

Done with Dieting Podcast #70: River of Misery



Full Episode Transcript

With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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On today's episode of the done with dieting podcast, I am talking about something that sounds terrible, but it's something that we all go through whenever we want to change a part of our lives. Whenever we want to change a habit, whenever we want to create a new behavior, we go through something called the "river of misery" or the "valley of despair." They're both used interchangeably.

And this is the point in our process where things get difficult. And when things get difficult, we want to give up.

So, in today's podcast episode, what I want to share with you are some of the ways that you can get around or get through the river of misery so that you can come out the other side and be successful in your goals.

Tune in right now.

You are listening to the done with dieting podcast. The podcast for women in midlife, who are done with dieting, but still want to lose weight and feel good in your clothes.

You know that diets don't work long term. But you feel like there's this secret that everyone else knows that you just haven't figured it out yet.

I am your host, Elizabeth Sherman. And I've helped hundreds of women get off the diet roller coaster, change their relationship with food, exercise, and their bodies.

Through this podcast, my goal is to help you too.

Welcome. Let's get started.

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Hey everyone, welcome to episode 70 of the done with dieting podcast. Today, we're going to talk about something that I've been talking with a lot of my clients about recently. And you know, it's kind of funny, I had planned on talking about something else today.

And then, I woke up in the middle of the night with this idea that I had to talk about this specific subject which is what we call the river of misery or also known as the valley of despair. And I know those terms sound terrible.

But it's something that happens to all of us whenever we are going through behavior change or habit change. Whenever we want to change something in our life, we always go through this process.

So, whenever we want to do something, and this could be something as easy as cleaning out a closet. It could be something like reorganizing your pantry or doing a kitchen make-over. Whatever it is we always get motivated to do the thing. And we start ripping out the guts of whatever it is that we want to change, we're full Gusto into this project.

And then, at some point within going through the motions, and cleaning up, and doing all the things, we lose steam. This is what we're talking about.

My husband renamed his parent's house, computer network. The house of half-finished projects. I think it's hilarious because so many of us have this same problem that we start a project and then we don't finish it. We don't have the follow through to go through it and to finish it to completion.

Now, sometimes we judge ourselves for this. And when we judge ourselves for this, we walk by that thing. Like the suitcase that's in the corner and we have this little friction in our head that just beats us up every single time. And it doesn't make us feel good.

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When we do these things, when we judge ourselves for not finishing a project, when we feel shame about that, or when we feel demotivated or judgment. The last thing that we want to do is go exercise, or go eat a salad, or do any of those things.

When we feel bad about ourselves, we want to curl up on the couch, or curl up in bed, and eat Oreos, and surf the internet which just makes us feel worse at the time. Right?

But anyways, I've noticed that with many of my clients over the years and I have this kind of theory of 70%. That for so many of us, when we're talking about weight loss, when we're talking about a health goal. We'll get to about 70% and then we'll give up.

I think that the problem is this river of misery that our brain starts telling us, this is too difficult, it's not worth it. And part of the reason behind that is because we forgotten what it was like when we started the project. Our brain has forgotten the pain that we were in or the reasoning that we wanted to start it in the first place.

The idea that we had in the back of our heads of life is going to be better when I'm able to run a mile, or what I think I'm going to feel like when I am able to complete a half marathon, or whatever it was that project that we started on that we decided that we wanted to accomplish.

So, when we start out and decide that we want to do this thing, this habit change, whether it's exercising, or whether it's eating better, or even if it is something like a kitchen makeover. It doesn't matter.

And so, the purpose of this podcast episode is really to help you through that experience. Now, I think where things break down for many folks is that when something doesn't work right.

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So, let's say that I want to establish an exercise routine. And I don't want to do it for any particular reason other than I just want to be able to be strong as I age. So, maybe I don't have goals to run a marathon or a short-term thing, but I have a longer vision.

What happens for many of us is that we get to a point and we're like, you know what? I just don't want to exercise today.

And so, what happens then is that we blame the routine. We blame ourselves, and then we also go out and we look for a new exercise program, or a new diet that is going to teach us to be more adherent. And this is where things break down. Because there is no shortage of information on the internet about what we should do. What actions we should take.

In talking to most of my clients, almost 100% of them, we all know what we should be doing. We all know that we should go for a walk. We all know that we should eat a vegetable and we all know that we shouldn't drink some water. And those are really the basics.

The problem is that we think that something outside of ourselves is going to give us the answers. Now, this goes back to the think, feel, act cycle. The main tool that I work with my clients on. And the think, feel, act, cycle what it says is everything that we do, right? All the actions that we take going for a walk, not going for a walk, eating a vegetable, not eating a vegetable.

The reason that we do those things is not because of knowledge. It's because of how we feel or how we think we're going to feel when we do the thing. And that trump everything. When we know that the reason that we are adherent to an exercise program, or a diet, or whatever is because of the emotion that's behind that thing.

