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Overwhelmed and Feeling All Alone.

By Dr. Frank Carter

The Buddhist religion professes a basic philosophy that begins with “Life is struggle.” I find great comfort in the fact that someone recognizes what I feel and what I see in my clients’ every day. Many people living a Western-style existence are very familiar with the feeling of struggle, yet are unable to take comfort from such wisdom because our modern competitive, capitalistic culture can be so alienating (for instance, with regards to the necessities of family, the obligations of marriage, the participation in acts of community and finally the invalidation of our self-image and self-worth).

When I am coaching a parent, a business executive, a healthcare or legal professional, it is my job to pull back and look at the big picture in order to show them what part they play in the larger experience of life, and how they contribute to their unhappiness. I help them see why they are struggling, feeling overwhelmed and alone. There is always a reason, just not the reason they hear in their head.

While it may seem obvious that we are all interacting with each other as individuals, because that’s how the brain works, it is not an accurate reflection of what is really happening. During every interaction with another person, you are actually thinking and feeling what they are thinking and feeling simultaneously. This is how the brain works. There is a price to pay when you carry the burden of understanding the other person’s pain.

The brain does not experience itself isolated in space. Rather, the brain recognizes its existence and its entitlement to continue to exist, while simultaneously, in the presence of other beings, recognizing the other person’s right to exist and their entitlement to continue to exist. In other words, your brain is constantly processing two lines of data: Your data or “the self” and then the data from “the other”.

When you are feeling overwhelmed and alone, it is a distorted perception that you learned in childhood. To simplify this concept, think of a broad picture that takes in the full landscape of your life and a narrow picture which focuses in on the specific

activity at hand. Typically, the people I work with are focused on the struggle regarding the activity at hand and don't pull back and look at the landscape in order to appreciate how their efforts fit into their bigger picture.

People who come to me generally can't do this, because they are too focused on the narrower picture. Why are they too focused? There is an association or habitual feeling in the background that is generating a deep sense of fear. Their sense of being overwhelmed and alone is too great to handle because of the emotional association of fear in the past. As a result, they can only see themselves and what they need to do in the present moment in order to feel safe, in order to feel accomplished, and in order to feel worthy enough to be taking up space.

Feeling overwhelmed and feeling alone is also providing them with some important feedback. For the time being, imagine that the human body and brain (the mind) are just one big feedback mechanism. The mind takes in information and throws out information. It takes in information through its sensory organs (feelings), and it throws out information through its behaviors (words and actions). When your words and actions are well balanced according to the sensory information you are receiving from the environment, you feel safe, you feel happy, you feel satisfied and accomplished. This is what I call feeling "triumphant". When your words and actions do not balance with the sensory information, you feel overwhelmed and alone.

When the feedback loop is in balance, you feel triumphant. When the feedback loop is out of balance, you feel fearful and in extreme cases, you start to feel depressed or worse. This is the range of warnings that the brain provides you to say there is something out of balance between the data coming in and the energy going out. Clients typically describe this feeling of being overwhelmed as too many things to do and not enough energy to do them. In reality, overwhelmed means too many problems that have gone unsolved and too little energy to resolve them because of some deep historical beliefs and memories that were acquired in childhood.

It is a common belief that any difficulty experienced on a day-to-day basis, which accumulates day after day after day, is perceived to be a function of a dysfunctional process of reasoning/thinking. There are people who believe that if they could just solve this problem everything else would fall into place. The solution is to think more clearly, or to simply think more about their problems (rumination). These people are also told by friends and family that they are not looking at the problem correctly. Their perspective needs to be adjusted. They need to let go. I would disagree!

I would like to offer a different perspective which essentially represents the model of coaching that I use with my clients. Rather than accepting responsibility and blame for feeling overwhelmed and alone, I offer my clients that feeling overwhelmed and alone is actually a familiar, or normal, feeling for them. They have felt this way all of

their lives. It's just that as you get older, you start to run out of energy to continue to deny the truth by doing all of this thinking.

Another truth is that this feeling of being overwhelmed and alone is a feeling that was taught to my client when they were children. In other words, feeling overwhelmed and alone is not the fault of the person feeling their feelings, but rather it is an example of a feeling that the client is re-creating for themselves in order to feel normal. And what feels normal? Everything that mother and father taught us, whether through modeling or lectures, is the truth regarding how we should live and what we should be feeling.

In a recent article in Psychology Today written by [Linda and Charlie Bloom](#), they acknowledge an overriding problem in society regarding feeling stressed. "Our culture's failure to prioritize the needs of the family over the values of free enterprise is a primary factor in the disintegration of the American family." And the disintegration of the American family must imply the disintegration of the individual as well as. While our democratic republic and capitalistic system continues to exploit its population, living in America continues to pressure the population. More and more people, men and women, husbands and wives are pressured into feeling inadequate to fulfill their obligations to themselves and therefore their children.

What is even sadder is that, as the population succumbs to the pressure of dual wage earners and increasing taxes, and less individual time, the sense of feeling overwhelmed and alone continues to be modeled in everyone's home for the children to witness and then to model themselves.

We would do well to take it upon ourselves to fight back cognitively and emotionally. Not only to fight the models of our childhood, which have incapacitated our abilities to behave effectively, efficiently and to persevere in order to live up to our full biological potential, but to also stand up to the pressures of our ever present competitive reality. Yes, life is struggle, but the sense of victory is also available to those who are willing to change something about themselves. People who feel overwhelmed and alone can be helped. Not by being told that their feelings are irrational, but by understanding where the irrational feelings come from, accepting that those values are counterproductive today, and then committing to changing something about themselves in order to combat this losing battle.

If you were to live a life based on your biological potential, then deceit and dishonesty towards others would be unnecessary, and you would eliminate the need to be dishonest toward yourself. With such changes, the sense of feeling overwhelmed and alone would disappear. I teach my clients that the objective in life is to enjoy the day. There is a process to change from seeing every day as painful to experiencing every day with a sense of satisfaction. It takes practice. It takes discipline. It takes effort. You take one day at a time and you only do the things that make you feel like

a person, like the person you were supposed to be without the dysfunctional models of childhood.

For more information, visit my website at www.peaks-coaching.com (858-454-2828)