



# Bio-Spirituality

The Bio-Spiritual Focusing Newsletter

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## From Persecutor to Partner Focusing with Pain



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The initial reaction towards any physical symptom of pain in our Western civilization is: "How can I get rid of it?" Pain is seen as a threat, an interference to our ambitions and a disturbance to our comfort zones. Society worships the golden image of *Life Without Pain*. If pain were a person, he/she would be the most outcast person in the world.

Our language reflects this stance: deal with the pain, fight the pain, suffer pain, kill the pain, control the pain, alleviate the pain, endure the pain, a pain in the neck.....

Often pain is interpreted as a punishment for our sins and is inextricably linked with hell and purgatory. According to the Oxford English dictionary the word pain is derived from the Latin word 'poena' which means punishment. No wonder we'd rather see the back of pain...

But is it possible that we have totally misinterpreted the sensation that we have labeled "pain"?

I've always wondered why many tribal passages into manhood revolve around rituals which contain some form of intense pain. Is there perhaps a value and a meaning within the sensation

which we call pain? Could our attitude towards pain perhaps be a key factor in our spiritual growth?

### THE 'DELETE' COMMAND

For the last 7 years I've been living with a spinal condition which produces regular spells of intense pain for prolonged periods of time. At the time this was diagnosed, I found myself labeled, put into a medical category for which only certain solutions existed; I could feel myself beginning to believe "this is it for the rest of my life, this is who I am, I'll be helpless".

My initial reaction was indeed to reach for the pain-killers. I approached the pain in the same way that I approach my computer at work: I am in control and what is on my screen is there to be manipulated by me. The computer gives me a sense of absolute control: with every click of the mouse my command is obeyed and any deviation from this control is regarded as an error and therefore wrong. My pain was wrong, so I reached for the DELETE key every time it came. But the pain kept coming back, again and again and again.

It was sheer desperation that finally made me realize: "If I can't beat it, why not join it? Perhaps I need to change my attitude towards the pain. Perhaps it is telling me something"... It was at this time that I was introduced to Bio-Spiritual Focusing and started to learn how to replace the DELETE command with the FOCUS command when the pain surfaced. The steps gave me the space to see that I could choose to be with the pain instead of automatically

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reacting to it.

A painstakingly (!) slow process ensued, which required many months of regular Focusing and

lots of tenacity, patience and humility. The hesitant beginnings of some kind of a respectful and meaningful relationship with the pain began to emerge. This relationship grew out of two ingredients: 1) the realization that it is OK to have pain and 2) a sense that the pain had a meaningful message for me.

What follows is a brief account of this journey into the pain up till now. The last 18 months that I've focused with the pain could be divided into the following phases:

#### CHOOSING TO BE WITH THE PAIN

It took weeks and weeks of regular Focusing with my partner as a companion to begin to have some sense of acceptance of the pain. Since we focus together routinely, there were times that I was able to focus when not actually in pain. These sessions turned out to be crucial as they were, almost without fail, characterized by going deeper and deeper into myself and coming to know a wonderful loving space in which I felt totally at home and in which I could feel the goodness of Life. I began to be able to draw from this experience in order to provide the Caring Feeling Presence in which

to hold the pain. It was quite discouraging to me that, soon after this, the pain began to increase in frequency and intensity. It took me a while to understand that this loving space was actually providing a safe and welcoming place

for the pain to come into.

At times the pain was so bad that I simply could not focus directly with it, so during those sessions I focused on the feelings about having the pain - often a sense of despair, of depression, of being trapped. I can vividly remember the many sessions where being with a sense of despair or depression led to the realization that I was still, at some deep motivational level, expecting the pain to lessen through Focusing. I was using the FOCUS command, hoping it had an in-built DELETE program... Those admissions were very important because they began to cultivate a sense of humility and reverence for the process unfolding through my body.

I also realized that I simply could not do this on my own. My companion's presence was crucial as she continually encouraged me to have faith in the process and to be honest with what was going on. Behind each sense of frustration or discouragement there was always some kind of hidden agenda of how I thought things should work out... The need to stay in control is deeply ingrained.