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Then, we know that external diets cannot help us, external exercise programs cannot help us in order to be more adherent because they cannot change our feelings. When we start out on a new program, we feel motivated.

And the reason that we feel motivated is because we have this idea in our heads that this program is going to be the ticket. This program is going to work for me. It worked for my brothers, cousins, aunts, girlfriend.

But the reason why we feel motivated is because we have this thought in our head that thinks, "this is going to work for me." And when we have that thought, this is going to work with for me, I like this. Then, what happens is we feel motivated. We feel inspired. We feel determined because it worked for someone else, it can work for me too. That's very inspiring.

And so, we do the thing that the diet or exercise program tells us to do. And when we do that, we get the result that we are looking for. But at this 70 to 80% mark within our journey, our brain starts thinking, you know what? This is too hard. This is difficult.

I'm not getting the payoff that I thought that I was going to. The weight loss isn't coming off fast enough. It's not working fast enough. And so, when we have these thoughts, of course, we don't feel motivated anymore.

We don't feel inspired, we don't feel determined. What we feel is discouraged, we feel uninspired, we feel frustrated because we are believing these new thoughts. But our thoughts change like the wind.

And here's the thing, when we start on any program, we think that we are going to be motivated from the time that we start all the way through to the end. What we don't expect is the river of misery.

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The river of misery is when we start to get uninspired. The river of misery is when things get tough. The river of misery is when things get boring and this thing that we're trying to do becomes our new normal. How do we stick with the habit that we want to develop?

I was recently talking to client of mine, and we were talking about her exercise. And she was like, you know, I don't love exercise and I just want to love it. And I think that this is so funny because most people's perception of me is that I love to exercise. And let me clarify that, I love the way exercise makes me feel after I've done it.

Now, what happens is every single morning, I sit on my couch, I do my morning routine. It brings me such peace and joy. And I drink my coffee and it's so peaceful and I love it.

At some point, I need to get up off the couch and start my day. And so, what I've done is I've set a goal or a hard-stop for myself that after my second cup of coffee, that once that's done or 7:15 in the morning, I have to peel myself up off the couch and go exercise.

And as I explained that that is exactly what happens. I do not want to go exercise. And at this point, 15 years later, I still do not want to exercise. But I have an agreement with myself that I am going to show up for myself.

What I mean by that is that I am going to get ready. I already have my exercise clothes on. I've already known that that is part of the equation. Meaning, that when I get up in the morning, the very first thing I do is I put on my exercise clothes. Because if I had to put on my exercise clothes and go upstairs and exercise, I wouldn't do it. And so, I've created these habits for myself that make doing the thing easier.

Now, when I say that I have to show up for myself, what I mean by that is I require that I put on my shoes, and I go up into my exercise space, and I start doing whatever it is that I've decided that I'm going to do for that day.

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Now, I always give myself permission to stop exercising after 10 minutes, I have to at least, start. And I can probably count on one hand the number of times in the past five years that I've stopped after the 10 minutes. I have to feel pretty bad in order to do that.

Because what happens is once we show up for ourselves, once we put our shoes on, and once we go out and do the thing, then it just becomes easy, our bodies already warmed up. It's like when you've already cooked the healthy meal, why ever would you then go and order out. It's easier to eat what you have than to go order, and wait for it, and pay for it, and so on, and so forth. So, it's about reducing friction.

Now, back to my story about my client is she was so super surprised that I said I don't love to exercise. And she was like, you know, I see all these people running around the park. They look so happy, and I want to be like them. And what I think that we believe when we see other people exercising, when we perceive other people in the habits that they're doing, we think that they must love what it is that they're doing.

But going back to the think, feel, act cycle, there are many other emotions other than love, inspiration, motivation that will get the job done. And so, even though, I don't love the act of exercising, I am committed to it. I am committed to myself. I describe myself as being disciplined. I describe myself as being consistent. I describe myself as being focused. And so, there are lots of other emotions that will get the job done of exercising.

When I peel myself up off the couch, my brain wants to have a conversation with me about why we shouldn't do it. And I just don't entertain that anymore. This is our new normal and this is just what we do.

Now, I think where the river of misery in the valley of despair show up is when we start grieving our past experience. When we start thinking fondly about how things were easier before we started this new habit, before we started this new way of thinking, before we started this new experience.

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We romanticized how things were. Forgetting why we started the process in the first place. Some of the emotions that go along with this are resentment. Like, "oh, I am working so hard and I'm not getting the payoff." Or the poor me, the self-pity, oh, I have to do this. And I know these emotions because I've had these emotions when it comes to changing my behavior.

I was so resentful of my body, and I felt so victimized by my body. I felt such self-pity that I had to make all these sacrifices in terms of my health that seemingly no one else had to do. And then, what comes with those is the resistance in doing the thing that will produce the result.

