



BURNOUT

The sun will set without thy assistance.

The Talmud

Are you working so hard that you never seem to have any time off? Are you constantly struggling to get things done or meet some objective? Are you living to work? Are you feeling tired and exhausted all the time? It might be time to do some major re-assessments before you completely burnout.

Isn't it curious how sometimes a good attitude can work to your detriment? To set goals and put all your effort into achieving your objectives is a proven recipe for success. However, sometimes being overly conscientious, or focusing too much on the desired result can distract you and pull you off your center. Burn out is not so much a physical phenomenon so much as mistake in your thinking. Unfortunately the tendency to push so hard for success that you burn out, can appear at any age.

A mother brought her very shy 16 yr old daughter to see me. Despite doing extremely well at school, the young teenager felt terribly tired all the time, and was so thin that she looked anorexic, despite eating a normal diet. Her hands were deep red and so cold that she had to wear gloves. Sometimes they turned purple, but tests for Raynaud's syndrome were negative. She also had a habit of falling recently and there were several big bruises on her knees and ankles. Her demeanor spoke of hopelessness. Her energy was so weak, it was as if she wasn't even living inside her tiny child like body.

When I questioned her about her tiredness, she merely said it was due to having to work so hard to pass her A-levels during the last year. Before then, she had had more time to go out with her friends and have fun. Now she had to study all the time. Everything else in her life was fine: happy family, lots of friends, but her only exercise was walking, and all she wanted to do was curl up at home and not go out anywhere. It seemed an effort for her to even answer my questions.

As we talked, I noticed her eyes were fixed on a position down to her left. So I asked her what the image was that she was looking at. Surprisingly, she said 'A Beach'. It was an idealized beach, a combination of all the beaches she had ever been to, and there were people playing and having a good time. As she described it, her mouth began to quiver. She admitted feeling sad. There was such a contrast between her hard working life and that beautiful beach. I asked her if she believed that she had to work really hard to pass the exams? Yes, but it was only the teachers that pushed her, she told me, not her parents. She was such an all round good student, that all the teachers pressured her to do well in each subject. And since she didn't know what she wanted to do, she was trying to do them all equally well.

Then she admitted that the teachers didn't really push her. Her school had quite a friendly, relaxed, country atmosphere. Wondering why she had developed this exaggerated belief about studying so hard, it soon became obvious that she was mimicking her father. He worked as an accountant from home and was incredibly serious and diligent, often spending long hours helping his clients. I could tell by the



way she talked about him, that she really admired her father. In fact, it was quite likely she was a chip off the old block. She probably had his genetic disposition as well as absorbing his beliefs and attitudes.

At some point, she must have decided that becoming an adult meant that she had to work incredibly hard like her father. Part of her wanted to remain a child and longed to play like she used to. But the rest of her had turned into a slave driver as she strove to excel in all her subjects to please everyone. She was also worried about the choices she had to make. How could she decide which direction to take for university? What would happen if she made the wrong choice? As she looked towards her future, it seemed like the rest of her life would be nothing but hard work. No wonder she felt so sad, tired and depressed.

Looking at her hands that were so cold and red, I asked her to notice that her body was giving her a message. Hands are about doing things, holding things, reaching out and touching things. Her hands were obviously not happy with what she was doing - and she was 'caught red handed', so she was the culprit herself. Her recent falls and wounds on her legs, spoke of being 'brought to her knees', probably a message about letting go of control. She was so bright, she had been using too much will power and deciding everything with her head.

The antidote I gave her was simple: listen to your heart, follow your heart, and then put your heart into everything that you do. Let your heart lead your head instead of using so much will power to over ride your feelings. When your heart is in what you are doing, it feels like play. I also talked to her about being true to who she is. She cried, and said she didn't know who she was! But gradually she understood that she had the rest of her life to discover who she is, and that although she might make mistakes, everything she chose and experienced would be an important part of her journey. She promised to take better care of the little child inside, by listening to what she really wanted, and taking time off to play.

Without love, the acquisition of knowledge only increases confusion and leads to self-destruction.

J.Krishnamurti

If you are feeling burnt out, ask yourself a few questions:

1. Looking at how your life is going right now, intuitively guess how many steps off your center are you?
2. Make a list of all the goals and objectives you are working so hard to meet.
3. Assess each one: is your heart in this? Is it something you really want? Is it true for you? Delete any unnecessary objectives that you can.
4. Are your goals possible? Do they conflict with one another? Would it genuinely be good for you and for others, if you achieved them?



5. How will you know whether you are progressing towards each goal, and how will you know when you have achieved them? Is the time scale realistic?

6. If they are true for you, how can you make them more fun?

7. What else can you do to bring your life into better balance? How can you honour your heart and take better care of yourself and your desires?