

Feelings Matter

Keys to the Unexplored Self

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INTRODUCTION

I have been searching for answers for quite some time, because I have had a persistent feeling that despite all of our efforts to improve our situation on this planet, there has been something unnoticed or undiscovered that would explain why we have not been able to get a consensus about anything, even saving our own lives.

When I came across the information that our human population has been becoming increasingly dominated by our Reptilian brain stem, I immediately wanted to know more about what this meant because I felt that here was the missing piece of information I had been looking for.

Even though the symptoms and enactments of advancing Reptilian brain domination have been becoming increasingly apparent, I had not recognized it for what it really is, for how it happens or for what it really means. The understandings of how and why Reptilian brain domination has been happening and also of how we can shift this may take awhile to sink in, but, in short, this is a brain imbalance that has been imperiling our very humanness.

While there are many things about our Reptilian brain that are good for our survival, domination by our Reptilian brain is not the way our human brains are meant to develop. All of our brain lobes are meant to develop and function in an interactive balance, and yet Reptilian brain domination has become so prevalent, it has become thought of as normal and has even been being described as "human nature," but it is not.

I feel that by understanding the root cause of our internal problems and what we can do about them, we can more effectively make the shifts we need to make, not only in ourselves, but also socially and globally, on the deep levels where they need to be made. Even those of us who have been doing "all the right things" can still benefit by understanding the "why" of it.

It seems necessary to have a foundation of understanding some things about our brain and the interactive interdependence of its development to understand, and even to believe, what it can really mean to become Reptilian brain dominated. In the light of this, I have tried to make the scientific information in this book highly readable and emotionally engaging, as best I could.

Even though it has become known that we can grow brain cells and neural pathways at any age, shifting our brains into a state of balance may be more difficult than it at first appears, but very likely, it will not be too difficult, and more than that, it can be an interesting journey of self-discovery, challenging us to develop more parts of ourselves.

There are many suggestions in this book for improving the balance in our brain. There is also information on what can be done during pregnancy, birth and early infancy to stop perpetuating our developmental imbalances, as well as information about the role that stress has been playing. As a stepping stone to finding additional help if we need it, there is also a resource section included at the end of the book.

Much of what will improve the development, integration and balance in our brain can be found to be enjoyable, even fun, and is not particularly "mental," because in most of us, it is the parts of our brain other than the Neocortical, thinking part that need help. Better brain development and balance require giving our brain what it needs. With that, our brain can make many shifts for the betterment of our entire being. After all, our brain is the processing center for our intelligence, and its state of development is reflected to us in everything, internal and external. Why not improve its development?

THE REPTILIAN BRAIN

Our Reptilian brain, also called the Brain Stem and sometimes referred to as the R-Complex, is a rather small, bulbous mass located at the top of our spinal cord inside the base of our skull and beneath our Mammalian, Limbic, Emotional brain, which nestles around it. On top of our Limbic, emotional brain lies our Neocortex, often called our thinking brain.

Our Reptilian brain is the part of our brain that establishes and maintains our baseline settings for what are generally regarded to be our involuntary body functions, such as our breathing, heartbeat and digestion. It is the first part of our brain to form during our fetal development, and developing first, in our Reptilian brain's perceptions, it is the self.

Our Reptilian brain needs our help, and for us to be able to give it the help it needs, it needs our recognition and our understanding. It has been giving us the valuable gifts of protecting us and of stabilizing and maintaining our basic inner functions so that our consciousness does not need to pay constant attention to our survival and maintenance. For quite some time, however, our Reptilian brain has been having increasing trouble performing its functions effectively because it has become trapped in stress, trapping us along with it.

Our Reptilian brain's response to this entrapment has become a stress-management plan of taking over our brain and dominating according to its own priorities. Our Reptilian brain is not meant to dominate our human brain, and yet its domination has become increasingly apparent all around us. This is not our Reptilian brain's fault. It is only doing its job. Our Reptilian brain is a reactive brain, and this has been its reaction to entrapment; yet, on its own, it cannot change this.

