

# The Emotional Journey of Overcoming Muscle Pain

Hannah Knaack-Völker

[Muskelschmerzerfahrung.com](https://muskelschmerzerfahrung.com)

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## Reviews

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“Thank you so much for sending me THAT book. Simply wow! I got hooked from the beginning and I felt like with every word I was walking with you through that journey. The words are raw and so beautifully written. I love how you gave examples; it gives so much clarity. Thank you for sharing your pain, your wisdom and your heart. You've achieved through this book everything you wanted; you've made me feel less alone, less lost and given me hope that I can heal and become the best person I can be. Overall, I enjoyed your book and admire your thoughts, your writing and your boldness to put all that onto paper. There are so many strong messages in there and I love how you put them across.”

*Jennifer*

---

“Beautifully written. Good job, Hannah. It's so attractive to keep reading “

*Kiki*

---

“OMG, Hannah, I am in love with your book. I am just at the beginning, but I can feel it all throughout me. Thank you for sharing it. I can reflect on what you are telling. Our silent battles. “

*Priscilla*



“Hello my lovely Hannah,

I have read your book and I must say a big WOW. I felt like I was the one writing this. I can feel each and every bit of it. That's how I learned those positive ways to move forward in life. And yes, we should always remain down to earth also. Bad experiences will come again throughout our lifetime but how we tackle them will be different.

I find that you are really courageous to write a book out of your experience. You made us live part of your life and I am grateful for the trust. I would have never been able to do so, maybe due to lack of courage. Those lessons you mentioned in your book were those I have learned during some bad phases of my life too. But I think I have forgotten or kept them in a drawer far away. So, thank you for reminding me of these. It means a lot.

Hoping that one day your book touches many more people as it did for me and Jennifer.”

*Priscilla*



“Hannah offers some very practical, heart-felt wisdom. She doesn't speak at you she speaks with you. She gives you the invaluable benefit of her experience. I highly recommend this short read for anyone suffering or has someone in their life who is suffering.”

*Larry*

# About the Author

My name is Hannah. I am an M.Sc. Student of Geosciences at the University of Hamburg.

I own the German blog [Muskelschmerzerfahrung.com](https://www.muskelschmerzerfahrung.com) which I tend to in my free time.

## Why I Am A Hobby Blogger

When I was 23, severe abdominal pain was diagnosed as an ovarian inflammation. I was given antibiotics and painkillers. After initial improvement, the abdominal pain returned with full force. The inflammatory value had normalised, and all traces of bacteria had vanished. However, the symptoms were the same as before. Only now there was no explanation.

Since a diagnosis for my complaints was missing, I had no doctor to guide me along. I was on a desperate mission to find ways to reduce the cramps and pain intensity.

A year after the onset of the pains my deepest emotional low came. From there the path of recovery slowly began. The colours of hope shimmered on the horizon. The fear I would never get well again has gradually disappeared. My cramped body is now a strange, surreal memory. Frequently I searched for my clinical picture and symptoms. I was convinced of the thought that there had to

be someone somewhere with the same experience. My blog provides the support my younger self would have liked to receive.

*Muskelschmerzerfahrung* covers permanent (chronic) muscle pain from the perspective of the affected person. To relieve tension in the muscles, many simple and inexpensive ways to help yourself exist. I write about such exercises. The information I share on *Muskelschmerzerfahrung* I have learned from my LNB pain therapist, my Rolfer mother, my homeopath, belly dance teachers and from many treatments of various methods such as Rolfing, LNB, osteopathy, manual therapy, physiotherapy and chiropractic.



*Hannah*

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# Dedication

I wrote this little book during my Erasmus semester in Spain and on a research cruise in the Indian Ocean.

This time made me realise the beauty and importance of intercultural communication, universal love, trust, and respect.

Every experience facilitates connection.

Every day we make a choice.

To either see ourselves in everybody or no one at all.

Connection is the key to healing.

# Who this Book is For

This book is for you if you suffer from cramp-like muscular pains or other physical pain you struggle to accept.

If you are like me, you will at some point feel devastated by chronic pain impacting your passions, social and professional life.

Loneliness and despair have become good acquaintances.

The mind and soul are beginning to suffer from the strain constant physical pains put on your body.

You're looking for help and hope.

You want to learn from people you can relate to.

You want to know how you can work with the pain to overcome it.

My hope is, that after having read this book, you feel accompanied in regard to handling chronic pain emotionally.

You understand that you are not alone in case of a lack of diagnosis and effective treatment.

I wish for you to have a strong positive story and first-hand experience to refer to when life feigns no reason for hope exists.

My aspiration for you is to take away beneficial approaches to how the mind and emotions can deal with physical pain.

If my book is successful you will have strategies to guide you and view your situation as the temporary experience that it is.

You can live without fighting with your body, worsening the pains or wasting your precious strength.

Including pain in your everyday life will take away stress and fear, allowing you to use your valuable energy to heal emotionally.

This, in turn, will provide you with the spare energy necessary to dedicate to the physical healing process.

# Epigraph

Sadness exists so that happiness can exist.

You are the cumulation of your experiences.

Nothing dies, unless it dies in your heart.

As long as you love, the world will love you back.

Every tear is a diamond.

Hearts break, hearts heal, and hearts grow wider.

Beauty is in everything.

# Introduction

Hi, I'm Hannah. I am 27 at the time of writing this. Four years ago, I developed strong abdominal pains. As the pain didn't fade away like other stomach aches, the doctor diagnosed an ovary infection as the cause. I was treated with antibiotics and painkillers. However, the cramps in my core continued even after all culpable bacteria had disappeared. This book describes the following year and includes the advice and wisdom I didn't have and searched for at the time. You can look at my words as the words I would say to my younger self to help manoeuvre a new life restricted by constant muscular pains and increasing emotional isolation.

I am not a doctor, physical therapist or body work practitioner like Rolfer, osteopath, etc... I neither have a traditional nor an alternative medical background and I cannot explain to you the logic of pain, the responsible biochemistry or why the emotional processing of pain matters so much. But I know that you need to adjust in order to survive and that emotional processing of painful experiences plays an important role in finding back into life. I speak from my experience as a young woman that didn't want to live in pain and didn't know how to live with pain, let alone facilitate it's departure or increase the distance between *it*, the pain, and my emotions and lessen the impact of the physical situation on my mind and emotional life. What you will read in this book are the lessons time taught me. Those lessons are too simple in hindsight and still, they lay hidden when I needed

them most. It's worth writing them down, so that you may add to them all that works for you and neglect what doesn't help you.

This is my first book attempt, so forgive me for lack of structure, linguistic acrobatics, and other flaws. I apologise for spelling mistakes, as this is not a professionally edited book. I'm an ordinary person without a writing background but like everyone, I have something to say. I feel honoured, that you are taking the time to read my words.

What is my aim, if it isn't to produce a flawlessly edited traditionally published book? My goal is to put my story, lessons learned, advice and thoughts about dealing with physical pains in the shape of a small book so that hopefully it will make you feel less alone, less lost and encouraged to explore ways of helping yourself with the possibilities that lie in your power. My story is about chronic muscle pains. Pains that weren't understood. I know what it feels like to be "alone". Alone with my experience, without a category, I fitted in, without people to ask questions to or receive advice from. I want to answer the question: What do you *do* when you feel stuck in such a situation? I used to wonder how I could find a solution when I don't understand the problem.

This book is based on my experience with muscular pains but a big part of it is about how to deal with the unknown and what to make out of the absence of an explanation for pain. The lack of apparent cause for my symptoms made me unable to explain what was going on in my life. Rational problem solving threw

me straight in a dead-end. The more rationality I applied the more frustrated I became.

*I wasn't meant to have these complaints.*

They weren't supposed to exist, and they certainly didn't to match anything my doctors had ever heard of or learned about. A logical solution was far from sight.

# Three Pearls of Wisdom

When I started the project of writing this book, I didn't have an inkling of how to compose and edit a book. So, I took some advice. The advice said to start with the first three things that come to my mind that I want you, my reader, to know. So here we go.

The first wisdom I wish everyone knew, is that there is no point in striving for happiness at all times. Happiness only exists because its opposite exists by its side, and we know how it feels to be unhappy. Therefore, happiness and unhappiness are two poles of the same thing: your level of joy.

Happiness comes from the appreciation of your level of joy. Appreciation of joy comes more naturally after a struggle for happiness, simply because it's easier to feel grateful for something that's absence is a known experience.

The second wisdom is that everything passes. Neither the good nor the bad lasts forever. We do not need to worry that things will stay miserable forever. The next second will be different from this one.

The third wisdom is, sad is beautiful. Being sad is an emotion. Emotions are life and life is experience. Feeling alive, feeling raw emotion is a beautiful experience in itself if you allow sad emotions to exist. The truth is, life is not always "nice" and that is okay. It will deepen your gratitude for the good and understand the

lessons of the difficult times. Easy is boring. Experience is what enriches lives.

Everything has a place, even if it doesn't make sense right now.

A more poetic person than myself said this wise quote I saw in a temple in Hong Kong:

*„When dealing with matters, don't seek the easy way. Without difficulties, one will become proud and extravagant. Such thoughts will override everything else. So, a holy [wo]man regards tribulations as a way to liberation. “*

Eternally equal levels of contentment would create the exact same feelings every day for the rest of your life. Those feelings wouldn't have the power to make us happy, even if they once embodied happiness for ourselves, or are happiness for someone else. The struggle for happiness determines our understanding of happiness.

