

Connecting The Body To The Brain Again | Yuji Oka

Yuji Oka helps people with brain injury reconnect their body to their brain again in an attempt to restore function that may have been lost due to acquired brain injury.

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Yuji Oka 0:00

The woman that I'm working with who's working through paralysis, one of the things she's finding with herself is that she was a project manager. And so she was very much into, she's kind of driven type a personality.

Yuji Oka 0:16

And now that she's injured, she has to find the other side of herself. She has to find the patient, I gotta trust in the process, I can't push this, it's out of my

control. And so somehow, you know, in a strange way, when you go through a process of healing like this, in a way you can get more whole, you know, parts of yourself that you had forgotten, you start to integrate.

Intro 0:44

This is the recovery after stroke podcast, with Bill Gaisamis, helping you navigate recovery after a stroke.

Introduction - Spiral Praxis



SPIRAL PRAXIS

Bill Gaisamis 0:56

Hello, and welcome to the Recovery after Stroke podcast. If you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience come and join me on the show. The interviews are not scripted, you do not have to plan for them. All you need to do to qualify is be a stroke survivor. Or you are one of the fabulous people who help stroke survivors.

Bill Gaisamis 1:16

Go to recoveryafterstroke.com/contact, fill out the form, and as soon as I receive your request, I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you and me to meet over Zoom. In today's episode, I'm joined by Yuji Oka, who is the founder of the Spiral Movement Center. Yuji helps people with neurological disorders and acquired brain injuries to reestablish the connection between the brain and body.

Bill Gaisamis 1:46

Developed over 35 years ago, Yuji's approach to rehabilitation has helped 1000s

of people gain a deeper awareness of their bodies and dramatically improve their motor functioning. This is a very deep philosophical conversation that you may benefit from if you listen to it more than once. Yuji Oka welcome to the podcast.

Yuji Oka 2:08

Thank you for having me.

Yuji Oka and his background



Bill Gasiamis 2:09

My pleasure. Thank you for being here. I am excited to have you here because I understand a little bit about what you do. And the way that I understand it is that you help people with neurological injuries, overcome the deficits and rewire the brain. But as correct. In your words, why don't you tell me what you do and how you got to be in the position that you're in now?

Yuji Oka 2:37

I work in a field called Cymatics. And in particular, I work on what I call body-mind Cymatics. In this field, basically what you're dealing with here is just focusing more on the internal experiences and the learning process that a person is going to go through when they're dealing with their body.

Yuji Oka 2:58

And so like, for example, a lot of people who have had strokes or any kind of brain injury, there's the traditional sort of medical stuff that happens that needs to happen, you know, all the drug treatments, surgeries, all of that might be

happening.

Yuji Oka 3:18

But then there's always the piece, you know, that is how you feel inside how much you feel like yourself. And that can range from a physical part and an emotional part mental part. And these are things that there are no real metrics for, it's your experience that counts.

Yuji Oka 3:35

And in my field, that experience is a leveraging tool. But when you understand that your experience, your internal experience is telling you something. Is something telling you deeply about yourself? As a person, your learning process, and how you're gonna get how you're going to deal with the challenges that are ahead of you.

Yuji Oka 3:59

So I work with kids, I work with adults, my background, I have a background in physics and dance. So I'm interested in the scientific part of this, you know, the kind of the, the, you know, I feel that we all experience things in similar ways inside there are laws of our internal experience. And at the same time, I recognize that there's a sort of art to this, everybody is going to enter into that healing process through their door network. It's a creative process that lends itself to the lens of dance and art and, and how people get excited and motivated to fully express who they are.

Bill Gasiamis 4:45

Okay, beautiful. What came first, was the study of dance or physics, physics, physics. Did that lead to dance? How did that evolve?

Yuji Oka 4:59

You know, I come from a line of scientists, my father is a fairly well-known scientist. And so I was expected to be a scientist and I love mathematics. I love the logic and the, the process of it. And during that time, I studied things in neurophysiology, and I learned all the medical stuff. But you know, during my studies, I was just one big brain, I felt like I understood everything through the lens of the intellect, but I didn't know my body.

Yuji Oka 5:31

And I just started taking dance classes in college started very, very late. But I fell

in love with it. And I had to change. There's something that drove me to change my field, actually only had one credit left, I was at Cornell University, and I had one credit left. And I couldn't finish the degree. I knew if I finished that degree, I'd have to go into physics. So I decided, I was going to leap, and I decided to go to modern dance.

Bill Gasiamis 5:58

Wow. So you had to physically stop yourself from finishing your physics studies? Because you knew that if you had finished them, there was only one path for you to follow.

Yuji Oka 6:17

Exactly, Yes. And it wasn't like it was a failure-type situation, I was doing well in school and all of that. But, you know, I think this is part of it, you know, all of us are driven by these internal needs, you know, we know, we're sort of driven to the things that we need to do. And in my case, I was always interested in you know, the beginning of things I, you know, I did the math and all of that, but I was interested in philosophy. And that's sort of the beginning of thinking.

Yuji Oka 6:54

And I felt that through dance, I eventually found my path in dance. And I realized I didn't want to do ballet and modern, I had a company and all of that. But what I was interested in what unfolded for me, as I started working with people who were injured, was the beginning of the dance, I just love this idea that when we are exploring our bodies, we have this miraculous thing, where we somehow know, we go through a process of learning how to move and how to use our bodies, and we live in this body through our whole lifetime.

Yuji Oka 7:29

And that process of unfolding from the very beginning is what interests me in particular, I think this is what's relevant to people who are, who have experienced brain injuries, and they have to start at the beginning. And that process almost is like a second childhood for them. And I love the sense of discovery this is a passion of mine to see people.

Yuji Oka 7:58

We visit those different points in their life with areas that they experience without necessarily a full cognitive awareness. But with the older people that I work with,

it's like they have to learn everything all over again. And I love that process. I think it's like, it's a fascinating process.

Bill Gasiamis 8:17

I made a couple of points, as you were describing that part of your career with regards to the dance and the sciences, and you said, you know, philosophy was part of the beginning of thinking, I, I imagine what you're talking about is critical thinking it's not the, the part of thinking just like about something general or basic, but deeply thinking and thinking about the way you think, even Is that what your version of thinking is? What type of thinking Have you taught Yeah,

Yuji Oka 8:57

I think it's even more rudimentary. I have a lot of people that I work with children I work with, and people who have gone through brain injuries, they lose their capacity, to talk sometimes. And even at the very beginning, they might be in a place where they've lost sort of that higher level of consciousness, they're unable to form words and thoughts, in the way that they used to.

Yuji Oka 9:22

And so they come back to the basis of thinking and thinking starts really with the senses, you know, your eyes, your ears, you pick up these experiences, you say it in your sound, and these perceptual experiences, eventually become, you know, concepts and thoughts and, you know, laws of, of nature. But initially, they're just physical experiences.

Yuji Oka 9:51

And so the thinking becomes a perceptual process. So when a brain person experiences a brain injury, for example, they very often have to, they can't sometimes talk even. And they realize what they can do is they can sense their bodies and they start to find, like just spatial relationships, you know, what does it move mean to move my arm in this direction?

Yuji Oka 10:18

Like, what is that? And that spatial, temporal energetic sort of process of exploring your body is sort of a primal form of thinking, it's perception and thinking. So it goes deep, I feel like where I start with thinking is just the sensorimotor stage.

