

Turning anger into strength: how to overcome self-doubt and self-sabotage (#73)

Jean 00:11

Hello, everybody! I'm super excited to bring to you this conversation with Peter Michaelson. Peter has a Master's in Psychology and Counseling and is a practicing psychotherapist. I came across his blog WhyWeSuffer.com and was immediately fascinated with his insights about our inner workings. I know so many miserable people who have no idea why they are this way; you probably do too. Some are committed to social justice. And yet when they see the world, all they feel is despair. Certainly, there's a lot of injustice, and unfairness can bring us down. The difference for me now is that I have tools, and I know how to break myself out of all that suffering. If you are committed to helping to create a better world, and you want to enjoy your life, I encourage you to listen to what Peter has to say. His wisdom is worth sharing. Hope you learn and enjoy. Hello, Peter.

Peter 01:35

Hello. Thank you for inviting me.

Jean 01:38

I am so delighted you agreed to be here. As you know, and I've told you several times, I came across your website and was stunned by the information that you revealed, and by what you had to say. I've already reposted one of your blogs on my website and was anxious to get you in person so we can fill out some of the information that you have to offer. So, let's just get started. First to the listener, Peter is a psychotherapist with a Master's Degree in Psychology and Counseling, specializing in something called Depth Psychology that I think I had heard of, but I wasn't sure until I read about it. So, welcome again. And let's begin. I want to get started by first asking you what got you involved in the work you're doing and what is your journey like, tell us about your journey to get to where you are at now.

Peter 02:53

Well, I was really mainly inspired by the degree to which I was miserable. When I was a younger journalist and reporter, I was floundering in my career. I was not doing well at all. I knew I had some talent skills and occasionally I would show some flashes of competence and good writing and such. But I wasn't getting a really good vision of what I was capable of. I didn't have a sense of purpose, a sense of vision. I just couldn't see my way forward. I was kind of stumbling around.

Jean 03:29

Well, I can tell you right now from that start, a lot of people will be able to recognize that whole feeling of clouding, what's my life for, what am I supposed to do? I think I've got something to offer but what? I personally can relate to that. Okay, keep going.

Peter 03:48

And so, I came across this therapist at the prodding of my late wife, who was very much into her own self development, and she really prodded me and encouraged me to see this particular person. And sure enough, it was just absolutely amazing what I began to discover about myself, I saw all these patterns of self-defeat and self-sabotage. I suddenly realized that I'd had all these blind spots about the inner workings of myself, and how I was unwittingly creating all these different ways that I was blocking myself and preventing myself from flourishing. So, I just came into a whole new understanding of that. And I went back to school, and got my master's degree in counseling, and began working with my wife at a practice in Florida. And things have been going very well, ever since. It was absolutely the most exciting thing I've ever come across. And I'm so thankful that I discovered it.

Jean 05:00

Was this a magician you went to see? What did this person do that led to all of this intense self-discovery?

Peter 05:08

He was just a wonderful psychotherapist. He understood classical psychoanalysis, he understood all the issues involving inner conflict. Basically, when you work in that way, you become a teacher; you teach your client these principles of depth psychology, and your client begins to see that in himself or herself. And it gets this whole new realm of self-understanding. So, he was excellent at it. And, he was a great teacher.

Jean 05:45

You've used two words that I'd like you to elaborate on, two phrases. One is depth psychology, and the other is inner conflict.

Peter 06:00

Depth psychology is kind of a generic term and certain groups have different ideas of it. For instance, Jungians call their process depth psychology. But mine is based more on psychoanalysis. And I just feel that I've taken absolutely the best that psychoanalysis has to offer. As a former journalist -- and I was the science and health writer -- I've been able to communicate it and refine it and make it more intelligible for people or accessible for people. And giving people, just everyday people, a chance to read and understand this content and material in the easiest way possible. Just communicating it and making it really clear for people.

Jean 06:46

Classic psychoanalysis, depth psychology, what separates them from traditional, what is now brief therapy? A lot of people do brief therapy, a lot of people do behavioral therapy, what separates what you do from that?