Mountains exist as a response to valleys and plains. If mountains didn't exist, the earth had an even face. Would walking the plains feel pleasant? No. Walking the plains of the planet would be all you knew; it would be entirely normal. Appreciation of walking a plain comes from knowing what it means to climb a mountain.

Peaks are hard to climb because we may be more accustomed to valleys and plains. If we only ever lived the life of a mountain goat or rock wallaby, rock climbing would feel familiarly unremarkable and not very challenging at all.

*“Both light and shadow are the dance of love”*

Rumi, Sufi-Mystic (1207-1273 AD)

The same relationship that exists between mountains and valleys, exists between darkness and light. The darkness looks eerie because looking at a light makes the darkness appear more sinister than it really is. When I stare into the night from a well-lit house the outside seems blacker than when I walk in the middle of the forest, where the moon and the stars light my way. Only because the sun shines brighter than the moon, the night isn't dark.

No night lasts forever. Some just last longer than others. Once you find yourself within an extraordinary starry night, watching the moon rise in the sky, you will realise, life is not so frightening at all.

Few people can see the stars like you can because few stay in the darkness as long as you did. You possess your own unique way of looking at the world. You will see the beauty the darkness holds, you might otherwise had never known, for fear of leaving the light.

Experiences aren't difficult or bad. They are just there. What you do with them, determines what they will mean to you. They will be with you to look back on for many years to come. They make you who you are. But it's *your choice* what you make out of the challenging and painful experiences. The choice is between connecting to the whole world through your understanding of pain, and isolation

from a perceived hostile world. There's only one way to heal. To know that you are not alone, even though others might suffer differently.

You're special and unique. Experience is what makes you you, and valleys only paint the future golden.

# How I found Hope

This is the story of how I finally found hope after a year of chronic pains without an end in sight. I don't particularly like the word "chronic", but it clearly describes the nature of the pains. I didn't know what I had because there wasn't a name for it. The doctors couldn't classify my illness. It couldn't be found in a textbook which is why I wasn't diagnosed with anything. I had „*nothing*". That the child couldn't be given a name heightened my anxiety and lowered my hopes for a solution. In addition, I was unable to explain to the people around me what was going on. "You are not ill, if you don't have anything (with a name)" is something I heard and felt often. I generally referred to my pains as "the pains". This description was precise and vague at the same time but explained the situation as best as I could.

My favourite advice is indirect advice, which comes from somebody's personal experience. The way I learn from personal experience is by diving into the life of somebody else. This is the type of advice I tend to search for. I find it the most convincing as it resonates with me because I see myself in that other person. It means, *I am not alone*. In fact, you are never alone. The connection to another human allows me to feel accepted. As if a piece of the puzzle was put in its place. My emotional distress seizes from the security I feel from having someone to reference to. I enjoy learning from other people, and I feel, we don't share enough of our true emotions. Because emotions are more frightening than facts.

For a long time, I tried to find standardised answers, systems to guide my way and give me orientation. It didn't work. Thus, I don't want to provide you with recipe-style instructions on what you should do on complex issues concerning your life and body. Enough rigid systems exist to order, sort and catalogue the world. Instead, I want to share my experience with you. Rather than giving you generalised one-size-fits-all advice, my goal is to provide you with information and inspiration on approaches that have helped me, so that you can learn through my and your own experience. I say that because I believe oftentimes standardised solutions do not exist for our bodies. The only instructions that can guide you, in the capacity you need, is to walk your own path.

One essential aspect of that path is to be around people who inspire and assist you in attaining new insights and experiences. These people accept the self that you are and foster an atmosphere that allows you to cultivate the skills, feelings, and thoughts that will help you overcome your lowest point and find joy in a seemingly grey world. Learning from these people is childlike, it doesn't require effort. It lures a smile onto your face and a sense of energetic positivity into your body. When you feel happiness in something you do, you will gain momentum, like a snowball rolling down a mountain gains size. In that situation, with the right people, you flourish; no matter where you've been before. I believe humans are extremely good at recognising when they flourish even if they may not have thrived in such a long time that it's hard to remember how it feels. When you thrive, you float. You will know that you are flowering like a cherry tree in spring.

Two elements helped me finally find hope for my situation: My encounter with homeopathy and meeting my pain therapist in a moment of complete despair.

Flashback to my personal low point. This is what I experienced before I finally found two therapists who could help me after having come to my wit's end. Most importantly I was looking for reason to trust circumstances could improve and that I would eventually be less miserable again.

November was the eleventh month of my life with chronic pain. No clear answer existed to what went on with my body. I began to feel gloomy; the constant pain began to get to me emotionally. I unquestionably struggled to keep my morale up.

The situation is now very uncomfortable: I can't walk far enough to go to university. The distance between the house and public transportation is more than I can surmount. Changing trains and busses and walking from the metro station to the university building is like a trip to a different universe.

I didn't even make it to my bike outside the house without overwhelming pain in my knees. Due to those pains, I stayed at home. My knees hurt so awfully, even moving myself in the house proved challenging.

The pain around my knees made me panic. I thought it was *in* my knees and it caused me to worry about my joints, which again made me think of surgery. For two weeks I sat at home watching movies all day long, purely because I couldn't do anything else. Realising how uncharacteristically downhearted I felt, this behaviour alarmed me. As I scrutinised myself, I noticed "This is not me. Now there is seriously something wrong with me, and it's not just the pain". Did I want

to vegetate for hours and hours while watching other people's lives on a screen? No bloody way. Now my complaints weren't of an exclusively physical nature anymore. I was watching myself turn into a different person.

I lost all hope. I had tried so many things at this point and nothing had helped me properly. Occasionally some things helped a little bit yet there wasn't a specific approach that made me believe "This method is going to solve my problem." Nothing flowed. I couldn't help myself. Occasionally there was progress, but it was more random than reliable. No strategy showed consistent results and I was stuck. All I wanted was to find hope that I would be able to control my physical wellbeing in the future.

This aspect is powerful. The human mind wants to have control, and it makes sense: it's nice to know how you can put yourself in a position where you can walk around. To be able to do that is freedom. I wasn't aware of any means I could use to control my situation.

Let's face it, it was eleven months after the constant cramps had appeared out of nowhere. The permanence of the situation was emotionally challenging. I was approaching a year of pains and my mental state was deteriorating. I knew that I couldn't go on, isolated in my own four walls, for very long; forever glued to irrelevant movies. I couldn't go to university, my immune system was frail, I had ear pains, I was physically weak. Suddenly there were too many roadworks going on at once. My emotional stability felt shattered. I had no reasons for positivity,

let alone hope. I just couldn't detect any progress at all. *Why wasn't there a methodology working for me?* Feeling down made me anxious.

The only large part of my life I had so far managed to protect from the consequences of my pains were my university studies. Now my degree was impacted. It became clear to me that I didn't have much time to continue like this without swiftly ending up in a dead-end. Only when we can't maintain our basic bodily functions, we realise just how important certain abilities are to maintain our role in society - even if it's something *simple* as attending university. Not attending university for a prolonged time would be dangerous for my studies. Serious implications for my career would follow if I didn't partake in mandatory classes and field excursions along with staying in touch with my classmates. This was the bare minimum of social integration required for me to maintain a future in my chosen profession. My professional identity made me feel part of society, relatively normal, safe and in touch with other humans outside of my shrinking bubble. Without that, family and very close friends were the only people I interacted with. As I wasn't very mobile my social contacts were severely reduced.

During the last few months, I had compromised on every aspect of my life. I had given up daily exercise which brought with it not only an emotional and mental restlessness but also loss of social interaction. I had given up my part-time job working in the university museum and only left the house when it was absolutely necessary as it was too strenuous to do for any other reason. I couldn't compromise on any more parts of my life. Compromising on my professional

future terrified me. It was the only thing left of my normal life, the one thing that was taboo if I weren't to completely fall through society's expectations and my own rules for survival. It cut too close to what remained of my identity.

Some things are hard to abandon, others easier but this was about being able to survive with a functional future without an infinite dependency on my parents. The ramifications of my health complications weren't anymore just about the emotional difficulty to give up yet another thing. They had evolved into an existential problem.

Here I was not knowing what to do. But...

## It Can Always Get Worse

Don't make the mistake to think, things can't get worse from where you are. It can always get worse and you're probably really lucky that what you're currently going through isn't worse. I used to think, my life couldn't possibly deteriorate more as it was so unpleasant already, and then it did just that. So be careful what you think, it might as well happen. While I thought, nothing worse than this can happen to me, my feelings connected with this thought were focused on "This is the worst situation ever".

Because that is the reason for the underlying logic, "It's so bad, it can't get worse from here".

Whereas on the other hand, a mind that thinks, "This is not ideal, but I know from experience that life could be more unpleasant" connects the feeling "How nice is it that I only have this problem and not a million more!".

You can't force a mindset but nevertheless, mindsets are important. Try to be aware of how your trains of thoughts create emotions and new beliefs about the world. Your thoughts might be more powerful than you think, which is all the more reason that they need to be genuine. There's not much help in forced "fake thoughts". Your thoughts don't need to be unrealistically optimistic, as long as you turn on your detector for toxic thoughts and toss them overboard with zest!

