

## 2 WHAT CAUSES OUR PAIN?

Pain, like all feelings, is under the control of the person experiencing it. However, if we refuse responsibility, it will seem that others inflict our pain upon us, and that it is, therefore, inescapable. The pain Richard was experiencing was the result of an internal process; it was not caused by others. In order for Richard to heal, it was essential that he step apart from his internal dialogue that convinced him that everyone else was the problem in his life. He had to let go long enough to hear something other than what was going on in his head.

"I hear you saying that you have had many unhappy experiences in your relationships and I understand that your mind makes it look like the source of your pain is outside of you. To think the cause is external is confusing the trigger for your pain with the mechanism that delivers it. The pain you feel is not dependent upon outside events and no one but you can create what you feel inside."

His response was sharp and cutting, "You're just handing me more guilt!" he shot back quickly, "and all I want now is to make sure that what I've been going through doesn't happen again!"

When I introduced Richard to the idea that we are each responsible for our pain, he heard, as many of us do when someone points out that we may have erred, something different. I spoke of responsibility, but Richard interpreted my words to mean other than what I intended. This brought to light an essential element in the healing process. There is a difference between what happens in the world and the mind's interpretation of those events. One triggers feelings ; the other causes them. Grasping this concept is a key to personal empowerment and the release of pain. What Richard perceived as the "cause" of his unhappiness was nothing more than a trigger which served to bring to awareness an experience stored within him, one which he had repeated so often it was now old and familiar.

"Richard, if you want to create your life differently, you must live from a place of knowing that you are the root cause of all that you experience. Knowing that you are at cause in your life, rather than continuously being triggered into old patterns, is the source of empowerment ."

The thought that we are responsible for our lives can be difficult the first time we hear it. Richard appeared to flip-flop between his hunger for understanding and his resistance to taking responsibility.

"For instance, Richard, a few minutes ago I spoke to you of responsibility. What you heard was guilt, fault and blame. As you listened to your internal dialogue , it informed you of the potential pain inherent in being to blame. Next came the defenses you have built up against being at fault and guilty, which are your mind's interpretation of responsibility.

"The reason you don't escape your pain when you leave town or a relationship is that pain is internal and you take it with you when you go. The fact that you can hide your pain

successfully does not mean it is gone. There is a toll for hanging on to a negative energy, even when it is not being consciously experienced. Anyone who just says the right words can trigger what you are trying to hide from yourself. Your pain is caused by the energy you are holding, not by them."

"I don't get this cause and trigger stuff," he prodded.

**KEY THOUGHT**—Just because you leave doesn't mean you're not in the same place.

"Let's see if an example will help to make sense of that," I suggested. "Imagine we place a person from the jungle beside a river and ask him to figure out what causes a drawbridge to open. He observes, time after time, that the bridge goes up when a boat arrives. He further notes that when the boat passes, the bridge lowers. Our observer, not being familiar with bridges, comes to the obvious conclusion that boats cause bridges to go up!

"We know that boats can't cause bridges to move either up or down, though they are the trigger that begins the process. Being familiar with bridges, we know that the bridge tender sees a boat and puts the bridge's internal mechanism into motion with the flip of a switch. The switch delivers power to a motor that in turn causes the bridge to go up.

"What if we assign our observer the job of making sure the drawbridge remains down forever? If he clings to the false idea that boats cause bridges to go up, he certainly has his work cut out for him. To accomplish his goal, he may have to change the direction of every boat that approaches, potentially every boat in the world. If, on the other hand, he understands that there is an internal mechanism lifting the bridge, he only needs to get inside the control room and clip one wire and the bridge will remain forever still."

"I see what you mean, michael, and forgive my being blunt," Richard said, "but so what?"

"Richard, this concept is a major key. Your reality arises from inside you. My words are just a trigger for what shows up in your mind. The word 'responsibility' does not include guilt, fault and blame, though that is what you heard. You must choose to take responsibility for your feelings and what goes on inside of you, if you are ever going to change the patterns in your life and heal!"

**KEY THOUGHT**—If you keep thinking what you've always thought, you'll keep getting what you've always got.

My intention was to assist Richard in seeing that we all have a system of beliefs and ideas which is at the root of our reality structure. Most people talk to themselves all the time, yet remain totally unaware that they are engaged in an inner dialogue which both reviews and reinforces their beliefs about life. Some people are continuously figuring out how to justify themselves in that review, before an inner judge made up of their parents, spouses and any number of other people. "What would the judge say if he saw me doing this?" they ask themselves.

Our internally generated realities and the nature of our continuous silent dialogue operate consistently and automatically in forming the basis of our decisions in life, even the seemingly unimportant or trivial.

I demonstrated the presence of Richard's internal dialogue using the example of his reaction to the word "responsibility." He was unaware that the ideas of guilt, fault and blame came from his self-talk, his own silent speech. More importantly, it had never occurred to him that his perception of reality did not necessarily match the reality shared by the others in his life.

"Richard, our decisions in life arise from our internal reality and contribute to both creating events in our lives and generating our feelings about these events. To a great extent, people go through life oblivious to the impact these inner beliefs and ideas have on what happens." I invited Richard to look into the concept that our inner realities and self-talk are governing forces behind the life experiences we create. I suggested he examine his silent dialogue to determine its thrust.