Peter 07:13

The main thing that separates them is the recognition of inner conflict. Inner conflict is systemic in human nature, and people do not really have a very good sense of it at all. But when you start to understand inner conflict, you'll see that, for instance, you might feel like you want to be a loving person and be loved by others, but at the same time, have a tendency to feel as if you're not loved or not really appreciated. And so, there's a conflict there. People can feel like they want to be in charge of their life and control of their life, and yet so easily feel like they can spiral out of control, or that they have weak self-regulation. So there's a conflict there. People go back and forth, say, between feeling loved and feeling unloved, or feeling controlled or feeling out of control and feeling in control. And it just goes back and forth in so many different ways.

Jean 08:15

I thought that was normal. So, you're saying, that's inner conflict?

Peter 08:22

Yes. Yes, absolutely. It's inner conflict and you can see the mechanisms of it, and get to the heart of it.

Jean 08:30

So, with your own experience, you're seeing this terrific therapist. You discover inner conflict; you discover your own inner conflict. What good is knowing that to you?

Peter 08:44

Well, you make it conscious. Otherwise, you will feel for instance that someone, say, is trying to control you. You get triggered and irritated when you think people are trying to manipulate you or dominate you or control you, when you don't recognize your own participation in that. The way in which you yourself are prepared to feel that, and magnify and embellish the feeling that somehow you're being controlled, when that might not be the other person's intention at all. But we have a kind of a sensitivity

there, a kind of hair trigger response, say to the feeling of being controlled, or to the feeling of being rejected, or to the feeling of being refused. And we bring our own participation to it. And people don't see their own participation in it, they don't see that part of themselves that is so ready to take on those feelings and get all tangled up in those feelings. And they come out of childhood, that's what children feel. Children can easily feel refused, they can easily feel helpless, they can feel controlled as they do during the terrible twos when they go into all these tantrums. Later on, they could feel as if they're being rejected or unloved. And all of that in childhood can be very subjective. In other words, there's no really real objective assessment of that.

Jean 10:16

Oh, hang on. So, you're saying that people may have a tendency to feel controlled, they have that predisposition from childhood. And then when somebody actually tries to control them, it triggers them or they are just perceiving that the person is trying to control them?

Peter 10:41

Well, even if the person is trying to control you, you won't necessarily get triggered, if you don't have the attachment to feel in control. So, the person might be trying to control you or might not. Either way, if you're insightful enough, you don't get triggered. But oftentimes, the people, especially when they're not insightful, they'll feel as if somebody is trying to control them, even when that person is not trying to control them. Sometimes it's just a boss, who's telling you how to do something, well, you know how to do something better. And people can feel like that's a heavy-handed approach to dealing with them, and get triggered by it. We start to recognize these emotional sensitivities within ourselves. And everybody has them. They might be sensitive to the feeling that they have them, but they don't really understand why they have them and what that means and how they can liberate themselves or clear that out of their emotional life.

Jean 11:47

I want to really tease this out, because I'm imagining a skeptical group of people out there listening to this, saying, I know, good, well, my boss wants to control me. And what you're saying is that could be, but it's the person's propensity to be triggered by it. That's the question, not what the boss is doing, but how we respond, how we feel about it, that makes a difference?

Peter 12:19

Absolutely. Absolutely. If you're not sensitive to the fact that you're feeling controlled, then you won't react. What happens is that people have emotional attachments left over from childhood, children can be very sensitive to feeling control. Teenagers, when they're trying to establish their independence, can be very touchy about how they feel that parents are still trying to control them, and regulate their lives or interfere in their lives. So, teenagers can be very sensitive to that feeling, which is just an example of how it can then also be the same for adults. And adults can be sensitive to the feeling that somebody is trying to push them around or intrude or manipulate them and control them. And they're not seeing their part in it, they're not seeing their own sensitivity to it. And that sensitivity can be horrible, it can create some extraordinary misery. That happens in relationships all the time. Happens all the time with married couples, that one will feel that one is more controlling and be reacting all over the place to that. A lot of passive-aggressive behavior is a reaction to the feeling of being controlled.

