

MASTERING OUR HUMAN PAIN

by

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Pain is one of the most confusing and misunderstood phenomena in our human world. We wonder: Why do we suffer? What is pain all about? What does it mean? Why is it here? Why can't we just command it away?

Could it be that we are “in pain about pain” because we're not looking at it from the right angle? I strongly believe so. Could our basic, underlying assumptions about pain be erroneous and, because of that, set us up for frustration and even more suffering? You bet.

Think about it. Don't we almost always think of pain as something we don't want? Let's face it, we just don't want anything to hurt us. We resist any sensation in our body that feels painful. We try to avoid physical discomfort when we can. Emotional, psychological and relationship pain trigger our immediate resentment and resistance. We find spiritual and existential pain even more mysterious and incomprehensible. And what about the suffering that permeates our precious human family? That puzzling, seemingly unanswerable question can easily throw most of us into a state of deep anguish.

Yes, human pain just keeps showing up—it's everywhere we look. It is inside us and all around us. It's reported to us repetitively in the news. It just won't let us alone. We feel a strong impulse to escape it, but we can't. Despite powerful mega-systems to help us overcome pain—medicine, psychology, religion, to name a few—it keeps mysteriously recurring in our lives. For as long as we humans have had awareness, we have tried to understand pain.

Understanding pain

Like everyone else, I have spent much of my life puzzled and *in pain* about this human phenomenon that we call pain and suffering. Unexpectedly, a unique moment appeared when, from the depths of my wisely guiding soul, I knew that I simply now *had* to understand it more fully. Being masterful in relation to pain suddenly became an integral part of my destiny.

Yet, to arrive at this masterful relationship with pain, I realized (don't ask me how) that I had to get beyond my then current mindsets, to stop thinking about it in my usual ways. My intuition voiced the opinion that, if I would just let my mind explore pain from "outside the box" of my customary thinking, I might come up with some fresh insights about this seemingly uninvited visitor. I couldn't argue with that.

So I set upon the task of *changing my relationship with pain*. By simply following my soul's subtle nudges at each step, I embarked upon what turned out to be a mighty adventure with pain itself. Later, in hindsight, I realized that this years-long exploration unveiled itself in four distinct phases. With a sense that my journey may mirror your own, I'm honored to share these four phases with you:

Phase I: The Mental Approach. As a first step, I decided to release my own aversion to pain, my knee-jerk dislike of it, my learned allergy to it. To do so, I committed myself to *think about* pain differently than I had—to perceive and interpret it in an entirely new way. I set about re-training my mind's habitual style of conceptualizing pain.

As a first step in consciously changing my thinking, I desensitized my mind's learned desires to escape pain. I repeatedly commanded my mind to stop thinking of pain in negative terms. I required of myself that I stop judging, condemning and decrying pain, both in my own life and as I found it rampant around our earth. I refused to numb or escape from pain ever again. Over and over, time after time, I stripped my mind of its historical ways of relating to pain.

It worked. Slowly and with resistance at first, then more cooperatively and helpfully over time, my mind reached a magical moment: it had dramatically changed its style of thinking about pain. Yes, my mind, now more empowered and in charge of itself, had awakened into a very new world of mental functioning. It was no longer judgmental about this mysterious thing called pain. Any time my thoughts focused on pain—whether my own or that of others—my mind found itself consistently in *neutral gear*.

That's right, my thoughts had become neutral in relation to pain. My mind saw pain as neither good nor bad, neither positive nor negative, neither wanted nor unwanted. Mentally, I began to see pain as *just pain*, period. Yes, it simply was what it was—with no added stories, values or interpretations attached. At last, my pain became exactly that, just plain pain, and my mind was no longer making it into anything else.

The result, besides my now having a mind that was no longer upset, angry or depressed about being in pain, was that I was now free to just "be" with the pain. I could now co-exist neutrally with it. What a relief it was—one I never sensed was even possible! I was a truly happy camper, though I knew I couldn't stop there.

