

Pathways

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“Sooner or later we will come to the edge of all that we can control and find life, waiting there for us.”

Rachel Remen

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The Voice of Your Truth

There is a space between things we perceive in the world around us, and our response to them.

For most of us, most of the time, I suspect...there is no space there...that we can see. We respond without thinking. The inner voice that prompts a particular response has been trained by all our previous experiences to perceive a threat to our emotional safety and respond accordingly. For instance, suppose I fear losing control in my world, or fear being rejected for who I am or that I will be abandoned by one and all sooner or later...then, let's suppose none of that really matters.

R-i-i-i-g-h-t!

Really, they are simply lessons that we have internalized and use as our rudder for responding to an event in our lives. In the language of emotional intelligence these are our schemas, and boy, do we get triggered by them! The voice of my inner truth is far quieter and can only be heard in the space between event and response...if we allow it to be so.

That 'still, small voice' is there in each of us, waiting to bring us to a higher self, so how do I get to listen to my inner voice of truth? How do I actually get to hear its promptings?

Here is where breathing, witnessing and mindfulness all play a role.

When an event happens that triggers you, stop for a moment, be aware of the desire for that knee-jerk response,

and see it for what it is...a knee-jerk based upon decades of conditioning. Take a breath or two, deep ones, long, slow breaths from the abdomen and focus on just the breath...feel it enter and leave your body. Witness your instinctive response building within you...see it in slow motion.

Now, listen.

Guess what? You just slowed down time...well O.K., you really didn't but you just put a pause between stimulus and response, and that gave you room to breath, and room to choose.

You see, the thing is that a knee-jerk response is exactly that, an immediate reaction, which short-cuts the higher brain functions that might choose a different response.

Mindfulness gives us space, maybe only parts of a second between stimulus and response, but it does create space. It gives us time to witness our normal response path and it gives us time to choose a different response. Different response choices cut new neural pathways in our brains. So perhaps I should call it Full-mindedness? When we open up a space between stimulus and response we invite our entire brain in on the conversation about what to do under the circumstances.

Here is a path to freedom. An any path that gives us choice is a path of freedom. What does your path look like? ☺

Pleasure and Pain

When I was developing coaching materials for martial artists we often used to discuss ways to motivate athletes using the “pleasure seekers vs. pain avoiders” model. Pleasure seekers will be motivated by the potential rewards they receive for doing the work, pain avoiders will do the same work to avoid any perceived negative consequences. What is curious about this, is that as a coach, it matters not one whit what I might perceive as a benefit or a negative consequence. The perceptions of pleasure vs. pain are entirely based in the mind of the athlete.

The thing of it is though, there is almost a cultural prejudice against doing something to avoid pain, even though large numbers of us do exactly that in life. We talk about rewards, we talk about doing things to get some benefit.

So what’s the big deal here?

Why is it that we so assiduously tend to avoid pain?

It is almost as though there is a sense in which pain is a bad thing. Really?

Pain has a very powerful way of focusing attention. I’ll grant you that pain tends to focus our attention on things that are well, in the moment, painful and therefore, by extension things that we don’t want...whether it is a physical trauma, an emotional trauma, or a psycho-social trauma. So let’s look at pain for a moment.

We often avoid pain or ignore it as though by avoiding or ignoring it, we can somehow lessen its impact. Unfortunately though, avoiding or ignoring pain leaves us with unresolved lessons in life, that will, almost inevitably resurface and require our attention later. Let’s take the athlete who ignores the pain of a repetitive use injury. Eventually a chronic issue develops and the athlete can end up with significant physical limitations than might not have been the case had warnings of the initial pain been attended. In similar fashion we are often taught to bury our feelings or hide our true emotions, and often we do this so effectively that we cannot see them ourselves. We separate ourselves from the effects of emotional pain, and therefore, we deprive ourselves of the powerful lessons that might have been possible had we allowed the pain to run its natural path. Invariably, all this means is that we end up repeating the cycle.

So what’s a person to do?

If we take the effects of emotional and psycho-social pain, we learn about them very early in life and we develop responses that shield us from those pains. They might work really well for a baby or a toddler, they don’t play so well as an adult.

It seems to me that we pretty much have the same needs and wants...a) to be respected, loved and accepted for

who we are, b) to be of service and value to those around us and c) to have the freedom to choose our path in life. Consequently, whenever we run up against obstacles to any of these wants and needs, we inevitably feel pain of some sort.

