I knew this was where I was supposed to be.

He said we had much to cover and very little time. With a touch of his hand on my head, we were suddenly in front of a council of elders sitting stoically at a long table in a bright and sparsely furnished room. They all resembled my gracious guide, exhibiting varying degrees of blacks and browns on their faces. They spoke only to him. He translated their high-frequency sounds. I was to learn of the two parallel histories, both of which he told me were my own. He said that on Earth, we are born with ego, and that for us it is important to use

that to cultivate the idea of independent survival for a few early years until we can stand on our own. But as humans, we forget to drop it, choosing instead to believe all of our lives that we are separate from each other and in competition. He told me that this limits our potential and our sense of freedom, and keeps us small as we spend too much energy in a conflict based on an us-and-them view of the world. The council unanimously emanated a frequency in unison. My guide paused, responded in kind, then nodded to them before speaking to me again.

“I will now reveal important information to you. I will show you a more expansive way—our way. The way to freedom.”

He placed his hand on the back of my head and showed me pictures and experiences as though I had grown up with them. Without any memories, I seemed to remember that as a child in his care, I was born without ego, experiencing complete unity with those around me. Oneness vibrated through me, and I saw that each face of my childhood was a reflection of me. There was nothing I could do to another that I didn’t feel and experience myself. My heart was bigger, flushing warm waves of contentment with each beat. There seemed to be no filter between each breath and my implicit trust in my own safety. In this unity experience, there was no fear. He flashed me forward to age twelve, the time for a rite of passage where one becomes acquainted with his or her own ego. With oneness in every fiber of my being, the introduction of ego was nothing more than a vehicle by which to discern my personal contributions to the larger organism. It was not a limiting force or a veil of illusion. It was something we only used when we wanted to give more to the whole and ourselves. From a base of unity, our egos functioned like sparkle on an already beautiful picture; it was just a small texture adding one tiny layer of depth to an already infinite source. As his child, I saw my most expansive self, free of the limiting stories my human ego had so diligently invested in. He told me that in his world we all had seats at the table of the divine, and if I could learn how to shed my stories and learn to **be** differently, then I’d remember all of this and once again know my own freedom.

VACATION MIND

If I told you that you could learn to squeeze the vibrance and beauty out of each moment of your life, strip away those limiting stories, and experience more joy, ease, presence, and freedom in your life, would you care what effort it took to do that? Would you say yes to a new daily practice that promised to get you there? We have the ability to dismantle our mental fortresses and prisons. Our beliefs shape themselves based on our experiences, molded and sculpted by our engagement with life. They can just as easily reshape themselves when the waves of life change our direction suddenly. Our beliefs are our castles made of sand, seemingly solid until the waves of change wash in. I have come to believe that Neurosculpting is the power that can direct those waves and help us rebuild our thoughts.

I'm sure you know the incredible release that happens when you are nearing a vacation you've been planning, especially if it's one you've been thinking of for a long time. For those of us in the daily grind of a traditional work/life relationship, this may be a vacation we've planned for and worked an entire year or even years toward. Maybe you relish the moments that lead up to that one- or two-week paradise, perhaps even adopting an "I don't care so much" attitude to normal stressors as you get closer to the moment in which you know you will leave it all behind. Suddenly, maybe that co-worker's complaint isn't such a bother in your mind. Maybe that dog next door who barks too early in the morning or too late into the night doesn't seem to set you off as much. I remember that in my last few months as a public school teacher I was a better teacher than in all the months of my career before that. I was relaxed, found more joy, had more patience, and connected more personally with the children.

Why? Because I saw a light at the end of the tunnel that shifted the present moment into a different perspective. I was navigating the present moment differently, which gave me a sense of freedom and empowerment. Suddenly, as in my vision, I didn't feel stuck in the old story of who I was. My mind happily engaged in the full potential of what life could be. I had access to more of me.

Remember yourself on your favorite vacation. Did you feel that sense of openness and potential? Did you feel like a freer version of yourself when the routine of your day no longer mattered?

Sometimes after a vacation, we carry that relaxed mentality back with us for a short time after we return. Or sometimes we might feel sadness the day our vacation ends, as though that experience is now on a shelf, unable to bleed into our mundane experiences of the “real world.” Vacation has shown me how large an influence my mindset is on how my body chooses to experience and express itself in the world. I smile more on vacation; my muscles relax; and my aches and pains recede. In fact, I wear different clothes and adopt a different posture when I’m on vacation. I wear my body differently, and it experiences the world differently based on some minor circumstantial changes like location and schedule.

What makes our vacation self so expansive, joyful, and full of permission? What strips us of that when a random day printed on the calendar notes the end of the vacation? What invisible constraints do we shed and then put back on during that whole process? What underlying processes or behavior scripts shift our body relationships in the world from one context to the next? It is clear to me when I think about this scenario that my mind, body, and spirit are in one sort of communication *before* vacation and in a different type of communication *during* vacation. The catalyst for this changing communication might just be our beliefs, illusions, and expectations.