Jean 13:38

We're about to go into hallowed ground in a minute, because of what you're now saying, but I want to get this teased out in the employee-boss relationship before we move into racial relationships. The boss is trying to control me. You are telling me that it is my reaction to it that's the problem, not the jerk who's trying to pull my chain?

Peter 14:15

Right. Right, the boss might be responsible: if the boss is being really rude and inappropriate, in which case you probably might need to speak up for yourself, represent yourself well. And perhaps as diplomatically as you can, let the boss know that it's not appropriate for him to speak to you that way.

Jean 14:40

Okay. So, you can defend yourself.

Peter 14:43

You can represent yourself, maybe that is a better way of saying it. If you get too defensive, then you're getting triggered. But you're representing, it's all by reference how well you represent yourself in given situations. But if you're too passive, then you really won't represent yourself very well. You might, for instance, remain silent. But then you'll end up being quite resentful later. And then at that point, it's not even so much that you're resentful so much about what the boss did. But then you become resentful, unconsciously, about your own passivity, bothers you that you took it the way you did without somehow representing yourself better.

Jean 15:27

I know that feeling. I get home full of, "I should have said. I could have said. I wish I had said it." The key is, they're separate things. The person, the boss, the jerk said something horrible. I represent myself, not defend myself, and speak up for myself. If I'm emotionally triggered, I'll move into defense not representing myself.

Peter 15:59

You could also move into anger here, which would be another self-defeating reaction. But yeah, you can move into a kind of defensiveness which would not speak well to yourself, you know, you end up kind of groveling if you got too defensive. So that wouldn't be you representing yourself very well.

Jean 16:20

Okay, I could move into anger and shoot back and get myself fired. Or the other option you gave is, I could move into passivity. And then that's when I go home and kick myself about what I would have, could have, should have said.

Peter 16:37

If your passivity is activated, you could decide to just listen to the boss and not take him seriously. And sort of let it go in one ear and out the other, which might look as if you're being passive, but in fact, you're not necessarily being passive. It is the difference between understanding passivity; if you understand passivity, then you realize you can act as if you're being passive without being passive.

Jean 17:02

Wait a minute. I want you to repeat that. Let's take it from, you were explaining the difference between being passive and choosing not to speak. Take it from there.

Peter 17:30

You can decide if your boss is being unpleasant or rude to you, that in that given situation it might be best, considering the circumstances that you take into account, not to say anything provocative. And to just sort of listen, maybe, you know, whatever, nod your head in quiet agreement or whatever, and that doesn't mean you're necessarily being passive. You can just decide in that moment that that's how you're going to respond to the situation. And then afterwards, you wouldn't have to feel bad about that at all. But if it's unconscious passivity and you are kind of frozen there and you're not able to represent yourself, you don't have the option of representing yourself because you're at your passivity, then you'll have a problem, then you'll feel resentful afterwards. And it will feel to you afterwards that you're really angry at your boss. And what's happening and what's disturbing you more than anything, is the fact that you yourself weren't able to represent yourself in that moment.

Jean 18:35

You're saying, what will bother me the most is my own passivity and that I didn't represent myself and not the jerk who started the whole thing?

Peter 18:48

Well, the jerk is just who he is, you aren't necessarily going to give that person the power to disturb you or to cause distress in your life. If you're more conscious in that way, then that person is just who he is, you don't take him seriously if he's a jerk. But if he's your boss. Right? If he's your boss, you sort of got to strategize and navigate your way through that situation so you just don't get angry at him, you just don't waste your time being angry.

Jean 19:24

Okay, so we started off talking about your personal journey. And you're saying, this is what you discovered in your therapy. How many years did it take you to get to that?

Peter 19:40

Well, so far, about 45 years.

Jean 19:45

I haven't finished either. Am not complete.

Peter 19:52

Right. Right. But people started picking it up right away, you know, you can feel progress happening pretty quickly. It's all an accelerated process, but it can seem to some people that it's happening slowly. But really, it starts to accelerate. And then you're just pointed in the right direction. You're pointed in a good direction and time will take care of how much progress you make. But you feel good, that you're moving in a good direction.

