



Getting Through Tough Times

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With the financial markets in shambles, many of us are feeling a good deal of fear. Some of us are in difficult financial situations because of this situation. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming to deal with this financial strain on top of the challenges we normally face. So, what's the best way to deal with this type of stress? Life is already difficult enough. How do we deal with the stress and uncertainty we are facing?

It may sound crazy, but I believe the best way to get through times like these is to see them as an opportunity. If we live in fear of the pain it only gets worse. If we make up our minds to make something good out of it, we immediately change the way we deal with it. We gain a sense of control over the stress.

The mentality of turning pain into gain reminds me of a program I saw on The History Channel recently. They did a whole program about how people several hundred years ago made swords. The whole process reminded me exactly of the process of human growth. Initially, the blacksmith takes an elongated piece of steel and puts it into a fire until it becomes red hot. Then he pulls it out and begins to beat the impurities out of the steel with a hammer and an anvil. To me, this hammering process is just the way I feel when I am really being tested as a person. Sometimes I don't know if I can go on one more minute, the pain is so bad. But there is real purifying going on that can only be accomplished by pounding the impurities out of ourselves.

To continue with my story, the blacksmith continues to pound until the steel cools. Not only is he pounding out impurities, but he is forming the sword into its final shape. It is the same with us. To reach our actualized selves, we must go through the purifying process that only pain provides. Once the steel is cooled, the blacksmith again puts the steel into the fire and repeats this process. He continues in this manner until all of the impurities are out of the steel and it has reached the shape he wishes it to have.

Now he's done right? Not quite. Now he must harden the steel. In the hardening process the steel molecules are shrunk by quenching them in cold water. Not only does this condense the latticework of steel molecules, but it traps carbon molecules inside the steel, which further hardens the sword. This also is how growth can feel to us. At times we may feel that we have learned a lesson, but life often has one final test for us to prove we are ready to move on to the next level.

Nietzsche once said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." Not necessarily. We have to be courageous. We have to face the pain and learn from it. Otherwise we are doomed to repeat our mistakes over and over again. Once we realize that pain is necessary for growth, we no longer avoid it; in fact we may even come to welcome it because it presents us an opportunity to become a better person. I know it's tough to take this attitude about present economic conditions, but take it from someone who used to run from pain like it was going to kill me, facing it is much simpler and beneficial than running away.

Here are a few thoughts about how to make this tough economy work for you:

- Live one day at a time. Worrying about what might happen tomorrow will not help you get through today. Also, don't kick yourself for what you messed up yesterday. You need every ounce of energy you have to handle today's challenges. This is the way: Learn from yesterday, plan for tomorrow, live today.
- Exercise daily. The most proven way to reduce stress is to exercise. This will reduce your anxiety and give you the strength to handle your challenges.

- Only deal with what you can control. According to research ninety-eight percent of what we worry about is beyond our control! Write down all of the things that are causing you stress. Don't do anything about the things you have no control over. That wastes energy. Next make a plan to do something about the things you can control. Make a plan to implement a little of that plan every day.
- Meditate or pray. This is also a proven way to get centered and gain insight from the challenges you are facing.
- Start a journal. This is also a good stress reliever and it gives you an additional tool to grow from your challenges.
- Read books about stress management. An example would be: *Control your Anxiety Before it Controls You*; by Albert Ellis.