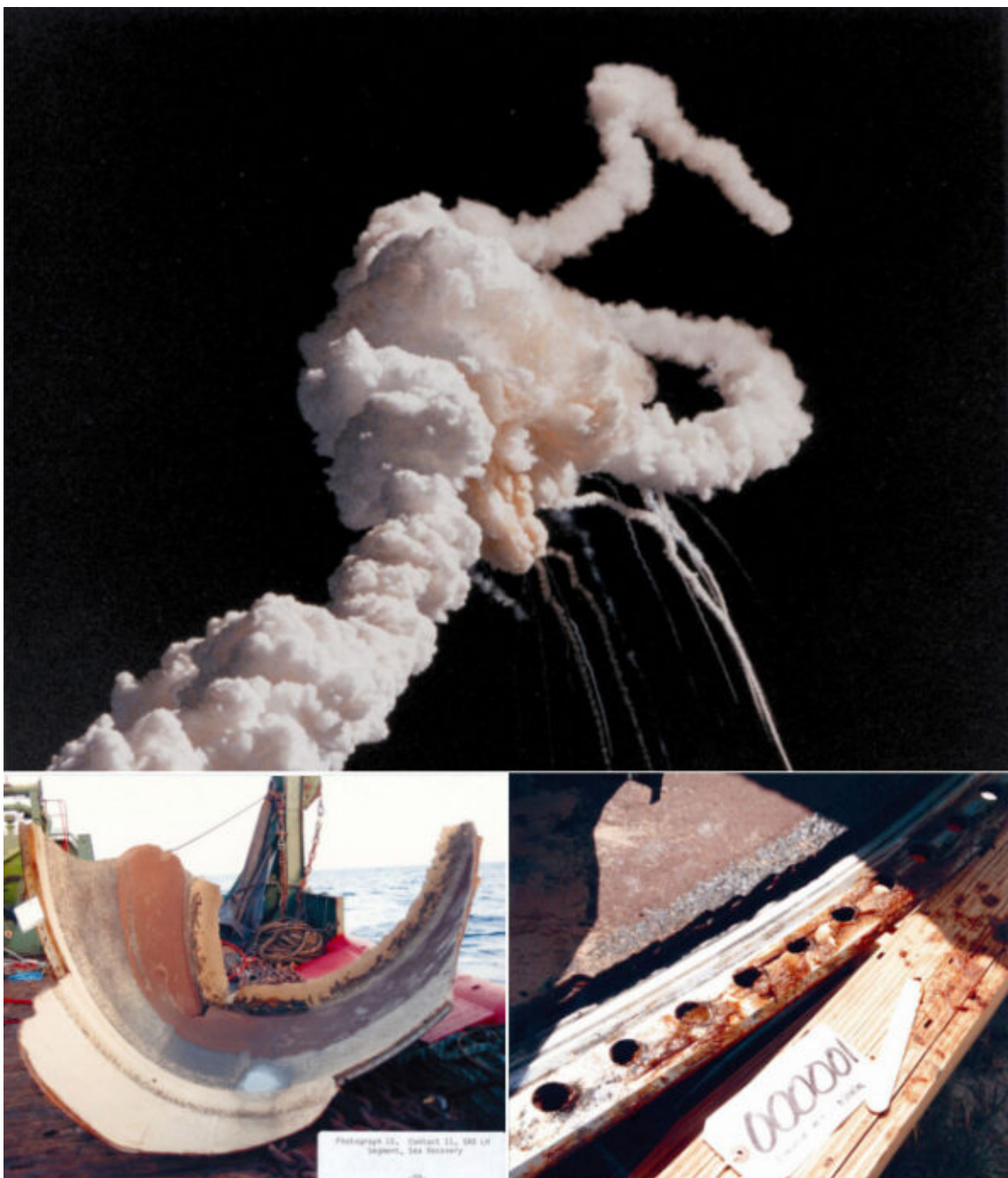


# The Need for Awareness

How can you solve a problem in any realm if you don't understand the relevant aspects of it; especially if the problem is complex. Consider the complexity of building a skyscraper or spaceship. There are endless details that have to not only be addressed but mastered. None are unimportant.

