

When We Feel Broken Inside



All of us have been broken many times in our lives. Life delivers blows and knocks us to the ground. Many times. The pain and the feelings of hopelessness and despair make us wonder if we would ever survive this, or if we would ever feel happy and safe again.

Although it is impossible to believe, yet these challenges, painful at the present moment, often become the catalyst for us to change our lives, for the better.

For us to live our lives to the fullest, the only way we can achieve this, is by getting us to examine our lives, so we can see **why** we feel so broken inside. We have to experience the pain, the adversity, the feelings of hopelessness and despair in life, because how else do we find out why our lives are so unfulfilling and how else do we find the motivation to make changes. When life throws challenges at us, when we feel hopeless and despairing, then we have to make changes....

Life can't go on in hopelessness and pain forever.

When we are sinking, do we choose to do nothing, or do we choose to swim?

Everyone feels broken at some point in the life journey. When that happens, we often do not know what to do. Many of us end up living our lives through fear, regret, pain, disillusionment and sadness.

This is not the way our lives are meant to be lived.

1. Accept and Anticipate Change

"It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself."

- Dr Leon C. Megginson

In today's world of constant change, it is so hard to hold on to who we are and manage the complexity and unpredictability of life. The one constant thing in our lives today is CHANGE.

Instead of fighting the inevitability of change, we need to learn to accept it.

Events happen throughout the course of our lives that we simply have no control of: whether it is a serious illness, or the loss of someone, or something that means the world to us. There are also things that happened that we may feel responsible for, things that we are ashamed of and wish we could take back, or things that happened to us that we wish had never happened. There may be things that we feel powerless to change and things we wish we didn't have to do.

All these cause stress and pain and resentment.

It is a heavy burden to carry.

It will remain a burden full of stress, pain and resentment, unless we learn to accept that it is what it is, it has happened, it is in our lives. When we accept it, and not resent it, and despair over it, then we can lay down this burden.

The only person that stands in our way is us. If we have faith in ourselves to accept and overcome life changes, then we know that no matter what happens in our life journey, we have got it in us to overcome it.

Once we start to lift the burden off ourselves, there is less stress and we can then think more rationally. We can then start problem solving. How long do we want to wake up in the morning, put on a fake smile and somehow get through our day, wishing the problems would miraculously go away?

NEVER, I hope.

2. Embrace Our Power of Choice

"Today I choose life. Every morning when I wake up I can choose joy, happiness, negativity, pain.... To feel the freedom that comes with being able to continue to make mistakes and choices – today I choose to feel life, not to deny my humanity but embrace it."

- Kevyn Aucion

Using our power of choice enables us to change our approach to life from one where we languish in pain, to one where we flourish with joy and hope.

Using our power of choice empowers and strengthens our ability to take action and to make decisions.

Our power of choice is a gift within us that we can choose to use. That power of choice brings the control of our life back into our hands.

If we are unhappy with our circumstances, we can choose to change it. If we are unable or unwilling to change our circumstances, we can choose to change our thoughts and our emotions regarding our circumstances.

For example:

Instead of thinking: "COVID has devastated my life and I fear for my future"

We can choose to think: "Thank God I am still healthy and have the ability to still work. I have a future."

Instead of thinking: "My surgeon disrespects me by always being late and I hate it."

We can choose to think: "I am grateful that I have a slate and my surgeon is operating. I have work during this difficult period where work is scarce."

(Our power of choice then also includes choosing to speak to the surgeon about being on time, book a later start time, or giving you a heads up if he/she is going to be late so you don't have to rush, etc. By keeping quiet and being resentful, we may be denying the surgeon the choice to make changes to improve the situation.)

Or today, I can choose simply to do nothing. It is in my hands.

3. Ask for Help

"Asking for help does not mean that we are weak or incompetent. It usually indicates an advanced level of honesty and intelligence."

- Anne Wilson Schaef

Asking for help is NOT a sign of weakness.

When we are feeling so broken inside, we want to hide away from the world.

We want to curl up on our own, and not talk about it – because talking about it means thinking about it, and feeling the pain and stress and despair.

Sometimes, it is because we feel embarrassed, or we believe that people won't understand what we are going through.

It is often the support, advice and encouragement from others that help us overcome adversity and problem solve, especially when we feel so broken inside. It is the energy and wisdom from friends, family and supporters, even professionals, that fuel our courage and our desire to start taking action to change our lives for the better.

Spending time with friends and family can give us a respite from our troubled thoughts, so we can feel better and stronger to tackle our challenges.

Talking to friends and family who know us can bring different perspectives, and some may even offer advice and help in areas where we may feel hopeless.

For example:

When we feel we are unable to manage our work life balance and feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of looking after work, patients and family, someone may offer solutions that you may not have thought of: someone can do the school run for you, there's a reliable kids cab service that will take that responsibility away from you, etc.

Sometimes, talking to a professional (psychologists, life coach, financial advisor, etc.) may help solve a problem you don't know how to deal with. And colleagues who may have experienced similar issues can share stories and tips that you may find helpful.

4. Be Present

“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.”

- Buddha

We often hear about the importance of living in the present and the different ways that it will benefit us, such as lowered levels of stress and anxiety. But how exactly can we live in the moment when our mind is constantly worrying about the past or plans for the future?

