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## Conversations with self-33

### Self-created suffering

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Suffering is inevitable, but much of it can be avoided or reduced by the way we react to a situation

This story was recounted by a psychiatrist — a middle-aged man once came to consult him. As the session progressed, he began to rant about his ex-wife. He complained that she had cheated on him.

The psychiatrist listened for a while and then asked the man “How long has it been since you were divorced?” The man said, “It’s now 17 years.”

While some kinds of suffering are inevitable, others are self-created. Refusal to accept suffering as a natural part of life can lead to viewing oneself as a victim and blaming others for our problems. We add to our suffering and keep the pain alive, by replaying our hurts over and over again in our mind.

Our reinforcement of such negative emotions makes things worse. We often add to our pain and suffering by being ‘touchy,’ which is often wrongly understood as being ‘sensitive,’ over-reacting to minor things and sometimes taking things too personally. Whether you suffer or not depends on how you respond to a given situation. For instance, if someone speaks ill about you behind your back, you react to this knowledge with negativity, hurt and anger, thus destroying your peace of mind. Your pain is your own personal creation. On the other hand, if you refrain from reacting in a negative way, let the slander pass like clouds in the sky, you protect yourself from feeling hurt, from feeling agony.

Although you may not be able to avoid such situations, you can at least modify the extent to which you suffer by choosing how to respond to the situation.

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