

Processing A.K.A.¹ Staying With Uncomfortable Emotions²

Processing is becoming a ‘buzz word.’ In movies, articles, books and on TV I’m hearing the word processing more and more. Processing is central to the work that I do. I learned about processing from my teacher Charles.

In the beginning of working with Charles, I wasn’t sure what processing meant as people used the word. I heard people say processing and then they’d describe very different states that they were experiencing as they ‘processed.’ So I went from ‘I don’t know what processing is’ to ‘I’m confused about what processing is;’ which is really just again saying: ‘I don’t understand what people mean when they say they are processing.’

After seven years of working with Charles, I’m ready to say, for me, what processing is, and also what processing is not. This is a point of view; a view from one point.

What Processing Is

Processing is staying with uncomfortable emotions. Many people say that they’re ‘processing so hard.’ They can be processing (or not be processing) when they say this. What is so hard is staying with the uncomfortable emotions. If they’re staying with the uncomfortable emotions, then I say: ‘yes, the process is happening.’ With processing it’s about not interfering/stopping the emotions from dissipating and leaving. This is a very different type of effort than the effort that most people ‘do’ when they say that they’re processing.

Internal And External Acting Out

We also may be acting out (being pissy, moany, angry, sad, blaming, feeling shamed) during processing. There are two types of acting out – internal acting out and external acting out.

Internal acting out is when these uncomfortable emotions are also accompanied by a story that goes on in our head. The stronger the story, the more acting out internally. The stronger the story, the less processing. Yep, this is where people think that they’re processing like crazy and they may be making the uncomfortable emotions even stronger.

Internal acting out is very common. It's very usual for people new to processing to internally act out a lot. Also people internally (and often externally) act out a lot when a big trigger³ gets pushed. The more internal acting out, the less processing. Not only less processing, there can be no processing at all when there is a lot of internal acting out. Not only no processing, we can be energizing and making stronger the exact uncomfortable emotional issue that we want to be free from. The more experience that we have with real processing (yes, there is fake processing), the less we internally and externally act out. Then real processing can happen faster and deeper as the years go on.

External acting out is also very common. Sometimes it's unavoidable because we're overwhelmed. When this happens, don't beat ourselves up. When we can, apologize to the person for our rude behavior. Never let ourselves be physically violent to another person. Most people are not strong enough to never be emotionally rude or abusive to other people; especially people they live with.⁴ Know that when we're being rude or abusive to another that we're not processing.

Another way of externally acting out is venting. Venting is when you're telling another person about the uncomfortable emotions inside you and the associated stories about the uncomfortable emotions. This can actually be processing, and it can be anti-processing. Venting is tricky in whether it actually helps us process or if we get more invested in the story. We can feel relieved after venting, though we may have actually ingrained the story more inside us. Relief after venting doesn't always mean that the venting was processing. If the story gets more ingrained, then the venting is anti-processing.

The best aid that I can offer about processing is a 5 CD set by Pema Chodron called 'Coming Closer To Ourselves.' The greatest help that I've had about processing is from Charles.

What Processing Is Not

Processing is not our mind running and running and running with the emotion, and being all 'whipped up in a frenzy.' I've heard people say: 'I've been processing for days.' And what they've really been doing is adding more and more energy to the emotion. This is not processing. It's the opposite of processing. This will be a stage that many times people will experience before they process. This stage would be similar to buying flour in the store to bake bread and someone in the store asks you 'what are you doing?' You say: 'I'm baking bread.' You're not baking bread.

You're buying an ingredient that you need to bake bread. When people are frenzied and they say that they're processing, my opinion is that they're buying flour; they're not baking bread.

If we're thinking a lot about what is bothering us, then we're either slowing the process way down or we're not processing. Processing is not trying to figure something out. Processing is not trying to make sense of something. Processing is not trying to make peace with something.

I like JART. If I'm judging, analyzing, acting out (internally or externally) resisting, running away from (suppressing, repressing, denying), trying, transcending (wanting to be 'above' or someplace other than with the uncomfortable emotions), then I'm interfering with, or totally stopping, processing.

Why Is Processing Difficult?

