

How Not to Hurt: Eight Methods to Delete Pain

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All the stories revolved around pain, or so it seemed as my friends told of their rolfing experiences. It made me shy; but in the sessions, methods of processing pain soon evolved. It became fairly easy to strip away the horror of pain, by means of several different methods.

Oddly, sometimes method 3B won't work, but method 6A will, and occasionally none of them work, but that's rare. Each technique is a mental gymnastic exercise, and each has the net effect of stripping away the "hurt!" response from the sensations then resounding through the nervous system.

Here's how I deleted the pain:

Method #1 begins at home, days before session #1. Perhaps upon retiring, lie down and relax your body and mind. Imagine yourself lying on the rolfer's table. Dwell upon seeing the room, hearing the rolfer's voice, scenting your own body, feeling the air against your skin, etc. Relax!

Repeat mentally a few times the following program: "I enjoy the strong and novel sensations of rolfing—the sessions are pleasurable." Relax!

That's all. Go on to sleep or gradually reawaken yourself, as is your wont. Repeat this procedure over several days.

At the rolfer's, if you get uncomfortable, recall how you feel when in your fantasy you relax.

If you notice yourself saying to someone (or thinking to yourself) words to the effect that you fear pain or some such, stop a moment and mentally say: "Fine. That's a fear. However, I enjoy the strong and novel sensations of rolfing—the sessions are pleasurable." Note: you don't have to believe this. It's just a program. Program comes first, experience later, belief last. The program is an image cast into words. The mind tends to react according to its programmed images. So you influence it in the desired direction.

And who would desire abject, shriveling pain, when he can have strong and novel and interesting and pleasurable sensations?

Not you, surely!

Method #2 consists of a relaxation procedure done at the rolfer's, prior to or during a lull in the session. Any method you know is fine. I use deep yogic breathing plus a trigger image I've conditioned myself to, which induces relaxation. Recalling a time when deeply relaxed is a quick relaxer, as is this procedure:

1. Take a deep belly breath. Relax your chest and spine to exhale, and close your eyes.
2. Eyes closed, *lightly* glance "up," then straight ahead, relaxing the eyes.
3. Imagine heavy, warm, puffy sensations in your hands, then in your feet.
4. Notice two to six heartbeats.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *There are many ways to deal with pain; "deleting", but one. In future articles, certified rolfers will discuss ways of learning and understanding from the pain — it should be noted that Mr. French is not a rolfer and many of his ideas do not represent the thinking of most rolfers.*

5. Another deep belly breath. Relax your chest and spine to exhale. Notice the warm, comfortable feeling of your chest, and a warmth in your belly.

6. Imagine your face numb, slightly prickly, and your forehead cooling. (You can even moisten your forehead before starting.)

Repeat this cycle as long as you desire, with your eyes closed. It will make you more and more deeply relaxed each time around. You may begin to yawn. Deep sighs or contented groans will help you to relax even more. As you become more deeply relaxed, you may forget the steps. A good sign. Let them go. You might want to shift to merely breathing gently with your belly, slow and relaxed. When you wish to open your eyes, open them very slowly, sleepily.

Because you must close your eyes at step # 1, a friend or a tape recorder will help you learn the procedure. He/she/it reads the steps with a little pause between each one. It's best to overlearn the sequence — learn it until you know it and then drill it a little beyond that point — so as to effortlessly apply it when under mild stress. It's handy at the office, or after lovers' spats or traffic tickets.

Method #3 uses visualization to modify the experience of strong sensations, and is an easy first step toward assuming responsibility (and control) of the nervous system, the first step away from "it changes me" toward "I change it." These didn't work perfectly for me, but they worked some.

A. If you feel a "hurt!" when the rolfer works on a spot, put your attention right into that spot — become as aware as possible of the sensations in that spot (they often appeared to me as a ball of furious energy, but almost numb in that they exceeded what I could perceive as "sensation"). Now imagine a thin tendril extending out from this area of strong sensation, and imagine that the "hurt!" (a part of it) is draining away down that thin tendril, draining away out through your feet (unless the area is in your arm, in which case drain it out through your fingertips.) You may discover an insidious tendency to move your attention down that tendril, away from the area. Don't. Stay right there in the spot, and imagine the tendril draining some of the "hurt!" away from where you are. It seems that the more you can do this, the less the sensations register as "hurt!"

B. To prepare a muscle or muscle group that tends to automatically tense up or resist, relax deeply and then put your attention into that muscle group. Imagine and mentally chant: "numb, transparent, jelly . . . numb, transparent, jelly . . ." You are visualizing that the muscle is transparent and that you can see through it as if it were made of clear Jell-o.

Then, as the rolfer works on that spot, keep your attention there and be aware of the sensations there, but maintain at the same time the visualization and the chant.

Method #4 involves disidentification . . . getting clear that you aren't your body, that a poke in the ribs is neither an affront nor a deadly threat. We don't want to withdraw from the body, but we do want to change our viewpoint. (We can perceive a thing without being the thing.) Usually we so closely identify our "self", our essence, with the body, that if something happens to it, we think, "It's happening to me!" A poke in the ribs is a personal attack, if and only if "body" = "me."

