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A frequent question in the minds/hearts of many people is “How can I be happy, or feel better, or at least stop this suffering?”

It seems all of us, at some time in our life, face a situation that is very painful and causes enormous pain: divorce, the death of a loved one, a traumatic injury or chronic illness; a child who is addicted or abused; a grandchild who has a severe learning disability or is imprisoned; the loss of a career or our life savings; a parent overtaken by Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s Disease; being betrayed by a close friend; guilt over a mistake/harm we have done.

How can we deal with deep pain? How can we not be overwhelmed by suffering and despair?

Throughout the years, several wise teachers have suggested truly helpful ways to address unremitting suffering. These suggestions frequently focus on:

1. acceptance of the distress, the loss, the pain
2. focusing on engagement with life in a purposeful way [engagement with life based on meaningful values].
3. using the pain to grow in wisdom and compassion: “I will use this experience to be a better person and help others.”

“Because we’re told that happiness is normal we tend to keep silent about our struggles---[we can think suffering] means we’re abnormal.” Dr. Steven Hayes

“It isn’t the things that happen to us that cause us to suffer, its how we relate to the things that happen to us that cause us to suffer.” Pema Chodron

“...accepting your pain is a step toward ridding yourself of suffering...” Dr. Steven Hayes

“No suffering can defeat us if we are prepared to search for its meaning, no loss is conceivable that does not hold the possibility of at least one meaning...” Dr. Elizabeth Lukas

“...we are urged to say ‘yes’ to life. Suffering can be used in a meaningful way and translated into a positive experience.” Rabbi Reuven Bulka

--Dr. Viktor Frankl asserted that suffering can trigger our search for meaning and that suffering without meaning often leads to despair.

If you are in the midst of suffering, you might find the guidance of these teachers helpful:

1. Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life, Steven Hayes, Ph. D.
2. When Things Fall Apart, Pema Chodron
3. Meaning in Suffering, Elisabeth Lukas, Ph.D.
4. Uncommon Sense, Rabbi Reuven Bulka
5. The Doctor and the Soul, Viktor Frankl