When the Challenger space shuttle exploded in 1986, killing the seven crew members, it was discovered that a small "O-ring" leak caused the explosion. What is disturbing was that there was knowledge of the potential problem from the beginning in 1971 that was essentially covered up. So, the people making the final decisions were not fully aware when the decision was made to launch the spacecraft. But the complexity of that project pales beside the intricacy of the human organism.



## The human body

There are 50 trillion cells in the human body and 80 billion brain cells. Each neuron is connected to 10,000 other neurons. This central control system maintains a delicate balance of the body's chemistry, metabolism, blood flow, temperature, and this list is almost infinite. Every bodily function is balanced by an opposing reaction that maintains this delicate balance. The baseline state is called, "homeostasis." You, through various sensors are in constant contact with the external and internal environment to monitor and control your responses in order to survive, regenerate, and thrive. Pain is just one of the many sources of sensory input. You cannot interpret or treat a patient's symptoms (reactions to the environment) without understanding the world they live in.

But one step deeper is the need for the patient to become fully aware of **all the factors** that are affecting his or her bodily functions. The only person than can really figure this out is you. The way you process the world around you is based on your early childhood programming. It is the "filter" by which you interpret sensory input – whether it is physical or mental. For example, there are people who are able to immerse themselves in ice water and maintain their body temperature for up to an hour, whereas I can't tolerate a 30 second cold shower.

If you were raised in a chaotic family without feeling nurtured and safe, you have been programmed to view the world from a hypervigilant perspective. So, your baseline existence is on "high alert." This creates a chronically defensive neurochemical state in your body and the data shows the people become ill with serious diseases and don't live as long.

Awareness is the first and necessary step on your journey to health, as what you're not aware of can and will control you. If you're unaware of the impact of your environment on your body's response, you will be ruled by feelings that you have no idea where they are coming from.

## Defining Awareness

Awareness is seeing the world as it actually is – not just through your interpretation of it. Pure awareness is almost impossible in the human experience; we look at life through our pre-programmed perceptions of reality that start to develop at birth. But the closer we can come to pure awareness, the more functional we can be as human beings.

Awareness is the key to developing meaningful relationships; in a one-on-one encounter, the greater your capacity to see a situation through the other person's eyes, the greater chance of developing intimacy. Intellectually, we understand the importance of awareness, and yet most of us continue to struggle with gaining true awareness. Why is that? Consider the following:

