

The Key to Acceptance: Understand That Everything Changes With Time

By [Claire Marsden](#)

“If you argue with reality, you lose, but only 100% of the time.” ~Byron Katie

I love this quote. Ironical, really, because when I first read it I was furious—furious with my reality and anyone who encouraged me to accept it. In my mind to accept [chronic illness](#) was to accept defeat.

I had just been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, an incredibly painful condition that had me bedridden most days and unable to care for my then two-year-old daughter, never mind myself. My home became filled with carers and aids and adaptations.

Rather than starting a new career as a newly qualified occupational therapist, I was struggling with the fear of lifelong pain, the shame of unemployment, and the guilt of not being the active mother I desperately wanted to be. I was in no mood to accept such circumstances in life.

So how did I move from a position of resistance to one of restoration? How can we find some wiggle room in situations that may feel utterly immobilizing? Well, chocolate and cake help, but what really started creating space for growth was the Buddhist notion of impermanence and the insight, acceptance, and mindfulness that flowed from that.

Impermanence is a universal law; every single thing is in flux. Take the British weather, for example. We know it's unpredictable and always changing, so when we go on holiday here we often take boots and raincoats as well as sun cream and hats!

We see this same principle mirrored in ourselves as we change with age. I remember a time when I was washing dishes and, in looking down at my hands, was taken aback at how much they resembled my mother's. Soft lines and delicate wrinkles that had found a home on my skin stared back at me.

The deep realization that not a single person or thing is fixed and all is ultimately impermanent can cause some sadness and anxiety, but within this there is a freedom and hope.

The Glass is Already Broken

Someone once asked a well-known meditation master, Ajahn Chah, in a world where everything changes, how can there be happiness?

The teacher held up a drinking glass and with much compassion explained, “You see this goblet? For me this glass is already broken. I enjoy it. I drink out of it. It holds my water admirably, sometimes even reflecting the sun in beautiful patterns. If I should tap it, it has a lovely ring to it. But when I put this glass on a shelf and the wind knocks it over, or my elbow brushes it off the table and it falls to the ground and shatters, I say, ‘Of course.’ When I understand that this glass is already broken, every moment with it is precious.”

When I read this and really let it sink into my bones, slowly, gently, something shifted. I realized then all human life is fragile—sickness doesn't discriminate.

Though my ill health had initially caused so much loss and sadness, I was able then to move from a place of “Why me?” to a “Why not me?” It cooled my rage, and the first shoots of [acceptance](#) began to show.

We will all experience pain at some point in our lives. It is part of the package of being human. Accepting this can help ease the suffering enmeshed in pain and encourage us to truly embrace and appreciate life's pain-free moments, the pockets of joy.

Saying Hello to the Here of Our Circumstances

There is a wonderful story in Pádraig Ó Tuama's book, [In the Shelter](#), about a photojournalist who was returning to a tribe in Papua New Guinea where she had lived as a child. Within this tribe there was no word for hello. Instead, upon seeing someone you simply said, "You are here" and the response being equally clear was "Yes, I am."

Isn't that wonderful? No judgment—just acknowledgement of what's here. When we say hello to the here of our circumstances, no matter how dire or unfair they seem, we're better able to accept them.

Acceptance is not defeat. It is an acknowledgment of the truth. Once we accept where we are we can move forward with greater clarity, courage, and strength. It's an opportunity to become unstuck, to experience well-being in the midst of our symptoms and beyond our symptoms.

The Power of Mindfulness

One thing that helped me get unstuck was [mindfulness](#), which means conscious awareness of our moment-to-moment experience, without judgment.

When I began to tentatively practice mindfulness each day I soon realized that my experience of pain was never static. It changed in its intensity and location, and ultimately had many flavors. Sometimes it was a stabbing or burning sensation, at other times a dull ache. I could observe how it felt in different parts of my body and how, like waves, it had a tendency to rise and fall. I was shown how my experience of chronic pain was, like the weather, ever changing.

This helped me shift my focus from one of resistance to flexibility. It removed the sting of emotional suffering from my pain, creating a much less devastating and more manageable illness experience.

I was finally able to whisper a faint hello to the pain and the emotions around it, and the practice of listening became a sort of self-hospitality. I could welcome what is just as I would welcome a friend.

Within this I also saw the flip side of impermanence, the gift that nothing is set in stone. I was told I would always be in constant pain, but I knew my pain experience was fluid. I had occasional respite from it, even if it was just one hour a day, and with new pain knowledge and Buddhist principles I was learning to emotionally disengage from it.

Seven years after my devastating diagnosis I actually recovered from the pain of fibromyalgia. That was over three years ago, and I have never had to take pain medication for it since, but that's another story.

As it stands I'm currently learning to navigate life with another painful chronic illness—hello, broken glass—but I'm much better able to manage it now that I understand the universal truth of impermanence and have nurtured the willingness to say hello to the here (albeit at times begrudgingly).

If a black mood does settle on me I try to take myself out for a mindful meander in nature.

When I can be still and behold a whirling turn of birds, twisting and twirling like leaves caught in a breeze, it cuts through the chatter and noise, my frets and fears. It's a sweet balm for life's concerns.

Mindful moments like these, when there is peace in every breath and joy in every view, are sacred to me. They remind me that there is so much beauty in the world to balance the pain. In nature I feel truly hushed, seen, found, and grounded, enabling me to appreciate the present moment and helping to create the chance of a promising future.

Happiness is, after all, an inside job. It's not about having perfect circumstances; it's about making peace with what is and making the best of the hand we were dealt.

Practicing mindfulness, appreciating nature, and understanding impermanence are some of the things that have helped me—and could help you too. When we embrace what is, enjoy what we can, and accept that all things inevitably change, peace becomes possible.