## Bad Experiences Can Lead To Good

In autumn of the same year, I began to see an inexperienced osteopath who was still in training and charged low rates. I chose his treatment because I could afford it better than the standard price of a treatment session. Once a week I had an appointment. He worked similarly to a chiropractor but was willing to listen to my point of view. At that point, I had months and months of experience with the behaviour and location of my pains and I tried to explain to him what I had observed. Sometimes it seemed like what we did worked a little bit. Occasionally some short-lived positive effects ensued but his treatment didn't relieve my discomfort lastingly. The reason I went there still was that I needed help and his treatment was better than nothing. Even if it wasn't making much of a difference, it at least was a straw to hang on to.

After a few weeks the osteopath gave me a homeopathic remedy, which he insisted matched my symptoms and although I couldn't follow his explanations, I naively thought, "Since it's homeopathic I might as well take it. If it doesn't help, at least it won't harm me. Worst case, it won't do anything at all". I wasn't concerned about possible negative implications of the remedy. I presumed I couldn't go wrong with it, which is why I religiously took ten globules three times a day.

There is something comforting about taking a pill, or globules in this case. It gave me the impression I was doing something to alleviate the problem. Thinking I was helping myself, I carried on taking globules for two weeks with all my remaining

vigour and increasing rigidity. At least I had a plan to stick to, an action to carry out and a faint promise of hope. I cannot tell you, how I channelled the last of my resources into this simple stubborn act. The rigidity became a symbolic fight. The last rebellion against the inevitable. It didn't occur to me that I may not be helping myself.

In fact, I continuously felt poorer while I developed extreme neck pains and tenseness in the shoulders. Strong states of fear caused me to cry without knowing what I cried about. It was a purely physical experience. My mind was disconnected. Apart from the overall situation I had no reason to feel extraordinarily fearful in the specificity of those moments. I had found it difficult to cry for years beforehand. Now I couldn't detect a reason for why I burst into tears so often. I was completely at the end of my nerves. Curiously, I felt my body and I were run by a remote control. I would unexpectedly, for me and everyone surrounding me, start crying. I was afraid of everything and nothing but couldn't point to the cause of my emotional distress.

One evening when I broke out in tears over dinner, my mom, impatient and tired from work, said, "What the hell is this? You're not your normal self!"

"I don't know. I just cry all the time. I'm scared of everything and I don't know what it is. I don't know anything..."

Most of all I was afraid, I'd never become healthy again. A vague feeling, but an all-consuming fear. She suddenly said, "What is this stuff you're taking?". I kept the globules on a table next to the kitchen where she would have seen them.

The concept of homeopathy is the law of similar. This means an illness is treated with a substance, that creates similar symptoms to the ones of the illness when given to a healthy person. Every remedy corresponds to a set of characteristics that the person suffering from this symptom set displays. The remedy activates the self-healing powers of the body with regard to this symptom combination. If a person receives the remedy that corresponds to their symptom pattern, the remedy induces the self-healing process. But if somebody ingests a remedy they don't need, the remedy *gives* them the symptoms it would fix in the ill person.

You can think about it like this: there is a certain symptom type that has a problem pattern and there is a corresponding remedy specifically to solve that distinct problem. However, if a person, who doesn't suffer from this specific set of symptoms, takes this remedy, it *causes* the symptoms that it heals in the unhealthy type. In a healthy person instead of fixing a problem, the remedy will create it. In homeopathy the remedy is connected to a certain symptom pattern, it can heal or cause. Given to the right person, the remedy can heal the symptoms, or create them if given to the wrong person that doesn't show this cluster of symptoms.

The homeopathic remedy restores balance, creates a disbalance or facilitates a change from one disbalance to another, only changing the nature of the problem. All this depends on, whether it's the right treatment for an ill person, an avoidable treatment for a healthy person or the wrong treatment for an ill person. This is as

far as I understand it and the best way, I can explain it. What happened to me was that I took a remedy that was completely wrong for me but which this osteopath guy, who wasn't a homeopath, who happened to get his hands on a homeopathic book felt the need to recommend to me. The globules turned my life into entirely irrational states of fear, extreme neck tension, and a shrill tinnitus. I should have never taken this substance.

That evening my mum looked up my homeopathic remedy on the internet. After she had read out all the symptoms the ill person displays, I said, "Wow, that's me! That exactly describes my "beside myself" - distraught state."

Only of course, I was not really like that. I had only developed these symptoms because I took a substance I never needed. A person that actually needs that remedy would most likely appreciate it, although I personally hold a hostile attitude towards it.

In connection with the increasing tension I felt in my neck, shoulder and head area, a vehement tinnitus demanded attention. I suspect that I had a faint tinnitus before but never knew about it because it was very weak. I used to think it was an annoying sound in the walls of the house I could only hear when I wanted to fall asleep.

This tinnitus, however, was incredibly unpleasant. There was no way to escape from it. You can't run from your body. It's such a strange sensation not to be able to put a distance between your ears and the source of noise. The noise just follows you around, it's in your body.

My tinnitus changed frequencies. It was as if it was alive and talking to me, telling me what it liked and what it didn't like. The evening that it broke out I was super tired, and the tinnitus felt like a siren going off in my head, with no regard to the rest of the world. Well me, the rest of the world couldn't hear it. Quite a selfish thing, I thought. That day the tinnitus gave a beastly first impression. If there's never been anything else in your life that demanded complete surrender, a beastly tinnitus will. It's impossible to fight. When it gets angry, it just screams louder. Trust me, that's not what you want. The only thing that you can do, is work with it, listen to it. What does it want? Why are your ears yelling at you? As my tinnitus varied so much, I began to interpret which activities were good (calm tinnitus) and which were bad (angry tinnitus). I look at it as a direct line from my subconscious giving me thumbs up and thumbs down.

I felt awful. Scared of everything without a hint of logic behind it, with a fire alarm in my head. The crying, the constant fear of a vaguely defined everything made me feel like one large emotional dysfunction. I cried as if tragedies had happened that instant, but the trigger was missing. I couldn't explain my tearful breakdowns. I felt like I had gone through a *Freaky Friday* body swap with no clue of my life. Neither my mum nor I could recognise me as myself. If your mum doesn't recognise you that can only be a bad sign. I felt like I was in a completely wrong skin and someone else had a remote control over me.

Fortunately, homeopathy wasn't a world I was completely unfamiliar with. My mom knew a homeopath that she trusted and that friends had also been to. Earlier that year I had purposely decided against homeopathy. I had almost gone to a homeopathic appointment but cancelled it because I didn't want to pay for something I wasn't convinced could work. I didn't see how it would help my specific case.

I was at no point against homeopathy, but I did *decide* against it because I would have had to pay for it privately with uncertain results. For me, the question wasn't as fundamental as: *Does homeopathy work at all?* Instead, I just couldn't imagine it helping me with muscular pains and therefore decided not to justify the cost. Hadn't the money been an issue, I would have surely given it a try when the thought first crossed my mind.

Initially, when I had many ideas for types of therapy but not the money to pay for all of them, I needed to funnel my financial resources into the direction I believed to be the most promising and useful one. I thought it didn't make sense to spend money on something that I'm not willing to genuinely give a try. I also thought there were better methods to try because I had the feeling it was a muscular problem. What was helping me most was physical body treatment loosening my muscles and fascia. That I saw working and could imagine helping.

I still believe it doesn't make sense to go down too many different roads at the same time. By that I mean, trying more therapy types at once than the body can respond to and that you can effectively evaluate. On the other hand, there is a value in giving a small range of things a try and then following the gut feeling. I

thought if I am willing to pay for one appointment only, that appointment would be useless to me since most times you need ongoing therapy. But I didn't take into consideration that my mind could be changed by that appointment, that I could end up feeling in safe hands and find enough trust in the method to justify more appointments or simply have the option in the back of my mind should I decide to first go ahead with other types of treatment. Don't underestimate how important it is to know your options.

I will now go on to explore two solutions, I found almost simultaneously.

## Why I Started Homeopathy

My mum and I finally found a possible cause for my states of fear late in the evening. First thing the next morning I called the real homeopath. She confirmed our hypothesis and explained what I could do right away to reduce the effect of the globules. We also made an appointment to talk in person. When I first went to see her mid-December, I was a picture of misery. My body and mind were much at the end of their strength. Physically I had already been in this shape for a long time but now I felt entirely and utterly exhausted on every level. All I wanted was to get better. Everything was better than this.

The negative proof of the homeopathic remedy convinced me homeopathy operated. The relation between the described symptoms and my ill-being was clear enough for me to realise that I would need help extricating myself from this dilemma. I figured the real homeopath was the only way that I could do that. That was the beginning of my homeopathic journey. Slowly we undid the damage that the osteopath and his globules had done. I went on to see my newfound homeopath about once a month.

When we started the sessions, I was extremely doubtful of the undertaking. But the truth was I needed to fix my anxiety. I was in such a predicament that in my distress, I thought, “Even if her homeopathic treatment doesn't help me or doesn't do anything, if it only serves as psychotherapy, then I can still really do with that”.

I wanted to go back to zero. To me, that meant undoing the recent globules-induced damage. If we could go further from there and reduce the muscle cramps, I wasn't going to say no. I knew homeopathy could do something because the osteopath's globules had worked so negatively in my body. I was convinced my homeopath could get me back to my real self and free me from the remotely controlled emotions. I believed, she would be able to help me with the specific homeopathic problem at hand, which was a beginning. And I didn't feel capable of going to a normal doctor and say, "Some weird homeopathic globules made me super anxious, please can you do something?".

However, I wasn't sure, if the homeopathic approach could help with my all-over-the-body muscle pains excluding the anxiety, tinnitus and intensified neck tension, which I all attributed to the nasty globules.

