

Journey of personal development (Part 2): Heal yourself

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This Course on Personal Development has three parts. In Part 1, we focus on Know Yourself as the foundation for personal growth. In Part 2, we move to the second stage of Heal Yourself. None of us can go through life unscathed. We all have experienced some brokenness and bruises along the way. This lesson focuses on self-help – on how to help you heal yourself.

What is healing?

Contrary to common assumption, healing is not curing a disorder or removing symptoms. It is possible to experience healing even when a disorder of infirmity is incurable. It is also possible to achieve healing, when one still lives with a certain amount of stress, depression and anxiety.

Properly understood, healing is a process towards wellness and mental health. According to National Wellness Institute, wellness is holistic and multidimensional, encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. It is also an intentional process, involving personal responsibility and commitment to achieve an optimal level of wellness. It is a process of moving from negative to positive territory.

Although you can learn and practice the essential skills of achieving mental health, in some cases, a qualified counsellor or psychotherapist may be needed to provide the support and guidance in overcoming obstacles on the road to wellness. Even with professional help, healing could still be a long process, involving ups and downs. You need to be patient and trust the process.

How to get started?

Often, the awareness of your brokenness and pain is sufficient to get you started on the road to wellness. Reflection on you own life can reveal what has gone wrong and what changes need to be made in order to live the life you really want. In the finally analysis, no positive change is possible, unless you really want it. Here are some helpful tips for making positive changes:

- Do a mental health checkup. (See Exercise No.1)
- Reflect on your life and understand how it has gone wrong
- Stop hiding your pain behind a fake smile.
- Feel sick and tired of your misery
- Want to live a life of happiness
- Be resolved to make some positive changes
- Take the first concrete step on the road of healing

What are the pathways of wellbeing?

Healing is a multidimensional process, involving several pathways, as shown in Exercises No.2. Here are a few important evidence-based pathways of wellbeing.

- From non-acceptance → acceptance
- From holding on → letting go
- From negative life attitude → positive life attitude
- From external control → internal control
- From helplessness → self-efficacy
- From purposeless → purposeful
- From self-centeredness → self-transcendence
- From non-engagement → active engagement

Acceptance plays an important role in mental health. It means unconditional self-acceptance, regardless of our flaws and limitations. It involves accepting the dark side of life and the inevitable paradoxes and predicaments of the human condition. It involves learning how to live with the negative emotions of confusion, depression, anxiety, sadness, loneliness and distress – they are all inevitable aspects of life. For example, by accepting the uncertainty of future as a human condition, we will be less anxious. On the positive side, acceptance also involves self-compassion. When you love and take care of yourself, you will have great capacity for loving others.

Letting go is a necessary step. It is an ongoing process of letting go all the baggages of negative emotions and memories; letting go false assumptions and beliefs that hold you back; and letting go whatever cannot be changed. If you feel tired of life and weary of living, chances are that you are carrying too many unnecessary burdens. Letting go is not an easy task, but it can be done by letting go one thing at a time. If you hold a tight fist, you will not be able to receive anything new. Only by letting go the old, will you experience the new.

Positive life attitude can immediately improve your life. Instead of complaining, count your blessings. Instead of thinking about what you don't have, be grateful for what you do have. With a positive life attitude, you can always discover something positive, whatever your circumstances. For example, cognitive reframing is a psychological technique of disputing irrational thoughts and finding a positive alternative way to experience the events, ideas, and emotions to find more positive alternatives.

Internal control is a hallmark of mental health. Healing involves moving from external control towards internal control. You will experience positive transformation, when you stop complaining and blaming, but start assuming personal responsibility for your behavior and wellbeing. Internal control encompasses several related psychological processes, such as self-determination, autonomy, self-control, and self-regulation.

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can get things done. It is part of internal control and personal responsibility. Such self-belief is essential to achieve success and happiness. If you think you CAN, you can. Try one self-affirmation a day. Make a list of your achievements and abilities,

then start doing something for yourself and for others within the realm of your competence. Only through doing something, you will restore your self-confidence. The more skills you acquire, the more confident you will be. You can also enhance your sense of self-efficacy through faith in God or secondary control. For example, Apostle Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Purposefulness provides a direction and a goal. Living without a goal is like driving without a destination. Your life would be better organized and more motivated, if every day you are working towards some worthy goal. Decide on at least one realistic goal to pursue. When you are at a low point in life, you will need to latch on any positive goal to get you out of the rut; but when you have regained your footing, you will need to take a more long-range view, seeking to discover your mission and calling.

Self-transcendence is another necessary condition for happiness and well-being. Once you step out of your small self and start caring for others, you will feel better about your life. Think of someone that is in worse condition than you are, and do something to help that person. It is through serving others, showing compassion and dedicating yourself to a worthy cause that you will find meaning and happiness.

Active engagement is perhaps the most important key to living a productive and fulfilling life. To be actively engaged in what really matters and with people who matter to you. It is only natural that you would feel that life is empty, meaningless and joyless, if you don't do anything useful or enjoyable. You will feel more positive about your life, when you start getting engaged in something positive and meaningful, such as leisure activities, visiting with friends, or learning something useful.

Take-home message

- Only you can decide whether you want to get well.
- Healing is a process towards wellness in spite of negative aspects of the human condition.
- One can work on several pathways to improve one's mental health.
- One needs to learn how to live with troubles in order to achieve inner peace.

Exercise No.1 Mental health checkup: (Answer Yes or No to each question)

1. Do you often feel depressed, anxious, angry, or resentful?
2. Do you feel the need to hide your real feelings all the time?
3. Do you avoid facing your own negative feelings?
4. Do you sometimes feel that you are emotionally frozen or numb?
5. Do you still feel ashamed for something you have done?
6. Are you tormented by an inner pain that refuses to go away?
7. Are you fearful that sometimes you may lose self-control?
8. Do you keep people at a distance because you are afraid of getting hurt?
9. Do you feel pessimistic about your future?
10. Are you sick and tired of feeling miserable?

(The higher your score on Yes, the greater your need for healing.)

Exercise No.2 Ratings on your mental well-being: On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate yourself on the following dimensions?

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| 1. Negative self-concept | Healthy self-concept |
| 2. Non-acceptance | Self-acceptance |
| 3. Holding on | Letting go |
| 4. Negative life attitude | Positive life attitude |
| 5. Self-centeredness | Self-transcendence |
| 6. Complaints..... | Gratitude |
| 7. Blaming others | Assuming responsibility |
| 8. External control | Internal control |
| 9. Hopeless..... | Hopeful |
| 10. Helpless | Self-efficacy or Can Do |
| 11. Purposeless | Purposeful |
| 12. Non-engagement | Active engagement |

(The higher the score, the better your psychological well-being)

Exercises 3. Action considerations

- Find something that makes you feel happy to be alive today.
- Bury some things you need to let go. (You can write down these things on a paper and then set fire to the paper. It is better to do it with a witness.)
- Name three things for which you are most grateful.
- Name one thing in which you want to be actively engaged as soon as possible.
- Decide on one realistic life goal in your present circumstances.
- Take a concrete action towards life goal.
- Practice mindful meditation to increase your mental state of awareness, focus and openness.