Phase II: The Feeling Approach. With neutrality now officially in place, I felt ready to take the next step: I let myself *feel* the pain. I allowed myself to experience pain fully and deeply in any given moment. I felt its intense energy, its loud scream, its dull sensation—whatever tone it was communicating to me at the time—without trying to control it in any way. I let the pain translate itself into my body, my senses, my emotions—still without mental interpretation—in whatever way it wanted. In this process an interesting awareness came to me: I was now experiencing my personal energy system as the vocal chords of the pain. And my only job was to experience it fully.

Somewhat surprisingly, I noticed that the pain didn't hurt nearly as much as it used to. Perhaps because I was no longer resisting it, or maybe because I was now fully experiencing it, it both hurt and didn't hurt simultaneously. Hmm, it was not just my mind that had become neutral about pain.

I noticed something else: Contrary to my previous assumption, my body was in no way decrying or resisting these painful impulses. In fact, my body appeared to be quite comfortable with them. I noticed more and more that my body was actually welcoming pain whenever it came, as though it were simply a natural part of life. Over time it occurred to me that our bodies perhaps never did resist or fight pain—maybe that unenviable task had only been the job of our minds. Armed with these unexpected awarenesses, I was now even more curious to take the next steps.

As I allowed myself to experience pain more fully, I came upon another discovery: my body was hearing and experiencing pain *as a meaningful language*. Yes, just as you and I might

hear the deeper meaning of a friend's feeling-filled words, so my body was hearing, registering and witnessing the deeper, fuller meaning of my pain. Something truly significant was being expressed—and pain was its all-important voice. I knew by now not to interpret this communication with my conscious mind, so I just kept listening to my feelings.

It became clear to me that the pain was communicating in a *primal* rather than rational language. Yes, my pain was actually the voice of a deeper, more natural, more shaman-like intelligence. And I couldn't wait to find out what that intelligence was. So, I committed myself to doing whatever was necessary to learn that primal language that my body and its pain were inviting me to.

Phase III: The Oneness Approach. That commitment led me to step three: becoming *one* with the pain. Yes, in a radical but natural progression beyond simply feeling it, I let the boundaries dissipate between me and the pain. I allowed myself to sink into the pain, losing my usual sense of separation from it—much like we do when we lose ourselves completely in the romantic embrace of someone we love totally. I merged with it, gradually experiencing the pain as the pain experiences itself. I was able to feel the pain from inside its own being, so much so that I felt myself *becoming* the pain.

What a remarkable experience this was, to experience pain as pain experiences itself! I apologize if this approach seems a bit drastic. I grant that it's mystical and spiritual, but I don't consider it extreme. In fact, it may be the most natural approach to pain we can possibly take. Indeed, this is probably the way we were meant to relate to pain in the first place. Let's get back to being one with the pain.

In this oneness, I began to notice a primal, organic, intelligent force within the pain. In its elemental, vibrational impulses, I felt the beginnings of an ancient, cellular version of wisdom. Over a little more time, I began to recognize and respect that this intelligent “thing” called pain clearly knew what it was doing—and that whatever it was doing was pretty important. At this point, I began to feel fortunate to be an intimate part of the ceremony.

At this point, I had an ‘ah-ha!’ moment. A subtle but life-changing shift in my consciousness had just taken place: *pain stopped feeling like an enemy*. It had even stopped feeling neutral; it had now morphed into something else. All of a sudden pain—my pain—was feeling more like a *friend*.

Phase IV: The Creation Approach. That’s when step four emerged, all on its own. My new friend, pain, slowly became even more: a meaningful *partner*. Here’s how it happened.

First, I started to notice that, in some mysterious way, every time pain showed up, it was an integral part of a magical and powerful *creation*. Yes, whenever pain entered my life, something important was being initiated, birthed, given new life. And in every instance my pain was a primary actor in this ingenious, if enigmatic, creative act.

The creation was sometimes a bigger sense of freedom in my emotions (even though I had been conditioned to experience it as fear), or an expanded capacity for love in my heart (although I was trained to feel it as grieving), or a magnified sense of courage in my gut (despite my traditionally interpreting it as distress).

In every case, the accompanying pain was my primal self's way of joining in and empowering the creation—bringing my body, emotions and psyche into greater levels of resonance, so that they could support and enjoy this new and improved self.