Jean 20:24

So you went into therapy. You made this rapid progress, you said, "Okay, this is my life's work." Is that right?

Peter 20:33

Yes, that's correct.

Jean 20:36

And then you went into therapy. I mean, went into doing therapy with others.

Peter 20:45

Yes, it's wonderful work. Being a therapist can be frustrating if you don't feel like you're being effective. And you can pick up what your client is putting out there. Some therapists can get very triggered by the passivity that some clients bring to the session. Some people are in bad places where they're just feeling really helpless and hopeless about life. And they exude that energy. And so that can be a challenge. That's called countertransference, if you're picking up what your client is putting out. But once you clear that out of your own system, then you don't get triggered by wherever the client is at. And then the work becomes very rewarding. It is so satisfying. The privilege of working with people sort of at a soul level, you know, deep in the psyche, is quite a privilege, is wonderful.

Jean 21:52

I know several people who have decided all is lost. It's just this: the planet is doomed, the boss will never change, the races are going to win. What do you say to that person?

Peter 22:16

Well, I would say that you won't feel that way, if you start working on yourself. If you start recognizing the issues within yourself, first of all, you start to see that inner conflict. If you're feeling that hopeless, then probably you're feeling helpless. Feeling helpless to be a voice for change, if you just feel helpless to have an effect on what's going on in the world. And that is a painful place to be, to feel that helplessness. And as you go deeper into that helplessness, the more you go into that passive feeling, and it's a dead-end street, you don't want to go there. It may be that in some respects, you are somewhat helpless, at least at that stage, to have much of an impact in the world. But you can begin to try it and work on yourself. At the very least, you can start with yourself. And then as you make progress with yourself, that helpless feeling will go away. It'll just go away, you'll just connect with something that's so sublime in yourself, that will start to produce pleasure for you. And that's where you put your focus. You want to feel that.

Jean 23:41

I keep getting hung up in this business about the so-called objective reality. And what you're saying, which is that it's perception, basically. So, the objective reality is, the ice caps are melting. The objective reality is, there are a lot of races out there and they are trying to win. The reality is, my boss is a jerk. The reality is, I'm just one person and you are telling me that this is all a function of me?

Peter 24:19

Well, there's that reality out there, which you want to acknowledge. And you can accept that reality can be challenging for you. You give it credit, recognize that.

Jean 24:36

Credit the reality. I want to make sure that's clear, the reality is the reality.

Peter 24:43

Yes, for sure. Absolutely. But if you're reacting to reality in such a painful way, then that is your responsibility. It doesn't have to be that painful, it's challenging, it might even be grim, but it doesn't mean you have to suffer. So, if you're suffering, then you can address that. And if you start to address it, then conceivably you can become a reformer, you can be part of the process that begins to tackle that grim reality.

Jean 25:25

Okay. So, the reality is the reality. I don't have to be hopeless. I can be conscious of my inner passivity. And I can realize that part of my hopelessness is that I am being passive.

Peter 25:34

Well, when you say, tap in, by that you mean become conscious of it? Tapping into it is not like tapping into strength.

Jean 25:46

Okay. So, I can be conscious of my inner passivity. And I can realize that part of my hopelessness is that I am being passive.

Peter 25:57

Yes, carrying residues of passivity within your psyche that are left over from childhood. Childhood was a time when we were biologically passive, we were in a place where we had to submit to our parents' authority, we were dependent on our parents. And we spent all those years in those passive, relatively passive situations compared to other animals, which can be off and running around, as you know, within a matter of months, or even weeks. So, we had all this passive sense of ourselves ingrained into our system. And it still lingers within us. And most people aren't even aware of it, they just take it all for granted. They don't have a sense of it, they don't have any mode or mechanism for penetrating into it and seeing

its constituents. So you're trying to understand the constituents of it, when that comes into focus for you, then your intelligence goes to work for you, and you can navigate your way out of it.