Bill Gasiamis 10:41

I love that you've taken thinking out of the head, I love that you've taken thinking out of the head, and thinking is part of what the body helps you to do. It reminds me of a moment in my life, and probably many people will relate to this when I think simply based on the fact that somebody said something on TV, and I have immediately formed an opinion or an idea, and I just run with it.

Bill Gasiamis 11:09

Not really going into the process of paying more attention by using my senses, my eyes, my ears, my nose, and understand the lay of the land, rather than just taking words that somebody has said, and I embody them, and then I just run with it with the very, with a lazy version of thinking, which is just perhaps for the sake of feeling like I have something to say about a topic that I'm not an expert on.

Thinking and physical experiences - Yuji Oka

Yuji Oka 11:41

Yes, you know, I think thinking has to deal with our relationship with reality in the universe and the world around us, you know, and this is the Piaget idea that you build up all these physical experiences, you know, let's say, for example, you, you, you lift your arm, you know, at the very beginning, your body isn't, you don't consider it part of you yet, you know, it's sort of just an object of exploration like anything else, and you're discovering things about it, you realize that it has weight, it can fall it, it can feel pain, and it can pick up objects.

Yuji Oka 12:17

And all of this is the precursor to thinking, you know, and when thinking is connected to that concrete experience, it becomes a very, very, you start to understand what, its function is in life. And that is, to have you come into a relationship with the things in the things around you and how to navigate and interact with people's objects and things like this.

Yuji Oka 12:49

So, yes, this thinking, and, you know, I'll tell you, there's a very fascinating book that inspired me in my work. It's a book by Goethe. He's the German clitoris. But he also was a scientist, he did something about colors. And he made a book where he made all the observations that you feel when you look at color.

Yuji Oka 13:11

So if you look at a bright light, and you look at a dark place, you'll see the image of that light in that place. And all of these things. He has like 800 observations, and each one of them you can do now like it's everybody experiences the same thing, we experienced it slightly differently, we might have more powerful eyes, less powerful eyes.

Yuji Oka 13:32

But we all experience these things. And I feel like all of this, like raw data that we start with, is again, thinking body-mind is why we call it body-mind is slick, this primal place where we make all our connections together.

Bill Gasiamis 13:48

Yeah. Do you recall the name of the book?

Yuji Oka 13:51

Yes, it's the theory of colors. Okay.

Bill Gasiamis 13:55

For anyone who's listening, and might be interested in the theory of colors, I'll have a link in the show notes so that people can refer to that if they feel like it. Okay. So thinking, go ahead.

Yuji Oka 14:14

Well, I just want to say that, you know, from a pragmatic point of view, people who are going through that process, where they're going through rehabilitation, after brain injury, are going to find the similar things that everyone goes through, just like in this book. And I think this is fascinating. They're going to have to learn about how their body is aware.

Yuji Oka 14:38

They're going to have to hook into how to initiate and how to, what it means to have that spark where a movement starts again or a function of your brain starts to get back online. All of these are part of this body-mind process where everything starts at the basic thing of thinking and feeling And moving.

Bill Gasiamis 15:02

So in that case, does acquired brain injury from either a trauma to the head, a stroke, or something along those lines? does. Does that unlearn what has made us

unlearn a method or a process of thinking? And therefore, is part of what you do helping people relearn the somatic version of thinking?

Yuji Oka 15:37

Yes, yes. So for example, one of the things I sent you was a video of Dylan a 16-year-old boy. And he had exactly this problem, he had gotten to a point where he had a brain injury. But there were certain things that he couldn't solve there was a tremoring, that was starting to happen, it was stopping all his functions, and he could literally not grab onto objects and so forth. And he had plateaued out.

Yuji Oka 16:07

And, to overcome that tremoring, he had to reexamine pretty much everything, he had to re-examine first, you know, just the physical part of his situation. But he had to find out his relationship to pain, he had to figure out that a lot of what he was doing was to focus on, you know, sort of, he's very much into sports.

Yuji Oka 16:30

So he was focused on the competitive nature of sports. He had to understand that for him to heal, he couldn't be worried about other bodies and competing with them, but he had to know himself first. And that process became very, very important. And he also had to relearn how what it meant to have confidence in himself.

Yuji Oka 16:50

You know, what does that mean? You know, normally we measure by what we can do. But in the case of brain injury, we can't do that much at the very beginning. And so it had more to do with self-understanding, had to do more with just like learning, hey, the way I'm going to feel good about myself and confident about self is to know what makes me tick.

Intro 17:11

If you've had a stroke, and you're in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. Like, how long will it take to recover? Will I recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, and doctors will explain things that, you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

Intro 17:35

If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up

your recovery. If you're finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you it's called sevSeven Questions askAsk Your Doctorout your Stroke. These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke, they'll not only help you better understand your condition, but they'll also help you take a more active role in your recovery, head to the website now, recovery after stroke.com and download the guide. It's free.

Yuji Oka 18:14

How how how I process things? And so yeah, he had to relearn a lot of those things. And that's part of the healing process, not just a bunch of exercise he has to do, but he has to kind of re-examine who he is as a person. And so he is sort of reinventing himself as a thinker, as a feeler as a mover, everything.

Bill Gasiamis 18:35

It's identity level. Exactly. realize, okay, so So immediately because I did watch Dylan's story enough, it's amazing. Dylan was injured in a car accident, he had his head damaged. As a result, he developed some, I had some deficits, and those deficits seem to be progressing to getting worse. And I think that's somewhere around the time when the family got involved to the next level and interacted with you. And basically, you seemed in my mind to decrease the strength of the neural patterns for tremors and increase the neural patterns for not tremors.

Yuji Oka 19:21

Exactly, It was a very interesting situation. What was happening was that he was on a drug to calm his nervous system. And then what happened was, he went off that drug, and all of a sudden he started carrying this tremor in his hand. And that tremors just kept getting increasing, increasing and increasing.

Yuji Oka 19:44

And it got to the point that when he would reach for objects, he would just knock them over. He couldn't he couldn't close his hand. He couldn't grade And it was causing him the problem. You know, it was sort of his stopper that was stopping all the progress on all these different levels. And when he was dealing with that situation, there were lots of dimensions.

Yuji Oka 20:10

And this is what you find in body mind stuff is that there's not just the physical

aspect and neurological aspect of it, you know, there's something in the brain that's not working. But all these circumstances create that thing. And one of them, for example, was social shame. That is, he didn't want people to see him.

Yuji Oka 20:28

So he would hold his hand and kind of like trying to restrain it was kind of like, the more he held it, the more that energy builds up with happen. And so he was kind of creating this feedback because he didn't want to move his hands. So that was one thing. The other thing that was happening was that there were lots of pockets of pain in his body that hadn't been released.

Yuji Oka 20:51

And his body was kind of being triggered by the things that he didn't, he had been living with the pain for so many years, that he kind of didn't know that existed. So there was a pain cord that was also happening. And then there was also the most interesting thing maybe was that he was trying to learn how to move his body from using this part of his brain, you know, the frontal lobe stuff, you know, the thinking part of his thing.

Yuji Oka 21:21

So he was trying to Will his hand to do it but you know, moving happens from a much more primitive part of your brain starting from the cerebellum and your spinal cord, it's coming from a more unconscious part. And you kind of have to let your body do it.