Pain is a signal that a powerful rite of passage is occurring, a foundational “happening” or primal ceremony in which a newer or bigger version of me or you is being created. And pain is its imaginative producer, creative director and primary actor. Always.

Yet, here is the best part—and it's about partnership. My pain was also inviting me to be an active contributor in its magical creation. In this primal ritual, in which pain itself is the master of ceremonies, I was being invited to support the creation by actively participating in it. That's why our efforts to avoid, deny or reject pain rarely work. It is also why we experience pain so strongly or consistently—so that we can fully take part in the creation of our bigger and better self.

So, instead of trying to push the pain away, we would serve ourselves better by welcoming and uniting with it, then by opening ourselves to the emerging creation (even if we don't consciously know what it is), and finally by bringing our full self into harmony with its creative act. And we can accomplish all of that simply by being at peace with experiencing pain.

With this last piece of the puzzle in place, I was now an intimate part of pain's essential purpose, its *raison d'être*. I finally understood pain and its creative wisdom. Best of all, it was now my friend and companion. We could now play together in life's mystery-rich creation, and enjoy the show more freely together. Wonderfully, perhaps as an unexpected side effect, all my previous fears, including the fear of death, simply dissolved.

At this point, I sat back and took a fresh look at myself. I was different—something in my consciousness had radically changed. Pain was no longer the villain in my worldview; my allergy to it was gone. I wasn't afraid of it anymore. In fact, I was excited that I had found an internal friend and partner in my deeper levels of being. The mysteries and workings of my own primal world had opened to me, and I felt proud to be a part of its profound intelligence. Perhaps even more important, I felt deeply connected to my own primal nature, my personal earthiness, my own body. I was more complete, more whole.

Before we go on, I'd like to pose a question. If pain is indeed our devoted friend and creative bearer of gifts, what is the primal intelligence behind it? What is the source of this wisdom that creates pain? I ask not primarily to have us come to an accurate response—after all, there may be no all-encompassing answer—but to invite us into the mystery of this intelligent thing called pain. To help us grasp that mystery a bit more clearly, I would like to share a personal story.

My painful ankle

A number of years ago I fell from a high ladder onto my driveway and, upon impact, severely splintered several bones in my ankle. No one else was around, so I dragged myself into the house and, before calling for help, allowed myself to feel the pain thoroughly, to be one with it. What followed was a most bizarre yet compelling experience.

As I sank into and unified with the excruciating pain, I felt my bones screaming wildly, but in two distinct voices. The first was an enormous screech throughout my nervous system about the severity of the pain itself—as if my ankle bones were shouting, “This really, really, really hurts! I’m in agony! Help!” I had never broken a bone before, so the pain felt especially torturous. Its penetrating voice was shrieking in every cell of my body.

The second voice grabbed my attention even more. This one had a notably joyous tone, as if the pain were celebrating some highly anticipated event. With a birthday-party attitude it was proclaiming something like, “Bravo! We’ve done it—we’ve broken free! We have claimed our next level of freedom! Hooray!” Of course, these words made no rational sense to me—how could pain be an exultant, jubilant celebration, after all? But let’s assume the legitimacy of my inner hearing and delve into it further.

As I lay there puzzled and intrigued by this second voice—and the blissful party that my splintered bones seemed to be celebrating in my ankle—I realized that I had just walked through (okay, *fallen* into) a personal rite of passage, an initiation from one level of freedom to another. My broken bones were officially announcing that freedom now lived in the deepest parts of me—at the foundational level of my bones, symbolically speaking. I even noticed that my ankle seemed truly happy to have had the honor of hosting this meaningful rite of passage.

Even after getting the medical help necessary to recover, I felt personally freer and distinctly lighter. Something radical had shifted within me, and the bone-breaking rite of passage was the body-based ceremony that supported this wonderful leap forward.

