

Combat Fatigue Psychosomatic Disorders

UNITED STATES NAVY TRAINING FILM

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COMBAT FATIGUE

PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS

This is a heart. It belongs to Seaman Second Class Frank Williams. It's the right size, performs regularly, and it's normal. Frank served on an LST at Saipan.

This is a head. It's Paul's Romanski. Watertender First Class. He was aboard the USS Cooper in Leyte Gulf. No breaks, no other injuries, it's a normal head.

This is a back. It's well-formed, never been damaged. It's normal. Seaman First Randall Phillips was a 20-mm ack-ack man on a destroyer at Guadalcanal.

This is a stomach. Albert Burton's. He's a Marine PFC. Fought at Iwo. It's a good, normal, healthy-appearing stomach.

These are parts of four different men. They have one thing in common: pain. They're all normal but for reasons that neither the X-ray nor the microscope can discover, they hurt.

Okay, turn on the lights. Put your clothes back on, man.

These men are very much like you. They have real pains, there's no question about that. And each has a real disability because of these pains. The same as you. Nobody knows that better than we doctors. Well, you say... if these pains are real, shouldn't there be a physical heart disease? Or bone injury? Or damaged tissue? Or a stomach ulcer? Or some other tangible cause responsible for the pain?

There is a good cause, even though it doesn't show up in the test tube or in a strictly physical examination. However, it's just as real and reasonable a cause. Only this is emotional.

One important emotional cause is fear. Something normal and natural in all of us. A man who says he hasn't felt fear isn't being honest. Everybody has a different way of defining fear: here's what the doctor means when he speaks of fear.

Well, what about those feelings? Is your heart beating faster, as your stomach feels sort of queasy, as though the bottom has dropped out, hands and armpits sweaty? Everyone in that car feels that way. Just look at that girl in front: she is really jittery. It's the body's way of saying: "Easy, brother, I'm scared!"

Now, let's take a look at what these reactions mean, why we have them.

Scare a man and, automatically, his fear machinery starts rolling, wakes him up all over, and prepares him to recognize the danger. Nerves go into action, wake up a couple of glands. The glands come through with a shot of adrenalin, and all hell breaks loose. Nerve cells get hopped up. You may perspire freely. Your mouth may get dry as powder, or your bladder contracts and makes you feel that you need to urinate. Well, it all makes sense, you see more clearly. You hear more keenly. Muscles tense. Your body's ready to act, and act fast. But to act at top speed calls for extra energy. That's where the liver comes in: this is the fuel tank. The fuel is sugar, and here's where it's stored. Getting scared gets it up, out to the blood stream, to your muscles that need it. To get it there quicker, your heart pumps faster and you breathe harder, bringing in more oxygen to change that sugar into strength. These are normal instantaneous reactions to fear. After the situation clears up, these reactions disappear, and you're back where you started.

There are a lot of other normal emotions that involve bodily reactions too.

“There's only one man who is honest, as well as sincere! You all know who he is! He is one of our most beloved citizens, our leader in his field, and our leader in civic life! A man whose untiring devotion and unselfish application to the improvement of our community has endeared him to the hearts of us all! He is our good friend, our honest and upstanding Ernest J. Rat!”

“Harry, everything's getting cold! What's keeping you?”

- Alright, alright, I'm here!

- The eggs and the coffee have been on the table for ten minutes already, what's been keeping you? I can't understand, you said you'd be right down fifteen minutes ago.

- Oh, I cut myself, those damn blades are no good.

- Why didn't you tell me?

- Why don't you stop nagging all the time? I probably wouldn't have cut myself if you hadn't kept yelling up every two seconds!

- Oh, you're always late, always something! I'm getting sick and tired of this sort of thing. Now sit down and eat your breakfast before it's completely ruined.

- It's always pick, pick, pick... Nothing ever happens peacefully. It's getting so I can't even shave in the morning without being nagged. I can't eat. I'm all fed up with this picking and nagging! I'm all fed up with everything! I just can't eat a damn thing!

His address is on this letterhead here. “Dear Mr. Gorman, in reference to our telephone conversation of the 29th...”

Those pains or peculiar feelings that you're having are the same kind of reactions as Harry's upset stomach, or any of the other physical reactions you've just seen. But there are a couple of things about them which make them important: first, they're an exaggeration of what usually happens. They're more intense, you're more aware of them.

For example, let's take the stomach.

When the fear reaction sets in, the stomach tends to shrink a little and its usual movements slow down a bit, which gives you a sensation of butterflies, or an ongoing sinking feeling. The sight, smell or thought of food leaves you cold. You have no appetite for it. Now, stepping up this fear reaction, food becomes repulsive, it turns your stomach. It's no dice: you're all fed up, or giving it another jolt, the old stomach really gets gripped. When fear sets in, your heart may beat faster. When it really gets going, the heart feels about three times as big as it is and it bongs away like a trip hammer. It may even become painful. The hammer may feel like it

has sharp points. A sudden or extreme wallop of fear may make you feel as though a riveter were hammering right inside your skull, or your muscles stiffen in ache. Your back may feel like it was squeezed in a vise, or it throbs painfully.

All of these reactions are simply exaggerations of what usually happens in your body in everyday life. The other thing that's funny about these symptoms of yours is that, pop! All of a sudden, there they are! There's no obvious reason for them. In other words, you're acting as if you were scared to death. And for the life of you, you can't figure out why.

