

# The Purpose of Suffering

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*It's part of life. We all suffer losses, disappointments, failures, and trauma. We all go through pain and hurts at some point in our lives. When we realize the true purpose of our suffering, we can use it as a means of releasing ourselves from situations that no longer serve us. And we can move forward and build a stronger, better life for ourselves.*

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We all have suffering, pain, sorrow, and hurts, painful and devastating events in our lives... like relationship break-ups, job losses, grieving, accidents, illnesses. Terrible things can happen; natural disasters, traumas, abuse, and losses. When we understand the purpose of suffering it allows us to process and deal with it with less struggle and turmoil. Understanding the purpose of suffering enables us to regain the power we feel we have lost when we experience pain and suffering.

We can start looking at our suffering in a new way. The first step to understanding suffering is awareness, and awareness comes from recognizing the power of our thoughts. Through our thoughts, we can begin to see suffering in a new light.

## ***Moving through suffering***

As we move through suffering, things go from bad to worse, and begin to fall apart. Our symptoms become more painful, and impossible to ignore. Here, the true purpose of suffering reveals itself: suffering is a catalyst for change.

For example, when a toothache becomes so painful that it is impossible to ignore, we seek the help of a dentist. When our level of unhappiness in a relationship becomes intolerable, we often make the difficult choice to sever ties with a friend, family member or partner. And if we are feeling overlooked, unappreciated and over-worked in our job, we often look for a better working situation.

Suffering propels us to shift and change, grow and learn. If we didn't feel discomfort or experience suffering in our lives, we would never change. As suffering comes into our lives, it leads us forward by being a catalyst for change. It compels us to acquire a new skill set, build resilience and strength, discover new opportunities and unearth untapped potential. In short, suffering compels us to change and shift in our lives by acquiring a new skill set, responding differently, challenging ourselves to take on new opportunities, or simply grow in our abilities by attempting a new direction in life.

## ***A catalyst for change***

Here's an example. Marysia, a young woman, decides to take a year off before going to university. She lands an enviable position as a waitress in a high-end cocktail lounge and soon becomes accustomed to the trappings of her high-paying job, and the many interesting and exciting people she meets. That year off stretches into three years. Eventually, while she appreciates how lucky she is to be earning such a great living, she watches her friends progress in their education, and begins to feel uneasy and unhappy with her choices. Over time, her negative feelings about her choices get louder and louder by the day and she begins to experience unpleasant symptoms. As well, her job begins to feel repetitive, unchallenging, and pointless. She begins to turn down invitations from her old friends, as it becomes too painful to hear about their experiences at school and their plans to continue their education.



One day, she wakes up and says to herself: *'Enough! I deserve better. I'm going to apply to university next semester.'* In this case, Marysia's suffering became a catalyst for change that propelled her forward, to the place where she truly wanted to be. Had it not been for her mounting discomfort and disappointment, she might have procrastinated longer and not have decided to go back to school.

### **Emotional debris**

In the aftermath of our suffering, there can be emotional debris, emotional memory of difficult experiences. It is important to let go of emotional debris, and not carry the suffering into a new chapter in our life. In Marysia's case, she needs to let go of her disappointment in herself, and her feelings of low self-esteem. And she needs to stop beating herself up for having wasted so much time and having fallen behind her peers.

Moving on is about releasing rather than carrying your pain with you. It's about forgiving or releasing the pain of a negative situation, choice, or relationship. Once you make a change it is important to let go of that emotional memory, in other words, the story of the pain that brought you to that change.

### **Resisting change**

Just as our physical pain pushes us to seek help and healing, our emotional suffering compels us to move on, change and grow, rather than stay stuck. But we are creatures of habit, and as such, we often resist change, even when we are suffering.

As the saying goes, what we resist, persists! We need to recognize when our suffering is constantly telling us something and if we resist acknowledging the shift our true self needs to make, the suffering and symptoms persist. If we are choosing to stay stuck in patterns and situations that

cause us pain and suffering, we can use these insights about the purpose of our suffering to find the courage to change and grow. When we are stuck in fear and self-doubt we stay in maladaptive patterns. The longer we stay, the longer we suffer. See your suffering as a signal to look for an opportunity to shift, change and grow.

### **To learn and grow**

We are here to live life to its fullest and follow our dreams. Suffering compels us to learn, change, shift, heal and grow.

When suffering shows up in your life, ask yourself: What needs to change? What are my suffering and symptoms telling me? Remember, as you begin to understand the purpose of your suffering, and learn to move beyond suffering to create change in your life, that change is a process with challenges and rewards. Allow yourself time, patience, and compassion to work toward your goal.

### **Putting suffering to good use**

**Understand** that your suffering is a catalyst for change and growth in your life  
*Take stock of* what has become intolerable in your life

**Decide** to take matters into your own hands, make a commitment to yourself to change what you can no longer tolerate  
**Move** beyond your suffering by letting go of past hurts, as your hurtful storyline led to significant changes

**Show** compassion for yourself as you make changes. We all have good days and challenging days. When you add extra self-care on challenging days, and see the challenges as opportunities to learn and grow, your suffering will seem easier to manage.



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**About the author**

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, *A Deeper Wellness*, is scheduled for publication in 2021. <https://www.drmonicavermani.com/> Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, *A Deeper Wellness*, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>*