We feel like, oh, I'm sacrificing so much for my body and my body isn't doing what it's supposed to do in response to that. And so, we're just like, well, I'm just going to give up. Even that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense.

This is one of the reasons why I work with my clients on a six-month basis, both in the Feel Good Sisterhood, as well as my private one-on-one clients.

And the reason is because when things get boring, when things get mundane, we still need to be able to push through and get to the other side. So that we can look back and say, "oh, I'm so glad that I stuck to it instead of giving up." Because we need that additional support when things get tough.

We need to be able to examine what the thoughts are in our heads that are making us feel the resentment, the pity, the self-pity. We need to understand what it is that's making me want to give up. What is making me feel bored with this? And then, how do I pivot? How do I position it so that it becomes something different, a different emotion, a different feeling?

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Because that right there is the gold. That is what's going to bring you the success. When you are committed to your goal, all the way through until you get to success. That is when you will feel proud of yourself at the end.

Now, I want to give you a few takeaways that you can implement in your process. So, the first thing is whenever you start a new program, a new diet, a new behavior change, whatever it is even if it's recycling. Be aware that there's going to be a point at which you are no longer motivated to continue. Expect it.

Because what I've noticed with all my clients and even with myself is that when we quote unquote fail, when we fall down, and things don't go as planned it's because we didn't have the expectation that we were going to experience something.

So, for example, when you are starting out with a new program, expect that there are going to be times that you are going to be bored. Expect that there are going to be times that you do not want to follow through on the plan.

Then, when you don't want to follow through on the plan, decide ahead of time, what you're going to do in order to help you get through that.

A good example of this is when I was trying to stop eating sweets after dinner. What would happen is when I prepared myself for wanting something sweet after dinner, then it was easy to not give into it. It was only when I stopped expecting it, that then I would go back to it.

And so, again, when we can expect that we are going to have a specific emotion, whether it's boredom, or whether it's resistance, or pity, or resentment or whatever. Then, we can take steps in order to address it.

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Now, the second piece is if you have a weight loss goal, and you're 70% of the way through your weight loss goal, and you're like, I'm just not feeling it anymore. I don't want to do these things.

What I want to share with you is that weight-loss cannot be your only motivator in eating properly and exercising and getting enough sleep. There has to be something bigger than that. There has to be another motivator because weight loss just isn't motivating enough.

It has to be something like feeling better, noticing how exercise gives you more energy, noticing how exercise reduces anxiety in your body. Noticing when you reduce processed carbohydrates in your diet that you don't get hot flashes anymore. Or noticing when you don't have as many processed carbohydrates in your diet that you don't have cravings as much anymore or you don't overeat.

Whatever it is, there has to be something better and more compelling than weight loss. So, weight loss cannot be your only motivator.

The next thing is we have to figure out why we want to do the thing. What's the bigger purpose? Because when we can focus on this other purpose, this bigger purpose, wanting to travel, wanting to play with my grandkids, wanting to live an independent life as I age.

What are the reasons behind doing this action? Why did you set off in this goal, in this way, in the first place? And when you can call on that bigger purpose and write them down.

Then, what happens is the excuses, and I hate that word, but the reasons that your lower brain is offering you as to why you don't want to do the thing. Those pale in comparison to the bigger purpose.

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So, my client, what she was saying is that the reasons that she didn't want to exercise were because it was hard. Of course, it is. And that it was going to be work. Yes, I understand. And that it was going to make her sweaty and she was going to have to shower.

And now, hearing all these things, you may be like, you know what? She's just being whiny. Well, okay. But these are all things that all our lower brains offer us. They don't have to be rational excuses. They don't have to be good excuses.

But when we hear them in our heads, they sound very compelling. And so, we have to be on to ourselves in acknowledging why we don't want to do the thing. And so, when we can write these things down, when we can knowledge them and really question them, that's when we can overcome them.

So, the last piece here is when we are in that river of misery, when our lower brain is offering us, these compelling reasons of why we don't want to do the thing that we're supposed to do, then we can talk to ourselves more than we listen to ourselves.

Call on those bigger reasons. Call on the purpose that's behind what it is that you want to accomplish. Call on that purpose that you've decided and how you're going to feel when you accomplish the thing.

The river of misery is something that we all go through and it's something that happens regardless of what the goal is. We will always want to romanticize how things were before we started.

But we have to remember that we started this for a particular reason. Whether it was to avoid the pain that we originally started with or that we thought it was going to be better on the other side of success.

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And so, when we can remember that when we are in the middle of the river of misery, that will make the journey so much easier.

That's all I have for you today. Have an amazing week. Everyone. I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.

Hey, thanks for listening.

If you're done with dieting and would like to work with me as your coach, I'd like to invite you to reach out to myself and my team to ask about programs and pricing. Go to elizabethsherman.com/contact to get started today. I can't wait to hear from you.

See you next week.