We know that having our bodies rolled isn't really a personal attack, so let's stop treating it so in the semantics of our thought. In return, we get to stop feeling attacked and then freaking out because of that.

A. Look at your arm and think "my arm." Look at it and imagine it hurting and think "my arm!" Alternate these two until you really perceive the difference between the two thoughts. Now look at your arm and think "an arm." Contrast this thought against the others. Really get the idea that it's not special or unique, that it's just an arm like any other arm. It could be any body's.

This latter is the viewpoint to which you can shift when sensation rages. Just look at the body part and mock up this "an arm" idea. It's as much mental feeling as mental procedure, and with practice you can induce it at will. When you do, much of your conditioned responses to sensation-overwhelm will fall away, not being triggered by your customary thoughts. (If you don't believe that your thoughts cause your pain, have your roller probe just short of pain, then you start mentally repeating, hysterically, "This is TERRIBLE! Ow! Stop! I can't STAND IT!" etc.)

A perception of pain implies tissue damage or functional disorder. But in our past, when we said "I'm hurt!" we got social responses — help, attention, sympathy, anger, propitiation, guilt, disdain, etc. Pretty soon, "I'm hurt!" got *conditioned into* certain situations, though no tissue was damaged. We usually hurt more than we're damaged.

Hurting when damaged is useful: it may save your life tomorrow. Hurting *without* damage is needless suffering. Why not stop? What was conditioned in can be conditioned out.

B. My tomcat, Mr. Frog, is large and orange and tough with a chewed ear. He seems largely indifferent to rough pats and thumps, to being brushed off the desk, to being rolled upon at night by humans. Sometimes in the session I'd pretend I was Mr. Frog, and think, "Oh, rats. I just don't give a damn." This was often late in the session, when I'd got used to being pummelled and stretched (note semantic error). I'd conjure up feelings like "fed up," "phoeey," "had it up to here," "disgusting," "I quit," or "Aw, bullshit."

You might try recalling times you just didn't give a damn, and find an appropriate phrase of your own which expresses these feelings. By repeating the phrase and imagining the feelings, you tend to induce these feelings, and so achieve the viewpoint that your body is being manipulated and so what? Considering that no tissue damage is occurring, this is an accurate viewpoint, and it feels so much better than "ouch! Oh hell! Please stop!"

Method #5 assumes that sensory arousal follows a predictable wave-form. My observation suggests that sensation increases into overload, going beyond what we can perceive as that sensation. But it eventually peaks out (sensory fatigue? Melzack's "gate" closing?), and then falls back down into the comfortable range of perception. This observation may or may not be true, but for sure we can use it to help us not hurt.

Knowing that it's going to peak out will allow you to hang in there longer, and another approach is to get yourself to that peak, the sooner the better. As sensation increases into overload, increase it *more*. Push. This mental "push" doesn't have the feeling of a sudden shove, but rather the feeling of a slow and determined pressing against inertia, against the inertia of your nervous system.

It's all a trick, of course. To perform these instructions, you must cease to resist sensation, and it may be true that our resistance *is* pain, that our perception of our resistance *is* the experience we call pain. To perform these instructions, you must actively create your sensation; and it may be true that when you thus take responsibility for your actions, no pain (resistance) is created. Now, quickly: who creates reality?

An interesting side effect of this technique is: as you fall back from the peak (your eyes will be changing focus), note the wave of pleasure that floods into the aftermath!

Method #6 is attention-locking techniques. These seem useful on the truly berserk areas where your experiments have revealed that no other technique will work. They seem to be centering devices of great power, which you can use to avoid falling into the panic of overload. Some experimental evidence suggests that increasing one's awareness of sensory information raises one's pain threshold, and it may be that these techniques are methods to generate sensory information in the face of overload elsewhere in the body. It is somewhat uncertain, then, whether or not these techniques are evasive. They seem not to permit *full* attention in the area of overload sensation, but they do permit you to remain centered in the body, aware of the overload sensations against the framework of your constructed attention-lock. As opposed to panicked mental flights, trying to fly from your own body.

General theoretical considerations suggest that, if they are truly evasive, they shouldn't work very well. However, they seem to work very powerfully. More testing is required.

A. Hold your arm $\frac{3}{4}$ outstretched, and aim over your index finger at some room object. With both eyes open, you will see two images of your index finger, so momentarily close one eye to get the picture of which eye you'll be using, and which image of your index finger. Get it?

Got it.

Good. Now you are mentally constructing a line between that one eye, across your index finger, and into the room object. This room object should have some precise point that you're aiming at. There is an idea of a flow that moves out, from your eye, and from your finger, into the target. There's also the idea of a mentally created line which you are holding in place with your mind.

When the overload-sensation comes, hold that line there. The emphasis is on HOLD. You are using this device to hold your position in space, grim and determined as a Viking holding fast a rope. Now, this doesn't mean that your body has to be tense. Let all of your body go. Focus all of your holding onto that line, unwavering. Good Viking.

