

Metaphorizing My Pain

Category: In Pain

written by Kit Loke | October 10, 2017

My chronic neuropathic pain is a physical reality, not a product of my imagination. It is the result of a spinal injury sustained during a “simple biopsy” of a spinal cord tumor detected through an MRI. The operation was performed by an eager neurosurgeon in 2004. When I woke from the anesthesia, I could hardly breathe; I felt like a tight band was around my lower chest wall. I also couldn’t move my legs, and they were extremely sensitive to touch. Since then, the pain has expanded and intensified.

A typical dreadful day starts when I am woken up by pain all over my body. Hot, coarse sand grains are pulsating inside my calves and thighs; fine nails are drilling into my feet and buttocks; sharp knives are plunging into my back; needles are pricking my chest; mallets are pounding incessantly on my arms; warm, fine sand grains are swimming inside my palms and puffed-up fingers!

It was another night with bad sleeping posture. My back must have glided off the three standing pillows propping up my back, curving my spine into a bow and pressing part of it against the air-filled pressure-reduction mattress, igniting pain all over my body. My head must have dropped forward off the pillow, compressing my cervical nerves and kindling pain in my arms and fingers.

By the time I finish my four-hour morning routine of sitting up, lying down, being hoisted onto a shower commode to toilet and shower, being hoisted back into bed, being turned left and right several times for grooming, and finally being hoisted down into my motorized wheelchair for the day, I am usually in agonizing pain. My feet feel like they’re on a tray of warm stones. My calves seem to be wrapped with coarse sandpaper. The small, air-filled cells of my Roho cushion are pebbles under my buttocks. My backrest is a stone-studded board.

The escalation continues with increasing power over the next 24 hours and beyond. No escape! Except meeting the pain upfront. Just sit upright, keep my spine straight, sit still, breathe in and out very slowly, guide the qi to the pain areas, be mindful of it: I sink into the pain—identifying it, recognizing it, analyzing its nature, quality, patterns, locations, and triggers, so that I can learn to prevent it from spiraling into another almost unbearable episode.

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