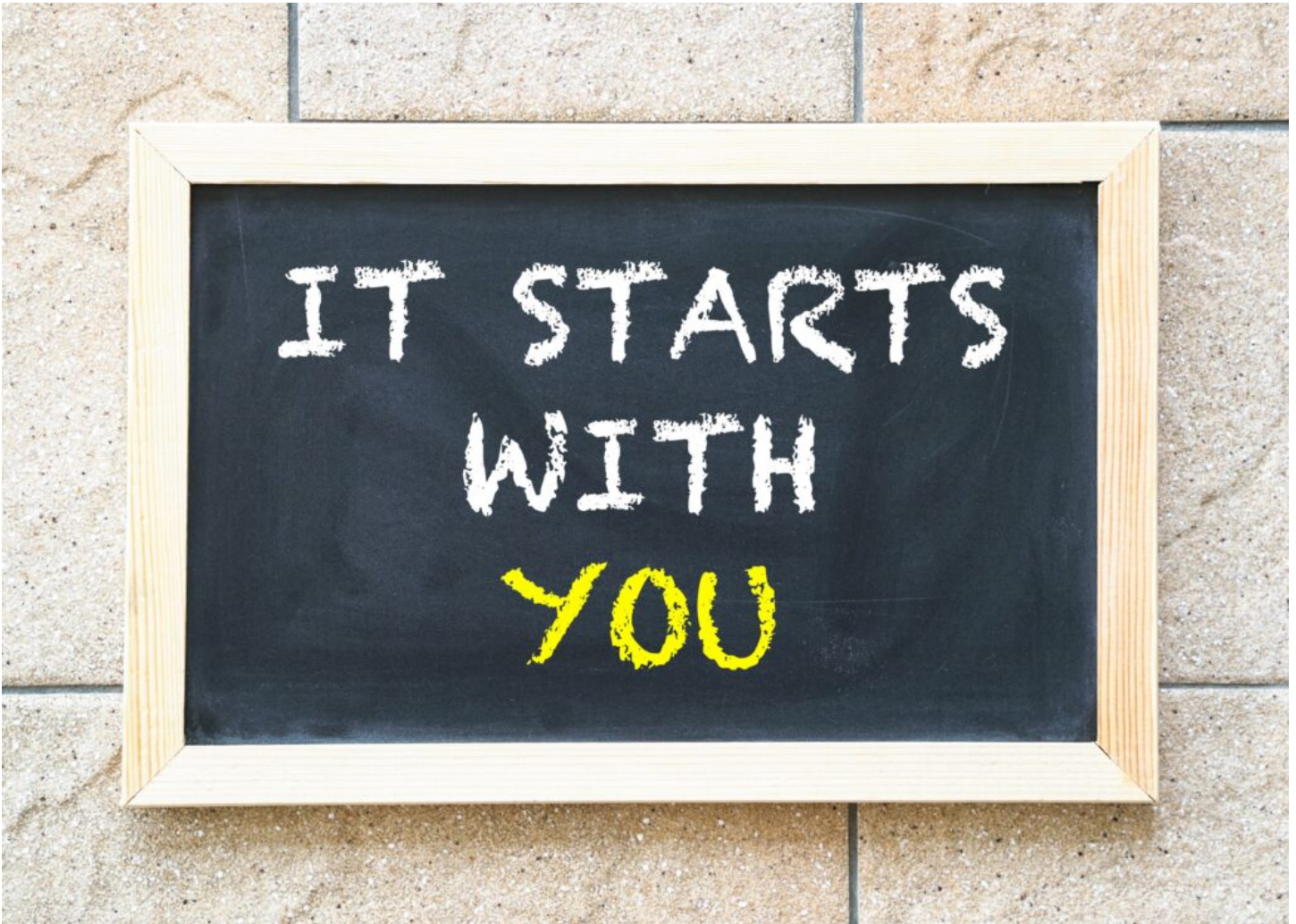
- Anxiety clouds awareness, but we are often not aware of our anxiety until it becomes disruptive.
- Anger covers up the feeling of anxiety, making it yet more difficult to be aware.
- The adrenaline that is released with anger decreases the blood flow to the frontal lobes of your brain. You cannot think clearly. Your brain is also flooded with inflammatory proteins that also distort your perception of your surroundings.

## Becoming Aware

There are several types of awareness that are necessary to learn for you to solve your chronic mental and physical pain.

- Understanding the nature of chronic pain. It is a neurochemical problem that is rarely amenable to structural interventions.

- Becoming aware of the nature of the solutions. They are centered around rewiring around the unpleasant (and permanent) circuits in your brain and also learning how to lower your body's inflammatory response to threat.
- Awareness of how your environment is affecting your sense of well-being. For example, if you are in an abusive relationship, no medical interventions will counteract your body's need to survive. The root cause must be addressed and every situation is different. BTW, the lifetime incidence of physical domestic violence is 28% for men and 32% for women.
- What was your home life like during the first 12 years of your life? Was it loving, supportive and nurturing or chaotic? It sets the stage for how your brain develops the rest of your life.
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### **Awareness – the foundation for stimulating neuroplasticity**

Using techniques and approaches that stimulate your brain to physically change structure is a core concept in solving chronic pain. All of our basic life skills are memorized and are automatic. For example, you don't think about which muscle to fire next when you walk or talk. How about learning an athletic or artistic skill? The same holds true for unpleasant experiences, such as disruptive thought patterns or pain. Just like riding a bicycle, they are permanently embedded in your nervous system. In order to reroute or create new and more enjoyable circuits, you have to be aware of what is already there. If you are continually doing battle with an unknown opponent, how effective are your efforts going to be.

So, one basic aspect of solving pain, is to allow yourself to feel it. You might say, “I am in pain already and am really feeling terrible.” But what is actually happening is that we have a strong tendency to suppress emotional pain and repressed thoughts and emotions are a huge threat. If you don’t allow yourself to feel emotional pain (being vulnerable) then you will experience physical symptoms. There is no place to run.

The basic steps of stimulating neuroplasticity are 1) awareness 2) separation 3) reprogramming. You have to feel to heal.

Chronic pain is resolvable once you become aware of its nature, your reactions to it, the relevant variables that affect your perception of it, and learning your set of tools to drop it down and often extinguish it.

The first step in becoming aware is understanding when you are *not* fully aware. Then you can use awareness as its own healing force.