

Healing Pain From The Inside Out

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Life is composed of a myriad of diverse experiences or “dots” as Steve Jobs characterized them. When threaded together, and with the benefit of hindsight and reflection, they reveal the pattern of our heartfelt purpose. Some experiences confuse and distract us from our desired path, while others align us with our gifts and talents and accelerate us forward. It is my belief that there are signs along our journey that, if recognized, help us navigate the uncharted waters of our lives. The essential question is: are you awake and listening?

Several years ago, I was adrift from my consciously intended path and consequently, my body physically shut down. I was not paying attention to the subtle signs of unhappiness in my personal and professional life. Thus, my body created symptomatic physical pain, a sign I could not ignore, to seize my attention and generate an awareness that something in my life was off balance and needed to change.

In an attempt to escape from a life I no longer loved, I went on a weekend ski trip to Mammoth Mountain in California with a group of friends. During the first run of the day, a snowboarder sideswiped me from behind causing a tangled crash. I landed on my back with the skis still attached to the bindings and my legs forming an acutely twisted X. I jumped up quickly, ignored the twinges in both knees, and skied the rest of the day. At the time, I was unaware that the pain from the fall was an important sign I needed to acknowledge, accept and integrate the lesson being presented to me.

After the ski lifts closed for the day, we gathered for dinner at a Mexican restaurant at the base of the mountain. When it was time to walk back to the lodge, I attempted to stand up and realized I could not move my legs. My mind flashed back to the fall and sharp twists my legs were in eight hours earlier. My left knee felt like someone cut it open and tied all the muscles in a tight knot. After limping and being carried back to the condo, I took 800 mg of Ibuprofen to reduce the inflammation and started the traditional medical treatment for an acute injury: Rest, Ice, Compress, and Elevate (RICE).

As a certified strength and conditioning specialist, I knew that proper treatment in the first seventy-two hours following a serious injury is vital to a quick recovery. So I kept my knee elevated and iced throughout the night, hoping the pain and swelling would diminish by morning. Unfortunately, that was not the case. As I sat up in bed, it was clear the pain was substantially greater than the night before. My knee joint had stiffened from a lack of lubrication during the night and was extremely painful to bend or straighten.

I hobbled into the kitchen where my friends were talking excitedly about which ski run they were planning to conquer first that day. Staggering past them, I headed straight for the couch to continue icing and elevating my knee, fighting back tears and wondering why they could all have fun while I had to remain inside suffering with this excruciating pain.

As my friends changed into their ski attire and trickled out of the cabin towards the slopes, Amy, a spiritual friend, stayed to clean the condominium before we checked out. She always encouraged me to explore a deeper meaning and purpose in life by asking better questions and learning how to shift energy. Until this point I had resisted the suggestion, however faced with the current crisis, I was eager to try anything to release the pain. I asked Amy her thoughts about my knee injury. She explained Louise Hay's perspective about how every body part parallels and signifies an aspect of one's present life. On a symbolic level, the injured knee represented a "major change in my life and my inability to bend or flow with the new direction my life was taking." So Amy asked me, "What are you resisting giving in to?" This question, and what was about to unfold, became a pivotal moment in my life.

In this moment of reflection, I saw a correlation between my knee pain and the wellness company I worked for, which had just announced a substantial strategy shift. I began to realize the new direction the company was embarking on was not aligned with my life path anymore, and in this new moment of awareness, I could acknowledge how toxic the work environment had become for me. Addressing Amy's question, illustrated by my knee pain, gave me the space, awareness and insight to re-examine my life in a new light and led to an opportunity to create positive change for my future. Clearly, I did not want to continue my journey with the same employer. So I asked myself, "If I can do anything, what did I dream of doing?"

Since the age of seventeen, I envisioned an integrative wellness center that fused eastern and western medicine to empower people to heal their mind, body and spirit from within. With the dramatic strategy shift by my employer away from a small family culture to a more formal corporate culture, it became clear this was the perfect opportunity to follow my dream of starting my own company. While sitting in a lounge chair with a pen and paper in hand, I brainstormed ideas and next steps to create and establish a new business.

Once this entrepreneurial idea blossomed, the writing flowed effortlessly onto the paper, one page filled, then two, and three. As words emerged, I quickly began to visualize the new venture and the people who could help bring this dream to fruition. This vision did not seem daunting or unattainable, as I had previously believed it would be. Once the details were fully conceived, I literally felt the cells in my body shift, almost like they were germinating this new possibility into existence. This was one of the biggest breakthroughs in my life! In this new moment of awareness, I recognized how every moment of my academic and professional training, as well as personal life experiences leading up to this point, were preparations for this opportunity. A smile quickly spread across my face as I surrendered into the excitement of a new path that just emerged.

My friends startled me out of this creative vortex when they returned for lunch. Excited to share this breakthrough with them, and without thinking about my knee, I stood up to join them in the kitchen and to my amazement, walked over pain free. To this day I am still in awe of this magical experience!

