

Et tu Brute: How could you stab me in the back?

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Let's say you and I have a close relationship, and you stabbed me in the back with a knife. I will feel a sharp pain, which is an electric signal. The suffering is when my brain reacts as, "Out of all people, **you** stabbed me in the back!", not "I feel a sharp, cold metal object piercing my skin and muscle fibers in my latissimus dorsi." **Pain is inevitable, while suffering is a choice.**

When someone shouts a racial slur to my face, I have two choices: to perceive the words as a racial slur or to interpret them as sound waves. If I choose the former, I would feel offended and be irritated for a while. That just achieves what the opponent wants. If I choose the latter, I would "hear" something, sense a vibration in the air transmitted through my eardrums, and try to figure out what the wave equation for that sound was. In other words, I wouldn't "listen" to anything, and it wouldn't affect my mood at all, defeating the opponent's goal.

Separating pain and suffering is very important because it helps us rebound very fast. When I fail an exam and have a very unpleasant feeling, that isn't pain: nothing is physically discomforting me, but I am suffering. We realize that the source of pain is internal rather than external: I am hurting myself. What is really happening here?

In Buddhism, pain is considered avoidable. All sources of pain come from desire, according to Buddhism. If I have a good time, pain starts when I desire that this joy lasts a little longer. If I am going through tough times, pain grows when I desire for this harsh time to end as soon as possible. When you love someone, pain comes when you desire that love back. "I love this person so much; does he/she love me back the same way?" This is the beginning of pain. This also explains how invaluable and hard unconditional love is.

Holding a grudge is also one hurting oneself. It is suffering, not pain. Not being able to forgive is something I truly understand. Most people know the terrible relationship I had with my mom, as she was abusive when I was young. My motivation for success was to be famous and give a speech that I overcame trauma and became the first person to say, "I could have done better without my mom," not praising my mother. I wanted to be successful as soon as possible so that I would never have to deal with her. I wanted to be stronger not only to fight back but to beat her as hard and as often as she did to me. I thought I would never forgive my mother, not only because of the experience but also because that experience molded my personality to be a person full of hatred. I had so much anger in me that it often hindered my growth as a person.

I was able to forgive my mother when I found out a couple of facts. One, she is never going to admit that what she has done is morally wrong; she sometimes even denied that such things ever happened. Two, even if she does admit that she made horrible mistakes and

apologizes, my anger towards her would not be resolved. I imagined taking revenge, beating her up, but that scenario did not seem to resolve my anger towards her either. I realized that I was the one who was hurting myself. Even when I was mad at my mom for my childhood trauma, she was never going to feel any sort of remorse or guilt. I found out that I had to be the bigger man in the house and forgive her. Now, we act as if it never happened. My father apologized to me a few years ago instead of her, even when he wasn't the one who did the beatings. In my eyes, now my mom is just a naïve woman who is aging and needs to be taken care of. I am even genuinely thankful for the beatings and verbal violence, because I am happy with who I am as of right now. I admit that I would be pissed to have a child like me—I wasn't the best kid to talk to. I know that she could have made better decisions, but I also acknowledge that she could have done something worse as well. After all, it's her first time being a mother. I have also learned a valuable lesson: hating someone only does damage to myself, not the opponent.

The whole moral of the lesson is that pain and suffering are two different things, and that suffering is just artificial pain created by myself acting on myself—which is self-destruction by definition. As one matures, they must realize that suffering is an illusion, and that pain is also nothing but an electric signal. Don't amplify that electric signal or illusion by consuming the context with your beautiful brain. That will just make it worse. Rather, observe things the way they are, then try to focus on the positive aspects of what you are observing, and be thankful for it. If this becomes your second nature, you will realize that this world is full of beauty and become so thankful that you are able to live on this planet during this exact period with these exact people around you. What's even better is that it will only get better.

I should probably have stopped there, but I'll make a stupid decision to add a couple more things to this. I used to think that the future is always worse: finals after midterms, death slowly approaching loved ones, unexpected goodbyes, and more responsibilities as we age. However, it's really not. The worst part of what's heading its way towards us is the anxiety and worry we have against the event. I learned this in the army when I knew we had some harsh training happening the next week, like a fully armed 20-mile night march that starts at 6 p.m., snowing and raining, with a 45lb gear kit, a 15lb gun, a 45lb vest, and a heavy-ass helmet. The worst time was not the actual march, rather the anxiety hitting me with "IT'S COMING." Of course, the blisters, the cold weather, rolling ankles on the mountain, hiking in complete darkness, aching shoulders, necks, lower-back, feet, hunger—all of them were real pain. But the greatest pain was when I was worrying about it actually coming, the suffering I created for myself. I am trying to reach a level where even the electric signal becomes insignificant, but that would need a lot of training.

I hope you gained something out of this writing, because you get to learn these free lessons without having to do that terrible march. Or if you actually had some similar experiences, please share them with me. I always love hearing stories. Educate me and entertain me. I always learn from you. My life is focused on spreading love, no hatred anymore.