As we prepare for that long-awaited vacation we take the set of beliefs we call “day-to-day” and store them away, reaching for a special set of beliefs we call “time off.” Our daily beliefs and stories might prime us to be burdened with deadlines and relentless to-do lists. These beliefs might limit what we think we are allowed to do in an eight-hour chunk of our day. They can define our responsibilities, permissions for leisure, and forgiveness for indulgence. These daily beliefs also carry with them judgments around what type of vehicle we drive, where we live, and even what sort of recreation we are allowed to have. Maybe in our day-to-day lives, we don’t allow ourselves to eat dessert for breakfast or have a glass of wine with

lunch. Maybe there is a type of protocol in our brain that says that sort of thing is not appropriate *unless* we have a valid excuse. Does your set of day-to-day scripts give you permission to nap during the day when you want? These daily beliefs dictate where we go, when we go, how we get there, what we wear when we're there, and how we feel about ourselves. How much more could you learn about yourself if you were aware of these subtle scripts? What freedoms might you experience if you could adapt the stories of who you are and release the version of yourself your ego had created? Who could you be without those scripts? What might be possible?

As we shift from the set of daily underlying beliefs to our special-edition vacation beliefs, we might change how we prioritize our time and what activities we choose to engage in. What special permissions do you give yourself when you are on vacation? You may find yourself interacting with people differently. Perhaps you engage in activities you'd never dreamed of except during vacation. You may no longer become annoyed at things that typically bother you. You may not feel compelled to answer the phone to take a certain call that might normally make you interrupt the important thing you're doing.

I always wanted to know why people were more likeable, gregarious, funny, happy, and even radiant during vacation. It couldn't be *just* the destination; it had to be a shift inside.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE RESCRIPTING?

This shift is not restricted to vacation; we experience these types of permission shifts in relation to the people we spend time with, the geographic location we find ourselves in, and the availability of certain opportunities and resources. Maybe you notice you use a different script with your best childhood friend than with your new colleague. Or maybe you find yourself animated in a completely different way when you are talking with a sibling versus a bank teller. We act differently when we're out on the town than when we're home with the family. We take different liberties when we have an abundance of

money versus very little. We change what drives us when we have a job we care about versus a job we hate.

Aren't we actually toggling between different scripts constantly? Does your language and tone change when you take off your work clothes and put on your gym outfit? Do you have different social permissions when spending time with your child versus your best friend? Although we don't spend much conscious time thinking about all the rules that correspond to each, we have cultivated an intimate relationship with each of these scripts in order to implicitly and automatically access all of their rules and behave accordingly.



DISCOVERY JOURNAL noticing your guiding scripts

Make two columns down a page in your journal, naming one “Daily Permission Scripts” and the other “Vacation” or “Weekend Permission Scripts.” Note in your journal some of your daily permission scripts around food, sleep patterns, and recreation during your work week. Example: “I don’t eat breakfast during the work week because it doesn’t fit into my commute schedule” or “I don’t go out dancing or to the movies during the week because . . .” Next, note some of your permission scripts around these same topics as they relate to your weekends or even vacation time. Observe some of your own sets of permission scripts. Note the differences that you slip in and out of with very little effort or consciousness.

How much energy does it take to create and store all of these different life rules? What is that shift inside that causes us to harmonize our mind, body, and spirit differently from one situation to the next? Maybe neuroplasticity can give us some clues.

NEUROPLASTICITY AND FREE WILL

When I think of neuroplasticity and the brain, I can't help but feel giddy. We are so fortunate to live in the age of the brain, when science has put these amazing neural machines of ours at the forefront of research and discovery. We know so little about how the brain works, yet the pace of our discoveries about its processes is speeding up exponentially. Our basic understanding of what these machines do on a cellular level has made it possible for us to feel more in charge of our destiny and well-being than ever before. We are at an exciting time in history where alliances between researchers are happening on a global scale—all in an attempt to create a working brain model.

Although many of these scientists use their understanding of the brain to postulate that we don't really have free will, my experiences and research have shown me that without a doubt we *do* have free will. More importantly, I want *you* to believe that you have free will in the same way my vision with the lupine creature communicated it to me. With this one belief comes autonomy, empowerment, and a proactive approach to life and freedom. This is how we begin to change our daily scripts and drink more of life's juice. This is how we move into wholeness. In fact, this die-hard belief in free will is a foundational model for Neurosculpting.

Neuroplasticity is the idea that although we once thought the brain was fixed in its anatomical function and structure, it's actually adaptable. We are not dealt an unchangeable hand. At one point, our mental capacity was considered finite. It was believed that brain cells, or neurons, died and could not be replaced. We believed, based on science, that dysfunctions of the mind were stamped as our destiny and that we had no ability to change that. We believed that damage was permanent. With the discovery of neuroplasticity comes the realization that we, and science, were wrong. We are infinite in capacity instead!

