

# The Purpose of Hurtful Experiences

By JP Sears, Holistic Health Coach

With everything in life supposedly being purposeful, divine and in our highest good, what in the world is the purpose of my emotional pain? How could my experiences in life be helping me when, at times, they hurt so much? It can certainly be a frustrating experience to work through the painful issues in life, but it can be doubly so to wonder what their purpose might be. It is my belief that painful experiences in my life may be serving as part of a lesson for me – specific lessons that my soul desires to learn. With this in mind, the intention of this article is to invite you to discover a more insightful understanding of painful occurrences in your life.

## THE SHADOW AND THE LIGHT

To understand the purpose of painful experiences, it may be helpful to first entertain the fact that we live in a field of relativity (also known as polarity) as Einstein proved with his equation  $E=mc^2$ . Being in the relative means that before we can know or experience something, we must also encounter its polar opposite. For example, to know hot you must experience cold, to know up there must be an experience of down. And just as our physical bodies reside in a field of relativity, so do our emotions. In other words, to experience happiness you must experience sadness. You must experience rejection in order to know acceptance. You need confusion to know clarity. With this concept in mind, is it possible that the treasure of true happiness that many of us seek is not possible without the vital ingredient of our negative experiences? Much as Buddha says, our purpose is to experience the extremes so we can find the balance in between.

After reading this you might ask, “Well, what if you are born into true happiness? What if you were born into a loving family with all of your needs taken care of? In that case you don’t need the painful or negative experiences, do you?” Is it possible that living through the challenging experiences that you and I have seen might allow us to experience the joys a kingdom has to offer, while the person who hasn’t encountered any of life’s shadows might not be able to experience genuine happiness?

Hermann Hesse actually considers this possibility in the story of *Siddhartha*. In this novel, the character Siddhartha is born into a kingdom without pain. He has parents who care for him very much. He has all of the resources, power, and luxuries one could dream of. But one thing he doesn’t have is an ability to experience what somebody standing in my shoes would consider the light of his

circumstances. In order to have the ability to appreciate his life, Siddhartha chooses to abandon his family's kingdom and seek out what you and I might call the shadow side of life. In the end, it is only after experiencing the full spectrum of life's possibilities, including pain and hardship, that Siddhartha is able to become a wise and happy person.

## NECESSITY OF SHAME

Many wise people, such as Paramahansa Yogananda and the Dalai Lama, say the ultimate goal we are journeying for is to know the unconditional divine love found within ourselves. If this is the case, then do we not first have to become very *conditional* with ourselves so that we may move toward and know unconditional love? In other words, don't we need to place or discover the conditions or boundaries on our own self love before we can know love without conditions or bounds? My experiences, both with my self and in observing clients, say that one of the most common ways we become conditional with ourselves is by feeling shame. The essence of shame is that we judge ourselves as not being good enough. There are infinite numbers of reasons why we might shame ourselves. Some of them include feeling that we are not enough to please our parents, not making enough money, not smart enough, not good looking enough, or not enough to help other people. Because it can manifest in so many ways, shame plays a very significant role in most of our lives. Fortunately, it has a purpose.

A very wise teacher of mine, John McMullin (1), says that shame moves us toward discovering unconditional love for ourselves because it gives us the opportunity to forgive ourselves. Forgiveness is synonymous with unconditional love, which resides on the opposite end of the spectrum than shame. Therefore, forgiving ourselves for our perceived shame means that we accept ourselves with unconditional love. With no forgiveness we stay stuck in a place of conditional acceptance of ourselves. Without shame in the first place, we do not have a need to forgive ourselves, which is to say we do not have a mechanism of discovering unconditional love. Could it be possible that learning how to be more unconditional with ourselves means that we are getting closer to God, the pinnacle of unconditional love?

## INNER STRUGGLES CULTIVATE STRENGTH

At some level many of us know that without our struggles we wouldn't be able to grow stronger. As a metaphor for our challenges and hurtful experiences leading us to personal strength, I invite you to consider the story of the monarch butterfly as taught to me by my beautiful teacher. The monarch can fly further than any

other butterfly, often going from one continent to another. However, its strength to fly great distances does not come without a struggle.

The transition from caterpillar to butterfly is exhausting. The monarch has to break free of its cocoon by constantly pushing its wings into the walls of its shelter. Eventually, after prolonged effort, the butterfly frees itself from the cocoon. But what if, seeing the creature struggling so and feeling pity, someone decides to open the cocoon for it? Do you know what happens? That butterfly will never fly! It is the tremendous struggles in breaking open its cocoon that strengthen the monarch's wings so much that it can fly from one continent to another. During the time in its cocoon, the monarch butterfly may have no awareness of the purpose of its pain and struggles, yet it clearly benefits from the fruits of its increased strength that is the result of those struggles.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps you can now entertain the possibility that happiness is a state of awareness not due to external circumstances in our lives but due to our subjective experience of the spectrum of polarity, including pain. This would mean that the most painful emotions that we inflict on ourselves, such as shame, give us the divine opportunity to discover unconditional love. And it may now also be conceivable to you that the strength and growth we desire necessitate inner struggles and challenges. In my life having these insights allows me to diffuse the sting of my hurtful experiences simply by having the awareness of their purpose and function and I happily invite you to do the same.

## REFERENCES

1. John McMullin, Holistic Coach. [www.Journeysofwisdom.com](http://www.Journeysofwisdom.com). 1-800-889-1976. Columbus, OH.