

At Peace with Pain

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Chronic pain can't be always reduced by conventional medicine using medications and other treatments covered by insurance and available in the Western world, more specifically in Northern America and Europe. This medical system is limited because it is not well designed to deal with invisible and highly subjective experiences modified by variables such as social activities or relaxation practices. In addition, in Western medicine, the role of medical professionals, trained to work with objective results from X rays or lab test results, is not well defined when these physicians can't offer a cure.

In my own experience, when pain remains intractable and when our conventional treatments do not bring significant results, we must acknowledge limitations of our medical system and put our energy on **care** rather than **cure**. The first action is to recognize suffering and the second one is the attempt to transform pain into growth. People experiencing chronic pain face two options. **Option 1** is: Their life will shrink and they will remain vulnerable, powerless and passive patients. These people are unable to get beyond the limitations the wounds impose and then allow the wounds live their life for them. Preoccupation with pain is not productive. It causes emotional suffering, costs money, destroys relationships,

separates families, causes unemployment, and generally complicates many facets of life.

Option 2 is: Their life will enlarge. This last option leads to personal growth and removal of suffering from pain. The pain is still there but it is easier to live with it because this option reduces the negative impact of this pain. The experience of pain can be seen as an agent of transformation. Option 2 is the one which should be selected even if it means additional work. Working outside of the home, raising a family or maintaining quality of life will become extraordinary challenges.

The goal for the one in pain is growth and consequently the goal for health care professionals is to offer care, monitor progress, coach the ones in pain and provide a better quality of life in a healing and safe space. People in pain will use this space to enlarge their life. In my own experience when quality of life increases, suffering decreases.

Illness can change your life and we often suffer before discovering our priorities in life. It is important to believe we have the power, through the mind and hard work, to reduce suffering and find peace. This is not always easy because we may see our pain affecting our loved ones and/or we may live in the wrong environment, for ex. In a bad marriage or in a situation where there is no support. In the search for peace, it is important to keep a firm grasp on the mind. You will

train your mind to focus on your blessings, help eliminate suffering and ultimately find peace. Happiness is not dependent on how you feel but on how your mind reacts to pain and loss.

The key to understanding pain is to distinguish it from suffering. Pain and suffering are not good in themselves. It is what you do when in pain that makes the difference. If you master the maintenance of a steadfast focus away from pain, you may achieve a transcendence unavailable to those who are void of pain. In contrast, if pain becomes a fixation, suffering will result. In fact one can fixate on imaginary pain and some suffering will ultimately result.

To be in the right space is very important because of the impact of the environment on the one in pain. This space can be a home or a physician's office. It is a very ordinary space but it becomes extraordinary because it is the place where the one in pain will enlarge his/her life and will heal even if pain does not disappear. It can be the place where care and compassion are provided by health professionals or it can be the space where optimism and support are offered or it can be any other location where the one in pain will work on reducing pain, for example by using mind therapy or practicing yoga or connecting with others. This space is essential for resilience to grow.

Development in quality of life includes the following actions taking place in this extraordinary environment: development of connections and passions, and finding a purpose in life. These activities will reduce pain and will remove suffering from pain.

Connections

Nobody can survive alone and suffering decreases if we are not alone. The challenge is to find the right people with whom to connect. Ideally these people will offer unconditional love and compassion. They will not judge, will not seek to impose barriers to healing, and will not accept common misconceptions attached to chronic pain. When goals are divided into activities involving others, when we share pain by talking and planning activities, when we manage to remain positive, pain starts to decrease, difficulties become lighter, healing starts to occur and medication becomes more effective. Information flows much better. .

Of course the one in pain will connect with the medical team. This person should be the centre of an interconnectedness in which every professional member of the team must participate. The team includes physicians and various specialists, psychologists, massage therapists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and other healthcare professionals. Professional qualifications are meaningless if the service provided lacks compassion. People in pain know their condition best.

