

Ethics and Spirituality
Reflections and Contemplations on Life and Living

Why Do I Hurt?

by Elana Zaiman
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We often enter the forest of worry, fear and anxiety
when we could just as easily enter the ocean of
calm, comfort and peace. *Why?*

Our imagination all too often takes us to places we don't want to go: "My daughter didn't call when she said she was going to call. She must have been in a car accident." "My friend's headache won't go away. She must have a brain tumor." "My feet are in constant pain. The pain will never end."

Why do we run the tape of all that can possibly go wrong instead of having a little faith and saying, "It's probably just traffic, or a migraine, or the foot pain will heal." Why do we enter the forest of worry, fear and anxiety when we could just as easily enter the ocean of calm, comfort and peace? How we choose to view a situation makes a difference in terms of our emotional, spiritual and physical well-being.

This is particularly true for those who are suffering from physical pain. I lived in pain for many months before I learned why, and after going through two hip arthroscopy surgeries I still wasn't convinced that my hips were my only problem. I continued to believe that there might be something more serious going on. I was consumed with worry when I should have been focused on healing.

It's true that we must adjust ourselves to the fact that, as we age, our bodies are not as able as they used to be, but before giving into our pain, before accepting pain as an unwelcome houseguest who refuses to move out, we have another option: We can change the tape we run in our minds about pain and what it means.

Not long ago my physical therapist recommended a helpful handbook by Adriaan

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Louw titled *Why Do I Hurt?* that successfully consolidates the neuroscience behind pain into terms a layperson can understand. (Louw, 2013) He speaks to the complexity of pain, noting that how we think and process pain is vital to the amount of pain we experience. Louw explains how the painful areas in our body have nerves that connect to the spinal cord, which, when faced with danger, send messages to the brain by way of electrical impulses. Once the danger is averted, this system usually turns off, but sometimes, like when we're not healing as rapidly as we would like, we're worried or anxious about not healing, or experiencing stress in other areas of our lives, our system remains in a state of heightened sensitivity.

How can we turn it off? We can educate ourselves about pain. Louw notes that exposing people to a 30-minute session on neuroscience and pain helps these nerves calm down. Brain scans prove it. Though I didn't have a brain scan after reading his handbook, I know I felt calmer.

Meditation, with its known benefits of increased calm

"To me faith means not worrying."
— John Dewey

and focus, is another way to change the tape we run in our minds and decrease our pain. It's not for everyone. I, for one, find it hard to sit still, in body and in mind, but when I make it a point to stop and to take deep breaths, I am aware that I experience greater equanimity. Jon Kabat-Zinn, scientist, writer and meditation instructor, offers meditation guidance and more in his book, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. He also speaks to the link between the emotional and physical elements of pain. In fact, one of his chapter titles is "Working With Physical Pain: Your Pain Is Not You." (Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

Another way to change that tape in our minds: Tapping or Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), a psychological acupressure practice that works to clear the emotional block from our body's energy system by tapping on our energy meridians (the same meridians used in acupuncture) and voicing positive affirmations. An example of a basic affirmation offered by Dr. Mercola, an advocate of the process: "Even though I have this _____, I deeply and completely accept myself." (Insert your pain(s) in the blank.) (Mercola, 2014)

I have now made tapping part of my daily ritual; it re-trains my brain and guides my mind to a place of positivity, a place where I can find the faith to know that I can heal and that I am whole.

When you experience pain, you have a choice. You can let your imagination run to the worst possible scenario and inhibit your healing, or you can nudge your imagination to a healthier place and promote your healing. It's your choice. Choose wisely. ♦

Sources:

Kabat-Zinn, John. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Delta.

Louw, Adriann. (2013). *Why Do I Hurt? A Patient Book About the Neuroscience of Pain*. International Spine and Pain Institute.

Mercola, Joseph, D.O. (2014). "Basic Steps to Your Emotional Freedom." eft.mercola.com Retrieved November 20, 2014.



BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS / From Page 18

Answers to Crossword Puzzle

ELF			DAM		AHOY
PAR		BALI			ROBE
IMAGINATION					IS
CAULK				ELM	
	AID			LAPSE	
DARNERS					TAX
MORE	IMPORTANT				
SEE		IMMERSE			
GRACE		ETA			
	ALI		OCEAN		
THANK	KNOWLEDGE				
WATT	CARD	DEA			
OLEO	STY	YER			

Answers to Sudoku

1	7	2	4	9	3	6	5	8
8	5	3	1	7	6	4	9	2
4	9	6	2	8	5	7	3	1
3	6	9	7	2	1	5	8	4
7	1	5	6	4	8	9	2	3
2	8	4	3	5	9	1	6	7
9	3	1	8	6	7	2	4	5
6	4	7	5	3	2	8	1	9
5	2	8	9	1	4	3	7	6

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