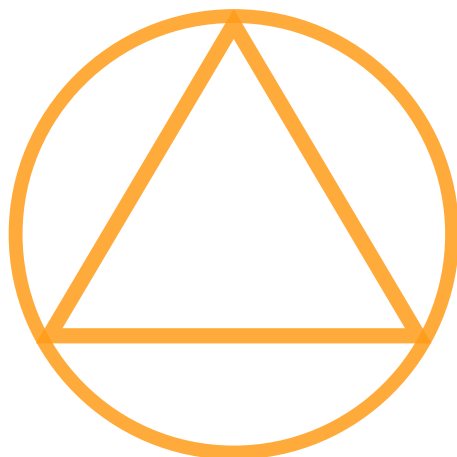


Diagnosis: Cancer - What now?



Thomas Bach
Reading Sample



Chapter 4: Findings/discoveries of salutogenesis research

You remember what I said about the findings of Victor Frankl. In addition to the idea that life should primarily be based on a positive vision, which we looked at in more detail in chapter 2, salutogenesis researchers add two further aspects: the comprehensibility and manageability of my illness or what life's fate has in store for me.

Salus is the Latin term for health or well-being and we know *Genesis* as the story of creation in the Bible. In other words, we are dealing with the question of how and where health or well-being comes from, where and how it originates. An important proponent and developer of the Salutogenic Model, Aaron Antonovsky, interviewed survivors of concentration camps on how they coped with their experiences. He recognised that those who coped badly, broken by the fact that many relatives and friends died in the camps, also died relatively quickly themselves, describing their lives as meaningless and not worthy or valuable. Others, however, who came out of these catastrophic events with a feeling of gratitude for their survival, saw and understood a deeper meaning in that fact. They survived for a relatively long time after their ordeal and were able to re-build a meaningful existence. He reduced his findings to the coherence of three essential factors: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

So, for your own recovery process, this means that it would be important to realise that your illness is not a random event, but that it developed out of your life. As confirmed in other non-fictional literature, your illness didn't come by chance, it is a specific result of the way you live your life. You reap what you sow.

This may sound strange at first. Am I supposed to be blamed or somehow responsible for falling ill? Most of us would reject that thought outright. Accepting responsibility would inevitably mean accepting you did something wrong.

It may be easier for us to recognize and accept our own responsibility by drawing a comparison to our car. If we don't fill it with petrol, it will stop running. If we fill it with the wrong petrol, e.g. diesel, it will stop running. If we don't use oil or use the wrong oil, it will eventually stop running, and so on. In other words, you need to look after your car by giving it what it needs, otherwise it just stops running. Obviously, the mechanics or the "engines" of our body are much more complicated. But in essence, the principle stays the same: give it the wrong or inadequate attention, and it will stop functioning properly. Our body consists of millions of cells, all with a very specific function as part of the whole. Many things can damage these cells. For example, stress is particularly damaging to the immune system, which of course we need in order to keep the cancer cells, that are always present in our body, in check.

Comprehensibility in this context means the realisation that you have often maltreated your body. How many times did you refuse to stop working, giving your muscles a break? How many times did you think there was not enough time to have a proper meal, and quickly bought something from a fast-food chain? How many times did you accept to do something, even though you knew you should have said "no"? These are all examples of your body giving you signals of distress, and it wants you to do the right thing. Realising and acknowledging this is an important step in understanding or comprehending your illness, and that it probably is a direct result of you neglecting the signals.

You may think that looking for other reasons, such as genetics or coincidence allow you to deny responsibility. But it would also deny you the chance of fully comprehending what is going on. You would look for external reasons outside your own influence as a reason for your illness. You would want to call it a freak of nature or the fault of your parents who provided you with such a problematic genetic make-up. However, genetic researchers have now discovered that although genes carry certain characteristics, these are not necessarily activated without some other influence. According to these findings, there must always be external factors that trigger the genetic programme. External factors that you are able to control or influence.

The nonsense about amputating the breasts of young women whose mothers have (had) breast cancer is, in my opinion, only the product of business-minded brains. Too often the medical industry uses the tool of "inflicting fear" to make people decide issues that are not necessarily the best for them. In fact, it is exactly this fear that causes your immune system to take another hit and to no longer be able to keep the cancer cells at bay.

