

# Addicted to Suffering

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Addiction has many faces. If we hear, that somebody is addicted, we think of drugs or alcohol, maybe even of sleeping pills or tranquillisers. We certainly do not get the idea that somebody may be addicted to suffering. The privilege of old people to share their physical fragility with each other has become fashionable in all age groups. The personal suffering fills many hours of conversation, gives one identity and can ultimately determine one's life.

A few years ago a man came to see me, a European who had lived in Japan for many years. A year before he came to my place, his life had taken a sudden and surprising turn. He had moved into another house. This move was the beginning of a long chain of events in which his life had collapsed. He had worked himself more and more into a state of shame, guilt and the feeling he was a failure. He had gone to different therapists for help and had found open and compassionate hearts, but nothing had improved in his world within. On the contrary, it had become worse. As we examined his problems, it became clear that they presented no existential threat. On the contrary, the sale of his house had improved his financial situation, though not his marriage or his personal well-being.

While I listened to him, I saw a small, inquisitive boy, who didn't dare show himself under the crushing burden of self blame. I showed him how his posture and breathing pattern helped to maintain this condition, and how he could gain a realistic estimate of his situation by changing his breathing pattern and grounding himself. This gave us the base from which to explore the gift that was hidden beneath his self-accusations. On a symbolic level, the self blame took the shape of a gigantic flint with sharp, cutting edges. By holding onto them he could gain a sense of safety and stability. This stone had grown during the year and seemed to overpower and suffocate the flame that was his true symbol. In the course of our work he recognized how his wailing and complaining had pulled him down deeper and deeper into a spiral with power so strong that all resistance seemed vain. He had become addicted to suffering.

His story reminded me of a conference some years ago in Findhorn that dealt with world problems. The process-oriented psychology, which Arne Mindell has developed, presented its work with global questions such as race discrimination or the suppression of minorities. Most participants of the conference belonged to the white middle class of Europe and the USA, and many of them were part of the helping professions.

To my surprise, the participants introduced themselves by stating what they had suffered in their lives, and within a couple of hours there was a furious competition going on about who had endured most. I got the sense that you had to present your business card of suffering before you were entitled to speak in the hall. Silently I watched this competition.

I was also reminded of times in the Findhorn-community when 'woundology' was the common ground of communication. In endless meetings, participants shared the wounds of their childhood, and yet talking about them did not resolve them. On the contrary, one's misery proved to be an excellent way of gaining some sympathy and love without having to change anything in one's situation. Wounds served to create a sense of identity and communality until the destructive side became evident to everybody.

This experience in the collective repeated what I had learned years before in my therapeutic process. At the beginning of my training in Bioenergetic Analysis, I had had the idea that I could overcome my suffering if I went deeper and deeper into it and finally came out on the other side. Joy seemed like a trophy to be achieved as a reward for successful suffering. But the deeper I dug into the morass, the worse it became. My therapists supported me in this process and helped me find out more and more details. It took me many years before I realized that I had landed in a dead end. The reward at the end of the winding path through suffering was not delight or satisfaction, but an accommodation with it.

It is important to distinguish between pain and suffering. Pain signalizes an injury or an imbalance in our system. Suffering is a fixation on the pain, an attitude of ignorance or an attempt to find an identity. Suffering can also serve as a defence mechanism and prevent one from being confronted with the real pain. Unfortunately it also prevents healing from taking place.

I realised that the recollection of one's story, the awakening of consciousness is an important work which needs to be held within a structure different from suffering. Energy flows to where we put our attention. If we focus on suffering, we strengthen it. If we focus on joy and fun, life gets more colourful, richer and fulfilled. I realised the need to cultivate joy.

Joy is the quality, which pours out of the heart when it opens to the flow of life. Certain principles facilitate or complicate the opening. These principles are personal responsibility, forgiveness, gratitude and service. These concepts are not new, and often they are misunderstood. I will explain what they mean to me and how they impact the cultivation of joy.

In its original sense, responsibility refers to our ability to respond appropriately to people, situations and incidents. This presupposes that we are able to recognize what action is appropriate in each moment and that we have the internal freedom to act upon it. According to this understanding, responsibility has much more to do with freedom of choice than with any guilt, burden or imposed external discipline as many people understand and have experienced it.

Seen in this way, responsibility means that we recognize our life-circumstances as our own creation. Many people perceive themselves as victims of circumstances. They feel at life's mercy and powerless to change their situation.

If I look at the people with whom I work and who share those feelings, I often have to confirm their impression of themselves. They lack both the psychological and physical strength and the self-discipline to develop the necessary resources. Our comfortable lifestyle is not conducive to strengthening our capacity for stamina and perseverance. And the subculture of woundology offers sufficient incentives to remain in the suffering state, or to even slip back into the addiction.