Yuji Oka 21:38

This was the biggest thing that he had to learn that he had to learn to go back to moving, he couldn't do it through his head, he had to tune into his body and kind of relax, calm down, and not be afraid of looking at pains in his body. And just working all that out before he could start to realize what it meant to control his body.

The importance of not thinking about movement

Bill Gasiamis 22:12

It's counterintuitive because he had to not think to move his body he had to do

just do. Thinking about it. Perhaps in the head-based thinking, not the Cymatic version of the thinking, which we've already discussed. Thinking about it is overcomplicating it in my mind, it sounds to me like if I have to think about moving when I had to learn how to walk again, it was so difficult to do, it was so draining, so energy sapping that I couldn't sustain it for a long time anyway, I had to have faith in my legs ability to give the feedback to me and my brain.

Bill Gasiamis 23:05

So that when it was on the ground, even though it felt different, I had to believe and trust in the fact that it was on the ground. And the feedback that was given to me was that it was a new language, but it was feedback nonetheless, that it was on the ground. And then that therefore, that released the tendency of my knee to overcompensate and also created a situation where if my li wasn't overcompensating, it also wasn't undercompensating, because my knee would buckle.

Bill Gasiamis 23:39

And as a result of that, I started, to feel and understand the way that my leg was now responding rather than trying to think about how I was responding and looking at my leg. Falling my foot, landing on the ground, and then and then wondering whether or not I had it in the right position or not. So I kind of had to learn visually what the position of the foot knee and leg were when they were in the quote-unquote, correct position.

Bill Gasiamis 24:17

And then once I visualized that and knew what it looked like, I had to believe that my body was doing it and risk falling over and risk injuring it. Even though that would not have been the best outcome. It would have been a learning opportunity to say, Okay, I have to make an adjustment and allow for that thing that caused me to lose my balance trip over my knee to buckle or my knee to overextend on my hip to give way.

Yuji Oka 24:47

Yes, how old were you?

Bill Gasiamis 24:49

I was 37.

Yuji Oka 24:51

Wow. So it's later in your life. Okay. Yeah. So surreal. I'm working with a woman who's about 40 and she has described something very similar to you. She was on a trip and she was in the Dominican Republic and she went on a waterslide. Someone went after her, hit her head and she became a quadriplegic, there. And she's just relearning, she just came back, and they did an emergency surgery.

Yuji Oka 25:23

And one of the first things she realized is that you know, she's, you know, they're doing all this physio, and the first thing she just realized that she found effective was exactly what you said, she was spending her time looking at her feet. And that visual, just establishing that visual in her mind, was her first link to ability to move.

Yuji Oka 25:49

So when it was out of sight, out of mind, she couldn't do anything. She's just feeling spasms. But when she got in the chair, she would tilt the chair so that she could see her feet. That was the first moment that she started moving her feet.

Bill Gasiamis 26:01

And if I have to be honest, the very first moment before that, and, I was 40 years old, I had to look, I had to learn how to walk again, after my brain surgery at 40. My whole, the whole episode started at 37. But at 40, I had brain surgery. But honestly, the first time I imagined I saw my leg in the correct posture, correct position landing on the ground correctly, was before I'd started rehabilitation, it was in the hospital, waiting for rehab, imagining myself walking the perfect stride.

Bill Gasiamis 26:39

Before I had started rehabilitation, maybe a day or two before I first got on my feet for the first leg therapy session. And I was just imagining myself looking at the third person running the story in my head, imagining myself and seeing myself walking and creating an image of what that looked like. And then I applied that image to the actual first session of therapy. And then I was able to remove myself.

Bill Gasiamis 27:19

And then I was able to take my head out of the equation, and then just trust in the process that I just explained. And if I go one step further back, the very first day

after brain surgery, when I woke up, and I couldn't walk, I was attached to a harness onto the ceiling. And that was holding up my weight. And I recall and I have a photo of this, I recall myself holding on to the parallel bars and looking down to see where my foot was landing.

Bill Gasiamis 27:48

So, there were three stages to that it was the initial stage where it wasn't working at all, where I didn't know the new language that my leg was giving me. It was the second stage when I was imagining the correct physical process. And then the third one where I had faith that my leg was going to be able to deliver the outcome for the correct.

Yuji Oka talks about dealing with involuntary movements

Yuji Oka 28:23

Yes, you know, you've outlined a process that's, that is very, very important and very, very deep inside the situation. You know, we're initially looking for movement, you know, purposeful movement, that's the goal. And that's not usually what happens. And sometimes we have these involuntary movements that are happening and the politics. So that's what this one was dealing with involuntary movements, and, you know, literally, no voluntary stuff whatsoever happening in that situation that relates to this first stage.

Yuji Oka 28:54

And, you know, in this stage, things are already happening. Like sometimes when those specificities and things are happening, people look at that and say, oh, gosh, look at me. But you know, all of that is positive, your body's like actually moving, you know, just the fact that it's moving, whether it's voluntary or not. This is a whole unconscious process where your body's trying to figure out where am I what am I doing, you know, how is this work?

Yuji Oka 29:19

And that second stage where you're starting to look at your body and making these connections, there are all sorts of things again, going underneath the hood, there, even though there's not the movement per se happening, still purposeful. Your nerves are kind of rehearsing themselves. You know, the kind of like figuring

out, okay, what's the like, again, what's that impulse feeling where, you know, What's it supposed to feel like in you're looking at yourself?

Yuji Oka 29:45

You're trying to send impulses in your body, hit or miss, something's working. It leads to a movement, a lot of times it just leads to nothing. It's dead. You just use this word. Is it offline? What is it? This is all an exploratory process that's happening. the thing that's happening on the level of your muscles, nerves, your bones, all inside your body. And then yeah, there's this thing where it gets translated into movement.

Yuji Oka 30:09

So this general process that you're talking about is exactly kind of the area that is this body-mind somatic process where it's, it's half, it's more on the unconscious part of things, it's just happening under the hood. And your conscious mind is trying to make a connection between, you know, where it's at, and trying to find a language that is connected to that, you know, physical unconscious processing that's happening deep inside your body.

Bill Gasiamis 30:43

Physics came first, then came dance, and then from dance, did you move into this space? How did you start to move into this space? Tell me about the transition from dance to this space.

Yuji Oka 30:55

Yeah, well, I was dancing. And there was a grant that was brought up, and I was in Cleveland at the time. And it was a big grant, you know, it was a big push to put arts into the school. And as it turned out, you know, I just had a small company, just two people. And somehow I got this grant. And I was charged with making a curriculum for a school with kids with behavioral difficulties, special needs, autism, ADHD, developmental delays.

Yuji Oka 31:30

And initially, I wanted them to Just Dance I thought, Oh, just go in there, making dancers just have to improvise whatever it is. And then I found out like, you know, that doesn't work. These kids again, have to learn from the very beginning. They're not in touch with their bodies, they freak out, they shut down. They, they don't know themselves. And so what was just an art project at the very beginning,

became this, like, very important question like, Well, how do I get them to connect with their bodies?

Yuji Oka 32:02

And, you know, that's pretty much how it started out working with kids, these kids are amazing. Because they're just like people with brain injuries, like, if it works. It's so connected, like, you see them connecting. And if it doesn't work, nothing happens. So you're just in this place where you're working with bodies that are finely tuned to progress and, you know, figuring out ways to do it. And I learned a lot in that place.

