

The Tip #12

Winston Churchill once said, "It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required."



Q: Why do we suffer sometimes? A: Because we benefit.

It is hard to imagine how pain can be of benefit but enough of us seek it out voluntarily on a regular basis possibly with the unconscious understanding that it benefits us. It may appear at times that too many people are on a hedonistic treadmill but look around at how many put themselves through torturous routines.

For Paul Bloom (Professor of Psychology, University of Toronto & author of *The Sweet Spot: The Pleasures of Suffering and the Search for Meaning*), he ponders and researches the reasons why we put ourselves through painful experiences voluntarily.

His research questions why people eat really hot spicy food, or watch terrifying movies, or run ultramarathons, or have a steaming hot bath or sauna etc. He explores the paradox that one way to get pleasure is through pain. He believes that we can “lose ourselves” through painful experiences in so far as people find a way to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life through the enjoyment of painful experiences that obliterate the day. In addition, enduring and benefiting from pain is a form of control we exert on our own emotions.

Whilst the principle of least effort does apply to most humans, choosing the pathway of voluntary pain – benign masochism - for many is liberating and a source of pleasure. Sometimes, pain is the only pathway to a good life. (Bloom asks why would we have children as it is often a huge challenge over many years but ultimately it gives us a source of great satisfaction).

‘Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa the healthy psychological state resides somewhere in between hubris and humility. In the same way that the synthesis between hubris and humility

breeds psychological health, combining ecstasy and agony establishes a healthy relationship with reality.

Ecstasy makes me feel invincible: it makes me feel that I am the master of my destiny, that I create my reality. But agony is likely to make me feel vulnerable and humbled: it makes me feel that I am the servant of my circumstances, that I have little control over my reality. Ecstasy alone leads to detached arrogance; suffering alone engenders resignation. Life's vicissitudes bring us closer to Aristotle's golden mean.

A deep respect for reality implies an acceptance of what is—of our potential, our limitation, and our humanity. Recognizing that suffering is integral to our lives and that there are other benefits to pain, such as the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, we become more accepting of our suffering. And when we truly accept grief and sorrow as inevitable, we actually suffer less.' Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar, Co-founder of WholeBeing Institute.

The Tibetan monk Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche discusses four benefits of suffering: wisdom, resilience, compassion, and a deep respect for reality. Wisdom merges from the experience of suffering. When things go well, we rarely stop to ask questions about our lives.

Note the emphasis throughout on the voluntary nature of this. This is not about 'involuntary pain' - or pain done to us against our will. When do adults begin to know this pain? Firstly, they have to test themselves against self-imposed limitations and that may involve some pain. (eg running 60mins instead of 30mins).

Secondly, many may want to push their own boundaries and experiences even though it may involve pain (eg I am going to try a dose of hot chilli). Subjecting ourselves to a degree of pain pushes our own boundaries and hopefully we get to feel the ecstasy and benefits of experiencing it. This certainly plays into the aphorism: No pain, no gain.

Leadership also demands we push some boundaries for the sake of fulfilling a vision. There may be some pain associated with this but it can be harnessed for the good.

Are you pushing yourself enough? How do you balance hubris and humility in leadership? You may be doing your best, but are you doing what is required? Coaching & Mentoring (Moaching) can help. Call +61 410 586 700 **Be and Become**.