It usually takes this kind of frustration and a good dose of honesty for me to recognize this dominant stance during my Focusing. It's an approach which endeavors to exercise any command - DELETE, SAVE, ADD, etc. - to submit the felt place to a certain

ideal picture of what is deemed to be better. This ideal picture may even consist of very noble intentions (e.g. therapeutic, religious, spiritual) but it's basically still a controlling stance.

Number one on my control agenda was usually an

impatient wish that the whole journey would finish in one final megabyte shift so that I could get on with my life...it was this wish that actually stood in the way of the real

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megabyte shift: to let go of control and simply be with whatever my body presented as a felt sense.

#### RESPECTING THE PAIN

Slowly, very slowly, a sense of acceptance of the pain became a genuinely felt experience. Sometimes the emergence of a hair-width of space, allowing me to simply tolerate the pain, already felt like a huge shift.

The sense of grace which came with these shifts noticeably began to strengthen my trust in the process. I began to feel o.k. about having the pain and it felt o.k. for the pain to be there.

A healthy respect began to build and the pain began to unfold, gift-

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**if I honor the pain**



ing me with numerous realizations and felt shifts. The pain led me to a place of a little hurt boy with whom I was able to develop a parenting kind of relationship. The felt shifts seemed to get stronger:

**I had discovered that the way in which I held the pain was the way in which I held myself. The feelings I felt about the pain were actually the feelings I felt toward myself.**

some deep, deep gut-level sobbing or a shaking of the body; a sense of energy being freed up and released. Because the emotional release was strong and often brought a sense of relief, I noticed in myself a tendency to become 'addicted' to that. But I knew that it was important to

keep checking back with the bodily felt sense of it all, because it was this which was the leading edge of the process.

Experiencing the unfoldment of the pain's story helped me in turn to give it the proper weight and value it deserved. Instead of decrying the pain, I began to feel that it was there to guide me. I had discovered that the way in which I held the pain was the way in which I held myself. The feelings I felt

about the pain were actually the feelings I felt toward myself.

#### FOLLOWING THE PAIN

I was still taking medication from my GP in order to be able to work.

After about 12 months of Focusing I reached another crisis point. The medication did not work anymore and the pain began to spread to both arms and wrists.

One thing I've learned from this period is that desperation is the threshold of a new door. I contacted a cranio-sacral therapist who uses Bio-Spiritual Focusing as a cornerstone in her work. The sessions with her opened a door into a deeper understanding of the pain and the issues it was pointing to. She suggested to ask inside the question: "What place in my body wants to connect with this pain?" Then breathe into the connection thus formed. This was of great help during times when the pains were very severe. But, if this 'connecting' was done out of a desire to delete the pain, it would come back with a vengeance. Only when the 'connecting' was done out of a genuine sense of being

with the pain would some kind of felt shift take place. Sometimes you could almost hear the pain utter a sigh of relief when it felt it was really heard and listened to...

At this time I decided to stop with the medication and during the month that followed I was in constant pain. Every spare minute was used to be with the pain in this 'connecting' way. I was just

about able to continue my work at the office.

It was during this time when the pains were at their peak that I began to have a glimpse of how much Caring Feeling Presence there actually is around us in

nature. I vividly remember an occasion when I was in considerable pain and struggling to be with it in a caring way. It was quiet and sunny outside and I was lying in bed with the curtains drawn as I could not tolerate any light. And there it was coming out of nowhere, simple, short and most beautiful: a birdsong right in front of my window which deeply resonated in my chest and had a most curiously uplifting effect on me as though it was saying: 'Come on, you can do it!' It was this birdsong that gave me that little bit of extra space to enable me to be with the pain in a caring way. Soon after that, the pain began to unfold its story -the pain transmuting into a child's cry of desperation longing to be heard. Since then, whenever I see a bird, I also feel its most glorious and uplifting presence and a deep longing in me to sing along with it!