Jean 27:08

So, the reality is grim. I'm going to keep saying this, because I know who I'm talking to. And a lot of people say, "Oh, no, no, no, no." So, the reality is grim, the reality is real. The hopelessness and helplessness I feel that's on me, that's residue of my childhood. If I choose to look at it, you're saying, I can then free myself up to go do something about this grim reality.

Peter 27:45

First of all, free yourself up just to connect with yourself. That's the first objective really, because that's where your strength will come from. Connect with yourself, your essential self.

Jean 27:59

What does that mean?

Peter 28:00

Well, we all have this essential goodness. It's almost a spiritual concept, but I try to keep it on a secular level, but our self, our better self, it's there for us to access. It's all part of who we are: our intelligence, our integrity, our courage, all these assets that are there as part of us. And so, we just want to try and find that within ourselves and then we're on our way.

Jean 28:32

If I'm steeped in hopelessness and helplessness and passivity, then I've lost touch with my essential goodness, I've lost touch with my strengths. I've lost touch with my better angels, in my words.

Peter 28:52

Yes. Then there's a disconnect from our better selves, we want to be connected. That's another polarity in life, connected versus disconnected. People can feel all the pleasure when they're connected. When they're connected to their friends, when they're connected to others, but especially when they're connected to themselves. And often it is painful for people when they feel disconnected from friends and family, loved ones, coworkers. So that's when things start to feel unpleasant for us. But as we're working on ourselves, the primary thing that happens is we start to connect on an inner level, connect with ourselves. And then all kinds of other connections fall into place as a result of that.

Jean 29:41

Let's switch to racial justice, I can imagine some people saying, I don't have the right to feel good about myself, with all of the terrible horrible things that are going on. The genocide, the abuse, I need to stay angry so I can be motivated to foster change. And if I allow myself to feel good about it, I'm ignoring the dismal reality of other people's suffering. And I'm doing that and I'm allowing myself to feel good at their expense.

Peter 30:27

Anger is a false way to try to feel strength. It's a desperate reaching out for strength, because anger can feel like strength. But it's really a third-rate kind of strength. And it's mostly a reaction to inner passivity. When we have too much inner passivity, we can be desperate for a feeling of strength. And sometimes the only strength we can feel is anger. It is the easiest sense of strength to access, but it's self-defeating. Anger poisons your own system, and it doesn't connect with other people, you only connect with like-minded people who are in that same place. It's so counterproductive.

Jean 31:23

Okay, we've got to take this real slow. Anger is counterproductive. And it's a poor third-rate way of feeling strength.

Peter 31:38

If anger is the only thing you can access and if anger is what motivates you to try to do good, then that's fine. That's okay. You know, I'm not saying that that's uncalled for or a bad thing. It's just that you can do better, you can do better than that. You can have a better form of strength, a strength that will be at much more capacity to connect with people, and then to become effective, more effective as a reformer. But if you stay at the level of anger, it's just not going to work all that well. It's just too limiting.

Jean 32:17

Too limiting. Anger is limiting. Just say more, I don't even know quite what question to ask. It's too limiting. If anger motivates me to get out and picket or write a petition, to form an organization, how is that limiting?

Peter 32:40

Well, if it does that, that's fine. In itself, that's fine. Maybe I'm speaking here at a higher level, that if anger is what you need to get going, then that's okay. I'm not trying to say anything disparaging. I'm just talking about how we can do better than that. We can be motivated by some sense of integrity, some courage. In my sense, the whole thing with the possibility of losing our democracy, I would be most motivated by going to go out and demonstrate. Motivated not out of anger, but a sense of the horror of losing our democracy, what that means to me. What a horrible thing that would be for me and for everyone. And so, that's what would motivate me. The connection with how good democracy is, and how important it is that we maintain it.

Jean 33:42

Ah. Okay. So, anger is a motivation against something and it's limited because when I'm against stuff, I'm not connecting with people. I'm not connecting with myself, I'm not connecting with my strengths. I'm only connecting with this part of me. But if I'm motivated by the vision of a positive good, democracy, social justice, if I can reach towards that, I can do that and connect with people at the same time. I can have a good life and move forward.

