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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Episode 1 Season 3

The Healing Power of Now

Welcome to a brand-new season of Busting Addiction and Its Myths. This is Episode #1 of Season Three.

I wish to call this episode The Healing Power of Now. Allow me to explain why. This what my podcast is about: helping those who have an alcoholic or addict in the family whether the addict alcoholic is living under the same roof or not, whether the addict is recovering or not.

A main feature of the addict's or alcoholic's family is that they are living in a state of fear, some of which is actually justified. I will use the term addict or alcoholic interchangeably since the rules apply to both, and to both types of families. And to tell the truth, these days many addicts are also alcoholics and vice versa. In most cases, "it" started with alcohol and then other types of less-legal pleasures, although I know many recovering alcoholics who start drinking beer when they were 12 years old and started smoking weed about the same time. Odd thing is, they report that it was easier to get weed sometimes than to get booze. And often cheaper.

Back to my premise: unfounded fear is characteristic of sick families, defined as any family with an active alcoholic in the house, and one which has not sought treatment for this family disease, either by counselling or by attending Al Anon meetings, or both.

Fear also grips the addict himself. Fear of being found out. Fear of running out of money, drugs or booze. Fear of being fired (I lived with that fear for three years until I did get my ...fired). Fear of abandonment. Fear of people and of economic insecurity. And more.

I wish to step back and talk about the psychological condition of fear. The following thoughts come primarily from Eckhart Tolle, author of the *Power of Now*. At first, he just states the obvious: that the *psychological condition* of fear is divorced from any concrete and immediate danger. It comes in many forms: unease, worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, and so on.

He goes on to elaborate by stating that this kind of psychological condition - which is chronic, that is, always there without let up – is always of something that *might* happen, not of something that is happening now.

This is the perfect time to bring in one of my favourite authors and a philosopher of the first order: the venerable Mark Twain. He said this on the topic: “I have experienced many terrible things, most of which have never happened”. You are in the here and now, while your mind is in the future. This creates an anxiety gap. And if you are identified with your mind -not with your inner being – and have lost touch with the power and simplicity of Now, that anxiety will be your constant companion.

You don't have to just imagine anxiety as your constant companion. This is the state most families who have an untreated addict in the house actually live in, day in, day out. They are trying to cope with an imagined future which does not exist, and never will.

You can always cope with the present moment, but you cannot cope with something that is only a mind projection – you cannot cope with an imagined future. The idea that you can cope with the future is a dangerous illusion.

I tell the younger guys whom I guide on their recovery journey that the future does not exist in reality. That helps pull them back into the here and now, the only thing they have anyway, and it helps them live one day, one moment at a time.

So here is where the arguments start. I hear parents say: “But we have to plan for the future, don’t we? What do you say to that? I say: “Sure, go ahead and plan for the future, *but* you don’t need to live there”. It still does not exist as a tangible reality. Once you begin to live totally in the here and now, in the present moment, all fear dissipates. It vanishes. Sounds insane but it is radically true and correct.

Let me ask: why do we meditate? It far transcends becoming a calmer person, although that’s one of its benefits. Meditation is embedded in twelve step programs for a reason.

We meditate so that we can learn how to be in the here and now, how to live in the present moment. Gurus through the ages have spoken of the importance of living in the present moment, in reality as it is, not in our heads.

So, whether it was the Buddha, Jesus, or any other great teacher, each had something to say on that topic. Jesus himself is to have asked whether worry would add even one day to one’s life, and a Sufi master from the 11th century stated this: “Past and future veil God from our sight. Burn both of them with fire”. His point is simple: if you want to experience God’s grace, it can only be experienced in the present moment.

Eckhart Tolle’s teachings have helped many, including myself, to overcome, to let go of needless worry by explaining that my mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more I am identified with my mind, the more I suffer. Or I may put it like this: the more I am able to honour and accept the Now, the more I am free of pain, of suffering and of my egoic, frenetic mind. Now, why am I even talking about the power of Now when you might be suffering from the torment of addiction or alcoholism in your family?

Let’s talk about a myth that many who suffer this way carry around in their minds. And the myth is that they have any, I mean, any power over alcoholism or addiction whatsoever. That’s why the first step in Al Anon is the same as the first step in AA: Admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable.

Notice it says powerless. That means no power whatsoever. If you have no power over alcohol, that means you have no real power over your loved one or his addiction.

