

## **Transform Your Thoughts To Start A Path To Recovery**

by Lauren Hill

MANY OF US WHO suffer or have suffered from chronic pain know all too well the myriad of emotions that one deals with after months or years of searching in vain for a diagnosis, a cure, or simply relief. Denial, Anger, Grief, Isolation, and Exhaustion are a few that come to mind. Helplessness is another emotion that many chronic pain sufferers experience and it can be a real obstacle to recovery.

My late teens and twenties were defined by chronic pain. For years I went from one practitioner to another looking for a diagnosis and a cure. Not finding either, I looked for someone to at least provide me with some type of relief from my symptoms. I experienced all of the emotions mentioned above. Helplessness, however, was by far the most dominant. Eventually, the pain controlled most of my decision-making, from small decisions I made about daily activities to large decisions I made about what career path I would follow.

It was not until I was able to make a transition in the way I thought about my chronic pain that I was able to deal with the feeling of helplessness and steer myself onto a path towards recovery. For a long time I looked upon my constant pain as a problem I needed another person to solve for me. For years I thought the answer was to find someone who could fix me. This put all the responsibility on someone else. What I really needed was to learn what I could do for myself.

The encouragement I needed to transition out of my old way of thinking came in the form of Alexander Technique lessons in 1995. As I began a series of lessons I was confronted for the first time with the fact that perhaps I could do something myself to help with my problem. My Alexander Technique teacher took a different tact than other practitioners I had encountered. She did not set out to treat me as a passive patient. Her approach was active and educational. She taught me what habits I could change in the way I used myself that were putting excess strain on my body.

Stress had always seemed to be something that aggravated my pain and so I had spent time and effort trying to “de-stress” my life. However, many things in life are outside of our control and stress will be there whether we like it or not. What was within my control was how I reacted to stress—this is what my Alexander lessons taught me. Most of us habitually react to stress in the form of strain and excess muscular tension, which has implications for our overall well-being. This was certainly clear in my case. My habits were not necessarily the underlying cause of my pain but certainly were exacerbating my symptoms to the point that they had become almost unmanageable.

In order to help myself I had to accept some of the responsibility for my problem—which was a hard pill to swallow. However, taking responsibility and being willing to learn what I could do gave me a sense of empowerment that had been non-existent up to that point. What a wonderful gift that was! The sense of empowerment that learning what I could do for myself gave me was what really helped to turn me around and steer me in a new direction.

The feeling of helplessness that all too often accompanies chronic pain tends to feed other negative emotions and perpetuates a vicious cycle. By discovering ways to develop choice in our everyday actions, we can begin to find a sense of empowerment and break that cycle. This freedom to choose can also put us in a better state to receive help from others when we need it.

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