What happened next was, that I got into a beautiful state of surrender where it didn't matter what the most rational next step was. Logic hadn't served me that well to this point. Everything was out of my control. I stopped caring what people around me believed about homeopathy. It didn't bother me whether my mind thought that homeopathy didn't work or that it could help me with my muscular problem. The only practical thing to do was to play the globules at their own game. I was so dependent on this woman that I said to myself, "I'm going to give this a try".

First of all, I needed her help to get out of the energetic cellar I had maneuvered myself into and that way leave the globule problem behind me. This thought was my driving force.

In the beginning, my sceptical mind considered the homeopathic treatment mostly talking. Talking about emotions was vastly unfamiliar to me. It made me feel uncomfortable as I wasn't accustomed to it and I was heavily emotionally congested. At this point, I thought, "I can really use some psychotherapy", and that was what I felt we were doing. She kept asking, "How does that make you feel?". We did an awful lot of talking. My body felt like a giant tip of distraught emotions of feelings of despair.

I had no chance to fully appreciate my scepticism. It crept in my mind occasionally but couldn't stop me. I had tried all the paths that I thought were promising and now had no idea what I should be doing next to help myself. There was a complete void of possibilities around me. So, I took what I got.

I've never been to a psychotherapist but from the scenes in movies where the patient lies on a couch and is asked questions, it doesn't look anything like my homeopathic sessions. Luckily, I was allowed to sit in a chair. There was and is a trust between us I can just not imagine with anybody else.

When I suddenly found myself in a homeopath's office, where at least someone was kind to me, I was dumbfounded. So far, my experiences with doctors had often been so unpleasant, that I didn't expect anything good to happen in a medical practice. I finally felt understood. There was a professional I could talk to. I was allowed to say everything I wanted and be myself without being ridiculed or attacked for it. To let things out was a whole new world. We talked about the acute situation which led to the background story.

In my miserable shape, I reasoned that even if the appointments would lead to nothing in the end and only help me on an emotional level, I was still very much in need of them. I thought, "I feel *right* here".

## Finally, A Way To Release The Tension

Slightly before I found my homeopath, I also found a pain therapist (LNB method) through rather unlikely circumstances. My lumbar spine suffered the worst kind of pains I had ever experienced in my back. It felt like unpredictably being cut deep into my body with a sharp, simultaneously hot and cold knife, close to the spine. Thank God this pain was not permanent. It was triggered by certain movements and made me fearful in anticipation of the next wave of pain. Large and relatively fast moves always caused the lightning strike to shoot in my lower back. After it had struck it would leave an echo as an aftertaste, that only gradually subsided.

This new pain reached its paralysing climax in November, the month of my ultimate energetic and emotional low. It felt like there was nothing left to go downhill from here. There was a quiet yet despairing certainty that I had reached rock bottom. I had gone so far down, I felt peace. No energy for a fight, no strength for a struggle. The waters were calm and cold. No wind. The scene had settled down. The game was decided. I had done everything in my power, and I had lost the game. It was as it was and there was nothing, I could do to change it. This was when I surrendered to reality. I was so empty that I knew I had not the least power to force reality into something that it wasn't.

By now I had exhausted all the possibilities I had placed my hopes on in the previous months. I was at my wits' end. Every road I had gone down proved to

be an interesting dead-end, not a solution to the knot I was tangled in. Enter my grandma and a small miracle. Oma told us she had finally found a therapist who could relieve her back pain which was so strong that she received painkiller injections in the hospital on a regular basis. Of course, this did nothing to solve the underlying problem and the professor suggested she have surgery to cut the nerves and stiffen the lumbar spine. Oma worried about the surgery because she had suffered a thrombosis before.

On to the funny part. The place she found the practitioner, who saved her from the scalpel, was on the beach. My grandparents had a favourite beach they liked to visit and as they chatted with the beach chair owners Oma mentioned her dilemma. The rental lady said, "You should talk to my son, he might be able to help you". The anamnesis took place on the beach. To me, this sounded unreal and I didn't give it more thought. Especially because I didn't see myself in a comparable situation to my granny! I thought, "What I have is different. The story is different. I'm young and I don't even know a doctor who believes I'm ill."

Yet the lowest point of the valley hit me so hard, that I called Oma and told her about the increasingly sharp flashes of lumbar spinal pain. I was ready to do whatever. She gave me the number of her pain therapist and I rang him. His practice was so far away from my home that for the 12 o'clock appointment I left the house at nine. Following this, I had weekly whole-day excursions every Thursday on my day off from uni.

Everything changed when my homeopath and my pain therapist entered the stage. The stars had risen slightly above the horizon so I could see light. Neither of them was a doctor but they didn't think I was crazy, and they had a plan. I felt trust in the face of their familiarity with my complaints. To them, what I said made sense, even though it didn't anymore to me after months and months of looking into clueless faces whenever I told my story. For so long, my story had had no right to exist. But now I had allies. Two people willing to stand on my side and work from there.

The homeopath took care of the underlying emotional situation and the pain therapist worked on the physical construction site I was. The homeopathic approach grabbed the psychosomatic source by the root and sorted the mess that had built up over the last year while the physical treatment of my muscles and fascia slowly undid the damage that was already done. I didn't need to meet them more than once for hope to find me. As a matter of fact, the phone calls that preceded, already gave me the feeling that, yes, finally I had found the right people.

What I want you to take away from this story, is that intuitively you will know when you are in the right hands.

# Hope Comes From Trust

Hope comes from trust and the feeling of being understood and safe. To be in the presence of people who understood me, was the most crucial factor in my quest for hope. I found two people who understood where I came from and who were comfortable with where I was. That my counterpart knew what I talked about and didn't run away from me in denial, because what I said didn't make sense to them, meant understanding for me. Before I met professionals I trusted, I didn't foster hope because I saw no improvement of my muscle pains and I always made my hope expectations dependent on what I thought feasible in reality.

But since hope is such a powerful emotion, I think it's beneficial to source trust from whatever place you can, even if it's not based on reason. In the end, trust is never based on reason. It's a positive assumption about the world and the people we interact with which, of course, becomes easier to practice when we have positive experiences to draw our trust from. For instance, now for me, it's much easier to go through the world with trust because I know better what matters to me and what doesn't. And I know a little better what qualities in a human matter to me in order to be able to trust them.

When you're chronically ill, a lot of people have difficulties relating to that. They may not understand where you're coming from and have no idea what it feels like to be going through what you're going through. When people know that they don't know, it makes them feel even worse and more frustrated because they *want* to

understand. Only it's difficult for them to live empathy if they don't have a single experience, they can use to compare their life to yours. Not everyone knows how an illness, that lasts for more than an overseeable period of time, feels.

Before I knew that almost all people did try their best to be with me in my suffering, their reaction only infuriated and disillusioned me. Although quite possibly they were searching every corner of their brain trying to find a resembling experience of their own. Now that I understand better the behaviour of people who are afraid of suffering and incapable of relating to people in pain, I know that the experience is agonising for them too; especially for those who deeply love you. What paralyses them is that they have very little power, indeed, less than you. While you feel helpless because you don't hold the control you would like to have over your physical pain experience and you may not be able to regulate your pain states, the people around you have less control still. That is because you have the power to make of your pain what you want and manage it as you see fit. Those not in your body have nothing in their hands when it comes to pain management and assessment, when all that loved ones want, is to take the pain from you. The pain you have physically, loved ones bear emotionally. This part of the ordeal is worse for surrounding people than for the person, in fact, experiencing pain. These realisations gradually came to me over time after repeatedly being deeply wounded by feeling forever misunderstood, not being taken seriously and given a blank stare.

The blank stare is the external expression of someone seeking for something in their life they can use to relate to you and not finding it. The blank face was so

hard to bear because I didn't know what it meant and that no harm was intended. To me, the blank stare communicated nothing but lack of empathy. *Cry with me, don't stare at me*, were my thoughts. When having experienced the blank face much it becomes easier to place. The first time it's impossible to understand what's going on behind the blank face's facade. The distance it conveys is rude and heartless. Nothing in the world could explain to me why the blank-faced people didn't hold my hand, looked me in the eyes or somehow expressed their sympathy. The blank face is the face of utter helplessness and overwhelm by the situation at hand.

Interestingly my homeopath and pain therapist behaved differently from other professional and private people I had met before. How was their response different? They showed an empathic reaction that allowed me to feel emotionally guided. What they said provided me with reason to believe they knew ways to benefit my life that I didn't know about. When they heard my medical history, they had a plan of action, an idea of how to manage my problem. What a rare taste of possibilities that represented for me. I was so accustomed to a hollow question mark behind my story that a tangible plan of response triggered in someone's mind at hearing my symptoms was exhilarating and surreal at the same time.

One powerful aspect that made me wholeheartedly trust my new therapists was that they took much time to listen. After eleven months of ups and downs and change in pain patterns I could sum up my life in one sentence, "I have pains all over my body", or I could tell a seemingly endless story. "I have pain everywhere" is so unspecific that it's necessary to study the details at the bottom of the case.

Unfortunately, not many people are prepared to spend the amount of time and energy needed to do that on a single medical case and some patients have years of illness, complaints and pain patterns to relate. So, you can imagine how time-intensive it is to work through a complicated and long health history. It not only requires patience and a genuine interest but also time, which in the end is always money.

The two therapists I finally decided to work with and place my trust in were willing to listen even though I didn't offer a five-minute story they could give a two-minute answer to. It feels silly to write in black and white but the main hope providing action they practised was *listening*. Of course, anyone can listen, yet it was hard to actually *find* someone who accepted my life and wasn't scared of whatever illness I had.