Once you surrender to that truth, totally surrender to it, things start to change for you. You can now ask yourself: “If I have no power over the addiction, what do I have power over”?

You have power over how you live your own life. You have the power to vanquish fear, resentment and despair. You have the ability to live life in the here and now. Realize, as Tolle says, that the present moment is all you ever have.

Simple, and so true it's radical. End the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops – unless you choose to use it. Tolle goes on to say that to be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively in memory or anticipation. You begin to heal when you make the journey from the head (your mind) to your heart (your inner being).

If you have an addict in the house, and you are living in the past or in the future, your memory is one of pain and regret and your anticipation is all about waiting for the other shoe to drop. And it almost always does. In ways you cannot imagine because you can't make this stuff up.

Case in point. My twenty something year old daughter at the time found herself in Las Vegas, having flown there by private jet from Austin, Texas, but then her new so-called boyfriend dumped her and her girlfriend on the street and she now needs airfare wired so she can make it back home. Plus, someone allegedly stole her purse and credit cards. So, I asked her: "How're you going to get on a flight without your driver's license, since I assume it was also in your purse? And how will you pick up cash that I am supposed to wire you without you having an ID to pick it up"? Well, the little liar didn't expect the question, but she recovered quickly: "Dad, I keep some of my other stuff in a little wallet in my jeans".

She had turned into a cocaine party girl there for a while. It was sickening, sad, and infuriating but I had to surrender to that reality. And my own counsellor wisely suggested to apply my AA thinking of one day, one moment at a time to my current situation in order to save my sanity. Not live in the future because the price of trespass into the future is fear.

Another way to look at the dysfunctional life, which is what happens when you live with untreated addiction and don't pay attention to your own needs, is that the past gives you an identity, that is, you start to define yourself in relation to the addict alcoholic. You might see yourself as the mother of Johnny the addict (not in public necessarily) and not as a worthy person in your own right. You are wrecked by anxiety and worry to the point of shutting down. And now the future is the only place where you see salvation or fulfilment in whatever form.

So, the future becomes either heaven or hell, depending on what you are thinking about. You do not see that the answer is not ahead of you, but right in front of you, right here, right now.

You can only adopt a healthy attitude toward life, of life in the moment, if you surrender to your powerlessness over someone else's problem and stop trying to fix it.

This is not about your addict or alcoholic, this is about you. Mom, dad, wife, husband, anyone who loves the addict in the family.

This process of change shifts the focus from his insanity to your wellness, for you are no good to yourself if your thinking is distorted by the delusion of power or by the illusion of time.

You might start to feel guilty for casting off the bondage of unnecessary responsibility for his consequences. That's to be expected. You have been carrying the burden for so long, you feel weird now that you are traveling lighter and actually coming into your own. One woman I know told me that after she stopped trying to fix her husband or cover for him, she picked up her paintbrushes for the first time in many years and expressed her emotions in a riot of bright, crazy colours. Good for her.

What she began to understand is that the eternal present is the space within which her whole life unfolds, the one factor that remains constant.

But old patterns are hard to break. It takes constant practice to break present-moment denial and present-moment resistance. And resistance means pain. "Tell me it isn't so" is a common way of expressing the desire to escape from the now.

Accepting what is does not mean resignation. It's a necessary starting point to do something about it, if you can. That goes back to the old saying: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. "This is a plea to a higher power for peace of mind, for courage and for wisdom.

In a moment of distress, it is good to remember that it all starts with acceptance. And from there you can calmly assess what your options are. Courage is then called for when you have to make the tough call like having your loved one experience the full consequences of his actions.

When you surrender to the power of Now, you begin to experience life as fresh and new, you discover immense creativity just waiting to be unleashed, you take joy in spontaneity, you walk without guilt and fear that haunted your every step, your every moment.

It is indeed possible to experience the healing power of Now. The Now represents a new freedom and a new happiness that you deserve, for you have already paid the price.

So, what have we learned today?

1. Unfounded fear is characteristic of families who have an untreated addict or alcoholic in their house.
2. The psychological condition of fear is chronic and is a constant companion that threatens the sanity of the parent or spouse, the “caregiver”.
3. You can always cope with the present but never with an illusion called the future, which has no reality of its own.
4. Although you have no power of alcohol or drug addiction, you do have the power to live your life fully in the Now.
5. Learning to live in the Now frees you from fear and liberates you from the prison of someone else’ disease. Now you are free to live the joyful life that you deserve.

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