Yuji Oka 32:36

I learned, for example, that a lot of times when you're dealing with patients and kids with disabilities, you try to give them use try to simplify, and you try to dumb it down and make things rigid, like programmatic. And the success I had was, because I didn't do that what I tried to do was to it's work on skills, but to do the opposite. Instead of like drilling it into them. I had them go through an exploratory process where they were, like, trying to get at that movement from different ways.

Yuji Oka 33:11

I put them on in clients, working with partners, working with weights, slowing it down, spinning it up, just getting them, to explore. And I think that this is crucial for anybody who is working from that place of injury, that it's initially an exploratory process. It's not about strengthening. It's not about learning the skill immediately. But it's first of all, exploring your body and just figuring out again, how this thing ticks again, as how do I get aware of it.

How to positively impact the body

Bill Gasiamis 33:40

It sounds like what you're doing is creating the opportunity for information to come in, in very different formats in many different ways. Perhaps information about the body came in one rigid way, in the past, because of their not connectedness to their body. Therefore, having a larger sample of ways for information to become available to the body, you can then potentially impact the body for somebody who has a unique way of getting to that, for that information

to pass through to get and make the connection where you see the connection has been made. It sounds like you're broadening the possibility of how to positively impact somebody's body.

Yuji Oka 34:41

Yes. You know, sometimes, again, I think this is something that sometimes we're finding in the medical field. I work with a lot of medical professionals. I work with a pharmaceutical company, and I've worked with universities. And what I find fascinating is, you know, the medical field is finding that out as well. That I think they're in the business, usually of working with people who have had very strong abilities, and then they have an injury.

Yuji Oka 35:10

And so you're trying to get them back from where they are. But usually, it's not. You know, that drastic thing that we sometimes see with brain injuries and, you know, kids with strokes where it's like, no, it just went way back. You know, it's like, it's not like, Oh, can I, you know, you know, it's not just about walking, it's like, can I even like, feel at home on the body again, you know, can I, you know, can I feel the same way I used to feel.

Yuji Oka 35:39

So, when you start from the beginning, you go through a whole different process that is, is very, very individual. And it just speaks to, to who a person is, like, you just go back to that time when you were, you know, under six years old, and you're just trying to figure out, like, you know, before any of this stuff of higher level stuff, just how do I move my body? And how do I feel myself? And when do I feel comfortable? And how do I self-regulate all those issues?

Bill Gasiamis 36:11

It sounds like earlier, you mentioned, I've got to experience a second or second childhood. It's really important to be young at heart. In that case, whether you're 70 years old, 60 years old, or 50 years old, you need to be young at heart and get curious about the possibility of what you're doing, how you're going about it, what, you know, I remember my kids looking at the hand and going, what is this thing? It's quite moving it, it's twisting, I can see it, it's touching me.

Bill Gasiamis 36:45

And then at some point, when they stop looking at it like that, you know that

they've made the connection that it's them. But until that time, they haven't made the connection, that it's them, and they're poking themselves in the eye, and they're putting it in their nose and their mouth, and it's just going places, and then one day they observe it, and you can tell something different has happened in the head, they've changed.

The curiousness of being a child

Bill Gasiamis 37:09

And I feel like we need to permit people to get back to that stage in their lives. They've been there before, and perhaps they thought they were beyond that, and they were past that stage of their life. But I think brain injury does necessitate, the curiousness that you instinctively practice when you were a child way, way before we overthought being childish, as a bad thing, rather than now being childlike, is potentially benefiting your recovery.

Yuji Oka 37:54

Yeah, yeah, there, you know, we, you briefly touched on that identity. And, you know, it is about rebuilding your identity, your, your identities, initially starting is always connected to your bodies always connected to who and what you are, what you you can do basically in stress with your body. And when that gets disrupted to the level that it does with brain injuries, everything changes. I'm wondering for you, things must have changed completely for you when you got your brain injury. You know, in terms of everything?

Bill Gasiamis 38:24

Well, yeah, so the, I think, if I have to describe the hardest part for me is for the people who are into astrology, I'm a Gemini, Gemini. Gemini is to, you know, face the two people in one body, whatever you want to call it. So it's what I experienced when I woke up from surgery was that my left side now felt completely different from my right side, straight down the line. And it is a completely different version of myself. The challenge that I have is that both of them need to coexist at the same time.

Bill Gasiamis 39:08

It's like being conjoined twins. Okay, and then somehow trying to create, create cohesiveness, harmony between the two conjoined parts of me and get them to

work as one even though they are both, too. So they have their own identity. They have their way that they express themselves, they have their way that they speak to me and giving information to me. They have their way of behaving.

Bill Gasiamis 39:43

And I've got to bring them together. So that says when I'm writing a book or doing a podcast, we're all on the same page. And that's the hardest part because when I'm in flow or a zone, I don't notice it but when I noticed that I noticed that my left side feels colder, my right side feels not well, and my right side feels like it's always felt. My left side feels tingling, and burning, reacts to temperature reacts to the wind gets tired quickly.

Bill Gasiamis 40:21

It's a different part of my personality. It's a second iteration of me. And it occupies only half of my body. Right down the line. Yeah, What's interesting is on the left side, obviously is where my heart is. So I have noticed a different way of how my heart expresses itself compared to how it used to express itself. And it's, I'm wondering, I didn't have an answer for this wondering, but I wonder if it was the opposite.

Bill Gasiamis 41:01

If it was switched, where my left side remained, quote, unquote, normal, and my right side was different, how I would experience my heart would have just remained the same expression that it always was. I think now my heart feels more sensitive, more easily. I'm not sure if the words offended or more easily hurt or upset than before.

Bill Gasiamis 41:29

But my heart coming online has also enabled me while I explained it's come online in a different way, and it has enabled me to create better conversations, deeper conversations, more philosophical thinking, and more emotive thinking, it's guided me to do what I love more than what I used to do before. Before, I used to do what my head told me I needed to do to make money to make a living never to do anything like this, which is free for everybody to download.

Bill Gasiamis 42:06

So and then I've had to get curious about how I live with these two versions of myself, because people experience me differently, but I experienced me

differently. And sometimes it's hard to, it's hard to. Sometimes the ability to notice the difference is really difficult to live with.

Bill Gasiamis 42:30

Sometimes really, if I'm having a bad moment, a bad month, a bad, whatever, it's sometimes it's like, wow, there's this stuck, I'm in a relationship that is sometimes I'm in a very good relationship with my two hearts, sometimes each of my halves is in a very bad relationship. And I'm speaking about them because I'm noticing it as a third person, while the two of them are going at each other. It's intensely insane.

Dualities and polarities in our being - Yuji Oka

Yuji Oka 43:01

You know, this whole idea of dualities and polarities in our being is, is very, very part of our body-mind, somatic viewpoint. And, you know, there's a, you know, this is something historical, it's not, you know, again, not just associated with brain injury, for example, just to give you an example, the right and left side of bodies have been traditional, you know, I've been associated, you know, like, the Latin form for the left is Sinestro, or sinister, and right, you know, right is right.

Yuji Oka 43:34

So there's, there's been an association with the left side being, you know, left and right side, the good and bad, but then there's a neurological basis for this to us, you know, you know, a lot of us know, that the right side of our brain or left side of the brain, you know, there's an analytical and a sort of creative side that people have started to find this neurological basis for.