Thanks to the work of scientists like David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel in the latter half of the last century, we know that the brain is much more elastic and resilient, malleable and trainable than we once thought.¹ We know that we can birth new brain cells in the hippocampus, an area of the brain highly involved in our ability to create

and store memories. Those new brain stem cells can then migrate to other areas of the brain for specified differentiation, becoming functional cells where we need them.² This implies our own ability to repair, regenerate, and enliven our own minds well into old age. In other words, we can regenerate cognitive functions in our senior years. Abilities lost to stroke damage can migrate to other areas of the brain. Neural maps or control centers of certain bodily functions can be taken over by neighboring real estate when damage occurs.³ This means that damage to an area can be compensated and adopted by another area. For instance, damage to an area of the brain that controls one finger may not mean the permanent loss of finger control as the neighboring area may be able to gain those abilities. Areas of cognitive abilities can also migrate from areas of damage to areas of healthy tissue. This current model of the brain has vast implications for healing damage due to physical, emotional, and mental stressors. Through this model, we no longer have to feel destined for senility and dementia, and we can look forward to the potential that our senior years can be rich, engaging, and mentally stimulating.

What neuroplasticity has illuminated for us is the miracle that we call “learning.” The process of learning neurologically looks a bit like our brain cells following a specific process: activating with electrical excitation; firing their neurotransmitters, or chemical messengers; sending signals across a gap; reaching and connecting with other neurons through dendrites, or spiny branches; and signaling the next neuron.⁴ These cells chemically and electrically signal each other when we learn new skills. For instance, when I pay focused attention to a new skill or activity like salsa dancing, rock climbing, or learning a new language, I have an excitatory response in brand-new neural maps, which then encode that new information. I’m learning something new, and my focused attention allows this experience to stick so I can retrieve it again later and build upon my skills.

We have the ability to strengthen neurological activity in some areas and lessen activity in others, growing and diminishing skills and competence all the time. Sometimes this happens unconsciously, and other times this happens when we exercise a skill with intention. Each skill

and thought we have is associated with an electrical firing in the brain that creates a path of activity. Imagine you are walking through the dense woods for the very first time. You may expect that the forest floor is full of leaves and vines, maybe even a bit difficult to navigate. You might find yourself stumbling for balance and a clear foothold. But each time you return to that forest, you retrace your steps and walk the same path to get you from point A to point B. What will happen to that path over time? How much more easily will you find that path after having walked it for years? And what happens to the alternative path you tried to make just once but never revisited? How easy will it be to find that one year later? Strengthening and diminishing neural activity in the brain is similar.

Sometimes we're relearning old lessons like how to tie our shoes, repeating the same thing for the hundredth time, and this neurological process is happening in an already established map or path. Consider the idea of reinforcement. Perhaps I have a skill or a hobby that I enjoy. Each time I practice that skill, or essentially retrieve that mental script and revisit it, I relearn that skill and store it again, this time with just a little more sticking power.

But this sticking power isn't just true for skills and activities; it is also true of our thoughts. Thoughts have sticking power. What does it mean to you to know that each and every thought we have, no matter how fleeting, is exercising and embedding a neural pathway? My guide showed me in my vision that the more I exercised the belief that I was ego-bound to a competition with others, the more locked up I'd remain in my stance of who I was. He showed me that a new belief about my own identity could open me up to freedom. Which thoughts about yourself did you exercise today?

THOUGHTS: THE MECHANISMS OF A PREDICTION MACHINE

The brain is a prediction machine; it likes patterns and prefers to default to pattern recognition. This ability enables us to do many things, like

focus on a new piece of stimulus while doing something routine or rehearsed. Once our brains know a pattern, the well-rehearsed script of that pattern is filed in an easily accessible way so we don't have to spend all of our resources learning it over and over again. We can access it with little thought and basically automate it. And once it's automated, our brains have resources available to focus on new stimuli.⁵ So creating patterns is extremely handy in using our brains efficiently. Imagine how much time you'd spend tying your shoes each day if you hadn't automated the pattern of tying laces. Or think about those who hunt-and-peck on a keyboard versus those who have automated the skill of typing. The hunt-and-peck person will likely use far more energy, thought, and time to type than what the automated typist expends. And to get even more fundamental, think about pattern recognition in small children when they are learning what shapes are and how to fit them into the appropriately shaped holes. Once they learn a shape and its corresponding hole, they'll never get frustrated again as young children (or even as adults) trying to cram a square peg into a round space.

We can use patterns to our advantage, automating physical patterns for improved performance as in sports, or dance, or building the muscle memory for playing an instrument. But what about the process of developing thought patterns? This can be a gift—or it can be a detriment. If we rely on cultivating and honing the patterns that no longer serve us, or the ones that are out of context, then we can become slaves to the past and limit the potential new choices in front of us. Imagine spending all of your neurological resources reinforcing the wrong way to play an instrument, or the cumbersome way to hunt-and-peck on a keyboard. Many of us have automated some negative, limiting, or fear-based thought patterns that might have been true once, but they are no longer true now (or maybe they were never true), yet we're still using them as a way to predict what we expect to experience in the world.

Imagine still being stuck in that “I can't do it” belief you had when you first were learning how to ride a bike. Or maybe you relate to this experience when you consider all of the ways in which you stick to the limiting stories you created of yourself in your youth when you