This takes me back to the last article...a lot of our knee-jerk responses in life were designed to protect us from pain. Curiously, they were not designed to maximize our pleasure. Isn’t that odd?

I guess it all comes down to a highly developed sense of survival instinct in the long run. Pain of any kind, emotional or physical, is perceived as a threat to our survival in some way (whether or not it really is in the moment, is entirely immaterial) and therefore we tend to avoid it.

But pain also tells us to pay attention. In one way of looking at it, pain tells us that there is a gap between what we know and what we experience.

Let’s say that as a toddler I put my hand on hot stove and burn myself. The gap between my knowledge (hard surfaces support my balance) and my new experience (some surfaces cannot be trusted not to hurt me) is a knowledge gap. So from this perspective, pain tells us that we are currently in the presence of a learning opportunity.

Going back to my toddler example for a moment, no toddler has to be

*“Skywalker: ‘I...I don’t believe it’.
Yoda: ‘That, is why you failed’”*

Star Wars, Episode 5

Pleasure and Pain

told twice about burning themselves on the stove. But does the same thing hold true for an emotional experience? Let's say that I feel burned by someone who lies to me. Do I now assume that all people lie and therefore cannot be trusted? Do I assume that the person who lied, can never be trusted again? Do I start testing people's word to find out if they are lying to me?

The emotional landscape is a lot trickier to negotiate. If those lessons come early enough in life, then we will tend to develop knee-jerk reactions for dealing with them, just like the hot stove.

The reason for this is fairly obvious. As young children we have few options about how we might choose to behave in any given circumstance. We certainly do not have the insights and awareness of a mature adult with a lot of life experiences to draw upon. The result is that our knee-jerk reactions were designed with a limited tool box and a limited skill set.

As adults we have more choice, if we can access it.

So we are no getting closer to my point.

About time too, don't you think?

I don't know, but it seems to me that the best outcome for any learning opportunity is found by going through it, rather than around it.

Anytime that you go through a learn-

ing opportunity you are changed by it, irrevocably, permanently. Such is the nature of education in all its forms.

If pain is illustrative of a knowledge gap and points to a learning opportunity, and if our knee-jerk reactions were developed when we didn't have a larger skill set with which to work; then anytime we meet emotional pain in our lives, there is an opportunity to examine our standard responses and see whether there might not be a better way to handle things.

Kinda smacks of the idea that if all you have is a hammer...

So let's bring pleasure back into the picture for a moment. Suppose for a moment that our experiences of pain are a function of our lack of knowledge and our pre-conditioned set of responses. I wonder then, what would happen if we came up with a new set of responses?

What if *repetitive* emotional pain in our relationships was due to *pre-conditioned* responses that have long-since outlived their usefulness? What if the end to that pain could be as simple as choosing a different response? How would that be for us?

Potentially, that brings us to a point of learning from each of our pain events and discovering new things about ourselves that enhance our well-being and bring us to higher states of pleasure.

It's not about avoiding the pain, it's

about learning from it.

We might even go so far as to say that we allow pain to be our teacher, a catalyst for change.

Arguably, we can take a step further and enter the world of the Yin-Yang symbol. Yin always contains a component of yang and vice-versa. Yin will inevitably transmute into yang and vice versa. Yin consumes yang and vice versa, and yin is in opposition to yang and vice versa.

If we apply this logic to pain and pleasure, then in the world of pain and pleasure, pain will inevitably give way to pleasure...when we allow it to do so. Pain will inevitably transmute into pleasure when we see it as a learning opportunity.

So finally then, both pain and pleasure are inevitable yin and yang-like consequences of living a life full of learning opportunities.

The main questions are:

1. How would you like to live your life based on the new knowledge that you have acquired?
2. How do you wish to frame your responses to pain-inducing events?
3. What lessons do you wish to glean from the inevitable "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"?

☺

"Wisdom lies in engaging the life you have been given as fully and courageously as possible and not letting go until you find the unknown blessing that is in everything."

Rachel Remen in My Grandfathers Blessings

What's the point of Coaching?

Coaching is about learning from the experiences of yesterday, planning for our successful tomorrows, playing the game of life, full-out, with passion, and living fully present, in a larger, more vibrant NOW!



For a 10% discount on a three-month coaching package
contact Chris at:
662 769 5522
or send an e-mail to: chris@thirdpathway.com