If processing is staying with, being with, uncomfortable emotions (sadness, anger, fear, grief, shame, judgement. etc.⁵), then it's easy to know why processing is difficult. Humans are designed to go toward pleasure and to go away from pain. Staying with uncomfortable emotions goes against the design of human nature. This is one major reason that processing is difficult.

Processing Never Killed Anyone

Processing is uncomfortable. I've never read in a newspaper that a person died from processing. I've read countless accounts when people died or when they killed others that could have had the headline: Another Result Of Unprocessed Emotions. Most of all of the terrible actions by people could have the headline: Another Result Of Unprocessed Emotions.

Why Don't People Process More?

Three reasons pop up of why people don't process more. The first reason is big and it took me years to 'get it.' *The uncomfortable emotions of fear, anger, sadness, etc. want to stay, and even build and grow.* Eckhart Tolle refers to what he calls 'the pain body' to explain why uncomfortable emotions want to stay and even get stronger. Years ago Eckhart's teaching started to wake me up to the energy of these emotions, and how the emotions want to stay alive in us. Charles has talked about this in group countless times. Each time Charles talks about the uncomfortable emotions wanting to stay, it becomes a little more real for me that the uncomfortable emotions actually don't want to leave. And it's from staying with

uncomfortable emotions during these last seven years that I can verify that the uncomfortable emotions don't want to leave.

The second reason that people don't process more has already been written: it's difficult to go against 'human nature.' Human nature wants to go away from being uncomfortable; not to be with, and come to closer to, what is uncomfortable.

The third reason that people don't process more is because processing is easier (though not easy) to do when you're in a community of people who are processing. We get strength from each other. I've witnessed for years real processing and how it's uncomfortable for the person, and how the person is *always* so much better after the process is over. I've witnessed many instances of processing by the same people for years, and seeing the long term clearing, opening, clarity and love that *always* comes from real processing.

I've also witnessed some people, time and time again, say that they're processing when they're actually energizing the uncomfortable emotions. I've seen the results of people getting further buried 'in their stuff' as they claim to be processing. They're buying a hell of a lot of flour, but they ain't baking bread. I've also seen myself go 'down the tubes' for a while, but I haven't called it processing. I'm just buying a lot of flour in the store, and I know it. The baking comes when I 'get home' a.k.a. staying with the uncomfortable emotions.

Rhythmical Abdominal Breathing

The best way for me to support staying with the uncomfortable emotions and not listening to the story is by breathing into my belly. Abdominal breathing activates the calming and centering part of our nervous system. Shallow chest breathing activates the part of our nervous system that responds when we're stressed, and energizes the stress.⁶ Processing generally happens much slower when people breathe shallowly into their chest.

We can choose at what rhythm we want to breathe. I like to breathe into my belly deeper than a normal breath. My chest also expands some after my belly begins to expand. Breathing all the way down into the belly so the belly expands just above the pubic bones is extra helpful. I often choose to breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth when I'm consciously connected to the rhythmical abdominal breathing.

I've trained my body over the years to breathe abdominally even when I have no attention to my breathing pattern. Without abdominal breathing, the process takes longer.

Closing Comment

I look forward to (and not necessarily always like) these uncomfortable times. With the awareness that I have, with the support of the community, and with the track record of always feeling more free and clear after, I'm signed up for real processing.

Footnotes:

- 1 a.k.a. = also known as
- 2 Emotions and feelings are psychologically classified as being two different states. In this writing, for reasons of simplicity, I'm going to use the word emotion to cover both emotions and feelings. I think emotions are primary to this topic, though I don't want to ignore feelings. [Click here](#) to read a view that I like about the difference between emotions and feelings.
- 3 Big triggers are big emotional issues that are strongly inside us. *These big emotional issues run a lot of what we want and what we don't want; a lot of what we do and what we don't do.*
- 4 It's bizarre that those that we live with, those that we're closest to, those that we love the most, that we can be the most rude or abusive to them.
- 5 Judgement comes from fear or anger, and ultimately from fear.
- 6 There are two parts to the nervous system. The parasympathetic part of the nervous system calms the body, and is activated by abdominal breathing. The sympathetic part of the nervous system activates the body, responds to stress by releasing cortisol and adrenaline, and is activated by shallow chest breathing. There are scientific studies that have measured cortisol and adrenaline levels as people change their breathing patterns.