To be around people unafraid of you and your life's current stage is the first step towards becoming unafraid yourself. This is why it helped me immensely to be around someone who wasn't frightened of what I was living through.

What am I supposed to make out of my life as someone experiencing pains, if people around me are terrified of something they don't even have? How is that supposed to make me feel? "*Come on, you don't have the problem!*"

The foundation of my unforeseen feelings of security was the expertise of my therapists. I analysed my observations about my body and the information I knew. They could help me with the methods of homeopathy and the pain therapy LNB which treats muscles and fascia. Meeting them allowed me to see a spark of light

in the darkness, a place where I felt terribly lost without sensible options. My gut feeling and rational mind both concluded that we were onto something helpful. When I look at my low point, it was at the beginning of my relationship with those two therapists that I truly encountered hope. They brought with them all the experience they needed to help me. Their professionalism and time gave me trust and little shining reasons for hope I was desperate to hold onto. Before that, I had not the tiniest metaphorical straw of positivity and I had trouble imagining a bright future altogether.

This is how I found this tiny ray of hope where there used to be a void. It wasn't a switch that suddenly clicked but my faith in healing grew over time from the familiar nothingness to a little light. I hope that what I told you helps to give you an understanding of what is possible. One day when you meet a doctor, practitioner or therapist in a discipline you didn't previously consider and you doubt the applicability of the treatment even though you are met with respect, shown an honest interest in your perspective, empathy and are being listened to; remember that all these qualities build a favourable foundation for co-operation and are strong indicators that the required professionalism and an effective methodology that will work for you, are also present. The feeling that you're onto something promising might only be a weak signal at first but you will still know. I experienced exactly that.

My firm opinion is that you need to find the method that works for you. It could be entirely different from what works for me, but that doesn't matter. The only thing

that counts is that you learn how to help yourself. Homeopathy does not speak to everyone and the pain therapy I love is incredibly powerful, but every situation and body is different and so is every story, which means our needs differ too. I tell you my story so that you see an example. The way you use your body varies from mine and the strain and stress that interacts and has interacted with your physical self in past and recent past are tremendously important too to consider when evaluating what your bodily needs are. What you bring into the equation is your original foundation of existence, your body, which in itself is distinct from any other body. That is why I don't believe in the concept of standardised solutions (or pretending that they exist) and thinking in categories too much when it comes to our bodies. The point is that when you find an approach that works for you, it will give you hope. The way that you can discover that approach is by harbouring the trust that you will encounter the right people, who can help you. They might at first only appear as a weak star on the horizon that stands out from the darkness, but that is still so much better than nothingness.

We are so trained in analytical thinking that it's relatively easy to quickly assess a method's theoretical potential to improve your health condition. The other part is intuition. Even though I cannot explain how homeopathy worked on me, I have the best story to prove to myself that it worked because I experienced the negative confirmation of its potency when I took the globules that caused the tinnitus to flare up. Even though homeopathy didn't heal me at once, after that experience I was sure it was a hell of a lot more powerful than I had previously

assumed. Since I didn't believe in homeopathy at the time of taking the globules, I don't think placebo played a role in the unpleasant effects I encountered.

# Energy Is Your Most Valuable Resource

The first thing, you must do to become healthy, is to learn self-respect. Go to bed when you need to. Get all the sleep that you need. Do the bare minimum of what you think is demanded of you. The bare minimum is always less than you think it is. Get used to being different from other people who multitask. Don't please everyone. Instead, please your body. You don't have to use the word "no", if you don't want to, but you do need to allow yourself to get all the rest that you need. Communicate your needs to other people if necessary.

When energy is the most valuable resource we have, the question of what activities are worth spending our time on arises. Pondering this question may cause you to become less absorbed by your professional life or less active in your private life than you used to be. It may mean you end up working less hard. But that's okay. At the end of the day, you need to be able to look yourself into the eyes in the mirror, while you brush your teeth. The only way that you can do that is by having treated yourself well that day and been true to yourself. What it means to you to have treated yourself well depends on your individual life. With the mirror test, it's easy to find which actions speak true to your soul and which don't. Your eyes don't lie. Some simple things you can do to treat your body well include enough hours of sleep, decent food at regular intervals in a peaceful environment and sufficient breaks to make work less strenuous for your body.

Find ways to minimise all unnecessary strain. This can range from big decisions like ditching an extra class you don't need to small things such as asking somebody to help you carry a bag that is way too heavy for you. Believe me, some people are nice enough to carry your bags. Self-respect means you place your physical well-being over the demands that are placed on you by yourself and others. It means you are not ashamed to slow down, to be yourself and to be imperfect. Imperfection is the beauty of art because imperfections make uniqueness. And life is art.

Of course, you could somehow manage to carry a heavy shopping bag home alone and afterwards endure the pain from your neck shooting in the back of your head. But you don't have to choose this experience. There is always a choice, even if it feels humiliating to ask for assistance. Self-respect means you're not afraid to be sick, in pain, uncomfortable or unwell. You are allowed all of the above. You are allowed to be this version of yourself, that doesn't feel good but that has all the right in the world to exist, just as much as the happy parts of your soul. Unpleasant emotions and physical experiences don't constitute the end of the world when you understand that you (and other people) can't always perform 100 %. That's not what our bodies and existences are made for. You're not a machine.

By denying yourself to be ill, your body feels increased stress. It reacts to that home-made stress by further getting unwell. The way to leave this devil's loop is

to give up as much as possible of the self-made stress and thereby reduce the amounts of unnecessary problems your body has to deal with.

By allowing your body to be weak, you prove your trust in it. It's an acknowledgement of your body's capacity to heal. When healing becomes a possibility, illness is not the end of the line and it begins to feel less dangerous. The moment I stop sensing danger, my system can pause.

In a situation with chronic pain, rest comes before all else. Long-term, your job is to find your personal balance between your desire to work and your physical requirements to rest. Most formal training teaches us to study, work, learn and neglects to teach us about sitting down to evaluate what, when and how to refill the batteries of mind, body, and emotions. This can prove a trap. Habits are the things we do on autopilot and it can be challenging to accept yourself sitting idle, while technically you could be working, like a hamster in a wheel but at least feeling busy.

To help reflect on your physical situation in respect to work, you can meditate over the following questions:

- What are the long-term effects of me recovering now?
- What are the long-term effects of me working right now and deteriorating my overall physical condition?
- Do I place short-term effects over long term effects?

- Do I value long-term results lower than short-term results?
- What do I think I have to do?
- Why do I think I need to do those things?
- Is it really I, who want to do these things?
- Are these things actually beneficial to me?
- For the things I really want to do, is the way that I complete my tasks energy-efficient?
- Is there a better way to do what I do?
- How much energy do I really need to complete these tasks?
- How do I know how much energy I need to exert to complete a task?

The answers to these questions are not universal but individual. The most important thing to learn is to give yourself the things you need. The first step towards this is to identify what it is that you need. This sounds trivial but it's the essence of what keeps you running. Your body and mind need fuel. They need to be paid for the work that they do. Otherwise, they suffer from an energy deficiency and you begin to live off your capital. In consequence, the body must use up its energy reserves to guarantee everyday functioning, thereby destroying its baseline energy levels, the foundational pillars of health. Continuously asking for credit is like taking a drug. It works short term; it ruins you long term.

Think of this as a flow equilibrium where energy continuously flows out of you into the things that you do while energy flows into you to keep the equilibrium in balance and to allow you to continue giving energy to the outside. There needs

to be a balance. The nature of the energy that comes in may differ from the nature of the energy that flows out but, in some form or another, there needs to be an equilibrium that allows you to live sustainably in terms of your body's resources. With that equilibrium in place, you can continue indefinitely in your state of being until your needs or the surrounding circumstances change.

When change comes, don't fear its results. Change keeps the world dynamic. In essence, healing is a change for the better.

# Work Less. You Will Be Fine

Perfection is an energy sucker. It's the first thing you need to let go of if you want to be efficient with your resources.

I have an ambivalent relationship with work. On the one hand, I believe that it can provide one with mental stimulation and a positive outlet for creativity. On the other hand, I have had the experience that work can take crippling dimensions when it is something, I feel forced to do. Working in a rigid environment that feels like a trap makes me stress out and feel overworked even when to the outside world the job doesn't appear tough.

When it comes to working with pain, less is more. You need your energy for healing and recovering. You must accept that you will have to do your work with half your usual energy. If you don't want to spend your saved energy on stressing about your supposedly low quality of work, you have to sincerely allow yourself to accept mediocrity. Otherwise, there is no gain in attempting to save energy by working less. Fact is that your work is not of low quality because you cannot exert yourself as much as you may have been able to at other times of your life. To equal excellence with exertion is a misconception. You can provide continuously good work in times of weakness. It is a worthwhile struggle and a lesson for life to find trust in your work even when you don't have a lot or any excess energy.

The first step towards this is to be content with something that is the result of 50 % of the energy you would spend under other circumstances.

Learning to be content with less than perfect, with less than necessary, is the art of providing work while feeling weak. When you allow yourself to be weak and hand in an - in your opinion - bad piece of work, you gain strength from the experience because you survived that moment. Because you allow yourself to be yourself and get on with things instead of holding yourself up by trying to perfect one piece that people will have forgotten about in the very foreseeable future. More often than not other people don't see the flaws you see in your work. They might come back with amendments and criticism but in my experience, it usually concerns an aspect of the work I was blind to in the first place and would have continued to be blind to while spending more and more energy on "perfecting" my task. You will have to learn to find out what it is, that is good enough. Not more, not less.

