

Ep #37: Dialoging with a Symptom



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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 a concept called dialoging with your symptom. Now this is a process that can be profoundly enlightening, even if it is a little bit woo-y. It's a process that I discovered or was taught about 30 years ago. And I can't even remember who it was that shared it with me back then, but I do remember it being deeply profound for myself.

I was in the throes of chronic pain back then from having athletic injuries. I had tried a lot of things and I was limited to what else I could try simply because I was a student and didn't have a lot of money. And I was a bit at my wit's end. And I learned about dialoging with a symptom and in a really weird way it made sense.

I would say, looking back, though I would not have described myself this way back then. I would say looking back I was a combination of a very logical process and highly intuitive. Although, like I said, I would not have used either of those words. I would have said I was looking for the right answer. And I was definitely looking for something in the physical plane. But I was also someone who was very much aware that there is a greater force beyond me and that there were things that I just knew that I didn't know why I knew them. So I was logical, and I was intuitive.

And so when I did the process it just sort of clunked home for me. Like, "Yeah, this is true." Even if it was so weird. And because it worked and my pain started to go down, my brain, my left side of my brain, my logic brain was like, "That's good enough for me."

So I want to share this with you. And I'm going to take you through two processes. And the idea here, the concept here, as I've mentioned in previous episodes is that our symptoms, in my belief, are communication

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tools. And when we can listen to what it is that they're saying to us they can let us know some interesting information.

Now, my critics might say, "Well, maybe it's just because you're getting quieter." Well, that's fine. If that's the process and vehicle that this process takes me on, and it gets me to that answer, then that's good enough for me. So however it is that it's the process itself or it's you're getting quieter, if it works, go for it.

So in addition to these two series of questions that I'm going to offer up to you, I'm also going to talk about some obstacles and some problems that can arise when you're doing a process like this. And I'll talk about that in between the two processes. So the first one is a series of four questions. And I'll read them through, we also have a worksheet that goes with this episode that you can download the questions for you to explore yourself. So here are the first four.

What I recommend is to find a quiet place. You might be out for a walk, which is great as well. If you have a note paper or a book and a pen. Some people who practice similar or offer similar processes to this will say get a different color pen or use your non-dominant hand. And you can do that, I find that I can fall into that space with the same hand, but whatever works for you, do that.

So here are the four questions. The first one is, what are you here for? Now you'll notice what I did not say is, "What the F are you here for?" You know? There was a little more love in my voice of, you know, what are you here for? And then the second question is, what do you want? Again, there's no force to that. There's a lot more love and nurturance in that question. And then the third is, what do you need? And the fourth one is, what action do you want me to take?

What are you here for? What do you want? What do you need? And what action do you want me to take? Now, you might want to press pause on this as you sit with it. But all the questions are important. You might find

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that some answers just don't come up when you ask those questions, which is fine.

But that fourth one of what action do you want me to take, is really interesting because we can do this inner work of connecting. But if we don't actually take into the outer realms, we might not make the gains that we want, we might not get the outcome that we want.

The other piece here is that sometimes people will answer the questions from their thoughts in their brains. And what I'm about to say is going to sound a bit strange and maybe nonsensical. But I want you to notice the characteristics of the answers that are provided.

What I have noticed is that there's a difference between my logical brain answering the right answer, and the voice or the answer coming from another part of myself. And that there's just a different character, and I can't necessarily describe what that character is. There's just something different that I just know is like, "Ah, yes." Versus, "You must do this." More like a to-do list type of answer, perhaps. It's there's an "Ah, yes" kind of feel to it.

I also notice that when the answer has a little more big T truth to it, that my body relaxes a little more. There's a sense of opening in parts that may have been braced or gripping. Whereas when the answer comes more from a part of my brain that might be in survival mode my body can tense up a little bit more. And I'll share an experience about that down later in this episode. But notice how your body feels as you respond.

Now, sometimes what can happen is as people do the process, levels of anxiety can go up, or depression can go up. Or like I mentioned, bracing and gripping can go up. I've also had clients tell me that they didn't feel safe doing the process. And I think about the pain science work that's being done in Australia, particularly by the NOI group, and David Butler, and Lorimer Moseley. And David Butler particularly who talks a lot about DIMs and SIMs. I mean, both of them do, but David Butler has some really great ways of describing them.

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And the idea here is that DIMs are danger in me and SIMs are safety in me. And symptoms, when we have higher levels of DIMs then that will increase our symptoms typically. And then when we have higher levels of SIMs that will reduce the symptoms.

And so if you're feeling a bit threatened or feeling like this is not a safe process, then that's telling me and you that the level of DIMs is higher or the level of SIMs is lower. And when you can start to recognize the relationship between these, and if you truly want to do the process, then what do you need to do to reduce the DIMs or increase the SIMs? And what becomes very cool about this is that it's a way of your learning more about what you need for supporting yourself and improving that internal locus of control.

But if you don't want to go into this feeling space then please don't do it. Right, because I want the process to be supportive, not something that drives you deeper into some space that's not serving you.