Peter 34:23

Yes, you're connected more out of your sense of goodness, your sense of what is true and just, and that becomes your motivation. And that's more powerful. It's more powerful, and it'll be so much more likely to influence people on the other side because they can see your goodness. It's like Martin Luther King, you know, his goodness was overwhelming. He didn't come at you out of anger, he came at us out of his goodness and his integrity. So, you know, that's so much more effective.

Jean 35:05

I know it takes therapy to liberate ourselves. But can you explain even at a high level, what does that mean to liberate ourselves from passivity? How do we go about doing that?

Peter 35:22

We're trying to liberate ourselves really from negative emotions. And there are several primary negative emotions that we first experienced in childhood. One is feeling deprived, feeling refused, feeling helpless, feeling controlled, feeling criticized, feeling rejected, feeling unloved, feeling abandoned, and possibly feeling betrayed. Children, as we know, are very sensitive to feeling abandoned, is one example. Very sensitive of feeling rejected, very sensitive of feeling criticized. So, we still, as adults, still carry residues of sensitivity to those feelings, I call them emotional attachments. We are still emotionally attached to those unresolved negative emotions. And if we remain emotionally attached to them, then in a sense, we don't have our own inner freedom.

We might have freedom in society, but we don't have inner freedom because we continue to get tangled up in these negative emotions, and we don't see our way out. We don't have the knowledge, we don't see our way out of them. So, this is about understanding how we are so likely, so tempted, so inclined to gravitate to the negative side. Passivity tends to be on the negative side, so we tend to gravitate in that

direction. For instance, if you're feeling attachment to rejection, that means there's some passivity within you, because you're not supporting yourself emotionally. You're taking the rejection so much to heart. If you don't have the passivity you'd be more connected with yourself, you won't take the other person's rejection so much to heart, you'll have more inner resilience and more inner strength. If one person rejects you, you perhaps move on to other people, put that person aside and move elsewhere.

Jean 37:41

So I shouldn't be passive and I shouldn't be attached. I know, it's not as simple as that. What am I supposed to do?

Peter 37:53

Well, it's just a matter of becoming more watchful. First of all, learning the basics of depth psychology, particularly all the aspects of inner conflict. The main inner conflict is between the passive side and the aggressive side. The inner critic which psychoanalysis calls the superego, it's on the aggressive side, and inner passivity, what psychoanalysis is calling subordinate ego, is on the passive side, and there's always been give and take going on between, and they are in conflict. And oftentimes the inner critic prevails, the inner critic can be the master, the hidden master of our personality. And so, we don't have inner freedom, if we have this primitive part of us that is the master of our personality. We're trying to liberate ourselves from that primitive master and connect with ourselves, which sees all of this and escapes from the inner conflict.

Jean 39:01

So my passivity is held in place, partly by my inner critic, that beats me up for what it could have done and beats me up for being passive.

Peter 39:18

Yes. The inner passivity, again, is biological, and so is the inner critic. According to classical psychoanalysis, the inner critic is formed because of our physically aggressive side. We once were predators ourselves, and so we have a natural aggression, even in modern life. To succeed and get ahead in life, we sometimes have to have a healthy aggression to do that, to go out in the world, extend ourselves into the world, and feel the confidence and the assertiveness to go out and find our place in the world. So, we have that healthy aggressiveness, and we have the passive side and trying to reconcile all of that.

Jean 40:12

Let's take all of this and apply it in the racial and social justice sphere. A lot of the people who listen to this podcast, and who I work with, are fervent justice advocates. Some are held in place by anger, some aren't. What does depth psychology, what does what you're saying have to offer someone who is looking at the world and seeing disaster? Learning about my inner critic or my inner passivity, how is that supposed to help me, or help anything?

Peter 41:02

Well, if you're looking at the world and seeing disaster everywhere, you might be under the influence of your visual drive. Where you're allowing that capacity -- the capacity of our eyes and our imagination and feelings -- focus primarily on the negative, focus primarily on all the unpleasant things that are going on in the world. And we can tip the balance in such a way that emotionally we begin almost, I wouldn't say to fixate, but certainly to spend much of our time putting our attention on what is more negative and seeing it on negative terms. And so we think we're being objective when we do that, but we don't realize that we have an emotional bias when we do it. And the bias is our determination to somehow be drawn to the negative, where we feel more helpless. Then our passivity gets more activated and we're drawn back into that whole passive side.