Yuji Oka 43:54

And then I just think, just in terms of personalities, you say, these polarities exist, you know, in the astrology or whatever it is, that the woman that I'm working with, who's working through the process, one of the things she's finding with herself, is that she was a project manager. And so she was very much into, she's kind of driven, a personality type a type personality. And now that she's injured, she has to find the other side of herself.

Yuji Oka 44:24

She has to find the patient. I gotta trust in the process, I can't push this, you know, it's out of my control. And so somehow, you know, in a strange way, when you go through a process of healing like this, in a way you can get more whole, you know, parts of yourself that you had forgotten, you start to integrate.

Yuji Oka 44:45

And so there is a, you know, it's important to understand that this healing process is not all about like, there's something wrong with me and, you know, it is a chance at kind of, you know, starting over again and, and looking at things that you might have a We're looking. And I think that when it's looked at in that way, it's a healthy process.

Yuji Oka 45:07

The reasons for our illnesses are, are out of our control, for the most part. And it's really lovely to look at a healing process from a positive point of view and to see it as a place where there can be immense learning.

Bill Gasiamis 45:21

Yeah, as absolutely learning is not lacking. It's so the learning the challenge with the learning is not a challenge the beauty of the learning is that it's so deep. Right? It's really deep, it's not open the book, read the first 10 chapters, and tell me what the book says. It's telling me what the book means.

Bill Gasiamis 45:46

What tells me what's in the author's mind, heart, and soul, tells me that that's the part that takes work that takes a long time. So it takes a lot of conversations with people like yourself, you know, who come from, what I noticed is that these deep conversations with people like yourself, and some of the other amazing people I've interviewed, that work with people who are recovering from brain injuries, is that they come from a different place of philosophy, for example, thinking upbringing, whatever.

Bill Gasiamis 46:18

But they're all working at the same location, they're all working on the person's identity, they're all working on the person's soul. They're all working at a deeper level, they're not working on, let's see, you walk, they understand that it's not the walk is the secondary part of the recovery. It seems like it's the most important

part, but it's not I often say, to people who listen to my podcast that, you know, recovery gets allocated by the doctors with what they can see, first, which is all the person's not walking, well, let's get him to walk.

Bill Gasiamis 46:59

But what the doctors don't know to do, and perhaps don't have the resources to do is explain that emotional recovery and, mental recovery are just as important as physical recovery, and they are all interlinked. You can't just do the physical recovery without tending to the emotional recovery, and the mental recovery, you have to do all three. And under those three particular headings, emotional, physical, and mental, there might be other subcategories.

Bill Gasiamis 47:34

And you can place whatever you want in that subcategory could be spiritual, could be part of the emotional recovery or religious, you know, for mental it could be, you know, thinking critically or curiously or in a new childlike way. The physical recovery might be, yes, that I'm doing something that appears to be walking.

Bill Gasiamis 48:01

But it's learning that thing that we spoke about earlier, which was to trust in the body's feedback, that I don't have to overthink it and correct and over, tell her what to do and to accept what my body's telling me, and learn the new language that my body is giving me. You know, so it's a very it is this the depth of the learning, for me to recover to the point that I am today, and to continue to recover? has been I've learned more in 10 years than I ever learned in 37 years.

Bill Gasiamis 48:41

Let's put it that way. It's so much more. I'm not sure if the word is intense. I'm not sure if it's intense, if that's the right word, because it's not a bad intense it's a jam-packed full of information, deep learning stuff. You know, it's nothing I ever experienced before the age of 37. And I was yeah, it's just nothing. Oh, I can't explain it. It's amazing.

The spiritual side of the situation

Yuji Oka 49:12

Yeah, yeah. And I agree, you know, the, you know, the, the walking is a

secondary, you know, walking, crawling, rolling, whatever it is that you have to relearn. You know, that is the way other people will see it, you know, they see the progress through the lens of your body and, you know, the look on the outside and say, oh, you know, Oh, I see you're able to do that, and that's what they'll see.

Yuji Oka 49:39

But, you know, inside with the person and with, you know, relationship with the therapist, it's the process, you know, it's all those gaps in between that lead from one place to the other that is where the real learning is taking place, you know, and it's nice to reach that milestone. But, you know, that processes like it is the key and the other thing I think is interesting, speaking of polarities is that, you know, there's this depth of understanding, which is coming to the bottom of like, childhood, and just these primal states of being where you're able to move your body.

Yuji Oka 50:16

But I also like this spiritual side of the situation. And what I mean by spiritual is, you know, I work with people from all sorts of different backgrounds and sort of spirituality as defined by their religion or something, maybe it can be quite varied, but I feel like, you know, underneath all of that, is this, this concern for mortality and, and, you know, universal human concerns, you know, that just cuts across lines everywhere age and race, religion, whatever it is.

Yuji Oka 50:53

And then that part of it, you know, again, this is hard to talk about, but it plays a huge part, in, in, in the recovery, like how you see the meaning of your life? And what motivates you what, what should motivate you what, you know, because you need to be so grounded when you're in that situation, I think everyone's that routed to such an extent, you know, because you're not sure if you're going to get it back or, you know, and you're dealing with, also what, what does it all mean, to put it all back together again, and in the story that I sent you with Dylan.

Yuji Oka 51:32

I feel like even though he's only 16 years old, I feel like the experiences that he's had, you know, being close to death, feeling sort of, like, separated from other people, you know, this whole person, society and stuff, and he's in it, but he's also kind of observing it in his because he's got a very particular situation. He had to learn to find inner strength inside himself. And that inner strength, I can't

describe exactly how and how you go about getting that. But I think it is about somehow confronting your situation.

Yuji Oka 52:10

And just coming to terms with what's happening with you, and somehow accepting that and letting your yourself flow with it, to be okay with it, and to start to say, Hey, I'm going to, I'm going to live this, I'm going to live it, and I'm going to live it as fully as I possibly can. And somehow, there's a point where there's something unleashed, that can happen, you know, in the in the film, he goes to Niagara Falls, he, has this thing, and I feel like, you know, that was just a day trip.

Yuji Oka 52:44

But this is something that I felt was happening inside of him. Like he plateaued out and he had kind of lost a little bit, he was getting a little frustrated, a little bit cynical, just losing a little bit of that drive. And he found he started finding it, I could feel him starting to find it. And I can't point to exactly how that was happening. But he was starting to come to the other side of life, where it's like, you know, what, I can live through this I can, I can put myself into the situation in my life that it is now and I can live and try to figure out what I can do in that.

Bill Gasiamis 53:26

So what I've discovered in my nearly 260 episodes is that it's universal, what you described is universal, and its cross-age is no barrier. What is interesting, the main common thread is that traumatic experience. Now, in my example, it's a traumatic experience as a result of a stroke. But I imagine in other communities where we're not talking about traumatic brain injury, it's the traumatic experience, the risk to life, the deep injury, the having to withdraw from society for a little while, whatever the reason being, and it's that traumatic experience, which, which puts everything on the line.

Bill Gasiamis 54:14

And I think that it's our innate nature, it's within us to go to that place that you just described as part of our innate way of finding ourselves and then coming out of the hole that we've ended up in. And one of the good things about that, for me was that it happened as a result of a brain injury because my brain was offline, and my ability to overthink things went away. And I just went to almost instinct, core, deep ancestry instinct.

