

Physical, Psychological and Spiritual Suffering and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Suffering is a fact of life and cannot be ignored.

There are three types of suffering:

- Physical suffering,
- Psychological suffering, and
- Spiritual suffering.

At any one time, we are experiencing one or more of these forms of suffering. As I will explain below, when you add together the proportions of these sufferings, which we experience concurrently, they always equal 100%. Our goal in life should be to balance these three forms of suffering so we are not experiencing any one of them in too great a proportion to the others. It's by balancing the suffering we are experiencing in the world that we are able to live lives of fulfillment.

The reason this topic is so relevant to your job search and career is because each form of suffering is interdependent. For example, if you're suffering psychologically in your job, you may find yourself experiencing physical suffering by getting sick all the time. If the work you do doesn't fulfill you on a spiritual level and you believe what you do is wrong, you may experience psychological suffering. All three forms of suffering are constantly going on in our careers and lives at all times.

There's a great lacking that we face with virtually every experience. For example, a great physical experience may leave us extremely satisfied from a physical and psychological point of view, but may leave us feeling a sense of lacking from a spiritual point of view. A great spiritual experience may leave us feeling very satisfied from a spiritual and psychological point of view, but may leave us feeling a sense of lacking from a physical point of view. This is why when people come at life from situations of one extreme or another, it's rare that they experience true satisfaction. The connection between physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering is incredibly interesting in many respects, and understanding this connection is highly relevant to your satisfaction in your career and life.

A few weeks ago, I was at a seminar and a young girl around 16 years of age got up and told the audience that she had been cutting her arm with razor blades for the past several years. This is something I've heard of many women and girls doing in the past. When I was in my early 20s, I dated a girl that had also cut herself when she was younger and in her teens. From what I understand, this is something that's actually quite common among both women and men. There are many people out there who habitually or regularly cut themselves and this is something that's much more common than you might think.

Cutting often occurs amongst young women and girls who've been sexually abused by a parent or someone close to them growing up. Because it's so hard for them to feel the intense psychological suffering that comes along with having endured such abuse, they use cutting as a way to cope with or satiate those innermost feelings. According to one post I read on Yahoo! Answers by a girl named Helena:

"Most of the girls that cut have been sexually abused. Cutting is a way of dealing with the emotional pain. The emotional pain that they have is so strong that it scares them because they cannot control it. Cutting is not a suicide attempt. Cutting is something the girl can control, unlike the sexual abuse or the emotions that are raging inside of her. Cutting is always done for a reason. Not everyone that cuts has been abused, but most have been. The statistics are very high, over 70%. The addicting part comes from the control you experience when you cut. The girls can control the pain (how often, the depth, the location), so that is why they continue to cut, especially when in a situation that might become emotional.

To overcome the desire to cut, pinching oneself is often a form of self control. It's teaching them new ways to control their emotions without hurting themselves so severely. Yes, slapping is also recommended. So is wearing rubber bands and snapping them repeatedly. Therapy will help teach more ways to control the emotions, while learning to deal with the situation (rape) that happened to trigger it.

I know many girls that cut. Every one of them has been sexually abused in some way."

The idea that this post seems to support is that psychological pain becomes physical pain. If the psychological pain doesn't become physical on its own, then the persons experiencing the psychological pain will do something to themselves to cause the physical pain. As a rule, if the psychological pain is too strong, it will seek an outlet in the physical body. Because psychological, spiritual, and physical suffering always equal 100%, if someone is experiencing intense psychological suffering, he or she will attempt to lessen this by transferring some of the pain to the body. This is why many women cut.

The story of Buddha is an excellent illustration in the same regard. Buddha was born to a king and queen in what is now modern day Nepal. During the celebrations following his birth, a seer announced that the baby would become either a great holy man or a great king. The baby's father was told that if the baby remained at home, he would become a great king and if he left home he would become a great teacher, the Buddha.

Buddha's father, wanting his son to become a great king, shielded his son from knowledge of human suffering, signs of death, signs of old age and also from teachings about religion. He had three palaces built especially for Buddha to occupy in different seasons. In addition, the Buddha had courts of dancers to dance and entertain him. Buddha had no physical suffering: all of his physical needs were catered to. Buddha also experienced no psychological suffering because all of his psychological needs were taken care of. However, because physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering added together always equal 100%, Buddha experienced tremendous spiritual suffering. Despite the fact that his father was able to meet all of his physical and psychological needs, he was not able to meet Buddha's spiritual needs in the least.

When Buddha was twenty nine years old, he asked to go on a tour of the capital. Anyone who showed any signs of old age and suffering was removed from the streets. Notwithstanding, one man who managed to stay in the streets, provoked

Buddha to question the nature of his life. Buddha witnessed what are called "The Four Sights," which forever changed his life. He saw an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a holy man. Therein realizing that suffering existed in the world, Buddha retreated into the forest to meditate about the number of things he had recently learned about suffering and the nature of life.

Buddha's father promised him he could have anything if he would stay home and become heir to the kingship. Buddha then asked his father if he could promise him eternal life with no pain, suffering, and misfortune. Buddha's father told him he could not, and so Buddha left the palace and went out to seek enlightenment.

All of Buddha's material needs were taken care of before he left his father's palace. However, this story of the Buddha shows us that once you have obtained everything you need from a psychological and physical plane, you will still experience immense suffering. You will begin to feel vague, bored, and lonely. Sitting around the palaces with every need fulfilled, Buddha became bored and lonely, experiencing a great and profound spiritual suffering. He needed to find something else.