Jean 42:22

Oh, so cool. I get accused frequently of being too optimistic. And I'm thinking to myself, who wants to live your negative life? But, what you just said made me understand. You're saying we have choices, we can look at and be drawn to the negative side, or we can look at and be drawn to the positive side.

Peter 42:57

And we can see both sides. See the negative and feel that as responsible citizens, we want to know what's going on in the world. And we also want to feel our own strength to accept what's going on in the world, feel like we can be part of the solution. So we have to keep our strength up, you know, sort of balanced, so then there's more balance. And then we look for pleasure, we look for all the ways that we can find pleasure, and it's all over the place.

Jean 43:34

I know people who turn off the TV because they don't want the negativity in their household. And you're saying, they feel as though they have to turn off the TV, because they don't have enough inner resilience to handle it?

Peter 43:52

That's possible. And sometimes it's a good idea to turn off the TV depending on what you're watching, but if you're watching the news, and all the cable shows, and so on, that can certainly grate on your nerves after a while and you can get overloaded. You're looking for a balance, trying to find a balance. But if you understand the temptation to get pulled into that sense of weakness and helplessness, then it's more easy to find that balance.

Jean 44:29

Okay, you know, something keeps flitting in and flitting out as you talk. It's like, you know, how the feeling of all the light is shining, and then all sudden it goes away? And so, the light that's coming in, because one of the reasons I was just so attracted to your work, I said, this man has the clue to have to be effective as an advocate, and have a life worth having.

Peter 44:45

Well, I hope so. I've certainly had a lot of success with my clients. And a lot of them are doing extremely well. So, I know it works.

Jean 44:57

Talk to me about resilience, say more about that.

Peter 45:07

Well, it's just a matter of moving away from the passivity. The more you move away from the passivity, the more you feel it. It's what gives you the most pleasure anyway, it's what feels the best, you're going for what feels good. Once you clear out the negative side, your interest is in feeling good and enjoying life. And a big part of enjoying life is to have that strength and resilience. And to connect with that and make that part of your life. You can get tired, worried over a lot of the things that are happening, but then you have a good night's sleep and you bounce back the next day and you're back and you're feeling that pleasure, gaining your own strength and resilience.

Jean 46:05

What keeps people from doing this kind of work?

Peter 46:09

It's so humbling, initially, to come into the realization of how much we don't know. Through our ego, we like to think we at least know so much about ourselves. And to suddenly discover how blind we've been, is utterly humiliating. That's the first sense of it. And then to realize on top of that, how much we're attached to all these negative feelings, impressions, and ideas. And even, you know, to self-destruction and violence, and I mean, you see so much of that in entertainment, in the movies, and people are drawn to

all that distraction and negativity. So, it's so easy to get pulled in that direction. And I think that's part of why people don't want to let go of what is more sensational, what is more exciting on that level. The fact that we also are so compulsive about being pulled in that negative direction, that's quite an affront to our ego.

For instance, just the whole idea that someone wants to feel loved, accepted, at the same time that you're unconsciously ready to be so sensitive to feeling rejected, or unliked and disapproved of, and criticized. Where does that come from? It's like, people don't even quite want to see that. It's all I want to be loved. It's all about wanting to be loved and accepted. We don't want to see that kind of ugly side of ourselves. It's who we are. It's that we haven't evolved enough to have cleared all that out of our system. It's part of nature, they invite the positive and the negative, good and evil, all those polarities exist all through nature. And they exist within us as well. So, we're fighting good and evil within ourselves.

Jean 48:31

I know people who think they're the smart ones, because they can see all the negativity of the world. And that people who don't focus on that are just living in a fake world, or being unduly optimistic. Or being with the law of positivity, they're trying to be positive, putting on a false positivity. And you're saying, they are the ones who attach to the negativity?