You want to do good enough to pass the bar of decent quality and little enough so you can rest yourself. Think that you want to rest your body while working. This is how relaxing your work process should be, for you not to overexert yourself. What's helped me the most is to think, "Do less than necessary". I found this wisdom in an article about Moshe Feldenkrais. It resonated with me because I found it so complex to define exactly what "good enough" constitutes. I always used to strive for the best I could do which would be way past the necessary mark. My recipe for any form of success was to overexert myself. By

those means, I would make sure I delivered enough because I always gave my all for everything. The result was, I left myself devoid of energy for many more important things. I didn't prioritise and couldn't plan ahead. Like driving a car with a blindfold on. I didn't know where the lower end of acceptable quality for my own work was. I didn't know how much fuel was left in my tank after the needle entered the red section on the dashboard display and how much fuel I needed to drive home.

“What is the minimum I need to do? How does the minimum feel? Can I be okay by giving less than humanly possible?”

I found it stressful not to know how much I needed to do in order to pass my courses and pouring energy into a sink of unclear dimensions. I worried about trying to find out what this minimum was, the minimum required to continue. I was missing the point. *I'm not trying to do less work just to put all my energy into finding out what that damned minimum is.* The thing that helped me solve this problem was to aim for less than necessary. If my goal is to do less than necessary, I cannot fail. This approach takes away the thinking in circles. That way I could let go of control and get into a breezier state of being. The irrational pressure fell off my body and my mind began to learn by itself. The preparation for my exams began to flow, and better still, some genuine interest independent of expectations returned.

# What The Head Has Got To Do With Pain

"Your pain is psychosomatic!"

When some of the people around me implied my pains were psychosomatic, it seemed to me they were saying I imagined the pain. I didn't know how to handle this insinuation. At first, a statement about the psychological origin of my pain alone did not help me. To receive understanding and further details on dealing with a possible emotional soul component in the pain origin, however, would have taken me by the hand. For the health of the soul especially, the feeling of not being alone plays a huge role to me and thus the feeling of being held and supported by other people helps me regain my strength. What I experienced when I heard the word *psychosomatic* was cold and distance on the part of my dialog partner. In my view, the subject was a blame allocation.

The sensation of pain is subjective. No one but yourself can know how you feel. In its subjectivity, pain is a fact. When I feel pain, I do not imagine it. People who don't understand your situation and don't take your bodily pain seriously because they or the treating doctors can't categorise your symptoms, but still want to draw a conclusion, may make a rough generalisation and claim that in the absence of their understanding, the blame for your illness lies with your psyche. This statement is particularly bad if it is presented reproachfully and conveys the impression that oneself is guilty of one's own suffering. If one would only think

differently, everything would be better. The conversation becomes even more unfortunate if it isn't exactly specified to what extent the mind is to blame for the pain perception and a diffuse feeling remains that the mistake lies somewhere in the head, although you may have thought until then, the head was the only thing working without objection.

Self-evidently, it is not true that your head shall out of the blue be guilty of everything another head doesn't understand. It's a simple explanation for a complicated problem and not a solution. Perhaps you receive the reproach that all your physical problems have a psychic origin from people who are neither familiar with the subject on a professional level nor on the basis of their personal experience and who do not make this assumption to assist you with detailed words and deeds but to emotionally distance themselves from the situation. With their reaction, they're building a wall between themselves and you, so as not to feel what you are feeling.

Certainly, a close connection exists between our body, our feelings, our physical sensations and everything we make out of our experiences with our thoughts. However, insinuations, accusations as well as the trivialisation of the situation are in no way conducive to achieving improvement of our state of health. A person who aggressively blames others cannot help you, because nothing that comes out of them heals. This person is out of their depth in dealing with your pain. That often seemed paradoxical to me. Why should it be difficult for people to deal with my pain and to endure uncertainty when they are not the ones affected by the

pain? The answer is, people want to help, and they want to understand what is going on. We want to be able to control what happens to and around us. A doctor who cannot give an answer experiences the limits of their power and that frustrates them. Their job is to give answers and to understand how their patients do on a physical level. Not living up to this aspiration and admitting this requires human greatness where pride bars the way.

For people close to you, like family members, it is equally difficult to build a healthy relationship with your pain and symptoms. They love you and want to help you. Nevertheless, their own powerlessness punches against their chest time again through your suffering. If we want to think solution-oriented in such a situation, we end up in a dead-end when there is no factual solution. If we cannot solve the problem of physical pain quickly - like a math exercise in one afternoon - it is more important to be present as a human for the person concerned and to accept the situation as it is, than to seek explanations for the head. Being present in and accepting of the moment enables the normalisation of the experience. In this way, you can avoid fighting against the current situation and put all your strength towards improving your plight.

The emotions you surround yourself with are important for your recuperation and well-being. Subsequently, the choice of people you surround yourself with is vital. An existence free of resistance to the present situation allows empathy and understanding to be ruling emotions, not fear and the denial of reality. You may feel frightened, overwhelmed or left alone with your health condition. This means

that you are feeling negative emotions anyway. When you find people, who are not afraid of your life, who might even be able to help you with practical experiences, you will be capable to uncover new confidence and develop a fear-free relationship to your body and life. This is the first step to recovery.

A label like *psychosomatic* is nothing more than a label. It's an absolutely meaningless label as its existence alone does not help the situation. Does it make you feel better? No? Then you can immediately forget about it again. Chiefly, it's the person applying this label who feels better because they have fulfilled their human need to categorise your problem and placed it in a drawer. They now feel up to the situation. Obviously, they have done everything in their power and are free of compulsion to act and responsibility.

Fact is, derogatory statements don't help you. On the contrary, such empathic-free, distanced insinuations have the potential to transform themselves into self-fulfilling prophecies. The transmitted cold and direct recrimination, "Your head is at fault" can lead to emotional isolation and forlornness. No one feels good after the diagnosis, "We don't know what you have, hence it's psychosomatic. See how you cope with it. Apparently, it's up to you."

Behaviour and statements of this kind are absurd. When I break my leg, the doctor doesn't say, "This looks bad. All I can say is that it's presumably your fault." It's not about responsibilities, it's about solving a problem together. Therefore, I believe that a doctor can only be as good as their communication. Otherwise, no knowledge of the world can issue from them. The doctor possesses knowledge

about bodies in general, but they haven't studied *your* specific body for years. You are the source of all information about your body; thus, the attending therapist or doctor must be able to cater to you so that an egalitarian conversation can develop. Of course, the ability to communicate is a working condition for both sides. The doctor needs it in order to help the patient and the patient must have it in order to provide the doctor with the necessary information for their work. This is the only way to tap into each other's sources of knowledge. If you feel trust, you are in the right place. In that case, the doctor's or therapist's supervision can help you in the long term.

Sometimes the seemingly endless achievements of medical research dazzle us. Nevertheless, doctors cannot look into their patients. Although medical technology extends our perception beyond the physical senses, it only shows a picture dependent on the methodology used. Through this magnifying glass, some things become visible, others can only be detected with other methods, yet others cannot be detected at all so that processes exist of which we know nothing. I don't want to frighten you with the limitations of medicine but convey a healthy relationship to the possibilities which lie in the power of conventional medicine. Medicine is a science and no science is ever complete. Accordingly, it is possible for a doctor, and even a specialist, not to know what kind of case an illness is about if it hasn't been described, investigated or acknowledged.

Perhaps the world from time to time makes us feel, everything is already explored because the time of discovering new continents is over. But nothing could be

further from the truth. The visible is explored, now it is time to explore the invisible. Naturally, this is more difficult. Modern research often takes place on a different scale than our bodies' existence. As Jane explains in the film about Stephen Hawking's life *The Theory of Everything*, the rules of the physical world change when you look at peas (the micro-world) instead of potatoes (the macro-world). More knowledge opens windows to more questions and unknown fields. Therefore, some subject matter in medicine may be inadequately enough researched for there not to be a standard procedure in place to solve certain medical problems. Such a situation does not mean that a disease or phenomenon is wrong, non-existent or invented, but simply that there are things we don't understand. Period. Gravity too existed before Newton established the theory of gravity.

## Emotiosomatic

I find the term *psychosomatic* disagreeable. This is mainly due to the manner in which I came to know it and the meaning it gained for me. Of course, the use of the term is decisive, but to me the term *psychosomatic* is presumptuous. At the same time, it is vague enough to be intangible.

The concept I believe in, which some people might associate with *psychosomatic*, I call *emotiosomatic*. By this I mean that perceived emotions express themselves physically. I find the term *emotiosomatic* more appropriate than *psychosomatic* because I think it's clearer and less emotionally overstepping the mark. I don't want to be told in a roundabout way that my head is amiss. I find this less uplifting than a caring question like, "To what extent can you determine an influence of your emotional world on your physical well-being?"

or "Do your pains occur more frequently in certain situations?"

or "Do you notice a specific emotion in relation to your complaints?"

This approach opens up a dialogue and can bear insights. New perspectives may be gained. This is fundamentally different from simple pigeonholing with the notion *psychosomatic*. Pigeonholing, in this case, is nothing more than labelling what has no other label.

I don't dispute the influence of thoughts on our pain perception. However, in my opinion, the connection between mind and body falls short. In my world, there are always feelings in between. If I don't have feelings about my thoughts, they do

not have an influence on my body. Then it doesn't matter what I think, and psychosomatics is no longer a working concept. In my view, it's nonsense that physical pain should only be caused by psychological problems. Through the emotional level between mind and body, the body will always express itself; and it expresses what it feels, not what it thinks.