It was also at this time of crisis that I began

to notice something about the pain which clarified its meaning and function to me and helped me further in building my relationship with it. I noticed that each time the pain intensified and I was able to be with it in a caring manner, a little more of the story behind it would unfold and the pain would change into a dull soreness or disappear altogether. This might take anything from a minute to two days. But, if I didn't listen to the pain it would simply get worse... and worse...

Looking back on this now, I compare the pain to a rescue dog (unfortunately without the rum) which desperately tries to grab your attention (and your trousers). My initial reaction was to get annoyed and kick the dog away, but as soon as I was willing to listen and be led to where it wanted



me to go it brought me in contact with places inside me which were desperate for healing. So the pain has become my guidedog and will probably stay with me till I've opened my eyes enough.

As an example: recently the days are filled with instances when the pain may suddenly flare up within a matter of seconds. This subsides again as I immediately respond and embrace the pain in a Focusing way and am willing to feel whatever it connects with. However, this often disrupts my plans for the day. Or it will change the way I'm doing things. And this, I feel, is the key question: Am I willing to let go of my agenda and let the pain guide me and tell its story? Or do I decide to delete the pain and continue to drive my own agenda? I have discovered that this can be a two-way street: if I honor the pain, it will honor me. It is almost as though it knows that when I'm at work I only have a few moments to be with it; and it is willing to be put on hold as long as I just take enough time to acknowledge it.

C.S. Lewis once said: "Pain is Life's megaphone to a sick and deaf

has changed and it is this relationship that allows me to move forward more trustingly into an unknown future. - *Addie van der Kooij*

## The Companion's Challenge

In the long period of companionship Addie on his journey into pain, I have learned a few things I'd like to share.

- It is hard to trust the process when you are overwhelmed with pain, and so my own trust, faith and interest in the process was crucial, especially early on.
- Pain is demanding - I had to make sure that our Focusing/Companionship part-



- Pain makes you feel like giving up: I had to keep encouraging Addie to sense for himself what was the right next step inside, so that he kept contact with his process and did not become totally dependent on my suggestions.

- Pain is hard to hold. At first Addie felt only irritation and impatience. It took much patience and flexibility on my part to keep looking for ways to

be with all these harsh feelings one by one as they led very slowly toward the pain itself.

- Pain makes it difficult to perceive and value the felt edge of one's

experience or the small movements in the felt sense. I needed to be alert in listening to where the felt edge was amidst the pain and where felt shifts occurred. I had to keep tabs on these and keep bringing them to Addie's attention, often again and again

## I learned to have no investment in outcome.

world". How true! I don't know how long I'll need this megaphone but what I do know is that it is playing a pivotal part in my spiritual growth as it enables me to have a much deeper relationship with myself. I have no idea where the pain will take me which is scary as it may change my whole life.

Looking back, I remember how frightened I was of the pain; and yet now I feel it is part of a healthy and friendly process in which I am carried forward. The pain is still there and I sometimes still struggle with it, but my relationship with it

nership did not become a one-way street or a "victim-rescuer" co-dependency. So we made sure that Addie companioned me as often as I companioned him and looking back we both can see how healthy this was.

- Addie's constantly recurring pain accompanied by despair and depression often felt like it was wearing me down. I needed tenacity to stay with his process but I also needed to be honest with my own feelings and take time to focus with them.

if they were ignored.

- I learned to have no investment in outcome. Often what seemed to me a spectacular leap forward in one session would seem to be lost and forgotten in the next. I learned not to see our sessions in terms of either success or failure, realizing that these were simply my interpretations of a particular moment in a process which would inevitably change and move on.
- Finally, one unusual experience may be worth sharing - in the

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latter stages of the process, Addie connected with a very early preverbal experience still held in his body. The very nature of this felt sense was that he always felt submerged in it and unable to 'own' it. I struggled with trying to find ways to help and eventually asked him if I could put it on paper as he spoke. What emerged was a kind of visual 'inventory' of all that was present. It looked a bit like a flowchart and since Addie is a systems analyst this made a lot of sense to him! Indeed, this 'mapping' seemed to provide a useful overview and catalyzed a lot of new realizations and connections for him. - *Lesley Wilson*