Our relationship with pain

Why are most of us so afraid of our primal pain? Having served as a mentor and guide to thousands of spiritually oriented persons, I have witnessed so many who genuinely feel repulsed by the 'darker' expressions of our earth: suffering, conflict and negative energies, among others. They sometimes tell me that they feel like aliens mistakenly dropped off on this strange, shadowy planet, and they can't wait to get back home where it's not so complicated and distressing. They often feel suffocated by the denser energies of human living.

Consequently, they often embrace one of the many spiritual paths or practices that help them transcend or escape this world. They try to live in a blissful, light-filled space of a purer infinity—their version of *nirvana* or unity. And, if successful, they feel really good there, at least for a while.

Often, though, life just doesn't allow them that consoling escape. It calls them right back to this earth and its more complex and often pain-filled ways—including illness, depression or existential angst. At that point their spiritual practices (which served as their doorway out of our human world) often stop working for them, and they become confused and suffer even more.

That's when these beautifully sincere people usually find me, hoping that I will help them more effectively eliminate the pain from their human lives. And I have witnessed the shock on their faces when I explain that they came onto this earth not to escape its dark side, but to find the underlying divinity that lives within that darkness. I try to help them see that, to arrive at a state of spiritual unity, they need to face—and make friends with—the primal

realities of our planet, not reject them. I sometimes offer the ancient maxim that we can only expand to the blissful heights (as in, get enlightened) to the degree that we are willing to descend to the primal depths (as in, make peace with our earthly nature). Or, to put it into religious terms, how can we love and unite with God if we are at war with any aspect of God's creation?

I've also found this same aversion to pain on the part of many psychologically oriented people. So often their motivation in seeking psychotherapy, reading self-help books or attending seminars is to put their pain behind them—rather than to enter into a deeper relationship with it. During the many years I functioned as a practicing psychologist, so many of my clients would eventually express some version of, "I don't care how you do it, just make the pain go away!"

In years of serving people in pain, I couldn't help noticing how often, almost predictably, their pain cyclically returned to them, no matter how successfully they had earlier side-stepped or healed it. Our soulful wisdom keeps finding creative ways—and pain is perhaps the most creative of them all—to invite us to experience our deeper human-ness. It's as though our deepest inner truth won't let us forget that our bodies, and their often pain-filled ways of expressing, are an intimate part of being human. These bodies of ours consistently bid us to be their cherished friend and willing partner as they pour their many gifts into us—so often in the form of pain.

In my experience, it is not just spiritually and psychologically oriented persons who are mystified by or afraid of pain; it's also true for those who find meaning in other orientations—

medicine, science, politics, business, religion and so on. Fear of pain is a shared *human* phenomenon—we all seem to have forgotten about the elemental wisdom of our bodies and emotions, the grace-filled love of our primal human nature.

What happens when we stop being afraid of pain

What would happen, do you think, if you thoroughly immersed yourself in your body's pained energies and your psyche's wounded feelings—without fear or resistance? What would you find if you took your own fear-free journey into your personal pain, whether it shows up in physical, emotional or psychological forms?

As you can imagine, I have explored this question quite extensively, so I'd like to offer the following seven examples of what you might discover as you become fear-free, as you just allow yourself to embrace your pain fully. You will:

1. Find *yourself*—your real, authentic, core self—more fully. Your body and emotions hold and guard the fundamental truth of who you are, and they do so with total devotion. In fact, in special moments they often choose pain as their way of delivering your deepest truths to you.
2. Discover an inner source of *self-healing* and *self-empowerment* that nests deeply in your core. Your personal pain often unlocks a personal power, a rooted authority, that has been buried or suppressed somewhere deep within you. It then graphically installs it within your conscious reach. As a result, your own capacities for healing, self-renewal and personal mastery become more accessible to you.

3. Encounter a unique and different *intelligence*—what modern researchers are now calling your ‘primal intelligence.’ We could call it your very own gut-level or instinctive intelligence. It lives not primarily in your brain’s cerebral cortex, but in your body, in your personal energy system, in your emotional feelings. I’ve found it to be as wise and dependable as any other intelligence in creation, including your cognitive intelligence. And it’s here to serve you.