An experience I had back after my injury in 2010 Boxing Day. So the day after Christmas of Boxing Day in 2010 I fell down my stairs. I hurt myself really badly. One of those where I hit my coccyx square. And when I kind of realized what had happened and I started to stand up and could barely stand up I'm like, "Oh boy, I'm going to be my own best student." And I held onto the wall and shuffled myself. I couldn't sit onto the toilet, I couldn't evacuate my bowels, my pelvic floor was just way too spasmy. I couldn't sit in a donut, and it was just a rough go.

And I remember about a month or so into it, and I was super tired from the recovery process, and I was sitting in front of my computer. And I had a lot of complaints because in addition to my injury, my mom had recently been diagnosed with cancer, I was going through a divorce. And there were a few other things in my life that kind of piled on top of each other.

So I would say that I was in a place where I had a lot of valid complaints. And I noticed my pelvic floor, this one time just getting tighter and tighter

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and tighter as I sat in front of my computer. And I thought to myself this is really interesting. And I also noticed that my brain was full of complaints. Like full of complaints. All very valid of course.

But something in me said, “This is not right.” And I kind of paused and I asked myself, “Okay, what do you mean by that?” And the answer that came back to me was, “If all those complaints were really true, then why is your pelvic floor getting so darn tight the more and more you think about them?”

And I sort of paused for a moment and then I asked myself, “All right, so then what do I really want to focus on? Let’s experiment. Do I want to focus on these complaints, or do I want to focus on what I really want, which is to get back to my yoga practice, to get back downhill skiing?” And a few other things I can’t remember right off the top of my head. And as I thought of those thoughts my pelvic floor completely relaxed. And I thought, “Oh, interesting.”

And I joke with this with a few friends to this day where I say, “Yeah, but I was still very right about those thoughts.” But my attachment to them all the sudden stopped. So it was a way of saying, “All right, what’s really going on here?” And questioning this relationship between my body and my brain.

And that’s when I really recognized that my body was a barometer. So when I could start to feel my body getting a lot tighter for no apparent reason I could simply sit back and say, “All right, what’s going on here?” You know, I’d go up into my brain and notice my thinking, I’m like, “Huh, interesting. Look at those thoughts.”

So it became a really interesting tool of gaining presence and of pulling myself back into my body and out of some swirl of thought. And getting, again, clear on what it was that I really and truly wanted. It enabled me to become a lot more deliberate in my process of thinking. And a lot more deliberate in my day. And as a result I got a lot more done, was a lot more at ease, and I wasn’t having to manage time so much because I was just

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feeling a lot more connected, which turned into being a lot more on purpose.

So that might feel like it's a big stretch from four questions of, what are you here for? What do you want? What do you need? And what actions do you want me to take? But there's something around gaining a better and deeper connection, which gives you better feedback and greater awareness. And then, in turn, more clarity about what's going on for yourself. It's that deliberateness and that discernment that is not commonplace, but when you do it some really cool stuff can start to happen.

So here are a series of other questions that you can ask yourself. Where do you feel stuck? Insert your symptom and say, "Okay symptom, what do I need to do to move forward? Okay symptom, what is the solution to this problem?" Ask your beingness or ask your symptom, "What if getting out of pain or reducing this symptom was easy? Then what? What relationship needs my attention? Symptom, how can I appreciate you? How can I appreciate you even more?" And see what comes up. And see what you recognize to be true. It can become quite remarkable.

Now, again, if this process of going inward is a little scary then leave it to the side, or maybe ask just one question. Or maybe start with a yoga nature practice or a savasana practice of just learning how to relax. Or learning how to connect. Maybe it's just simply watching and looking at your hand. Feeling your hand against your leg when your hand is resting on your thigh. Or noticing the inhale and exhale of your breath.

The key is if a nervousness around going here, going inward, then don't do it. But if there's something inside of you that's saying, "Yes, let's go do it." Then just take baby steps towards that. Tiny, tiny habits. Tiny steps towards doing that. And what you'll discover as you practice is some really cool stuff that comes out. A guidance system that you didn't even know was there.

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Now, if you are somebody who'd like to take this further, and I've got to options for you. The first one is that if you have a hypermobility disorder and you really want to tap into what that tissue, that hypermobile tissue is telling you, we've got the hypermobility disorders course that's coming up. And you can find the link at functionalsynergy.com/hypermobilitydisorders.

And you will gain so much in terms of understanding and connecting to your current pain trajectory and how you can move from being in a life sentence to one of way more freedom. Because I have found with people who have hypermobility there is a deep symbology to that tissue. And the way of connecting with it can be quite powerful and very freeing.

The other is if you want to dig into and connect with the concepts like this in a more profound way, you'll want to check out the therapeutic yoga intensive that's happening this spring. You can read more at therapeuticyogaintensive.com. And both of those links are in the show notes. You can also email us directly at health@functionalsynergy.com.

Enjoy the processes. Enjoy the questions. Enjoy reconnecting to your body. Have fun exploring.