Bill Gasiamis 55:02

And I did what my gut was telling me to do. And my gut was guiding me. And all I had to do was take action down that direction, I didn't even cognitively know the direction I was going down. So when I experienced my brain injury, I explained that as my head went offline completely, and even though I was doing the rudimentary tasks of talking, you know, answering questions and, you know, doing chores, and doing all the things that make somebody appear to be normal, and inhabiting the world, normally.

Bill Gasiamis 55:47

My head wasn't able to do the kind of processing that I had done before 37 and wasn't able to do it. And as I never, I never knew where to go. I never knew how to go there. I didn't have the intellect, the intelligence, the philosophical understanding, the deep. The deep study from my past to draw on just went there. And that this is the result of that I came to be in this space from going to a place where I had no idea where it was or how to get there, there was no roadmap, nobody told me to go there, just that I just ended up there.

Bill Gasiamis 56:32

And what's great about having a brain injury at such a young age, is that if you get away with it, the damage is not catastrophic, you have the opportunity to gain that level of wisdom, at such an early age, and if you live another 70 years after that, that will make that can make for a potentially unbelievable existence, distance, and a massive impact on the planet. And I'm grateful that I went through what I went through at 37.

Bill Gasiamis 57:17

Because I felt my life wasn't leading to anything particular. Particularly important. And those seven, my family was loving, and I was in a good relationship. And my kids loved me, but I was terrible to be around. Because I used to bring more problems. I used to take it out on my kids. I used to be angry, I used to yell and scream, I used to be one way. There's only one way, my way. And all that stuff had to go away when I had to go to this place of how do I redo me? How do I be me? How do I discover how to move forward without my head?

Bill Gasiamis 58:01

And it's making for an amazing it's foundation for an amazing another 10 20 30 years ahead. I've done 10 or 11 now. And that's resulted in a podcast, a book, a

coaching course all things that were not possible before for me to develop and be a part of and deliver and put out there and offer to people. Your background, your particular background interests me because of your Japanese heritage.

Bill Gasiamis 58:45

And I know the Japanese have a particular interest in the gut. And they have a description of the gut, which is hara. Can you give me a bit of an insight as to what if any of your traditional sort of Japanese heritage and upbringing and culture and how that has helped to shape your journey into this space? And also, what about the gut is important in Japanese culture?

Yuji Oka 59:23

Yeah, you know, the Eastern culture generally has a very strong tradition in body-mind kind of things, meditation, yoga, these are all different from Western culture, which deals more with that higher level thinking philosophy. You know, there's a practice that happens in other words, that whether it's a painting in ink painting or something, you're trying to put a little bit of your internal Energy and flow into marking your work, as opposed to just what you achieve on the outside.

Yuji Oka 1:00:08

So definitely has influenced me, you know, it's not the direct connection I was born here in, Ottawa, and my parents were immigrants. So it's not direct, but I feel like, culturally speaking, I think there's just this kind of game is kind of through line that happens. But all that discussion of like hara and stuff is all about working with the perceptions, the energies, you know, like, in the east, you call it energies and stuff like this.

Yuji Oka 1:00:40

That, it's just basically what you feel inside your internal experience, you know, the flows that you feel, and just things are always circulating inside of you all the time. And that tradition of looking at things is very related to body and mind. And it relates also pragmatically, to the methods that you use. So instead of working with lots of machines and stuff for working, from the point of view of functional exercises, you're first starting with things like bodywork, massage, meditation, meditation is was huge.

Yuji Oka 1:01:23

These are things that, again, are ways that are part of your tools, when you're

starting from that kind of mindset. You're not just working with medications, and, you know, exercise routines and things like that you're working with things where you're looking inside yourself in trying to gain a grounding self-awareness of what all this is about.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:56

When you come across somebody new to work with, or somebody comes across you and approaches you for work or support, I'm not sure what you'd call it, perhaps it's not work. It sounds like it's, you know, feel like it's work. It sounds like it's just what you love to do. What's the process? Is there any evaluation process? How do you assess the person that is coming to you and saying, I'm struggling with this? I've experienced this and I need some support.

How do you deal with pain? - Yuji Oka

Yuji Oka 1:02:31

Yeah, well, you know, it's exactly what you said earlier. It's like, it's all interlinked, you know, a person's whole life history is interlinked with everything. So, you know, the, the process just really just starts with talking, you know, as we're talking, you just find out how the person thinks, how they feel. And in the process of doing that, you learn so much. I had a woman once from Mexico, for example, she had complained about a bad back.

Yuji Oka 1:03:01

And, you know, instead of going to treatment, the first thing I asked her was now, how does she deal with pain, she had such interesting things to say she said, this is how I deal with pain Yuji, I feel pain. And then I grit my teeth and I don't say anything to anybody. Then I go home, and I go about my chores, and I do it.

Yuji Oka 1:03:23

And then right around evening time, I'm washing the dishes or something, and I just scream. And you are just knowing that defined everything for me, like it wasn't about like, oh, you know, your lower back and your distance. First, I just realized, okay, so you're the type of person when you feel pain, she presses in and represses that pain, and she just, no, she doesn't communicate it at all. And that's the first thing you have to learn, you have to learn that your pain isn't met like you don't ignore your pain like your pain is a signal right off.

Yuji Oka 1:04:01

And first thing you have to do is not like hold it and like, keep it inside, you've got to, you got to immediately start to figure out how to release and stuff. So it's things like this, like inflammation that comes around from lifestyle and the way that you approach pain, you know, she was a very proud person.

Yuji Oka 1:04:17

And she was like, no one's gonna ever see me feel pain. And again, that was more a part of the therapy initially. And so you can learn a lot from just talking to people and finding out their way of going about things about where they're going about life. And by doing that, you kind of see how they might be treating their own body.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:38

Interesting. If they're not expressing how the physical pain manifests. I imagine they're not expressing how their emotional pain manifests.

Yuji Oka 1:04:51

That's correct. I had another woman who was from Brazil. She was the grandmother of the mother whose child I was working with and, you know, she was like, I noticed that she was in the kitchen, she was having trouble lifting replace, she'd have to hold up bread. And I said, oh, we'll take a look at you. And because she only spoke Portuguese, her daughter had to come in and sort of translate everything I was saying.

Yuji Oka 1:05:16

And she had to, during this time, the daughter was realizing, oh, my gosh, I never realized my mom had pain on a scale of one to 10. She's like, I haven't nine pain. Letters, like you, never told me this, what's going on? And she, and I told her, you know, every pain that you're not saying is a secret, you're holding the secret, you're holding that secret. And that secret is something that is something in when you're already saved.

Yuji Oka 1:05:49

That's something you told me. And a few sessions later, you know, she was getting physical releases and stuff that I did learn plus the process. She says, usually, I have a secret to tell you. And I said, What is it? And she said, You know what, she had come from a line of doctors, and her aunt had died of ALS. And she

was afraid she had ALS. And she was so afraid, she didn't want to tell anybody. She didn't want to tell, she didn't even want to tell herself. And so when she had a pain she did, she said, Oh, this could be ALS.

Yuji Oka 1:06:26

And it was so I'm just going to ignore the pain is going to not pretend this is the kind of stuff it's its secrets and pains are like that every pain in a story has something that's connected to it in terms of your emotion, your history, you know, the way you handle things. And as you start to learn about that relationship that you have with the pain in your body, that's when you start to understand, okay, this is what I've been, or this is what I am. And now to get myself out of this situation, it might I might have to do things differently.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:02

I imagine that not attending or giving the pain, any airtime is a problem. But also, perhaps giving it too much airtime is a problem. Tell me about that.

