

## RECOVERY AND SELF-PITY

By Pete Walker

925-283-4575

As published in: "Recovering: The Adventure of Life Beyond Addiction"

I am often saddened when I hear adult children parrot the "conventional wisdom" that it is bad to feel sorry for yourself. This so-called wisdom shames people out of normal, healthy, self-pity. Everyone needs to occasionally feel sorry for themselves. Tears for the self are some of the most potently healing experiences of recovery. Self-pity, in balance and moderation, is extremely healing. Recovery, in fact, is often very limited until there are profound experiences of feeling sorry for the self.

Self-pity in balanced moderation is the miraculously releasing gift of "self-sorrowing". Self-sorrowing is one of the most beautiful and restorative of emotional experiences. There is nothing in the world more centering than a good unabashed cry about one's troubles. Nothing dissolves the awful abandonment pain of the inner child like a good cry for the self. This is especially true when the adult child imagines himself back in the past tenderly comforting his crying inner child.

Self-pity is only dysfunctional when it is excessive. This is sometimes seen in people who spend extreme amounts of time feeling sorry for themselves. Although long periods of self-pity can be healthy in some phases of recovery, it is possible to get stuck in and addicted to self-pity. This is sometimes the case with the long term recoveree who does nothing effective to recover the losses of her childhood. She may become so disempoweringly lost in self-pity, that she never acts to change abusive or neglectful situations. This kind of excessive self-pity usually looks so dysfunctional that it may even alienate others from healthy and moderate self-pity in an all-or-none kind of way. Self-pity, however, is not a black and white issue. We do not need to throw out the baby of self-compassion with the bathwater of excessive self-pity.

Crying for the self is especially therapeutic when old pain resurfaces from unresolved childhood traumas. The average dysfunctional family leaves its survivors with lifelong tendencies to flashback on some occasions into shame, fear and emptiness. Unashamed crying can often resolve and work through the pain of such experiences.

It is a sad statement about our culture that we have no positive term for the healthy side of self-pity. We are praised as compassionate when we feel sorry for others, but there is no corresponding term for feeling sorry for ourselves! Little wonder we are so codependent. Society's taboo against self-pity offers us no choice but to limit our compassion to caring only about the pain of others.

We need to resist those who toxically shame us for being on the "pity pot" whenever we express normal sadness about our painful life experiences. This is true whether they are past or present. Our recovery can only be aided by the rejection of this pervasive social indoctrination against self-pity. We must refuse to accept the nonsense that it is good to

feel sorry for others, but not for ourselves. We must strive to reclaim for ourselves the potent healing tool of sometimes feeling sorry (sorrow) for ourselves.

Unfortunately, the right and need to feel sorrow for ourselves can be very difficult to recover. Most of us have been thoroughly brainwashed against self-compassion by our parents and the wider society. Many of us also had this shaming of self-compassion reinforced by the religion that we were raised in. Consequently, many survivors have come to believe that self-pity is some awful sin, rather than the precious gift that it is. Some adult children may be helped to reclaim their self-compassion by remembering that even Jesus felt sorry for himself. He modeled the positive side of self-pity when he wept in the Garden and on the Cross.

Unless the survivor of the dysfunctional family feels unashamed sorrow for the child she was, she will never really understand the magnitude of what she lost. Crying for the inner child and her losses from poor parenting often spontaneously awakens a heart-felt desire to compassionately re-mother her.

Tears of self-compassion can also motivate our efforts to give our inner children the unconditional love that they so eminently deserve. . . that was so unfairly withheld from them. Tears for the child can also spontaneously awaken a desire to champion and re-father our inner children – to protest unfair treatment and to protect them from abuse.

Compassionate crying for the self can also create deep, bodily-based feelings of peace and relaxation. Balanced self-sorrowing often fosters a miraculous rebirth of the heart from the death of the obsessing mind.

Healthy self-pity increases an individual's experience of being heart-centered. As such, it often nurtures an inner softening that attracts real experiences of human love. As much as I can welcome myself in my sadness, that much can I thoroughly welcome and receive another.

Most of us must fight very hard to recover the right to self-sorrow. This hard-won right will hopefully never be given up or outgrown. We must always have a special place in our hearts for feeling sorry for ourselves.