The term self-discipline has a negative flavour. It is seen as a compulsory exercise or submission to authority, or at least as a restraint on personal freedom. We do not understand that self-discipline is the ability to receive what already belongs to us.

In order to receive, we need a vessel into which the universe can pour its gifts. At the energetic level, this vessel corresponds to the aura or your electromagnetic field, on the

physical level to your posture and deportment, on the emotional and mental levels to our inner soul dynamics and on the spiritual level to our connection to other dimensions.

Without the vessel, the energy oozes away like water from a river whose bed has eroded. For most of the people whom I see in my practice, the river bed has unclear contours and holes through which their life-energy drains away. They lack the strength to achieve what they want in their lives. Therefore, they first have to mend the river bed so that it can hold the flow, and then direct it towards the desired goal. This repair work, or perhaps even new construction work, requires daily, disciplined practice.

The difference between external authority and self-discipline is that it is your choice, your responsibility whether or not you undertake this effort. What matters is not what impacted you in your childhood, but what you make out of what happened.

Self-discipline is necessary in order to break with bad habits. We all know how easy it is to establish bad habits and how difficult it is to get rid of them again. Just by analyzing the history of their origins, one does not usually make them disappear. A more effective strategy is to work positive habits into one's program. These positive habits support the building of an inner structure. Implementation of the program requires daily practice and self-discipline.

If you have taken this step, you use the newly gained strength to clear up your past. This is easier said than done. Our memory has a tendency to draw together events in such a way that our dignity is guaranteed. And the more frequently we tell our story, the more we are convinced of its truth.

Forgiveness means the willingness to let go of your story and to look at it with fresh eyes from the broader perspective of the soul contract. If you understand the lessons of the events, its higher purpose, you break free from its negative power. This understanding often requires that you have to go back into the story and consider all the details to understand its higher meaning.

Some people would like to forgive in order to avoid the deep and intense feelings involved or necessary changes in their lives. They can feel superior and do not have to change anything. This is avoidance, not forgiveness. Forgiveness is a letting go and an acceptance that you are the creator of the circumstances of your life which you can change for that reason.

Gratitude is the key to happiness. In our affluent society we take many privileges for granted. It does not occur to us to be grateful for them. At a seminar, after a meditation on this theme, one woman shared that she had never thought of the fact that first her father and then her husband had provided her with financial security. Instead, she would always think about the things she did not have. And she is not the only one who thinks in that way.

Our cultural attitudes are programmed towards lack, not abundance, towards not-having instead of having, towards deficiencies instead of blessings. It would be healthy for everybody to take account of all the good things in life on a daily basis. Among them are the privileges that are given us by our culture, family membership, profession or personal contacts. We often take them for granted and claim them as our natural birthright.

Service is a goal that has been proclaimed as the path to happiness by many traditions. From my own experience, I could not grasp this thought for a long time. To me, service meant duty and responsibility, a burden that made me burn out more than once. I couldn't understand how

other people could say that they felt filled with happiness and joy after giving many hours of service.

It was only a few years ago that I learned the difference between helping and serving. When out walking one day, there arose in my heart an urge which was new to me: the urge to give myself, to give my Best and Deepest. This urge was free from all motives of external reward, appreciation or recognition. It was a genuine drive, the pleasure of expressing me, expanding and sharing who I am.

It was amazingly simple. I didn't have to be or do anything special. It was enough to be. It was enough to express who and what I am here and now. I understood that there is no difference between giving and receiving, that they are truly one. I experienced this physically, as if I were a funnel with two openings. While the energy flowed out from the heart centre, the funnel was refilled from the crown centre. Give and take was a circuit that nourished and sustained itself. This giving had nothing to do with exploiting the self, but was freedom, abundance and joy.

Living with responsibility, forgiveness, gratitude and service does not mean that our days are only filled with happiness. Pain and loss are as much part of everyday life as joy and fulfilment. I do though not fix myself on the pain and cultivate it, as in the addiction to suffering, but accept it as part of life and take it as a sign that my life has lost its balance. It is like tooth ache. Without the pain, I would not know that the tooth needs treatment. Emotional pain is a sign that my emotional and mental world is out of balance. It does not help to deny or suppress the pain. It will only return as a physical symptom. We need to listen to the message of the pain and change its cause. Sometimes this may take many years. However, time plays no role anymore, if we know, that we are on the right path.

**For further readings on this subject, see the book: [Growing through Joy](#) . Findhorn Press 1999**