

It's Not a Problem, It's an Experience

"To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest." ~Pema Chodron

Life has its down periods: your boss is unhappy with you, your business is struggling, you get into a fight with the love of your life, your finances are tight, you aren't getting good sleep, you get sick or have chronic pain.

Our way of dealing with this is usually to do one or more of the following:

- Get away from the problem — quit your job, break up with your partner, or stop caring. Anything you can do to exit.
- Ignore the problem — just don't think about it. Pretend nothing's wrong. Think about anything else.
- Comfort yourself — drink, smoke, food, TV, Internet, porn, social media, games. Anything to take your mind off the difficulties.
- Complain — lash out at someone, rant, moan about it to a friend, feel resentful, tell yourself that the other person is the problem (because they are, right?!).

There's nothing wrong with any of these things. Don't feel guilty if you do them. Sometimes, they can be soothing or helpful. Talking to someone about your problems, for example, is a good idea. Giving yourself some rest so that you are better prepared to take on the world's problems ... that's not a bad idea too.

But trying to avoid the problem, exit from it, or even comfort yourself — these have limited effectiveness. We know that by now, because despite our best efforts, the down times keep happening. We get in a slump, we get miserable, we feel down.

Here's a mental shift that might help: when you're feeling hurt, sad, angry, overburdened ... think of it not as a problem, but as an *experience*.

Fully feel whatever pain or sadness or anger you're feeling.

Stop avoiding it and just *feel it*. Truly allow yourself to feel it.

And as you feel it, don't think of the difficult feeling as a problem you need to solve. A thing you need to get rid of. Think of it as an experience you're having.

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That's all it is: an experience, a feeling. Nothing to panic about. (Unless you're feeling panic — that's OK too.) It's something you're experiencing right now, and it's not good or bad. It's just an experience. It might not feel good, but that's not a problem. Not all experiences feel good, right? Sometimes we just have to experience cold, heat, storms, and pain. It's part of the experience of life, and we don't have to shut it all out.

Feel your difficulty fully, with as open a heart as you can muster. Allow it into your heart, as you would a good friend. And just be with it, no judgments, no need to do anything. It's just your present experience.

Whatever you've done to comfort yourself — no judgments with that as well. That's not a problem, just an experience.

You can find peace with whatever that experience might be.

Now it's time for action.

From this place of peace about who you are, what you're experiencing ... you can take the next step. It might be something like:

- Love the feeling, the experience, the pain.
- Love the person who is in front of you, hurting. Feel them.
- Love the world. Give the world your gift.
- Take a small step toward making your situation better.
- Take a small action to realize your life's mission .
- Be silent, so you can listen. Be still, so you can experience.

What action to take depends on the situation, but it starts with a feeling of being at peace with your experience.