## The Kernel Of Truth

Although there is an emotional level between our thoughts and our feelings, it is true that thoughts, and therefore the psyche, influence our body. In what form thoughts express themselves and which thoughts actually lead to emotional and physical stress, remains open for the time being. Perhaps the possibility of a psychosomatic origin of the pain is alleged in a reproachful manner or unkindly accused. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that none of us is free of thoughts and most thoughts have a meaning for the thinker, which brings us directly to the emotional level, that can show itself physically.

The question I ask myself in the following is: Do I want to view the psychosomatic reproach reproachfully or sympathetically? Up to these lines, it was easier for me to protect myself from the reproach by rejecting it and facing it with the same reproachfulness it displayed to me. Naturally, I found the person who brought it up mean and hard-hearted. Although that sentiment is justified, I see the kernel of truth, which the person evidently couldn't convey better.

Simply to say, "Okay, my thoughts have something to do with my physical complaints", only helps me to a limited extent. First and foremost, this view is plainly frustrating, rather than empowering. Since, how am I supposed to change my thoughts? And what thoughts should I change? After all, I can't suddenly start thinking entirely differently, then I wouldn't be myself anymore. What's more, only

a few key beliefs back an emotiosomatic reaction. The task is to find those decisive views.

I don't think it is sensible to want to change all one's thoughts at an instance. Firstly, that would be impossible and secondly, the attempt would be consumptive of energy yet unsuccessful. Instead, my path is to search for emotiosomatic connections, isolate them and examine the associated thoughts.

## What You Can Do

Here is a short overview of the things that you can do to better learn to live with the emotional forcing of pain expressions. Once you accept the existence of an emotional factor in some physical pain formation, in particular, muscular tension-based pains, you hold in your hands a great control centre for pain expression. To me now physical tension release through treatments, movement exercises, and muscle lengthening are one side of the coin. But when I notice that these regulating screws don't show a lasting effect and that the tension and pain return time and time again without a physical trigger or plausible cause, I move on to search for emotional causes. An unresolved emotional stress like fear and serious discomfort can be the underlying cause for tension which brings the symptom back again and again, even after a mechanical tension reduction in the form of body treatment or exercises.

What you can do splits into four parts: first you can find pain-related emotions, then you may make out the thoughts connected to those emotions, third you learn how to treat somatic emotions and then you can begin to reframe or evolve emotiosomatic thoughts into less destructive alternatives.

- Finding pain-related emotions

Pain-related emotions are those emotions that occur in synchronicity with a known pain or slightly before it sets in. They are strong uncomfortable emotions yet ones that we may have grown accustomed to or are used to override for their lack of social acceptance and pleasantness. Have an eye out in particular for

feelings of discomfort that are familiar and ordinary, something part of your life in disharmony to your true self and the natural expression of your soul.

- Which thoughts are related to emotiosomatic triggers?

The thoughts that stand behind what we believe about us and the world around us to be true are the screw you can adjust to change your emotional responses, even though sometimes we may be under the impression we are subjected to our feelings without reigns in our hands and the experience of our emotions seems way out of our control. When you find the thoughts related to emotional stress triggers and the origin of your physical response you can begin to reflect on what they are, where they come from and whether they hold up against critical examination.

- Dealing with somatic emotions

This section shall be about how to treat those emotions which have power over your pain experience. They can either initiate pain or allow you to process it in a way that will help you reduce the pain extent and frequency of pain initiation until you eventually surpass a specific pain altogether, grow friends with it or just know what to do with it really well.

- Reframing emotiosomatic thoughts

This part is dedicated to explaining that you are able to gradually transform your own thoughts and the meaning attached to them. But there is no need to change your thoughts if you don't want to. You can simply re-evaluate your view on

thoughts that trigger a painful physical reaction and let the view become one of compassion, not of destruction.

## How to know which Emotions have a Pain Relationship?

Now that I have presented you with my view that emotions can have a direct connection to physical responses like the expression of pain, you may ask yourself which emotions exactly are responsible for your torments. How can you identify the emotions that stand in relation to a pain experience?

In my view, out of the countless thoughts the mind thinks only a handful can be considered critical for triggering unpleasant body responses. These thoughts correlate to what we believe about the world and ourselves. Otherwise, a thought is not personal and not relevant to your existence and hence has no power over your emotional landscape. It then cannot develop a control over the body.

In order for you to better understand what I'm talking about, here are three examples of pinpointing emotions connected to physical pain in my life.

### **Example 1: Environment**

The first time I consciously acknowledged a non-physical cause for increased pain occurrence was almost a year after the tinnitus appeared and had to do with the atmosphere of my workplace, a scientific Raman Spectroscopy lab.

I had back pain in both my Quadratus lumborum muscles and felt every movement my hip and lower back made. Every bend hurt. I had had treatment from my pain therapist the day before and the pain had temporarily gotten better but the next day at work as soon as I entered the lab the pain was back, the muscles tensed, falling back in the all too familiar pattern, now their most natural configuration. The muscle memory snapped right back into the old tension state as soon as stress from the outside world entered my system through my senses. There was no explanation for the pain to stay and intrusively reappear without comprehensible physical trigger. The only constant in relation to the back-pain appearance was the environment in which it flared up. It would stay on when I left the lab but refuelled every time, I went back to the Raman lab.

The environment was one where I didn't feel complete or myself in. The whole place, the building, the essence of how people interacted with each other and the lab, in particular, made me tense and on-edge. To me now the whole place represents discomfort and effort to keep myself together. Back then I had carefully thought out doing my bachelor's thesis in the field of crystallography and already knew a couple of people working there. While I had good reasons for my choice of work environment, the feeling was always wrong. The lab was dark as the measurements were light sensitive. There was a noisy pump and air conditioning which I could hear even through noise-cancelling ear-covering headphones and I had to wear special protective goggles over my normal glasses because of the laser. I would sit for hours on my own in the darkness only to leave the building after night had already fallen. When I learned that being a lab expert

would be my best bet for a job in this field, I started to feel even more unhappy in my place. This was not the life or future I wanted. I was where I was because I had enjoyed the lectures on crystallography and saw the value of the practical application of this branch of science in technology. However, my supervisor was an extremely ambitious and demanding woman whose expectations I did not feel capable of fulfilling. I had never learned more about quantum mechanics than that it existed, yet she insisted we understand Schrödinger's equation and Heisenberg's uncertainty relation in an afternoon. This angered me because I didn't see how that could ever be reasonably expected of somebody who is not even a physics student. The pressure to achieve more than I thought humanly possible for me put me under immense emotional and physical tension. This experience caused me to rethink my views on the theme of academic performance pressure.

### **Example 2: Stress-inducing Behavioural Patterns Of Surrounding People**

The other time I very strongly noticed an emotional reaction before my body responded with cramps and tension was in a stress situation under time pressure in the presence of my mum. I really do not like to be late and find it a stressful experience. I soaked up all the negative energy and panic my mum generated as we tried to drive under icy road conditions trying to catch a train for me. Even though I would be the one late, she was the one flustered and it was clear we were running too late to change anything about it.

First, our car didn't start because the cold had gotten to the battery. Then we organised to borrow my uncle's car, who at the sight of two hectic women reminded us of the slippery roads. In the end, we drove to a nearby town in the hope of catching the train on its way to where I needed to go and in the process got stuck in the pedestrian zone where it took us a forever lasting five minutes to back out of a tight dead-end. The whole time I tried to calm my mum to prevent her - and in consequence me - from panicking under the time pressure. The result was that I had to wait for the next train and arrived an hour late at my pain therapist, boiling with anger and exhausted. I soaked up like a sponge the stress that originally hadn't been mine and lived it in the same intensity as the person next to me. I used no method of distancing myself from someone else's emotions and suffered the consequent effects.

At the practice of my therapist, I felt physically and emotionally more drained than on the morning of that day. I arrived there to get treatment that was supposed to make me feel better but along the way had gotten myself into a worse condition only due to subjectively experienced time pressure and soaked up stress, that was never necessary and I could have chosen to reject. I was angry that my back was now more painful than it needed to be.

### **Example 3: Body Reaction To Anger**

My final example is that of a strong reaction my body showed to a fight with a study friend who accused me of letting her down because I needed her to contribute her part to the teamwork. I tried to stay calm and reasonable during

the fight but immediately after the screaming drama directed at me was over, as I walked towards the train station, my stomach started cramping intensely. I was home that afternoon enduring the muscular contraction in my core and my lower back fighting against it. I couldn't explain to myself how out of thin air these strong cramps had appeared on the stage but again my mum put one and one together and pointed out that the big fight with my friend had happened that very day. She made me realise that right at the first traffic light after walking down the road from my university building after the hour-long argument my stomach yelled at me in protest. In hindsight, I can only conclude that my body wanted me to defend myself better and refused to accept the accusations I was confronted with. From experiences like this I have learned that I always have to speak my truth to avoid my body going on strike. Of course, you have to pick the battles you fight but when something matters to your identity and self-image, in my experience it's crucial to stand up for oneself even in uncomfortable circumstances simply to be true to oneself. My body is the device that measures how true my actions speak to my feelings.

## What Have Thoughts Got To Do With Somatic Emotions?

The next step after noticing situations in which the emotional world is connected to a physical pain sensation is to pay attention to the mind's activity. What are the thoughts corresponding to these physically manifested emotions? Here are the

underlying thoughts in the three above mentioned emotiosomatic pain experiences.