I now have a much deeper appreciation for the human body and how the subtle, and not so subtle, signs we experience can affirm we are on the right path, trigger a pause to explore greater awareness, or reorient us back to our purposeful life direction. From that moment on, I dedicated my life to further studying the nuances of the body-mind connection and how our body communicates by sending messages that can stimulate awareness in every breath we take. My purpose and mission in life is to help people release their pain physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually so that they can bring into balance that which they may feel is lacking, and thus experience the essence and wholeness of who they really are. In working with clients along these dimensions, they report experiencing deeper levels of self-love, clarity of purpose, and freedom to express their authentic truth.

One of my clients, Tom, is a fifty-eight-year-old carpenter who has had hand and wrist pain for the past five years. His physician diagnosed the condition as arthritis and set out an expectation that it would worsen as he aged. Tom had also seen physical therapists, acupuncturists, and massage therapists to try to relieve his pain, without persistent relief. With five years of intense pain and numbness in his hands, he had nearly given up hope of living pain free. Fortunately, his wife heard about the impact of my work with one of their neighbors and hired me to work with her husband. Together, we co-created an experience where we worked on healing the root causes and within three sessions he felt pain relief and within eight sessions was pain free. Moreover, he shared that from our work together, “For the first time in my life, I feel comfortable in my own skin.”

My message is: pay attention to the pain in your life because it’s trying to teach you something you’re not aware of yet or have been ignoring. Listen to the subtle signs along your journey and allow your body to be your guide to greater awareness and insight. You will discover a whole new world opening up for you: deeper connections, greater self-love, and new opportunities aligned with your soul’s purpose.

I invite you to reflect on five key elements to understanding the significance of pain. These will initiate an internal dialogue exploring the nature of your pain and provide insight to what your body-mind is experiencing and communicating.

- 1) Awareness: Are you currently experiencing pain in your body? Or have you in the past? Where do you feel the pain? What does it feel like? Expand your awareness by connecting with this feeling.
- 2) Acknowledgement: Acknowledge and honor your pain. Try talking to your pain with a childlike curiosity. You can say, “I see you, I feel you. Now I want to understand you.” Ask, “what are you here to teach me in this moment?” Then listen for how your body-mind communicates with you.
- 3) Acceptance: Learn to accept your pain as a friend, an ally. If you just want to get rid of it, you won’t learn the lesson your friend (pain) wants to teach you. This is why pain typically comes back in the same place, because the root cause of the pain never healed. Invite your friend (pain) to stay as long as it needs to so you can master the lesson it’s here to teach. Maybe ask the pain to

stay for a cup of tea and chat. Ask what the pain needs from you without any attachment to the outcome.

- 4) Love: Love heals all wounds. Love yourself unconditionally for co-creating the pain. Love your body for bringing you the awareness that something is out of balance in your life. Be grateful for this opportunity to co-create a new possibility together.
- 5) Surrender: Surrender to the pain. Surrender to the outcome. Surrender to the attachment of what it looks like. Surrender to the emergence of a new path or opportunity that your soul is yearning for.

Learning to explore and navigate through these five elements will empower you to consciously choose new thoughts and create new patterns of awareness along your journey. As you co-create a deeper relationship with your body-mind, you will learn that all the answers lie within. And this is how you heal, from the inside out.



Marissa O'Neil is an award winning author, speaker and founder of ***Wellness and Beyond: From Pain to Purpose***, an integrative wellness company in Santa Monica, CA. With over sixteen years of experience in the health and wellness industry, Marissa specializes in relieving pain physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually to improve her clients' quality of life. She works with individuals to discover the physiological source of their discomfort as well as addresses the accompanying cognitive, emotional, and spiritual thoughts and beliefs that contribute to the physiological pain. She then engages her clients in a series of activities that teach them how to restore their body's natural balance and empowers them to live a more productive and fulfilling life.

Marissa has her Masters from the Psychosomatic Therapy College in Australia and a bachelors degree in Kinesiology from Colorado College. She began her career in NYC as the Medical Director at La Palestra – a Center for Preventative Medicine, where she closely coordinated clients' healthcare with Orthopedic Surgeons, Physical Therapists, Chiropractors, Nutritionists, Internists, Masseuses, Performance Specialists, and Behavioral Psychologists. She moved to Santa Monica, CA in 2007 to develop a new performance training center called Core Performance, with the philosophy of integrating mindset, nutrition, movement and recovery. Later she pioneered Corporate Health & Productivity Programs within Fortune 500 companies, such as: Google, Intel and Linked In.

Over the years Marissa has worked with a clientele that includes Olympic Gold Medalists, professional athletes, actors, entrepreneurs, adolescents, as well as special populations including orthopedic ailments, cardiac care, weight management and pregnancy protocols.