



Chapter One of The Joyous Recovery: A New Approach to Emotional Healing and Freedom

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Healing shouldn't have to be so hard.

I hear various versions of the following comments, made with strained voices:

"I have some really heavy issues I need to work on some day."

"There are things about myself that I've been avoiding facing up to."

"Eventually I'm going to have to dive in and deal with all this bad stuff I went through, but I just don't want to look at that stuff."

"I'm working really hard on myself. Some things are getting better, but it's so hard to keep moving forward."

What do I take away from all this? That people see emotional healing as painful, scary, and slow. That there are rewards eventually, but first there is huge work and sacrifice before the improvements start to come. That big changes aren't that common, but that if you really put your nose to the grindstone you'll be able to make some small changes, and that will feel good. That part of growing and maturing is accepting that life is hard, and adapting lowered expectations.

And what's my response to all this? That I don't think so. In fact, I don't think so at all. The reason most people find healing so hard to do is that they've had so little help, so little guidance, and so little information. Emotional recovery can be, and should be, mostly a joyous journey. People who really know how to heal find that:

* *Healing moves fast.*

* *Some of the gains are immediate, with many more to follow.*

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How can I grow closer to other people?

How can I stand up for myself better?

How can I get clearer about what I want to accomplish on this earth?

How can I make more of a difference to people?

How can I help the people around me to pull together?

How can I have an impact on the crises that are facing my world?

Some of you may now feel an urge to quickly put this book down. The last three or four questions on the list may especially bring up a sensation of, "I can't possibly take on those kinds of concerns right now, I'm barely making it through each day. The last thing I need is the weight of the world on my shoulders!"

Another way I hear this sense of barely-making-it summed up is in the common saying, "I have to get myself together before I can think about helping others – in fact, before I can think about anything else at all."

It does indeed make sense to be very careful about what you take on. And there are certain periods in life when we really have to just focus on our own healing and not think about much of anything else because we just can't.

But there are also risks to narrowing our view in this way, even temporarily. Notice some of the messages that we are sending ourselves from this outlook:

"I'm in such bad shape that I have nothing to offer others."

"My healing is all up to me."

"Dealing with relationships is just too stressful at this point."

"The world doesn't need me right now."



These ways of thinking can create substantial obstacles to healing. As I explained earlier, we run the risk of rooting ourselves in what's wrong with us. The result is that the whole, "I have to get myself together first" approach, as popular as it is – and as much as it's encouraged by many therapists and self-help books — often doesn't work well.

The Joyous Recovery approach is going to encourage you to start gently – not roughly – leading yourself to start thinking on four levels simultaneously:

- * my wishes and goals for myself
- * my wishes and goals for the people I care about (which often includes the goal to simply *have* more people that we care about in our lives, to find them and building connections to them in other words)
- * my wishes and goals for my surroundings (my neighborhood, my community, my work place, my spiritual community, my wider social world)
- * my wishes and goals for the world I live in

There are ways to think into these areas that will not add to your burden, and I'll guide you through how to do that. And what you'll find is that, rather than slowing your inner healing processes down, learning to move in and out of these four realms will get your recovery speeding along like never before.

One way to sum up this piece of what I'm explaining is that I would like to steer you away from thinking of healing as a process that you go through now so that you can live better later. Instead, think of healing as a *way* of living that will probably be with you your entire life, and at the least will be with you for many years. So you don't want to wait for later to live. The point of *The Joyous Recovery* is to start leaning into life right now. Yes, we do heal to live, but we also live to heal. And this interplay is actually what works best.

Point Six: Deep Release is What Greases the Wheels

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The sixth — and last — point in this section is the most overlooked of all, missing from virtually every well-known healing approach; and yet it is probably the most important concept of all. All human beings — and that includes you and me — come into the world built to heal. Healing *emotionally*, not just physically, is literally part of our bodies' physical design, and is in fact woven into how our immune system works.

Our bodies are primed to heal emotional distress through deep, prolonged, visceral releases. There is no question that these releases are inherent, because babies and children exhibit them without ever having been taught anything about them. These processes are present because they are *necessary* to us. The specific forms they take are the following:

- * Deep crying and sobbing, which is primarily a healer of grief and longing
- * Deep trembling, usually accompanied by frightened outbursts and agitated physical movements and often accompanied by sweating, which is primarily a healer of deep fear or terror
- * Deep laughter, which again is often accompanied by sweating, which is primarily a healer of fear and embarrassment at less-than-terrifying levels
- * Raging, which generally with intense angry noises and vigorous physical movements, which is primarily a healer of anger (this is a tricky one, as I will be explaining, because needing to release rage should never be used as an excuse for behaving in ways that frighten or intimidate other people)
- * Yawning, often accompanied by a desire to stretch, which is a mysterious part of this process and no one really knows for sure exactly what it does (but it is clearly one of the inherent emotional releases, for reasons that I will return to)

No other healing experience open to human beings has quite the transforming power that the inherent releases carry when they get a chance to work as deeply as they were designed to do. They are as central to lasting recovery as the immune system is to physical healing. In fact, they are interwoven in many intriguing ways with our physical immune system, as I explain in detail in my book *The Emotional Immune Response*.



Fortunately, though, there isn't any need to choose between these releases and other approaches to healing. One of my central messages is, "Stick with whatever you have found that brings healing to you. You don't need to abandon your practices or beliefs. Just *add* deep release to whatever path you are on. It makes *everything* work better."

The inherent releases have been massively misunderstood. One misconception is that these releases are ways of expressing emotion, which they actually have almost nothing to do with. We express emotion with words, songs, paintings, tones of voice, physical movements, and many other channels. But the inherent releases exist to *heal* pain, not to express it. And that leads to a crucial understanding: releasing pain cannot substitute for expressing it, and expressing pain cannot substitute for releasing it. These are two different processes that play very important but distinct roles.

A second crucial misconception is that the inherent releases just dissipate distress. In this view, vigorous exercise can play the same role as a deep sobbing cry does, since they can both leave us feeling clearer and both seem to have driven our emotional pain away. But actually two very different things have happened. The exercise has made the distress dissipate – which could lead to a better day, so it may well have been just the right choice for that moment – but the deep cry has actually *healed* a significant piece of the distress, so that it's gone. And over time, it becomes clear that the exercise cannot do what the crying can. Dissipation and discharge play two very distinct roles in our lives.

The releases don't tend to do much unless they go deep. That's why you may sometimes cry all night and not wake up feeling any better. Weeping won't do it. We have to relearn how to cry like babies, no holds barred, busting it all out of ourselves like an avalanche.

The Joyous Recovery will teach you some important ways to bring deep release to your life, it will also help you feel confident in responding when someone else starts to shed their pain, so that you feel like you know how to help and what to say.

If you can succeed in opening up these natural channels, all your other efforts will seem so much easier that you'll hardly feel like you're living the same life you were before. We could say that the deepest underpinnings of the Peak Living Network approach are love



and release. Our inherent nature, including the natural wisdom of our bodies, leads the way.

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You now know the six tenets of emotional healing upon which *The Joyous Recovery* is based. We will be exploring them in various ways throughout the pages ahead. These tenets create the foundation for building a healing process that is rewarding, connected, and successful. And above all, they lead to a recovery that is full of joy and excitement, rather than one that is dominated by a sense of slogging through a swamp in hopes of reaching green lands somewhere in the far distance. We can't do all of our healing today – in fact we will probably be healing for as long as we live — but the joy of regaining the pieces of ourselves that we lost, the joy of regaining our excitement and engagement with life, can begin today. And if it can, then why not do it that way?