

## The Cup Song

Could it be that the answer to chronic mental or physical pain is *The Cup Song*?

**Omega Institute, August, 2013**

Dr. Fred Luskin, author of [Forgive for Good](#), my wife, Babs, and I put on a [five-day workshop at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, NY](#). The course was intended to present the concepts of *Back in Control: A Spine Surgeon's Roadmap Out of Chronic Pain* as well as Dr. Luskin's concepts on forgiveness.

### Pain pathways are permanent

Most readers of this website already know that [pain pathways are permanent](#) and tightly intertwined with anxiety and anger circuits. As you cannot rid yourself of any of these patterns it is necessary to create alternative pathways. This can be done in several ways:

- Awareness, detachment, and reprogramming
  - Begins with connecting negative thoughts with physical sensations and then substituting appropriate alternatives
- Calming down the nervous system – [meditation techniques](#)
- [Play](#)

Play pathways are also permanent. People in pain lose their sense of humor. Reconnecting with those enjoyable pathways is a powerful way of shifting out of pain circuits.

### My wife

My wife is a professional tap dancer and accomplished in Balinese mask dancing. She has expertise in rhythm and movement. I asked her to be one of the faculty, as these types of practices can quickly reconnect and create new neurological connections. She was somewhat apprehensive about her role but agreed to give it a try. She turned out to possibly be the factor that had the most impact.

She began with just having us “scan” our bodies for tension and letting it go. Next she had us moving around the room with and without masks. Both of these exercises allowed the participants to relax and interact with each other.

### *The Cup Song*

Then she pulled out *The Cup Song*, which I had never heard of. It turns out that it is viral on the Internet and has been around since the 1930's. It was popularized by the movie, *Pitch Perfect*, starring Anna Kendrick.

#### *The Cup Song*

We all sat around the table and struggled at various levels to learn this rhythm with cups. We all began to laugh and the room changed. We kept trying and laughed more.

### The shift

There are many factors that went into the success of the workshop but within a day of “learning” this rhythm, the participants began to experience a significant decrease in their anxiety. By the end of the week

five of eleven went to pain free with the rest experiencing various degrees of relief of both pain and anxiety. We are staying in touch and almost everyone (with ups and downs) is continuing to move forward.

My vision for the week was to present enough of the [structured care concepts](#) so that people could implement them at home. I was hoping that most would engage and experience a shift in pain and mood over three to six months. There was not any part of me that envisioned the entire group experiencing a major shift.

### **Connection**

I will be writing about the Omega week in a fairly detailed manner and will learn more as the group gives each other feedback. There were clearly other factors such as videos of patient's successes, structured conversations, buddies, education, and active meditation techniques. However the concept of "playful" is what transpired as the most powerful force.

I have repeatedly pointed out that the concepts of the DOCC project are not a formula. What heals people is connection – to each other and to him or herself. The best part of who you are is when you are at play.

### ***The Cup Song or the gym?***

Here is an email from one of the participants who has made steady progress (ups and downs) over the last couple of months. He had been experiencing quite severe back and leg pain for about five years:

“Ah, the victim role, that is me seemingly all the time. All of David Burn's (author of *Feeling Good*) cognitive distortions are helpful to recognize in myself, but victimhood is the reminder most useful for me. I fall into it so easily!

I had a bad evening with the lower back several days ago. Instead of my usual hour+ strengthening and stretching routine, I practiced *The Cup Song* for 45 minutes and most of the tension in my back went away. I'm starting to synch the lyrics with the percussion! I'll need to go back to Omega for The Natural Singer In You to work on my tone and pitch!”

[Enjoy your day today](#)

Could *The Cup Song* be a key to healing from chronic mental and physical pain?

—Dr. David Hanscom