Under the rule that psychological, spiritual, and physical suffering must always equal 100%, the Buddha probably experienced a "spiritual score" of 100%, and a physical and psychological score totaling 0%.

My wife read a story in the newspaper last week that has basically guaranteed that I will be going to religious services every week for the rest of my life. This story discussed the fact that people who go to religious services each week and who consider themselves "religious" live an average of three years longer than those who do not. My wife and I discussed this fact over dinner on Thursday night, and agreed that we would start going to services each week from now on. We love our daughter very much and want to be there for her (and for each other) as long as possible; therefore, we decided attending religious services would be a worthwhile investment.

My wife is Jewish. Her father is from Israel and her mother is from New York. My wife went to Jewish schools growing up and has a very strong attraction to the religion. Early on in our relationship, we needed to settle on a religion and decided that we would have a Jewish wedding, raise our children Jewish, and so on. Since I was raised a Christian, this all has been a learning experience for me. We now attend a very Orthodox Jewish temple each Friday night. The services are so Orthodox that English isn't even spoken there and the men and women are separated by a giant curtain, which divides the room. Most of the men wear black hats and robes, and I generally show up in a pair of khakis and a polo shirt. I feel like I have a wonderful marriage in so many ways because I'm able to experience this with my wife (even though we're unable to see each other during services).

Like the Buddha, my wife has found despite our being very happy psychologically and physically, we need more of a spiritual component in our lives in order to be truly happy. She's right. I believe there's a real truth to the story that my wife read. Recognizing that suffering is inevitable and that finding a balance between the three types of suffering is crucial, I have come to believe:

- People who are spiritually fulfilled probably live longer than those who are not.
- Similarly, people who are psychologically fulfilled probably also live longer than those who are not.
- Finally, people who are physically fit probably live longer than those who are not.

We should strive to be physically, psychologically, and spiritually fit at all times.

This weekend, I read a story in the *New York Times* about a small tool and die company in the Midwest, which is planning another round of layoffs. There was nothing unusual about the story; it resembled many other stories about layoffs, which I read in the paper every day--except for one factor that stood out for me: The reasoning the company was following in laying off certain people. Apparently, when deciding who to lay off, the company looked at how many sick days various people in the company had taken, and made its layoff decisions based in part on who had taken sick days and who had not.

When I used to work in a law firm as a young attorney, I never saw attorneys take sick days. It was just something that was never done. One day, I came into work sick and threw up in front of a secretary station and ended up being sent home; however, it was around 2:00 in the afternoon and I only ended up missing a few hours of work. I made it into work the next day. At law firms, young attorneys are happy to have jobs, and they work very hard towards the prospect of becoming a partner inside of the firm, which makes sick days a rare occurrence. When they do occur, the person who takes the sick day is typically sick and unable to work.

I'm fascinated by watching people take sick days inside of companies because in most instances the person who takes the sick day isn't really sick at all. If they are sick, then there are in many cases I have found, underlying psychological or other issues driving the sickness. There's nothing wrong with occasionally playing hooky, and I'm not criticizing it in the least. However, what does interest me is the prevalence of sick days for some people compared to others. Certain individuals really do get symptoms and become sick more than others on the job, and need to miss work frequently. I've known certain employees who managed to get sick on average once a week or more. I've seen this happen under every employer I've worked for. There are people who just seem to get sick more than others.

The thing about it is that the same people who are taking all these sick days are almost always the same people who cannot stand their job, or who are unhappy in some other area(s) of their lives. This is almost always the case. I can remember a time in my life when I was very unhappy at home and used to have one of my parents call in sick for me so I could miss school. Employees who aren't doing all that well in their jobs typically are the ones who call in sick most often. Employees who don't like their jobs are also amongst those who call in sick on a regular basis. Employees who don't see a lot of future for themselves in the work they do also call in sick quite consistently. In short, people who suffer are the ones who most frequently call in sick.

People who like their jobs rarely get sick. People who like their coworkers rarely get sick. If you're calling in sick to your job often, you might want to consider these facts, even if your symptoms are real. There is a very good chance that if you *like* your job and are satisfied from a psychological and spiritual point of view, you would no longer be calling in sick--or actually getting sick--as much.

One of the most interesting things I've noticed in the world is how certain people tend to get sick and not others--both inside and outside of work. Illness in our bodies is something that's often a sign of illness in our minds and stress that we may be pushing down to our bodies from a psychological level. The people I've known who have had the worst and most serious health problems such as cancer, heart disease, and more have generally been the same people who face the most psychological and spiritual stress in their lives. Stress builds up and the body, mind, and spirit are all related. If you're suffering in the mind, then it often finds an outlet in the body.

Nothing is ever perfect in the world or in our own lives. If we are in good health physically, there's always a chance that we're experiencing some type of suffering deep down on a psychological or spiritual level. The best we can hope for is a middle ground where no suffering is too great. Physical suffering is generally the easiest to deal with. Psychological suffering is the next easiest and among all of the forms of suffering, spiritual suffering is the hardest to accept. Your career and life will experience an incredible transformation when you're able to balance the three.

THE LESSON

There are many different types of suffering that are important to balance in your life. Physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering are all interconnected, and you must balance them so you don't experience any one in greater proportion to the others. Balancing the suffering in your life will lead you to greater fulfillment.

<https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/>