While our mother's body is regulating us in the womb and cueing us with her hormones, our Reptilian brain acts as an observer who is developing a great expertise by reading the signals flowing

through it from our developing body. As our next brain lobe, our Limbic, emotional brain, develops, emotions and sensations we are beginning to experience in the womb are added to the impressions our Reptilian brain is receiving.

At birth, when our umbilical cord is severed, we have no immediate means for self-regulating. As our first breath sends our Reptilian brain the message that it is time to begin its full function, it begins to assess our situation. From then on, our Reptilian brain is working on our behalf twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for the duration of our life as the guardian, protector and stabilizer of our safety, security and survival.

Because our internal stability and organization are such an important part of our survival, our Reptilian brain does not take a long time to assess our situation and determine the settings that will regulate us. Since it cannot leave our body functions wandering for long, our Reptilian brain is going to utilize its developed expertise to determine these settings by reading the blood chemistry and nerve impulses that we have in response to our first experiences and their interactions with our body functions.

From whatever patterns it finds in these initial readings, our Reptilian brain is going to determine and then set the baselines that will regulate all of our basic body functions, including our brain chemistry and the cues for our hormone levels. Since these readings are greatly influenced by our emotional responses to our first experiences, it is highly likely that our regulatory baseline settings are going to reflect any stress we experience during this time. How could it be otherwise when all that our Reptilian brain has to go on to determine these settings is the internal physical reality of our responses to our first outer experiences?

Our Reptilian brain is a binary, either/or, attraction/aversion, yes/no, not maybe, brain that divides everything into only two categories: good for our survival or bad for our survival. From our first interactions, our Reptilian brain is determining what is good for our survival and what is not, and once its decision is made, it is going to decisively hold the line there and determine the actions we need for our survival.

Other than attraction/aversion, our Reptilian brain is not, itself, an emotional brain, but it does read our emotional state as good or bad for our survival. For us, as newborns, with no established internal or external physical or emotional stability or security, no experience and little to no Neocortical brain function with which to analyze, separation from our mother can be a disruption of our sense

of secure survival that can result in emotional agony and serious stress that can throw us into confusion and physiological disorganization. Our Reptilian brain does not read this as good for our survival.

While ongoing stress is never good for us, during the time our basic functionality is being determined, we are especially vulnerable. What happens to us then is going to impact us for the rest of our lives. Stress is a survival threat, and our Reptilian brain classifies as stress anything we experience as unhappiness or as unpleasant. It does not need to be severe. Even mild, repeated uncomforted distress or separation from our mother, particularly at night, can record enough stress in our system for our regulatory baseline settings to be adversely affected. Receiving the undivided focus we need during this time can save us a lifetime of woes.

In order for our Reptilian brain to be able to give us calm, balanced and health-giving baseline settings, we need the coherent help of balanced, reliable, constant, consistent, stabilizing and loving human care from one person, usually our mother, so that we can harmonize our body functions without confusion. During our first hours and days when our Reptilian brain is determining the settings that, in almost all cases, will be our body's settings for life, our responses to our experiences are keys to the ways these settings will influence the quality of our life. To whatever degree we experience stress from disruption of our continual loving care, our baselines are going to reflect that stress.

Beginning at birth and for our first few months, our Reptilian brain also continuously accumulates, sorts, classifies and imprints, in precise and minute detail, everything about the impressions it has been receiving from our first experiences, and even some of our impressions from before birth, especially if any of the same blood and nerve signal patterns also flow through it after birth. Thereafter, our Reptilian brain will run reactively according to its set of imprints. Once its information bank is imprinted, our Reptilian brain does not forget it and does not, on its own, change it.

The first two hours of our life is the time our Reptilian brain imprints who our mother is. If we are separated from her during this time, this imprint becomes confused. When we do not experience this initial bonding time in close physical contact with her, we can have trouble knowing where we belong, where our place is and who to harmonize with for the coherent help our Reptilian brain needs to stabilize our basic body functions.