However they do well to inform themselves of technical matters to help them make informed treatment choices. It is also important that physicians and therapists understand how chronic pain affects all aspects of life including relationships, family, career, income and hobbies because these various areas will need upgrades to adjust to the needs and conditions of the ones in pain. These are the areas where the ones experiencing pain will set – with help from the medical team – goals, strategies and performance measures to achieve actions, such as playing with a grandson or maintaining a part time job. These actions will be achieved if the ones in pain connect well with others, including the medical team monitoring progress and other people, such as spouses and children. It is very important to connect with the appropriate individuals, in a support group, or the appropriate therapists, in a medical team, who must be able to care, listen, share, be positive, compassionate and committed to the relationship so that the ones in pain feel supported and loved. The quality of the relationship is more important than the quantity of it. Then what seemed to be impossible – removal of suffering from pain – can be achieved.

Passions

Passions help average people to become champions and help us to go beyond our own limits. This means that passions can take you to this extraordinary and safe place where suffering does not exist any more. If we do not like what we do and if we have no relationships, we will not have the energy to manage pain and

to experience healing. So, please develop a passion in life, develop an activity with which you identify, that will be of service to others and to you because it will give you the feeling that you are a valuable human being. These are the activities where you connect with people. How are passions to be recognized? Passions have this characteristic: they involve the heart in loving. This could be love for children, animals, flowers, could involve spirituality, or painting, writing or playing a musical instrument. People experiencing pain should select activities allowing them to fall in love, leading towards something good and bigger than their own life, for example developing a relationship with a boyfriend or caring for grandchildren. Usually passions add beauty to the world and this quality increases their value even more. Passions allow you to meet people you can trust and who will help you to heal. Passions take you into a beautiful world where the ones in pain forget suffering.

Purpose

In order to heal, people who have chronic pain do well to develop and maintain a purpose in life. A purpose in life, also known as main goal or mission or vision, is usually connected to using your dreams and skills to create something you like, something good and important for ourselves and for others. It usually is seen as the reason for being in the universe.

Chronic pain forces an individual to think and find some meaning or purpose in life because a life preoccupied with pain can be viewed as a waste. No one chooses to feel useless, therefore it is essential to define a mission in life in order to focus and give a meaning to a life with pain. The environment around chronic pain tends to become toxic because of the complexity of dealing with pain, because of the suffering attached to it, and because not everyone can transcend it. A change in surroundings with unconditional love and support is one way to grow and feel better. Sharing our purpose with others is an act of kindness bringing us closer to others and allowing better connectedness. A mission is often invisible to the human eye even when the results are tangible. It may involve volunteer or paid work, or something learned from suffering.

If love is not the purpose in life, the purpose will likely hold a good amount of love. A mission is a goal in life which may make it easier to live with and manage pain. When we work towards fulfilling our purpose, our suffering from pain is reduced, energy returns and we enjoy achieving something positive for other humans in the universe. Quality of life increases. Everyone benefits because we are all part of this universe. A mission is both our reason and our method for healing and being at peace with pain. It allows for creativity and may form the key component of a bargain with pain.

A satisfactory life depends on whether or not we follow our mission and are willing to be guided by passion and intuition, develop compassion and unconditional love, make decisions and be at peace. Our purpose in life also requires us to love what we do, increase our level of energy, and select the right direction. It forces us to focus our energy in a primary direction towards achieving our mission.

We see intention followed by energy which is the force directing us and pushing us to achieve results. We should not have to struggle to achieve our mission if this one is the one for us. It should not be difficult to find a purpose in life. If you are involved in an activity where you lose track of time and use specific skills, most probably you are working towards your mission. If you are worried, negative, stressed or angry, lose energy and produce negative results, you are straying away from your mission. Your environment impacts your purpose and you should change it if it damages your intention and energy. This means that, for example if being in a bad marriage or depending on insurance for income damages your life, changes should take place to bring healing.

A mission helps one to live better and longer. It does not create emptiness around the person but on the contrary it fills up this person's life and spare time. We all well know how to be in a state of "doing". Pain diminishes when we enjoy "being in a state of being" without work or intention or labor. To enjoy just "being"

may be only breathing and being rather than laboring and doing.

It may be taking care of our mind and body. It could be to care for people in our life, or to raise a family and to bring them happiness

The teachings from pain

It is not well considered in our western world to perceive pain as a teacher, and we see it more as a symptom. If you have an invisible illness (such as chronic pain with no visible physical challenges), don't expect to receive compassion. Many people will doubt the existence of your pain even if you can show proof of disability. In addition many will treat you as an addict if you use medication to reduce the impact of an invisible illness. In these last two situations, you may have to change your environment to get any beneficial teachings from pain and to allow pain to bring you change and transformation.