4. Fall into the embrace of a truly *nurturing love* that lives in your primal depths—in your earthly body and your energy-rich feelings. Your primal self houses a love that knows and supports you unconditionally. It’s not dependent on outside sources for its healthiness. It is a self-contained, foundational love that remains solid and firm despite any external disappointments in your life. It is a constant resource for you, at any and every moment. Our journeys into pain often open us to that source of unconditional love—usually when we need it the most.

5. Feel a dynamic, vital *life force* vibrating in every cell of your body, in every flow of your energy. Pain is sometimes like a powerful pneumatic drill that penetrates into your dulled or sleeping vitality and awakens your nascent energy. It generates a fresh power or life force to support you as you move forward. While at first glance this pain seems destructive—just like a lightning-caused forest fire seems only damaging at first—it creates new life by first destroying older, no longer helpful energies within you. Then it opens life-giving energies and puts them at your disposal.

6. Become a full and devoted *friend of pain*. Through experiencing the richness of pain, you'll discover a true friend, one that has been living in and as your body ever since your birth. You'll find in that primal friend a source of love and wisdom that, once you're united with it, will flow daily into your conscious awareness. It will nurture you in all the ways you need. In fact, you'll probably find yourself talking quietly with your body, conversing spontaneously with your emotional feelings—just as you would talk to a close friend. And feeling good.

7. You'll feel a true love and *compassion* for the shared pain of our human family and for every other person in your life. You'll marvel at how pain has unified you with every member of our human race. Rather than judging or condemning them, you'll find yourself understanding their plight, your heart empathically meeting their heart, your mind resting in a state of peace, even in the midst of the seeming 'craziness' and pain that may surround you. All because you've embraced this mysterious phenomenon called pain—without being afraid of its hurt and by being open to its magical powers.

You will come alive in so many amazing ways. One of the most powerful paths to your new aliveness is the mysterious path of pain—your own pain and our shared human pain. I would like you to know that not only can you make friends with pain, but—once you learn its language and unite with its vast potential—you can literally become a master of its intriguing powers. Such mastery is totally possible for you, as it is for anyone who says 'yes!' to ultimate human living. With pain as your partner, you are now free to create peace, health and happiness in your life.

Pain as the voice of our loving body

Our primal self—residing deep in our physical bodies and emotional feelings—is vastly intelligent and wise. It’s also immensely loving and devotedly empowering. It’s our very own personalized source and resource of infinite gifts—living and breathing right under our noses. Yes, our primal nature does indeed create hurt in our lives, but never as punishment, never out of meanness or hatred, never as an act of cruelty.

Rather, in creating pain, our intelligent and loving primal nature is using its own special language to communicate something to us or to initiate a special gift within us. Just as our mind speaks the linear language of logic, and our heart speaks the embracing language of love, so our primal self speaks its own unique language. While different from what we may be used to cognitively, it’s a potent language that you and I can easily learn. What is this special language of our primal realm?

Our bodies speak to us in the same raw, elemental language that our earth uses. They communicate viscerally and vibrationally rather than rationally. Our core truth and our organic power “speak” energy and vitality into and through our bodies and psyches—continuously pulsating their love into our atoms, moving their power into our genetic fabric. They accomplish this miraculous act of gift-giving both primitively and instinctively—sometimes in ways that feel more like an internal earthquake or volcano than a quiet whisper. We’ve come to call that volcanic style *pain*.

This is the language of our basic life force. It is very elemental, very raw, very primitive. Can you speak, or even comprehend, that language? Your body can, and so can your emotions, sub-conscious mind, brain, heart and perhaps every other part of you—except, of course, your trained rational mind. Ironically, your mind also understood this effortless language when you were quite young and still instinct-prone. Can you remember those days? It's just that we all forgot this elemental language once we began to prioritize our rational mind.

Our body's language is an *energy* language. Instead of communicating with words, it expresses itself with and as, you guessed it, energy. It fills our entire energetic being—our bodies, energies, cells, instincts, emotions, life force—with an energy that carries a specific and intentional message. Our very own primal intelligence actually delivers personalized messages into our energetic fabric, then translates those messages into an energetic form—and we've learned to call that energetic form 'pain'.

