

Ep #50: Is Pain Bad?



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

With this episode I want to dig into this idea or question of, is pain bad? To give context to this I want to remind you that I am trained as a kinesiologist and a yoga teacher. I am not traditionally trained in the medical model, though I do work with a lot of professionals who are in the medical model and have a medical model way of thinking.

But this is important to note, because my job has never been one to fix problems. I have never been given or trained in the tools of how to fix problems. My job has simply been to watch movement, to watch breathing, to watch stillness, and to teach movement, breath, and stillness.

Yes, I do help improve movement, breath, and stillness. But nowhere in the conversation am I fixing anything. It was not what I was trained to do, it's not what I ever have done.

So I think what's important here is this really strong distinction between what is often found in the medical model of go and find the problem and fix it, versus something distinctly different from what I do.

In this context for me then, pain is not bad. Pain is totally normal. It's a totally normal physiological response. And it doesn't have to be a normal way of being. It's a messenger. It's letting me and my client know that something is up.

Not necessarily a problem, just that something is up. A general, vague, curious suggestion that something is up. And if one chooses to listen to it, to pay attention to it, there's some really interesting things that can be learned from the experience.

Now, sometimes when there is pain present, there also can be fear present. So then does this add to it? Does this make this any worse? Any

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better? Any different? My response is that it's an experience, just as pain is an experience. So it's as allowable of an experience as the experience of pain.

So then, if I'm not someone who is chasing after pain, or chasing after a find it fix it model, then what the heck am I doing? One thing I learned early, early on in my career is that when people moved in a range of motion that did not increase their pain, their pain reduced. Likewise, when they continue to move in pain, their pain levels either remained the same or they grew. And even though what I said a moment ago of do I feel that pain is bad, I still wanted that pain to go down.

Now I want to really emphasize there's a distinction between my thinking that pain is not bad and wanting pain to reduce. Those are two very, very separate ways of thinking about a concept. When I help someone move better, when I help them to improve their function truly, for real, their pain dropped.

So not only did they improve their movement and improve their function, their pain levels also went down. Likewise, for my clients with autoimmune disorders. When they were able to move better, when they were able to tune in better, when they were able to breathe better and connect more with their stillness, their degree and frequency of flares went down.

So there is this correlation between better function, more connectedness to one's breathing, more connectedness to one's sense of stillness, one's sense of inner quiet. When they had that the experience of their symptoms altered. This is the important piece.

Again, I'm going to emphasize, to me that's entirely different than finding something and fixing it. Because in all of that I'm not fixing anything. I'm not going in with a scalpel, or with a needle, or with an IMS needle, or an acupuncture needle, or a chiropractic adjustment. I'm not going in with any of that stuff. I'm not trying to put vertebrae back in order. I'm simply enabling and helping someone to move better, to breathe better, to find

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stillness and quiet more effectively. I hope that becomes really, really clear as being very very distinct than going off and finding a problem and fixing it.

Now, I also want to emphasize that going off and finding a problem and fixing it is not bad, a whole medical model is based off of that. And I would like to have that, if that is something that I need.

But when it comes to rehabilitation, where this model and way of thinking becomes really powerful are when we're in scenarios like persistent pain. Or autoimmune conditions with flares that are feeling rampant. When we can connect, when we can become aware, and then make changes based off of what we're becoming aware of, so much can change.

Now, I will say that back in the late 90s and early 2000s, when I started out in the yoga world, it was a very different way of thinking back then. Back then in yoga and physical rehab, it was all about ignoring the pain and pushing on. It was about gaining strength in physical rehab and just keep going and get oneself back to work.

In yoga, the body was meant to be transcended, to not be listened to. Which honestly, that made absolutely zero sense to me. Why transcend when I actually live here on the physical plane? I am living here in physical reality.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am as wooy as the next Yogi and I will happily play in the land of the esoteric and in magical. Magical, magical, magical. I am happy in that place. But the reality is, is that I live in the physical world. I do in the physical plane. And my body is the container for my physical reality. So why would I want to transcend my body?

Now, I'm sure somebody else is going to send me an email, provide me a comment, and let me know that this is exactly a reason why. And they're going to tell me all about that. And I would love to read about that. But at this stage, at this point in time of this recording, I love my body as a physical container for my physical reality experience.

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The more aware that I can be of this physical body, this physical container and help it move as efficiently and effectively as possible, the better that I will feel, the more aligned I will be. And as David Frawley, an Ayurvedic physician has said, when you build space inside of your body prana can emerge. And to me when we move our body well, when we function well, we create more space in our body. And with more space, you can have more prana, more life force, more groundedness, and more connectedness. And that, to me, is what it's really all about.

Which brings me back to the original premise of this episode, is pain bad? So ultimately what I'll say is, and this is not going to surprise you having listened this far, is that no, I don't think pain is bad. I see it as a barometer to pay attention to. It gives me as a teacher, it gives the client an indication of how their body is moving, how aligned they are between body, and brain, and being, and breath.