Peter 49:10

Well, yeah, everyone, it doesn't matter where you are in the political spectrum, everything we're talking about applies right across the political spectrum to everybody.

Jean 49:21

Yes. I agree with that.

Peter 49:25

And I sometimes, you know, read liberal publications and blogs, and the intelligence there is wonderful. The degree to which the people are smart is apparent, and the quality of the writing, everything, but the research areas tend to be such a focus on the negative, as I see it, in a lot of them. And, it's not balanced. It's not balanced. It sees through too narrow a perspective.

Jean 50:04

Okay, so the antidote to all of that negativity, you've used that word balance about 10 times since we've been talking. So the antidote to the negativity is not to go positive, that would feel too unnatural, it is to achieve a balance, to recognize what is and also look at and seek to create a positive life for yourself. I call it a life worth having. So my next to last question. Is there anything that's intriguing you now that you're working on? Or are you enjoying working with your patients? What are you up to now?

Peter 50:56

I'm just happy to keep things plugging along. You know, I'm still writing every year, I think it might be the last, I'm not sure. I'll come back and follow with enough steam or energy to keep it going. But I think I'll do it again this year. And I plan to keep seeing clients for many, many years, as long as I possibly can, because it's just so enjoyable, I won't be seeing nearly as many as I used to because I can't deal with the energy requirements of that. But I enjoy it so much. I don't have any particular idea of where it's all going or where it's going to go for me. I'm just happy to just keep plugging along.

Jean 51:46

Well, I will tell you, I am so delighted you kept going, I have probably read about half of your blog post, I could not get enough of it. I kept saying, is he really saying this? And then I read another one. And I found it totally fascinating. I know you have educated a lot of people. And I'm sure some people are sitting at home or listening to this thing: did he really just say that? And trying to figure it out. So please, tell us, anybody who wants to get in touch with you, how can they do that?

Peter 52:23

The best thing is to go to my website, which is, *WhyWeSuffer.com: Transformative Insights from Depth Psychology*. And there's more than 250 articles there. They're all free. And then of course, there's my books, which are available at Amazon. So, that's the best way. Send me an email, and we'll see what happens.

Jean 52:50

You have a great name for a website: *WhyWeSuffer.com*.

Peter 52:56

I chose it because I thought it would be a good one for the search engines, that was the main reason.

Jean 53:02

And that's probably why I got it. One of my mantras is, you don't have to suffer. Suffering is a choice. Pain is not a choice necessarily. You know, somebody stabs you, you feel pain. So that's not the choice, but the suffering part, that's the choice. So thank you. And I am delighted that you're here, and appreciate you sharing your wisdom with us.

Peter 53:39

Thank you, Jean. I really enjoyed it.

Jean 53:41

I'm going to listen to it multiple times to gain even more insights. He said a lot of subtle stuff, and I want to capture it all. You will notice he rephrased some of what I had to say to make it even a healthier way of looking at the world. Here's what I gained. Peter says we are wired from birth to experience negative emotions, fear, despair, rejection, abandonment. He also implied that we're wired for the capacity for joy and love and other positive emotions. Most of us want to feel those positive emotions, yet we find ourselves continuously recycling all that negative emotion stuff. The question is why? And what can we do about it? According to Peter, two parts of ourselves are competing for attention and pulling us towards negativity. Our inner critic tells us what's wrong with ourselves. And our inner passivity keeps us mired in helplessness, believing that all is lost, and there's nothing we could do about it. Both the inner critic and the inner passivity work together to keep us reliving and believing all is lost, and we are helpless. But we have a choice in the matter. The choice is to recognize when our inner passivity is keeping us stuck. And when our inner critic is helping to keep us stuck by beating us up and telling us how wrong we are for even being stuck. But Peter believes we actually do have the capacity to see the world as it is with all of its hardships, and at the same time, to enjoy our lives. In fact, our capacity to enjoy our life actually gives us greater strength and resilience, to be an advocate for change. This is what I want for myself, and what I hope you, too, want for yourself. The first step is to choose to face ourselves, including the part we don't want to acknowledge. I hope you enjoyed the interview as much as I did. Thanks for listening.