Part of being human is to be earthly, primal and energy-driven. It's to know the power and gift of pain in our lives. To participate in pain's energetic rituals without resistance or fear. To bond with and drink in pain's wisdom and love. To find the divine gift in the human expressions of pain. To be at peace with pain and, through it, with our entire human experience.

Pain is nothing more than our primal nature speaking intelligently, lovingly and creatively within us—in energetic expressions that we can intimately feel. In every instance, our bodies—the originators of our pain--know exactly what they are doing, and why. Our body's primal intelligence is our trusted friend, our faithful servant, our wise guide. It gives us precisely

what best serves our growth and our awakening—guaranteed. It’s as wise and all-knowing as our “higher” consciousness. But it translates that higher consciousness to us in ways that our deeper realms—our bodies, energies and sub-conscious minds—can easily grasp and welcome.

When we learn to relate to our pain in this spirit, it loses its seemingly negative tone, it ceases to be felt as an enemy, and it sheds its perceived role as a controlling tyrant. Instead, we can experience pain as an intimate part of our own creative path. We join it as a friend on a meaningful journey, as a partner in a needed process of change, and as a teacher who bestows the gift of a bigger and better self.

All we need do is to let go of our preconceived notions about pain and start understanding it exactly as our bodies do. Our bodies innately know the language of “pain-speak” and how to partner with it. Our bodies are comfortable experiencing every pain you and I have ever felt. Only our conscious minds, because of their learned style of thinking about pain, have developed an unfriendly relationship with it.

How important, then, for us to know this primal language and to be in intimate resonance with its intelligence and energy! When we’re in synch with our primal self and the ways it speaks, we can relate to its many powerful expressions—joy and sorrow, health and illness, life and death, for example—with deep awareness, inner peace and loving wisdom.

Human pain and you

Why do you think I chose to dedicate a whole article to the theme of our pain? Mainly because most of us don’t grasp what pain is; we don’t understand its natural speaking style; we

have come to fear it. Second, because you are here on earth to leap beyond every hurdle to your freedom—and pain is perhaps the hurdle that we trip over the most.

You and I are remarkable human beings—with a spiritual, cognitive, energetic and primal nature. If we ignore the language of any one of these aspects, it will speak within and to us in ways we can't understand, in ways that hurt. We can literally learn the language of our primal nature. To be sure, pain itself is our perfect tutor. Embrace pain as a friend and experience it as a teacher, and your life will become richer and freer.

If you are strongly spiritual, I suggest that your surest path to loving God or finding your inner divinity is to love the parts of life that you find most challenging. The primal world of pain fits that bill for most of us. If you desire a state of unity and bliss, try saying “yes!” to your pain and becoming one with it. Learn its language, befriend it, love it, even become it. Without a doubt, you will find a true and peace-filled state of oneness.

If you are more philosophically, scientifically or psychologically oriented, may I suggest that you think of your primal intelligence as perhaps the seat of your greatest brilliance—as important and vital as your prized cognitive intelligence? Then, go about learning its way of “thinking” as you have never done before. Find its style of translating sophisticated truth into gut-level truth. Then discover that translation as it lives in your body and psyche, as it expresses as pain.

Let's talk about you. What is your relationship with your own primal nature? How do you feel about the pain that occurs and/or reoccurs in your life and in the lives of those around you? Do you sense it is time to change your relationship to it, your perception of it, your way of

participating in it? Are you ready to leap into loving your own body and psyche in ways that open you up to more freedom and aliveness?

If so, then you truly are an emerging *spiritual and human master*. You are in the process of becoming everything you came to earth to be—including everything “earthy.” You are taking a bold step into your own totality. I can guarantee this: As you become true friends with your pain, innumerable doors will open before you, ushering you into bigger and bigger realms of self and life—realms you perhaps never knew were possible. Pain will have become your powerful passageway to those vaster realms of freedom.

Thank you for taking this momentous journey. Thank you for being so willing to make this quantum leap into your bigger self. And, finally, if I may speak on behalf of pain itself, thank you for befriending this beautiful, little understood pathway to personal freedom!

Bill Bauman

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