Pain teaches us how to make choices, grow, relax, love ourselves and others, be free with new psychological skills and move from a docile patient's position into an active leadership role inspiring others. It allows healing a broken life or heart which we would not have recognized as damaged without the physical pain worsening with emotional suffering when we are in the wrong environment. Pain provides opportunities to volunteer in the field of pain, to work to improve other peoples' lives and to make the world a better place to be in. From a patient's position we can become a model for others and learn to believe in each other to make healing possible.

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Pain teaches us how to recognize synchronicity or providence all day long because we learn to focus attention to signs around us resulting from a need to analyze any opportunity for possible relief. It causes us become more creative because we generally feel better when we create beauty around us and find inspiration in pain rather than fight it at all cost. A close link exists between pain, art and creativity. This could be the result of pushing the body to the extreme, such as done by dancers, music composers or writers who use their bodies and minds to the maximum.

Pain teaches us to feel better by sharing time, money and energy. Generosity allows connecting with others which is so essential for well-being and forces us to ultimately find our level of resilience. The purpose of pursuing our goal is the keystone which prevents pain from defeating us and allows us to transcend its effects. Pain starting in the body before extending to the mind then can become a universal matter where much remains to be discovered.

Pain teaches us recovery. It is a complex process involving the one in pain and a healer or group of caregivers. It combines knowledge from different therapists inviting the client in pain into a relationship. Healing is then “a dialogue and a learning experience” for the client and the therapist. The final result is an increase in inner strength, knowledge and enlightenment. Real healing goes beyond therapy, and increases abilities. The power acquired from healing

increases the ability to tolerate pain. The successful person in pain transcends his powerlessness in pain into a state of power over pain, which is resilience.

Pain is a complex issue with physiological origins. Pain extends its effects into work, finances, social life and intimacy with others. If you are struggling with a toxic workplace, marriage, family or friends, fear is unavoidable. Fear can cause additional stress and physical pain. If you live with fear or with toxic love, healing is likely impossible. Healing demands that you release fear and toxicity.

Pain also teaches us to establish a therapeutic alliance. Medication is a common pain reduction method. However some caring physicians have the power to alleviate fear and improve the client's comfort irrespective of medication. In my experience the therapeutic relationship is a most important factor in healing. It is one that is generally neglected. The client-doctor relationship can be seen truly as the first pillar of healing, In my experience the quality of the healing relationship (rather than the technique) is the hidden foundation of healing. The bond between physician and client results from compassion, trust, empathy, and a mutual willingness to move forward. This bond between the client and therapist must be deep enough to transform pain into something more acceptable and to allow the client to be at peace with pain.

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If the therapist does not care for the client, healing will not take place. If the client does not care enough for himself or herself and for the therapist, healing suggestions from the therapist will not be followed. Of course, the suggested healing message, helping clients to feel better, can be different with each healer. This message is important because it is the magical formula that heals the ones with pain. It may be modified according to clients' needs. People with pain often connect with a therapist presenting what they believe to be the most relevant message to them. The healing process is a dialogue and a learning experience for client and therapist, and benefits both because healers often look at their own pain and emotions when they deal with their clients' pain.

The therapist also empowers - and not overpowers - the clients by stimulating their own energy and educating them about their own resources.

Conclusion

Healing, happiness and well-being are never acquired once and forever. All three result from resilience, continuing hard work, artistic creation, renewed actions, ongoing attitudes and solid connections with significant people in our lives.

Pain is reduced through the right connections with the right people and these relationships are extremely important in therapy. Otherwise how do you explain that medication provides better results if you get along with your physician?

People experiencing chronic pain need to make a choice by deciding to avoid suffering and look for sources of pleasure that facilitate enjoyment.

Peace and happiness depend on our emotions and our environment. Both are not permanent by themselves. They must be learned to be reproduced, in order to become a very significant part of our lives. When emotions and environment are modified into better conditions, suffering disappears to make a place for happiness. Pain becomes then an opportunity for achieving a new and healthier life and implementing a purpose in life.