



Emotion in the Body

The Vagus Nerve

By Emma Gilmore

.....

In my last article “Physical and Emotional Holding Patterns” I said that I would explore further how emotion manifests in the tissues of the body, particularly the viscera. As a bodywork practitioner of 25 years, I have witnessed how our physiology holds our life’s story in memories and bodily sensations.

My experience shows me quite simply that emotion is in the body; there are multiple reasons for this. In this article I am going to explore the role of the vagus nerve and how it conveys emotion or “gut instincts” to the brain.

.....

The vagus nerve, otherwise known as the “vagrant or wandering nerve”, has multiple branches that emerge from the medulla oblongata, through the jugular foramen. The vagus separates and wanders from here to the concha of the ear, muscles of the larynx, the lungs and heart, as well as innervating greater parts of the digestive tract and other abdominal organs along the way. The vagus nerve has masses of nerve tissue that transmit sensory impulses back to the brain via two sensory ganglia. In brief the vagus is responsible for the regulation of internal organ functions, such as digestion, heart and respiratory rate, vasomotor activity and some reflex actions for example coughing, sneezing, swallowing and vomiting. The inner organs, particularly the gut with its huge surface area, are a major source of sensory information to the brain.