

A WAY TO RESPOND TO SUFFERING

Something very unfortunate has happened to you—a disease has entered your life and has caused other distressing consequences. You now find yourself suffering for many different reasons, and that suffering cannot be avoided because you cannot avoid your disease. It will have an effect and impact on you and your loved ones.

But you do have a choice in how you respond to your disease and your suffering. While the disease has taken away your freedom to some extent to plan your life, you still have freedom to decide how to respond to your situation. Choice puts you back in charge.

One option you have is getting mad and staying mad at the turn your life has taken. You can protest getting your disease and the problems that come with the treatment for it, by saying such things as “Why me? It’s not right. It’s not fair.” You can comfort yourself by feeling sorry for yourself. You can blame and criticize yourself and others, such as God, fate, or fortune, and get down on them. In other words, you can reject the situation you are in. You can reject having to suffer.

But if you take that course then you risk getting depressed, agitated, angry, and becoming alienated from your body. That course rejects the reality that you are forced to deal with daily. You will not be nearly as willing to tolerate your illness and the negative consequences it brings to you. Your days will be spent wishing or demanding for things to be different when that cannot happen. Your focus will be on your disease.

You take this course in part because you hate your disease. You can continue to hate it but you pay a heavy price for doing that. When you hate your disease you end up hating your body and that will cause you to hate yourself, because the disease is in your body and you are your body.

You have another option for responding to your disease and the suffering it brings. You can let the suffering into your life. In that case you accept your suffering as part of you, because it cannot be avoided. Just as you have two arms and two legs or blue eyes or brown eyes you have this disease and the suffering it brings. It becomes a fact about you, a fact you do not want or like but a fact about you nevertheless.

What do you gain by making this your response? Once the suffering becomes part of your life it will not be noticed nearly as much. Your mind will move to other matters that can be more beneficial for you. Your overall level of negative emotion will decrease. You will not feel driven to damn your luck or your body, which will help you feel better about yourself. You will stop hating your disease. You will certainly not like having a disease but the passionate antagonism felt toward your disease will ease substantially. You will not feel at war anymore and will instead feel much more peace-of-mind.

Hence, you have choices before you. Think about how you want to feel. If you choose letting your suffering into your life, which is referred to as *assimilation of suffering*, then you have much to gain. You will suffer either way, but if you choose rejecting of suffering then you will suffer more. If you choose to assimilate suffering into your life, you will have much less distress, and that is what you want.