"Many people have lives that include circumstances vastly different from what they would consciously choose. It frequently happens that an individual's self-talk and external talk are focused on what they do not want, and so they create their experiences out of avoidance. Avoidance makes an issue the number one priority in your mind because it focuses your energy on whatever you are avoiding."

Richard appeared to be reaching a level of comfort. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, and was listening intently when a smile floated across his face. "You mean I'm not the only one who talks to himself all the time?"

"No, you are not alone. You can become more aware and take charge of your internal processes if you so choose. Correcting what happens on the inside is the key to creating changes on the outside. Until you take charge of your internal reality structure, you are bound to keep re-experiencing whatever you are trying to avoid."

**KEY THOUGHT**—Thoughts are how we ask. A thought about what you don't want is as powerful as a thought about what you do want. Be careful what you ask for.

"How do I create the changes I want?" Richard asked.

"The first step is to correct your internal dynamics. I would suggest you change your thoughts about new ideas and let go of the chatter in your head that keeps you from hearing them. It is safe and healing to hear new ideas, and by doing your inner work you will change some of the core interactions you have with life.

"The next step in the process of changing your internal reality is to be responsible for your self-talk. If it doesn't change, then experiences keyed to your old thoughts will keep repeating."

Richard's admission that many times he had experienced the anger he was currently feeling was an indication that his self-talk was helping him repeatedly re-create some of

the same realities in his life. "By changing your internal dialogue , your reality structure will change and so will what you attract into your life."

"Sounds like you're saying that in order to change the output, I have to change the focus and the input!"

"You've got it, Richard! Everyone knows that in order to change the output of a system, the input needs to change. It does not seem to be common knowledge, however, that in order to change the input of the human system the focus needs to change. You change your focus by changing your self-talk and where you put your attention. When your self-talk informs you that other people or things cause your pain, whether it is anger, frustration, helplessness or fear, your thinking is off base.

"When you take charge of what happens on the inside, you regain your power. If you think you need to stop other people from 'making you mad,' you're going to have to change everyone who could potentially trigger your anger—an endless task!"

"Tell me about it!" Richard smirked. "To date, my efforts to change others have been futile, but I don't like being the one who has to do the changing, the one who has to do all the work! What about them? I want them to do their fair share," Richard complained. He seemed tense and squirmed in his seat. It looked as though he was having difficulty finding a comfortable position.

"The parts of your life which don't work for you now can be changed by simply doing the work we are discussing. That no one else has to change in order for you to feel good is probably the best news you will ever hear. You are the one who will have to do the work for you to be empowered.

"It is unnecessary to run away from life and keep cycling into the hopelessness you are experiencing now. There is something you can do and doing it is your healing process! As far as others are concerned, if they are in pain they will have to find their own willingness. They will have to do their own changing and engage in the process themselves in order to experience their healing and empowerment—in order to change their lives."

Two simple rules to remember are:

If I'm in pain , I'm in error.

Anyone who is in pain has work to do.

Richard's confusion about how to create new experiences in life without changing other people is typical of the way most of us see the world. In every difficulty between people, there are two conflicting realities, two people in pain, two who must take responsibility for themselves in order to heal. A common avoidance tactic is pointing the finger to what someone else has not done while leaving one's own work incomplete.

**KEY THOUGHT**—Let's put away our magnifying glasses and get out our mirrors. It is time to stop criticizing others and focus on ourselves.

Richard let me know that what I said seemed to make sense, but he was confused by the fact that his negative feelings only happened when he was with the women in his life. His hostility seemed to quiet as he expressed skepticism. I talked about how feelings are easier to hide when there is no one around to trigger them. I reminded him of the bridge analogy and that the bridge remains down when there is nothing to trigger its potential to elevate. I informed him of the work of a former IBM research scientist, Marcel Vogel, who was able to measure the high energy waves that leave the mind when we think a thought. "Richard, I like to call those energy waves the 'psychic megaphone.' Every reality in your mind sets up an energy wave to attract people who are in tune with that reality. The people we attract then trigger the reality within us, but the trigger does not cause our feelings, it only resonates what is already there."

Richard and I explored just whom he was calling with his psychic megaphone to serve as his trigger. The primary area of examination was his long history of unhappy involvements with women. As we did so, he hooked into some strong emotions while he talked about his list of unresolved resentments.

"I have drawn in some real winners! The women I am attracted to seem very warm and loving—for a while. Then all of a sudden they become distant and, no matter what I do, I can't seem to get their attention. That makes me frustrated and sad, then I get really angry and attack!" He was visibly agitated as he spoke.

Richard had blamed the women in his life for his feelings of sadness and anger and was confused about why he only felt those feelings when he was in relationships. "How," he wondered out loud, "could it not be their fault?"

"Once you grasp the ability the mind has to set up and distort its images, I think you will see how perception can be so far off base. One of the difficulties in understanding and seeing through our distortions is that we attempt to gain clarity without cleaning up the device that is doing the distorting—the mind!

"One historical method used to get past the inherent distortions in the mind is the parable, a word which in Aramaic means 'parallel meaning.' A parable engages the mind with its literal meaning while the underlying message, which cannot be directly taught, bypasses the intellect and is understood by the part of us that is more than a mind. I'd like to share a parable designed to assist in grasping how limiting current human beliefs are. It also helps build the brain cells necessary for functioning in a totally different way—with different realities guiding us."