But here's the same man three months later, and this isn't unusual. You may find that you, yourself, are the same way. Nowhere near of battle and yet, you look and feel as though you're still out there. This fellow looks like he's scared. He feels scared. In fact, he's so scared that it hurts. And the strange part about that is, there's nothing to frighten him. Nothing? Well, there's really something. It's a matter of still fighting the same old battle. It's right there with him, inside. He's never gotten rid of it. Those reactions keep popping out at odd times and in odd places.

Why do these reactions occur in some people and not in others? Why does your body have these marked physical reactions? Or why now, long after a tough spot, like a battle station, is your body reacting as it did? There are reasons. Didn't happen by chance. There wasn't any grand lottery in which your name was pulled out of a hat. But there was a definite reason; an emotional reason, buried deep in your mind, that kept pushing, pushing, trying to get out.

It may have been hate, or resentment against one of your buddies or one of your officers. Or it may have been a feeling of guilt, that you haven't fought as well as you thought you should have. Or that you aren't good enough to do your duty properly. Maybe you were afraid of being afraid. But whatever the reason may have been, it made you feel uneasy. It was unpleasant to you so you put it out of your mind. But this didn't really get rid of it. It boiled around, deep inside with tremendous energy, out of touch with everything else, growing in strength the more it was held back, until it became a powerful pinching trying to get out. Because its true nature had to be hidden, it looked for a disguised means of expressing itself.

The payoff comes during a period of excitement, when the body's all keyed up, just like it would be before and during battle. Then the organs of the body are working at full blast, and they can give expression to anxiety. The impact of battle upsets the balance, and all it takes is the extra pressure of the anxiety to throw the whole body out of whack, because the pressure of the anxiety is added to the danger. The result is physical symptoms that really get you down. And what's more, long after the danger has passed, the anxiety continues to press. To press through these same physical symptoms. The first thing you know about it is that you have a pain or physical discomfort where you didn't have one before. Then you worry about it. Here, the vicious cycle begins. When you worry about it, the anxiety gets bigger, and then the symptom gets bigger. When the symptom gets bigger, you worry about it more, which reinforces the anxiety more, which makes the symptom still bigger. And so on, until finally it's so big that you're all wrapped up in it. Then your symptom stands between you and the things and the people you like.

How do these symptoms express hidden emotions? In organ language. The way organs react expresses the attitude behind your emotions, like this man, who is vomiting. His vomiting expresses the hidden idea: "I can't stomach it". A man who has no appetite is "all fed up". The headache is an expression of the attitude that this situation or this person gives me a

“pain in the head”. The tender or painful feet are an indirect way of saying: “I can’t stand it”. A backache? “I can’t bear this anymore”.

Now, the question is: what’s behind your own symptoms? If you can get to the cause, you can get rid of your symptoms. Your doctor can help you get to the bottom of it. Talk to him about it. He knows it’s real. He knows you’re not goldbricking. And most important, he knows your symptoms can come from hidden emotional problems, something trying to find a means of expression. You’re not even aware of what’s going on. You respond automatically and then, all of a sudden, become aware of the fact through pain or discomfort or some other symptom.

Well, what do these symptoms mean to you? They mean you pay a price for them in sleepless nights. In pain. In uneaten food. In being unable to do the things you should do. They stand between you and the things you enjoy doing. Between you and your friends and relatives. Before you went away, you used to be a bright and... well, friendly guy. Now, to your friends who know you well, you’re no longer the same guy. Now, they see you as a stomach, or a headache, or a big throbbing heart. In fact, you look like one big symptom to them.

Well, now you know something about the meaning of symptoms, how they are the body’s expression of a hidden emotional problem. Naturally, we want to get rid of them. The first important step is to accept them. I don’t mean for you to say: “Oh, what the hell!” I mean, don’t fight against them. That’s like fighting your shadow. It’s the cause you’re looking for. There, let me show you what I mean.

Let’s suppose that this thing bothers me like your symptoms bother you, and naturally, I want to get rid of it. In my case, I try to wipe it away. Of course, I can’t get rid of it by doing this, no matter how hard I try. It’s still there. The closer I get to the cause, the bigger this thing grows. But If I move away from it, it diminishes, but it’s still there. This is a kind of shadow-boxing, similar to worrying.

Now, what does all this mean? Well, it means there’s something else behind it. The real cause. To remove the shadow or the symptoms, you have to remove the cause. Same with your symptoms. They’re the shadows that are being caused by something else. The morale to this little story is: don’t fight against the shadows, your symptoms. Accept them for what they are. Symptoms of something else. That’s the first step towards getting rid of them.

Here’s a man that has been badly banged up; he’s handicapped in much the same way as you are with your emotional problem. He can’t go where he wants to nor do what he wants to do. He can’t do his work nor have his fun. But he knows something about his handicap that perhaps you don’t know about yours. In fact, he knows five things.

He knows, first, exactly what got him where he is, that he’s been banged up in an accident. He knows, second, what he’s got to do about it, accept it for what it is: a temporary limitation of his activity. In the meantime, he’s doing whatever he can. Not everything. That’s not possible. But what he can: he knows that he can do nothing but wait until he gets better. He knows, third, where he stands with others. And he knows, fourth, where he stands with himself. He doesn’t feel insecure with them or with himself. And fifth, he does know that he will get better.

When you know these five things about yourself, your symptoms will bother you less. They won’t cut you off from your surroundings as much. You’ll begin to enjoy things again. You worry less about your symptoms as they diminish. The pressure of your hidden feelings will

let up. Then you'll worry about it all less and less, and eventually your symptoms will disappear altogether, and you'll feel like your old self again.

THE END

Keep the Fleet to Keep the Peace

1946

Transcript: Nicolas Guechi