Yuji Oka 1:07:17

Yeah you know, the pain can be treated like an enemy. And, you know, so either you, you suppress it, because you don't want to know about it, or you don't want other people to know about it. Or you start to get into a conflict with it, you start to feel like are this pain you, you start to vent, you start to read, you start to complain, you start to you, you go, you know, you start to cry at the garden, United's there's one person who told me that she said, You know, God, why'd you do this?

Yuji Oka 1:07:57

You know, like, there's this whole thing that you can get into this relationship with pain that can make you feel like a miserable person because you just focus on pain, you don't know what to do with it. And, you know, you have to come to a situation where, you know, as hard as it is, you have to understand the pain is not just in an incoherent signal. It's something your body's telling you.

Yuji Oka 1:08:22

There needs to be some adjustments, something can be done about that pain. It's not just always about popping a pill, there's something that you have to do, do you have to relax? Do you have to like give yourself time do you have to, you have to look inside that part of your body. And sometimes you have to ask for help. There

are all sorts of things that that pain is telling you. And you have to come to terms with that and realize this is like a terrible thing. But there's there is a meaning to it. It's not like it's not senseless. It's not just all sound, sound, and fury, it's telling you something, there's content.

Bill Gasiamis 1:08:59

Yeah, content, and then also the pain might be telling you that you have to attend to something emotionally, mentally, physically, but also you might have to get help from the medical profession.

Yuji Oka 1:09:11

Yep, there's nothing here that, you know, everybody, there's all parts of the puzzle that you have to do. I added a finger to see this, this is a finger that I ran through a table router. It's like you know, when I hit it just went like this and think I the nerves could run down the side and the top here, but you know, when I was doing that, I looked down at it. And I was in the emergency room and I was like, I can't move this.

Yuji Oka 1:09:38

There's no minor thing that I can do, like, you know, and they told me that the ligament had separated from the bone. That's a medical thing. Don't you know, no matter no meditation or anything is going to do that? You need that tenant attached. And this is the pulley system and that's the way it works. So for sure. You know, there's nothing here that's non-medical that isn't a polemic against medicine.

Yuji Oka 1:10:00

Yeah, there are things that medicine does well. But there are some things that it misses. And as you said, I think it's not well equipped to deal with the, the questions that, you know, that we can deal with, with bodied men. How do you feel what, you know, what's your strategy for the pain? What kind of environment do you need supportive environment do you need for your human process?

Yuji Oka 1:10:21

You know, sometimes when you go into hospital is the absolute worst place to feel comfortable to, you know, be and you know, it's so intimidating and so sterile. And so, you know, they do things, amazing things happen. But there's also recognition, I think that they're starting to see that, you know, they need this

ecology.

Yuji Oka 1:10:44

And I like to call it an ecology of people. It's you people who are close to you, your caregivers, your therapists, but other people, other things, your environment, everything, it all comes into play when you're dealing with things, you can't really, you have to find an environment that and whole ecology that works for you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:02

Yeah, it's interesting with the medical professionals, they like motor mechanics, there's the motor mechanic that likes to see you maintain your vehicle, when you bring it to him, or her for a service. All it needs is the oil replaced, you haven't, you've paid attention to the tires, you know, you haven't run it up against the wall and scratched the heck out of it and had panels missing, you've attended to it and he's happy to see you turn up and he says, well, all while the cars looking great.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:34

All we have to do is fix it for you, it's gonna cost this much see you at the next service. And then there are those other motor mechanics that can't wait for somebody terrible at looking after the car to turn up because they're counting the dollars again, and we're going to charge him for this. And I'm going to charge him for that.

Bill Gasiamis 1:11:49

And we're going to charge for that. Those doctors, they exist in both those people exist in both worlds the medical profession and the automotive profession. And I feel like they're the answer that's within them. It's not part of the training, the training for a motor mechanic is not to make sure that their clients will look after their cars, when they're not at the mechanic's workshop, right? Their job is to take the faulty part out and replace it with a new part.

Bill Gasiamis 1:12:26

It's your responsibility to bring the car to them in as good condition as possible so that they can spend the least time money and effort in restoring it and getting back to you. So that it's safe. It has served its purpose, you know, the doctors have the same role you go there, they expect you to do all the work to keep yourself fit and well, and they will fix you when they can. And yes, some doctors will go, Ah, yeah, well, I get paid if I do surgeries, why don't we just take that out

of you?

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:00

Or yeah, why don't we replace that? Or why don't we fix this part of you that you don't like, some doctors will do that. But none of them are going to send you home and say, Okay, now when you go home, meditate on your pain, your suffering your past traumas. And make yourself feel better so that you bring to me a better vessel of yourself when you visit next time that no one's going to do that. It's not their job, it's our job.

How the podcast came to be

Bill Gasiamis 1:13:26

Part of the thing. You asked me earlier about how the podcast came to be before we started the interview. Yes. And part of it was because I needed to share with people, the things that I learned that helped me when I went to hospital. Again, this was instinctive. I'm reflecting on it now nearly seven years after my brain surgery and talking about it in this manner. But I didn't specifically know that I was doing it at the time when I went there, I made it my decision to tend to bring the best possible physical, emotional, and mental version of myself into the operating theatre before surgery happened.

Bill Gasiamis 1:14:06

Because I knew that the surgeons, just dealt with whatever lump of meat turned up that day that was going to be on the table. And if I wanted to ensure that they had as good a job as possible, I knew if I wanted to make it just I wanted them to do nothing other than brain surgery. I didn't want him to worry about my blood sugar, my blood pressure, my blood vessels. I didn't want him to worry about that stuff, just to take out the faulty blood vessel that was bleeding in my head. So I saw I sent them or gave them the gift of the best possible vessel so that they could have a successful brain surgery. That was it.

Yuji Oka 1:14:50

Yes. And I think this is a healthy attitude. You know, it is unfortunate that you know maybe the medicine of the future will change. But you know, Yeah, during the business of fixing things, and, you know, once they're broken and not trying to keep something in health and you know, for my finger, for example, when I went

and you know, I had a choice, I decided to do without just with local anesthetic I didn't want to go under because I didn't want to do that. So I was conscious of the whole thing.

Yuji Oka 1:15:20

And it was, as he said, you know I could feel my finger over here, and it was being pounded on. Like, it felt like it was just a piece of lumber, and I was, but you know, they did a good job. And, you know, for what they need to do, they did their thing. But yeah, it you know, it's not just the surgeries, not the treatments, not the medication, this is whole after thing that needs to happen.

Yuji Oka 1:15:41

And that's where, again, we're the person who is undergoing that rehabilitation feels like they're, you know, that's, as you said, they bring they have to bring themselves to that process. And that's where, you know, that person is, is, you know, really comes into before.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:05

And that's the hopefully that wraps up the whole conversation that we had, as to how, you know, we move through those phases and those processes and those troubles that we've been faced with because of this medical emergency that we underwent. The other part of that, for me, was that I'm good at noticing patterns.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:28

Sometimes I don't know what to do with the patterns that I notice that I noticed patterns and that might take a while, what I hope that people get out of the podcast is they, I hope that they pick up the pattern of the last 260 or so episodes of how people have gone about their healing journey, their recovery. And what's common is that it's the stroke recovery process is not about listening to one podcast episode and then putting it down.