Step 1: Overcome worrying

When we are worried, we are often dealing with unrealistic thinking. We may worry about a problem that doesn't exist yet or dwell on all the bad things that can happen as a result. Often we feel unable to deal with the outcome. Sometimes, some of our problems are difficult to avoid worrying about, such as serious health issues, or those that are beyond our control, such as civil unrest, economic downturn or a pandemic.

So we need to practice calming our mind – because we can see clearer when our mind is calm. Unrealistic thinking is fueled by confusion and uncontrolled emotions. Calming our mind will reduce confusion and calm our emotions, allowing us to live in the present, stop making up a bunch of unlikely scenarios and deal realistically with the issues at hand.

Step 2: Focus on possible solutions and problem solving rather than the problems. Our years of education have taught us how to diagnose and problem solve. We need to use it in our lives too.

Step 3: Identify obstacles to living in the moment

- Racing mind and wandering mind – practice mindfulness
- Avoidance of painful emotions by resorting to food, alcohol, sex or substances, which stimulate pleasure or dull the mind
- Outside influences – most of us are not aware of how our environment and social norms influence our thinking and behavior. People, institutions and media are constantly competing for our attention, taking us to the past or future and away from the present.

Step 4: Practice Mindfulness (look up Mindfulness resource)

5. Focus on What Brings You Joy

"Find a place inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain."

- Joseph Campbell

When we feel despair, frustration and hopelessness, it is easy to forget the good things that are happening in our lives. When consumed with despair, it is easy to start believing that there is absolutely nothing good in our lives.

And yet, there are so many things happening in our lives that we don't even notice, that bring us happiness and joy, if only we could see it.

A good way to start is to start a Gratitude Journal.

Once a day, every day, take 3 minutes to write down at least two things that we feel grateful for.

It is not easy. When we feel broken inside, we simply find it impossible to believe that there is any good or to think of anything that we feel grateful for in our lives.

A good place to start:

I feel grateful that I have a roof over my head.

I feel grateful that I have a job that I can go to.

I feel grateful for the people in my life.

With practice, it becomes easier and easier to find things to be grateful for:

Thank you bed, for giving me a good night's sleep.

Thank you robots, for being green today. Traffic was a pleasure today!

Thank you rain, for watering my garden. I saved on water today!

Thank you body for supporting me. I think I am a little less breathless in my run today. Etc.

It becomes a joy to simply be alive.

In a study at the University of Pennsylvania, participants that take time to write about the good things in their lives showed a huge increase in happiness score.

The good has always been there. We just spend too much time focusing on what we are unhappy with.

6. Be Hopeful about Our Future

"The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time."

- Abraham Lincoln

It is understandable that when we feel broken inside, we become consumed by the worry that our life will be like this forever. It becomes extremely hard to be hopeful about the future when we feel so much pain and heartache inside.

A good thing to remember is that each day of the future comes one day at a time. Everything we do today help us to make it through today. We may have made mistakes, but we have also learnt lessons and learnt things that make today better.

Each day that goes by, we are living and learning.

Each day that we have gone through has made us stronger, given us more experience, simply because we have made it through!

It is important to remember that every day is a new day.

Life is permanently in a state of flux. The good and the bad ebbs and flows. What made us unhappy today may not be here tomorrow, and what made us happy today also may not be here tomorrow.

Our hope for the future lies in the fact that we are strong enough, within ourselves to deal with what may come tomorrow....the good and the bad.

As we live fully in the present and stop worrying about the past (which has happened already and no amount of worrying can change it), we are acquiring skills and knowledge that build us up, day by day, into who we are today. If we made it through all those yesterdays, we can surely make it through all the tomorrows as they come.

Today is the day that we need to focus on, for today is the day that we can make a difference – to cry, to learn, to be grateful, to be angry, to be lazy.....

Today is the day that we make those choices.

We will make tomorrow's choices when tomorrow comes, as we did today.

7. Accept that Life is a Mystery

"The Mystery of life is not a problem to be solved; it is a reality to be experienced"

- Jacobus Johannes Leeuw

Life is a funny thing. The more we fight and resist it, the harder it is to live our life. Accepting and embracing the mystery of life allows us to heal and look at our pain and despair as only one chapter of the many chapters in our life.

Life throws us curve balls. It tests us and challenges us. We survive and thrive in life by embracing these challenges so that we can grow and live with courage and inner strength. We have everything we need inside of us to live our life. The strength and the weakness, the joy and the pain are all part of our story.

When we feel broken inside, we need to remember that this is part of our journey and that there is no escaping the pain. We just have to work our way through the pain and despair.

Instead of fighting and questioning why anything happened to us, or even blaming ourselves for anything we feel we may have not done so well, we need to take a deep breath and remember our book of life is but a mystery for us to get through. Our moments of pain and despair are part of the plot. As our story winds itself through the mystery, these moments of pain and despair may turn into glory and joy. Do not make these moments of pain the foundations of our future.

Our role in life is to embrace the whole life – the good, the bad, the glorious and the ugly, and to live our lives to its fullest.

Make it a life worth living.



Excerpts and ideas from:

1. Kathryn Sandford
<https://www.lifehack.org/325895/7-things-remember-when-you-feel-broken-inside>
2. Michael Daws
<https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/10-things-that-will-happen-when-you-start-accept-change-your-life.html>
3. Charles A. Francis
<https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/21-instant-ways-to-live-in-the-moment.html>
4. Yair Native
<https://www.lifehack.org/890021/feeling-defeated>