Another level of comprehensibility will probably only emerge after some time. Looking back on your life before a diagnosis, you will realise that the disease put a break on it. Many patients seized the opportunity of this turning point in their lives as a chance to introduce meaningful changes. New and essential aspects were integrated into life after the diagnosis, often leading to a new, more conscious way of living. The understanding that illness can thus be a path to healing was enhanced. In some cases, people told me that the illness was seen as a gift that helped them to make difficult decisions deviating from the old and trusted way of life. In my opinion, this attitude can only be found after some time, because it requires reconciliation and a strong introspective self-evaluation.

So, once you understand that your actions determine your destiny, the next step in salutogenesis is to invite manageability into your life. If something is manageable for us, then we have the ability to deal with it in a constructive and life-enhancing way.

The worst state for your immune system is a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness, not being in control. However, these are exactly the feelings that are

present after an initial diagnosis and that take your mind hostage from time to time. The resulting paralysis and hopelessness severely limit the ability to act. This is a phase in which depressive moods or even full-blown depression may set in. During this time, it is almost impossible to get into a positive state and related readiness to act, because the tendency is rather the opposite: a blanket over the head and a "leave me alone" mentality spreads. If it has come to this, then the only thing that really helps is going to a specialist and perhaps taking antidepressants for a while. This self-made feeling of lack of control and hopelessness can greatly accelerate cancer growth, making healing become very difficult.

Thus, if within yourself, you discover tendencies of "I can't do anything about it," please consider the following:

This voice inside you that may want to throw in the towel, belongs to an inner part of you that wants to make itself heard. This subconscious part usually represents a need that you may not have given space to for a long time in your life. (You remember, giving and taking space is an important aspect of looking after your subconscious health!) Therefore, now is the time to give it some much needed attention and a lending ear.

During a controlled trance journey into the subconscious, one of my patients described the experience of meeting his inner child as follows:

"I see a dark stage on which a lonely figure is crouching. It is not very old, more like a child. It keeps repeating, 'I can't do it'. It longs for someone to come and do it for the child. It wants to snuggle up somewhere, to be protected and wants someone to take its hand."

Whilst working with the patient, we invited onto the stage another subconscious part that was very energetic but at the same time caring. It gave the child some comfort first, but then put it on its shoulder and together they tackled the things that needed to be done. In contact with this strong subconscious part, but never leaving the protective comfort of the inner child, the patient took the helm again and began his cancer treatment and therapy.

Now, of course, the questions arise again as to what or which therapy?

"What therapy am I supposed to use for my cancer other than what measures are recommended by conventional medicine?" This question is still typical for about 80 percent of people suffering from cancer. Unfortunately, as already mentioned before, doctors do not normally point out other methods, not even complementary ones.

This is where the mission of a responsible patient begins. The mission to not leave the management, therapy and recovery of the disease to his or her attending physician, but to take matters into his or her own hands again. Take back control!

Manageability also means taking the initiative, getting information, listening to second and third opinions and reading, reading, reading.

The fact that you have this book in your hands may mean that you actually believe there is such a thing as the psyche, that it has an important influence on your body and that perhaps you even believe that you can get healthy again. This allows you to increase your possibilities for manageability and enhances your recovery process in a positive way. By starting the process and by doing and internalising the exercises listed, the feeling of positivity will increase.

Last, but certainly the most important salutogenic level in your life, the third concept in the model, is meaningfulness. I already discussed this in the previous chapter using Victor Frankl's survival vision as an example. Through the exercise I showed you, I hope you were able to build a meaningful vision of your own future. But please bear in mind that your life should not "only" be meaningful for others, but primarily for you, from within yourself. By this I mean that you do not just experience being meaningful for your partner, children or parents, but that you also see meaning in your own existence by itself (even if you were to live alone in a cave). Only that way your life is worth living and worthy of preservation.

Thank you for your interest in this book!

With this sample chapter, we hope that - at best - you found some aspects useful and adaptable for your own life, or - at least - thought-provoking.

The Salutogenic Theory is one of many important principles/theories in our online training course to become a (psycho-oncological) cancer coach. Of course, the theory spans decades of research, experience and opinions by now and is thus a topic that cannot be reduced to five pages of text. We find, however, that just some parts of salutogenesis have proven enough and worth exploring with clients and with ourselves, in order to create a comprehensible, manageable and meaningful life.

We wish you all the best, take care,

Your TBAcare Team



Find out more about our programs and how you can help to accompany cancer patients and relatives on their individual cancer journey
at www.tba.care