YOU ARE BIGGER THAN THE PAIN
Six Comfort Strategies for People in Chronic Pain

Re-Focusing
Moving
Noticing
Enjoying
Re-Thinking
Relating

Daniel Lev, Ph.D.
Preface

I met Daniel about 5 years ago in the context of mutual studies related to the management of pain. We are each mature professionals who have dedicated decades of our careers seeking to better understand available options to help others overcome painful physiological conditions. My own background in nursing -- including working with individuals in the last stages of life, and in counseling individuals with chronic conditions has given me in-depth exposure to the magnitude of need. My own strong background in clinical hypnosis has taught me that intense suffering can be reversed and individuals can learn to recapture lost hope with their own internal resiliency. It is a matter of learning. Daniel Lev and I found common ground in our optimism and our ideas that the body and mind hold within untapped resources that can be redirected to serve this urgent need.

It is with great pleasure that I now read the completed volume *You are Bigger than the Pain*. Having immersed myself in literature about pain management for over half a century I can attest that Lev’s work provides a comprehensive approach coming in from a rarely explored direction. Instead of avoiding pain, Lev advocates active pursuit of comfort. This important work provides an opportunity for individuals to redirect their own present and future to a comfortable sense of normalcy.

Daniel Lev’s book is as informative as it is captivating. This volume focuses on recognition of one’s own capacity to create and maintain comfort even when confronted by trying circumstances. In so doing, Lev also addresses one of the great contributors to the experience of pain -- the sense of helplessness related to the way that pain draws energy, resources and possibility for change away from the sufferer.

In contrast to more traditional approaches to working with pain -- which generally aspire to management through control or avoidance of painful physical sensations -- Lev’s approach emphasizes the development of a hypnotic mindset. His unique work begins with a foundation of rational thinking, understanding and behavioral adjustments. From this solid beginning, the creative redirection continues to expand using evidence-based stories, explanations, and exercises. The powerful potential of suggestion, working with expectations, and of self-monitored states of conscious awareness provide fertile opportunity for change. Conscious alterations of one’s focus of attention can evolve into a shift in unconscious perspective wherein comfort itself becomes the focal point.

*You are Bigger than the Pain* acknowledges that pain can be powerful, frightening, and insidious and can even take over one’s life with a self-reinforcing process that increases sensitivity instead of reducing it. Pain does that, and thus we have huge populations of
individuals whose lives are compromised. Frequently, the individual then seeks relief through control (medications and procedures), through avoidance, denial or distraction. Some clinicians advocate acceptance as another approach to this problem; however, in Lev's experience, most clients shy away from this option, choosing to actively to alter their situation. All of these are strategies that continue with discomfort in the lead. Lev proposes to turn this around, and put comfort in the leading role.

Pain is complex in its expression; individuals are complex in their responses. Lev's considerable efforts to be comprehensive with his studies involved years in the making. His clinical experiences in therapeutic pain management settings led him to a seemingly inexhaustible conundrum -- the individuality of the expression of pain, coupled with personalized attempts to mitigate the sensations. This work reflects Lev's in-depth examination of the world of those who have been trapped in the redundancy of a pain experience. What Lev found was that despite all of the observations, information and resources, and individual attempts at adaptation -- a large segment of the population in need were left underserved by available resources. Thus the inspiration for Lev to transcribe his wisdom into a readable, manageable guide that can reach out to people in need, both near and far.

You are Bigger than the Pain provides an innovative guide for release from the loop of discomfort, distress and confinement. The strength of this work is also its weakness. Lev sought to make it as comprehensive as possible. This noble goal led to an expansive unwieldy treatise. Driven by his own commitment, he sought to refine the massive information into a meaningful collection of concepts -- the overriding and most central core concept being emphasis on comfort.

Lev's thesis is that through working with individual capacity to enhance one's own comfort, there is a natural progression of pain reduction. As one's focus of attention is consciously altered, the internal and unconscious perspective of misery shifts – and as this happens, pain sensitivity in the nervous system calms down, leading to increased comfort. The pain settles into a context more fitting to the overall life experience. In other words, acceptance of the presence of pain can be concurrent with a redirection of attention into an active pursuit of comfort. This action on the part of the sufferer stimulates a neuro-plastic cascade that leads to a more adaptive lifestyle as well as enhancement of quality of life. That positive redirection becomes a new directive for the life experience providing a fulfilling cycle of displacement of the maladaptive spiral. Little by little, the individuals become empowered in their own capacity to focus where they choose, and the disempowered pain recedes.

Pain may continue to have a presence within one's life, but learning to work around such an intruder can substantially alter the qualitative life experience. Yet rallying the energy for re-direction can be challenging in its own way. The enhancement of comfort involves an entire experiential deviation; it involves habitual responses, emotions, daily schedules, social
response and self-reflection. It requires time, self-exploration, awareness of the signals the body produces and a learned ability to assess the signals. It involves a contemplation of what comfort feels like, a search for meaningful experiences to draw from, and an ongoing supply of hope for a harmonious life experience. It involves learning to work with one’s own conscious and unconscious internal resources in a meaningful and deliberate way.

This book offers a tutorial for how to develop needed skills. The concepts are available for individuals who haphazardly open the book to scan the contents, for those who just want a quick fix, and for those who are willing to make a commitment of dedicated effort to redirect their lives. The book partitions extensive reading separately from the boot-camp intensive; it is arranged in a style to facilitate finding a path that works for the reader regardless of their readiness to make a commitment. The formatting into sections is at once directive and permissive. It invites the reader to find one’s own direction. This choice-making helps position the reader on a path to stabilize life areas that may need serious re-direction. Even the floral logo reminds participants of different facets of the journey by subtly suggesting directions available to address any present discomfort.

This work brings together the wisdom Lev gleaned from the most reliable sources -- those in pain. It combines his passion for helping others with the considerable knowledge amassed and now organized into meaningful lessons that guide participants through the process of change. Daniel Lev's work is a masterful collection of skills woven together with innovative thinking and a permissive perspective that opens a door to invite change.

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YOU ARE BIGGER THAN THE PAIN
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You have just picked up a book that may change your life for the better. I know that sounds a bit dramatic, but I've seen it happen again and again. If you are like many of the people-in-pain I've worked with over the years, you may find that its easier than you think to shift from frustrating efforts to control, remove, numb out, manage or even "accept" pain and focus instead on how you can get more comfortable around the pain.

I invite you to free yourself from the never-ending pilgrimage from doctor to alternative healer to the next promise-monger, pill-pusher, or overconfident surgeon and return back to the only person who can make a real difference - yes, that's you! You can use the "Comfort Skills" in these pages to build a new life despite the ravages and losses you've had to endure in the face of pain. Come join those who have taken up these practices and found more comfort and more engagement in life.

When it comes down to it, the purpose of this book is NOT to help you "live with the pain." Its aim is to invite you to empower yourself to "live life." As you open it up you might make some very pleasantly surprising discoveries...

Daniel Lev's wonderful book, You are Bigger than the Pain, is a treasure chest that clearly describes a variety of practical and effective strategies for managing chronic pain. This rich resource provides information in a way that allows the reader to easily select the tools and strategies that best match their own goals. Every person dealing with chronic pain will find the book useful; it provides them with tools that will empower them to gain more control over and feel more comfort in their lives.

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(Excerpt from Preface)

Daniel Lev, PhD is a licensed clinical psychologist who for over twenty-years has adapted meditation, hypnosis, and other "Comfort Skills" to help many people in chronic pain to find their way to increased comfort and a better life. He presently serves the people of Hawaii on the Island of Oahu. You can contact him through ComfortClinic.org.