### **Example 1**

I felt performance pressure, was subjected to noise, perceived hostility and very little goodwill, nurturing, support and encouragement.

My thoughts were, “I can’t keep up. The level of research is too high for me. It’s going to break me. I will forever be stuck in a pitch-black laboratory never seeing the light of day, tormented with too-loud background noise that will drive me crazy. This is an unpleasant, unsafe and unsupportive environment. There are no nutrients for me here. I don’t feel comfort. The people I work with don’t have my back. I’m supposed to be a machine and I can’t accept that because I don’t have the resources to perform better than I am.”

These thoughts were in many ways true and guided me on my way. It would have been very wrong for me to stay in that working group environment because it subjected me to destructive forces without providing me with enough time to recover and relax, develop faith in my own abilities while growing with my task. In response, my body sent a clear message about the state of things and the effects of the momentary situation before my mind had figured out the danger, we were in. Clear instructions to run and leave as soon as possible were issued and it proved to be the right decision.

## **Example 2**

I felt stress in the form of bad associations with previous times I had been rushed as a child with my flustered mum when I used to be late for kindergarten and birthday parties. Being late to me is a pre-stressed situation.

My thought was, “This is a big problem”. Of course, it didn’t need to be a big problem but still, I continued thinking, “This is incredibly stressful and hardly endurable. I find myself unable to remain calm and take things as they are. We can impossibly be late although we are undoubtedly not going to be on time”.

Better thoughts would have been something like, “We are going to be late and there is a good chance that under the current conditions we are going to miss the train, but we are doing our reasonable best without flipping out to make it on time. However, we are also preparing for not making it and calmly letting the involved people know about the icy roads and problem with the car battery and apologise for the probable delay. There is nothing that we can do about things that lie outside of our power, I know that, and I can accept that things don’t always go according to plan. It’s not a disaster to be late and most of the time there are no serious consequences, after all, nobody is dying.”

## **Example 3**

Here what I felt was anger, unfairness and injustice. I didn’t defend myself or stand up for my position. Instead, I let my study mate make me believe bad things about myself and through that gave her power over my self-image and feelings. So, I thought, though reluctantly, “I am a bad person”. I allowed that evaluation to linger in the air instead of fighting it. I let that thought in my mind.

Better it would have been to think, “I know that I am not lazy. I’m generous and I expect equal effort to be put into teamwork by all involved parties. I don’t believe for one minute that I shall be branded as the backstabber if somebody else has repeatedly been the parasite in my work and usurped my goodwill without return of favours.”

## Why Do I Have Somatic Emotions?

When dealing with somatic emotions it is important to, first of all, let them exist. After that, you can ask yourself what the underlying reason for a certain emotion is. The answer to that question is not going to come to you in a second but rather is the product of continued observation. For example, the emotion in question may be triggered by an environment or a demeanour of a person that reminds you of a hurtful past experience. By letting the emotion exist, acknowledging its legitimacy as well as understanding its worth as a messenger to give you insights into your own feelings and life, you can find peace with it because now its presence has a reason.

In my first example, the reason for my somatic reaction was that my entire system was warning me and letting me know that the path I was going down was not right for me. Even though rationally I could not find a fault with my decision to do my bachelor thesis in crystallography my heart and body screamed at me in terror.

In the second example, I was reliving the powerlessness of a child whose parent was constantly time-pressured and freaking out while inevitably running late again. Through the reminder of these old situations, the real situation in that instance loaded up with disproportionately more stress and tension than it truly deserved.

In the third example, my body fought my rational mind which thought it was doing everything correctly when in truth my words betrayed my self-worth and self-respect and I let my soul down in the worst possible way. It's so important to always speak your truth and self-express to let out the troubles from the inside even if the prospect of this is daunting. The moment your truth stops hiding (leaves your body in words) your freedom is back.

In short, how I would treat emotions with somatic power is with the respect and value they deserve. They are only there to directly show you what you wouldn't see otherwise. Have patience and trust in the fact that even their simple acceptance and appreciation is going to make these emotions more manageable and tolerable. After all, so much in the human mind can be justified when we see purpose. This view is going to help your pain perception by aiding the body to calm down instead of over-interpreting the mind's and emotions' sometimes confusing signals. Like with a super-sensitive detector some noise can just be ignored. At last, there is a chance for your feelings and mind to see your pains in the context of life and meaning.

## Understanding Emotional Pain Triggers

What can I do to surpass pain triggering emotions, you may ask yourself. You can build a respectful and healthy relationship with somatically loaded thoughts and feelings to allow you to in time understand why the emotion is there and what it wants to tell you. When I understand why the emotion is there and have found a meaning behind it, I have peace of mind.

The step to take now is to not only let emotional pain triggers exist without a fight but to find out what they mean to you. For instance, a running gag about a person being late while she isn't actually late could be stressful and painful to me while to somebody else it's nothing more than meaningless babble everyone's grown tired of. To me however being late in important situations like at work is something so unpleasant and emotionally charged that the joke is not funny at all.

I now have two options. Either solve the origin of the emotional loadedness of being late. That would mean diving deep into all the associations and connections I make to the theme of being late and figure out the meaning I personally attach to it. Or simply make sure I don't expose myself to such jokes and clearly tell the people around me that these jokes are not at all funny to me. That way I stand up for what I need to be comfortable, allowing the weakness to exist and shielding myself from harm because I know of my weakness and can work with it. In this simple example of the joke about being late my choice is to tell the other person how I want to be treated. Depending on the situation, however, it may be necessary and worthwhile to dive deep into the meaning of a concept that bothers you to truly understand where the attached meaning comes from.

## What Can You Do To Change The Meaning Of Thoughts?

A thought with a positive meaning or no meaning at all won't trigger an uncomfortable somatic sensation. It's all about the meaning.

For example, my tinnitus was and is a warning system that protects me from asking too much of myself. When the tinnitus was new and strong it appeared to me like torture, only existent to terrorise. Other times, I thought of it as a general strike trying to keep me from getting on with the next trivial task on the list, I thought I had to complete because I was on autopilot and didn't reflect on the necessity and purpose of a particular task.

Now when the tinnitus grows louder, I know have overwhelmed myself. Maybe my actions and words didn't speak true to myself and I'm locking up negative emotions inside of me instead of freeing myself of them. Or I physically overworked myself, possibly slept too little, didn't eat right and didn't care for my physical self. The emotional care I grant myself is more often the cause for an unhappy tinnitus but under stress that can easily go along with high physical demands on the body too. While working long shifts on-demand on a ship with very little time to sleep I also found half an hour of yoga and stretching to be more valuable in restoring the body than another half hour mediocre sleep.

The change in meaning is the transformation from seeing the tinnitus as a threat to my existence to seeing it as a watchkeeper over the gates of my being. Now the tinnitus' appearance doesn't scare me anymore. It helps me look at the events in my life and ask myself what it is that I find so challenging. Then I can respond to that by giving myself the peace and break that I obviously need, even though my brain would not have known about that without the watchkeeper. Please know that changes in meaning like this don't come overnight, at least not for me. So, don't be harsh on yourself and don't expect too much.

Back to the simple theme of being late. When I get to know the meaning I personally attach to being late, I can learn to recognise what the corresponding emotion feels like and how my body responds to that emotion. What you are doing here is learning patterns and once you're good at recognising patterns, you can simply note, "Oh, that is exactly how I feel when the "late"-theme comes up and I am reminded of how I was always late as a child."

Then the mind steps in and says, "I have analysed that and actually half of what we're feeling is not to do with the actual situation at hand."

And your emotional self will go, "I have gone through this pattern a thousand times before. I know exactly what's coming".

And the rest of you can take a step back and say, "Let the mind and emotions do their thing. Body, it's not necessary to jump on the bandwagon. This is just a little programme playing we don't have to react to."

In this scenario I haven't actively tried to change the meaning attached to the "late"-theme but simply by viewing and treating it with more comfort and freedom,

by giving it room, the meaning my sub-consciousness attributes to that little programme playing changes.

You can of course also work more purposely to attach new meanings to unpleasant emotions and change your thoughts by actively searching for experiences that shine a different light on a theme. I could surround myself with people who are always late and don't mind it one bit. Or I could practice being late in situations of no consequence so that my self accustoms itself to the sensation of arriving after everyone else and resists the urge to rush while witnessing the fingers of the clock creeping ever closer to the appointed hour.

So much of what we do is habit. That is good news. It means you can train yourself to gradually start new habits. I always start with baby steps as not to shock the system and make lasting progress.

Something else you can do is write down a belief you want to change, then write down the belief you would like to adopt instead. For me, this method of correction doesn't always work. It's too theoretical. But if it helps you, go ahead with it. Putting thoughts on paper to find more clarity in one's own thoughts can help in general. I love to hear experienced people's opinions on difficult matters. Yet recently I also noticed the peace that simply comes from explaining myself in written words.

Finally, in my view, every emotiosomatic relation is a journey in itself that has unique and complex origins that you are the discoverer of. To feel through all the

places, people, situations, comments, thoughts, and beliefs that trigger a deep emotiosomatic response takes time. Time as we knew it before clocks were a thing. That's how much time you'll need. Don't try to measure it, don't set a timer, a date or deadline. Your intuition knows when the time is ready and where you are on the journey. Here, like with many things in life, the path is the key. The destination only defines the path.

I want to thank you for joining me on this exciting journey of writing this book.

May it serve you well.