When I help someone move better, when I help them feel themselves and their body more effectively, they relax. They settle back, they just kind of, "Oh yeah, that's what my body feels like." Right, there is an automatic, very natural, down regulation. There's not this trying to find and fix sort of stress response. It just settles back. They see the connections and they see the indicators of what their sensations, their pain, their symptoms are telling them.

What I just said there was really important. They're not trying to find and fix. They learn that there is not something wrong. There's not something broken, and they can relax. They can simply feel and they can tune in.

When they grow this capacity to simply feel and tune in, they then go about their activities and their practices with a lot more mindfulness and a lot less mindlessness. There's more specificity, and deliberateness, and consistency in what it is that they're doing because there's more curiosity about what's going on. Right? There's a distinction, there's more of an inclusiveness of this idea of curiosity and of consistency, versus finding it and fixing it.

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Now, if you want to dig into this more, but what I actually mean by how does someone approach this with curiosity, versus finding it and fixing it, I encourage you to go to my YouTube channel, which you will find with the handle Susi Hatley, and we'll put the links in the show notes. And I have lots of video that I started to record when the pandemic started which will help guide you into this curious mindset of your body, and your breath, and your being. And to really tune into how your body is moving and how it can support you, and how you can support it.

Now, when it comes to professional training it becomes very interesting. Because not only do I work with yoga teachers and help train them into therapeutic applications of yoga, I also work with health professionals. Physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, physicians, chiropractors. And what's so interesting is initially when they come in, they want to find it and fix it. They go for the diagnosis. They want to solve the pain problem. Initially it's really challenging because they've been geared toward that.

The massage therapists that I work with, they have actually said to me, "But it's the insurance model. The insurance companies want it a certain way. They want to know when the client will be fixed. When the case can be closed. And when they can get them back to work." I totally get it.

And something really interesting begins to happen at about the four-month mark in training and when they start to realize that the pain isn't bad. In fact, pretty much everything that is going on with their client has very little to do with pain or any other symptom. They're meeting their client in a totally different way.

And this might surprise you, or not, their clients pain levels go down. Why? Because they are learning the fundamentals that pain isn't bad. Pain doesn't become the focus. They've stopped chasing it. Their view of their client changes. Rather than something that is broken that they have to fix, they can simply be curious. And that curiosity changes their relationship entirely.

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Instead of focusing on pain, they focus on what needs to be focused on. They begin to see the correlations between symptoms, and body movement. Symptoms and breath. Symptoms and belief. Symptoms and states of being. They see the pain in the context. They see the patterns.

So rather than being something about fixing the pain, it becomes something about altering the patterns. Now you might say, "But Susi, isn't altering just a euphemism for fix?" And hands down I will say no. It's an entirely different view of an individual who has a scenario going on. Because pain is not the actual problem, it's simply a sign that something is up.

When you're able to do this, what becomes really interesting is that there's a relationship between you and your client that you're modeling. You're modeling a curiosity, you're modeling a care, you're modeling this idea of not trying to find it and fix it. And as a result something really interesting happens, the client starts to have more curiosity. The client stops trying to find it and fix it. The client starts to relax.

And when we're in that state of relaxation so much emerges. Just think about it, think about when you're in a more stressed or sympathetic drive. When you're doing, doing, doing, doing. Perhaps there's a bit of grippy, a bit of tightness. Just think about what that feels like in your body and your brain. And then you come into a place of relaxation. And then notice what that feels like in your body, in your breath in your brain.

And where do your most innovative ideas come from? Which state? So often it's the latter. And so often when we are in that space, we can see the patterns and then we can provide the stimulus that's needed to really shift that pattern. And then interestingly, with consistency, the pain goes down, and in many cases goes away.

But it's the curiosity and the consistency that fuels it, not the race after the find it or the fix it, the chasing of the diagnosis, of finding the label, of sorting through all that mess. Our bodies are our friends, they support our

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minds. The mind supports the body. That's the relationship we're wanting to build.

If as you're listening to this, it's deeply resonating with you. Or at least you've got some curiosity saying, "Huh, what's this girl talking about? There's something curious inside of what she's having to say." Then you are going to love a new program that's launching on June the 15th, Healing and Revealing Human Potential. It is an up-leveling of the synergy of mind and body. Left brain logic meeting right brain creativity. The Yang meets the yin. The masculine meets the feminine. Body meeting mind, both in support of each other.

Doors open on June the 15th. But if you get on our priority list, what I call our ultimate goodies list, then you get some special deals and some special stuff, all fun stuff. You simply need to email us at health@functionalsynergy.com and ask us to be put on to the list, the list of goodies. And we will let you know when the doors open and you can get access to the goodies that you'll so, so love. See on the next episode. Have a great time exploring.