B. Fully outstretch your arm and turn your face directly toward your fist. Get the idea of a point which exists in the middle of your closed fist. Relax all of your body, except your fist. Isolate that fist from your relaxed body. Take a breath and relax, and do two things. One is to clench that fist. The other is to mentally hold that point absolutely still. The physical and the mental work simultaneously, and each tries to outdo the other. You'll find that they work together, and that you can hold this tight fist without much sense of effort, as long as you're creating the mental image of the motionless point.

Now *if* these techniques are not evasive, it's very interesting to have a fresh

look at an ancient radio technique, which is:

C. Here. Bite this bullet.

Method #7 was invented by my rolfer. It's used to delete the "violated!" response that sometimes arises when the rolfer moves into the lower belly. All you do is put your hands lightly on top of the rolfer's. That's it.

Method #8 is pure magic.

I've only used it when the rolfer manipulates a berserk area, but it should work anywhere on the body. It validates the cybernetic view that there is no painful experience apart from the motor intent to withdraw.

A. Let's say that the rolfer is pressing a knuckle into a thigh muscle. You think of that knuckle as a *stationary object* (easy to imagine if he's moving slowly). Now, without really using your body much, *you* press that body part into that stationary knuckle. You're only using your physical muscles a tiny bit, a subtle mirroring of your mental idea that *you* are now the one pressing, creating the pressure, but you want to fully perceive that it's *you* doing it.

If this isn't clear, right now press a body part against the edge or point of something. Don't press with great force, but be aware that it's *you* doing the pressing.

For me, when I do this, pain as such vanishes.

What we're doing here is taking direct responsibility for the sensation, shifting from the victim viewpoint of "It's happening to me" to the causative viewpoint of "I'm doing this."

B. Now let's go a step further. Here's a purely mental method of accomplishing the identical thing.

As the knuckle presses into a body part, mentally mock-up or create the incoming pressure. Whatever sensation you perceive at this juncture of knuckle or body part, you create that sensation.

If this seems too arcane, right now press the fleshy part of your hand against the edge of a table or some such point, and feel what the table feels like as it presses into your hand. Now take your hand away, and imagine that you have the power to cause, just by willing it, an invisible table edge to press your hand in just the same way. Then feel what the invisible table edge feels like. (It feels about the same.)

Congratulations. You have just created an incoming pressure.

Now, as the rolfer is making a pressure with his knuckle, you create an *identical* pressure in exactly that same place. Create that same pressure, in fact. With *you* doing it, it doesn't hurt.

OPINION, THEORY, AND WILD SPECULATION:

As I see it, pain is not sensation. Pain is what you do in your head with sensation. Nerves give the brain sensory data and there is probably a configuration of incoming signals which spells out "Damage!" Evolution has guaranteed that all of us respond quickly to the damage signal. Those potential ancestors who didn't respond left no progeny; we are the progeny of ancestors who *did* respond.

The picture is confused by the fact that we humans operate simultaneously on two nervous systems. One comes from the distant (evolutionary) past and

is similar to that of simpler animals; the other is a human specialization. The first uses "C-fiber" nerve fibers which are small diameter and slow. The signals go into the older sections of the brain, which operates non-rationally utilizing emotional responses to promote adaption and survival. The later (new and improved?) system uses "A-fiber" nerve fibers which are larger diameter, fast, and wrapped tidily with a (protective?) myelin sheath. These go into the later-developed sections of the brain, into the computer. The first system registers dull, throbbing, unlocalized pains and makes us uncomfortable and wanting to withdraw; the second system registers exact data such as touch data or sharp, localized pain, and this time the computer sends a fast message: withdraw!

We humans have all sorts of trouble in that the emoter system and the computer system operate independently and sometimes come to different conclusions. Result? We decide it best to interview for a better job, but fear trembles us all the while. Additionally, either the automaticity of the first system or an erroneous datum in the second system can produce a "wrong" (non-survival) answer.

Though we cannot escape the limits of the nervous system — we live there, you know — we can re-program its content and responses. Western society emphasizes programming your computer with data and then wonders why emotions don't automatically fall in line. The emotive/non-rational system is programmable using the techniques of magic: visualization, fantasy, relaxation, meditation, play, sex play, drugs, desire, repetition, drama, music, and art. Why is it that all these are fun? Are we Westerners just hungry for them?

Pain is no more an absolute than is anger — but it *is* more basic, being older in evolution. Pleasure/pain is our experience of the basic yes/no response to the environment which determines whether an organism survives. Let your emoter system be programmed by the happenstance occurrences of the environment, the accidents of your lifetime, and you will wonder at its random and inappropriate answers: why do these things always happen to you? (The environment, the same environment, happens to everyone. We live here. The things that "happen to you" are largely your idiosyncratic mental responses to this shared environment.) The alternative is to reprogram your emoter system, using all the skill of your computer system to do so. (And also to reprogram your computer, using all the wisdom of your emoter system: if, really, you can't stand Aunt Mary, even if you think you should, then, the hell with her.) Why hurt?

Let's opt for pleasure.