Bill Gasiamis 1:16:54

Hopefully, the people who are on Episode 262, or 63, I think this is going to be people that are on that have also listened to another 2030 or 40 episodes before this, so that they can pick up the pattern of how people have moved through the journey from the beginning to the phase that they are at now whichever part of the recovery that is. And what I discovered, in, this journey early on was that there was a book to be written that was about the fact that a stroke is the best

thing that ever happened to me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17:36

It wasn't just my story. And the reason why that occurred, why that became a book is because other stroke survivors say that many, many, many of them, not only stroke survivors, Dobie cancer survivors, heart attack survivors, and so on. And the pattern, once you see it, is impossible to unsee. And you and you might be on the journey of stroke recovery. And you might not have been at the part of the recovery where you can say it's the best thing that ever happened to you. From a philosophical level.

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:14

Because it's not the best thing that happens to people on a physical level sometimes, and that's understandable. And you might have inadvertently discovered the six things in the pattern. But you're missing four of the things in the pattern. And hopefully, what I'm doing here is demonstrating to people that, the interviews might sound repetitive, right?

Bill Gasiamis 1:18:41

But we know that mastering anything is just repetition, after repetition, and then getting nuanced differences and improvements all the time. And then honing the skill and honing the skill and getting better and better. Just like you, you started in physics, you applied what you learned in physics, to dance. And now you applied what you learned in dance and physics to the work that you're doing now.

Yuji Oka 1:19:13

Yes, yes. I agree with your assessment that you know that there are many different voices, we're all kind of working on the same, same area. And I really, truly believe, again, that there is a universal sort of education process that we go through. And, you know, the path may be different and there might be different, you know, ways that we sort of come about that. But we need to know that for people who are injured, there's a sort of general evolution that we go through, and that general evolution can give a lot of comfort to people to understand that.

Life as a process of learning

Yuji Oka 1:19:57

It's not an arbitrary process. It's not like You know, just things happen. But it's

like, the human body is this amazing vessel that evolves. And you know, the brain is an amazing organ that can regenerate itself. And, you know, it does. So in this, again, it's a process as a process of learning.

Yuji Oka 1:20:25

And when you get comfortable with that idea, you know, when I work with kids right now, for example, I see that process, so even no matter how severe the situation is, I know that from here, there's a whole path that extends out to there. And there's no reason to put an arbitrary cap on that you don't you just have to live it and keep seeing what unfolds.

Bill Gasiamis 1:20:50

Yeah, your work is done primarily from the United States, where do you base yourself?

Yuji Oka 1:20:58

I'm in Toronto and a studio there called the spiSpiral Movement Center that's where I'm based. But as I say, nowadays, I travel, and there's a lot of demand for kids, especially kids with disabilities. And so I go around, and I, I visit families and I work with families in their homes. Right now. I'm in Georgia, working with two children with CP.

Bill Gasiamis 1:21:22

Do you have people supporting you?

Yuji Oka 1:21:26

No, I have a small staff. But, you know, there's a growing awareness for this kind of approach and work and stuff. And so I think that you know, you know, even PT work is, you know, seven years ago, in the 50s 60s 70s, this is where it started happening. So there's still a lot to learn about everything. And I think we're just still evolving. And right now, I feel that this body-mind work is, is on the cutting edge of a lot of that kind of work.

Yuji Oka 1:22:01

The medicine has gone, way beyond the therapy, you know, therapies. And there's so much to therapy that hasn't been explored yet. All these combinations of what we've been talking about the body, the cognitive or spiritual, the emotional, all of these come into play. And so yeah, I'm not alone. So I feel like there are a lot of people who are interested in that kind of thing. And, and, yeah, this is what's

happening right now. And even the medical field, as I said, is open to my work. And, so it's a really lovely time for people to explore this kind of area.

Bill Gasiamis 1:22:45

You're not alone, I interviewed a lady called Anat Baniel.

Yuji Oka 1:22:52

Yeah, I met with her actually at a conference

Bill Gasiamis 1:22:55

Okay. And that's amazing. So she does similar work to you. She describes it differently, you have a very beautiful, unique way of expressing the kind of work that you do. And I see the similarities in the work that you do with an app. And of course, this type of work has been around for a long time, you know, Moshe Feldenkrais was doing similar kind of work, and perhaps describing it differently, many, many decades ago in the late I think, in the 30s, and 40s, and 50s, and even into the 70s.

Bill Gasiamis 1:23:25

So it's been around for a long time, I love the idea of the different versions of ways that this work has been described now. And that's, that opens up the possibility for people who appreciate your way of describing things to understand if somebody is personal if is somebody who is an occupational therapist, or, or a physical therapist, I would love them to get curious about how to apply the kind of work that you're talking about into their space into their work. So that it's not just the, the, let's see, you pick up a cup and put it down, and let's help you pick up that cup and put it down better.

Yuji Oka 1:24:19

Yeah, you know, I just say this little is that, um, you know, the work. As far as the work is concerned, it's been around for 1000s of years, you know, again, this whole emphasis of body and mind has been around forever. And I feel like, though, right now, and you know, in this is a very strong part. I want everyone to understand, though, that, you know, I have a very strong background in science and stuff.

Yuji Oka 1:24:46

And for me, and what I think that my work has to offer, the community right now is that, that a lot of times with holistic practices, we kind of think, like it's just a

feeling of vibe that we were putting off, you know, but, but it's not that is not the case, you know that there are a lot of very rigorous techniques that we apply. And, you know, not just on the bodywork side of things.

Yuji Oka 1:25:15

So for example, for Dylan, you know, you want to change his posture, you want to get rid of his pains, and many bodywork things advanced body mind bodywork techniques that you can do to do that, but even further working cognitively, and working emotionally, there are more modern, more active type meditations, that that we're developing in, you know, people in the field.

Yuji Oka 1:25:45

So, you know, this is a very exciting time where I think we're we sort of heard that demand, you know, I, we went through a big exploratory time in the 60s was a sort of just trying different things. But now it's in a very technical place. And, you know, this is what excites me is that, again, there is a place, in the medical field for this kind of work. There's just a lot of research and, you know, technical things that we're working on that I think is also part of the big story right now.

Where to connect with Yuji Oka

Bill Gasiamis 1:26:23

Yeah, fantastic. What's the best place that people can go to connect with you? And to see some of the work that you do. Are there some online places where they can find you?

Yuji Oka 1:26:37

I do. My adult site is called spiralpraxis.com. And then for my kid's work, there's a place called spiralmovement.org. And so if anyone wants to take a look at my work, yes, they can visit those websites.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:02

Fantastic. I'll encourage people to do that. I'm going to have links to your website and to Dylan's story because it's a very great little video, the documentary there that describes the process that somebody can go through and the outcomes that they can achieve. And I want to thank you for being on the podcast. Thank you for the work that you do, and for giving me your time.

Yuji Oka 1:27:30

Thank you so much for having me.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:33

Thanks for joining us on today's episode, I hope you enjoyed the conversation about the mind-body connection with Yuji Oka. Now to learn more about my guests, including links to their social media and other pages, and to download a full transcript of the entire interview, please go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes.

Bill Gasiamis 1:27:54

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Intro 1:28:19

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Intro 1:28:36

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Intro 1:28:59

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Intro 1:29:21

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Intro 1:29:44

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