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# EMBRACING DISCOMFORT: A Recipe for Fulfilment



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By Trishya Screwvala

Our world today lays an incredible amount of emphasis on comfort. We have constant innovations enabling us to exert the least amount of effort in our everyday tasks – instant food and grocery delivery, cleaning robots programmed to mop our floors at specific times in the day, digital forums for learning and interaction without the need to step out of our homes, entertainment personalized to our interests available at the touch of a button. Such developments are, of course, meant to allow us to utilize our time more efficiently and meaningfully. But a question that we perhaps neglect to ask ourselves is – has the need for comfort or minimal effort become a primary goal for us as human beings; and moreover, is this a worthwhile goal to pursue?

If we look to philosophers and great thinkers from the East and West, we may perhaps question our deep affinity for the cozy embrace of comfort. Plato's famous allegory of the cave, speaks of the journey of the human being from ignorance towards wisdom, as one that requires daring to let go the familiar shackles and notions of truth, in order to discover a deeper and truer reality.(1) Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "Amor Fati" or learning to embrace and love one's fate, was firmly rooted in the need to embrace all aspects of life, the seemingly positive and the negative – that each have a valuable role to play and are both an integral part of the nuances of one life. (2)

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha too, who dedicated his life to discovering the cause of suffering for all of humanity, spoke of pain as an instrument of learning, necessary for the evolution and growth of the human being. (3)

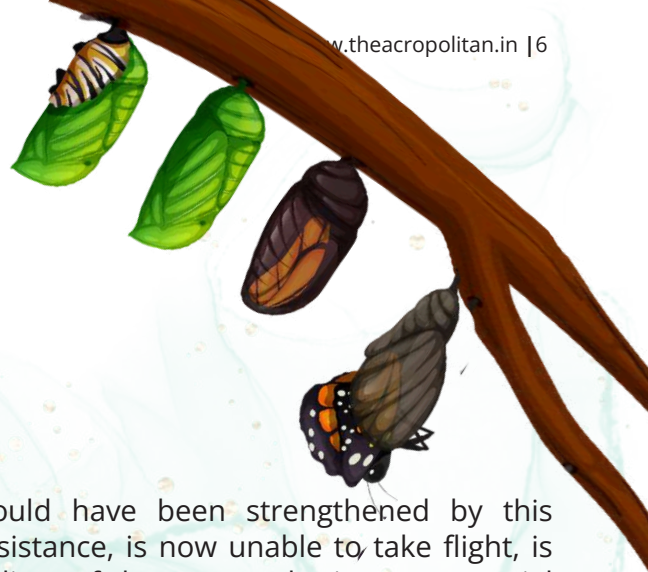


***...has the need for comfort or minimal effort become a primary goal for us as human beings; and moreover, is this a worthwhile goal to pursue?***

It almost seems that realizing one's human potential may be at odds with the pursuit of comfort at all costs.

If we look at great men and women in history, those that made breakthroughs in science, created inspiring art or architecture, or dedicated their lives to uplifting the dignity of fellow human beings,

we see that what defined them was their strength to rise above their challenges. What we remember about those we admire even closer home, isn't the ease with which they ambled through life but their ability to strengthen and ennoble themselves through the challenges life sent their way. As founder of New Acropolis Jorge Angel Livraga said, "We are nourished by our difficulties"(4), and if this is the case, could it be that our growing aversion to the smallest inconveniences and challenges are making us less resilient as a society?



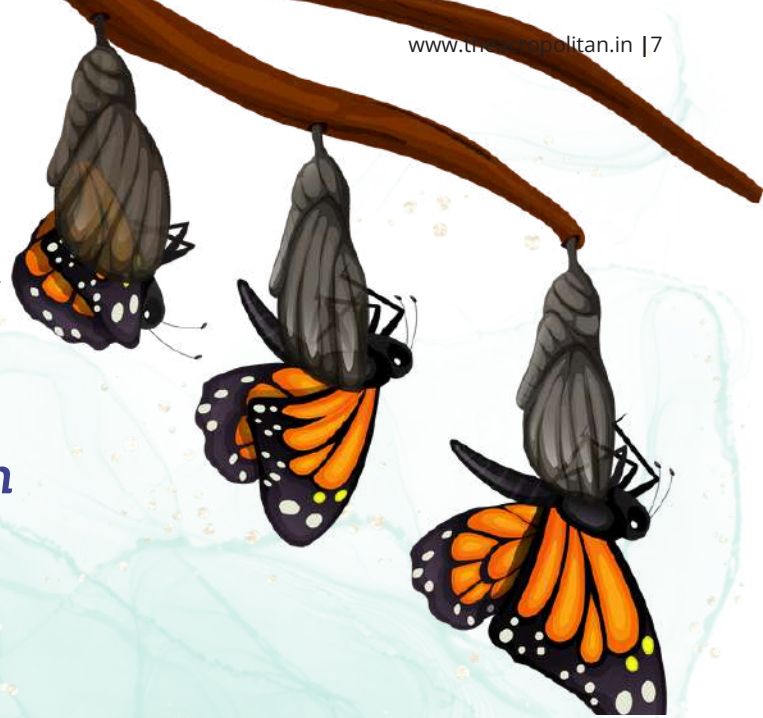
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If we look to nature, we see that conflict and struggle are an inherent and integral part of the natural cycle of life. A seed needs to break through its hard, protective exterior and travel through dense soil, upwards against gravity, in order to realize its potential as a shoot directed by the light of the sun. A flower must let go its life and beauty in order to bear fruit. A well-known modern parable about a man watching a butterfly fighting its way out of its cocoon, and out of pity carefully cuts open the cocoon, only to discover that the butterfly, whose wings

would have been strengthened by this resistance, is now unable to take flight, is telling of how struggle is an essential ingredient for strength and growth. Comfort, as much of an alluring cocoon it may be, keeps us stuck in the same place, holding us back from advancing forward.

Stepping out of our comfort zone can look different for different people. More than the constant search for physical comfort - which may also limit our ability to experience life, our emotional and mental habits and attachments are perhaps even more challenging to confront. For the introvert, challenging one's comfort may mean stepping out into new experiences, opening one's heart to others when the easier response may be to withdraw behind a mask of anonymity. For an adventurer, it may mean embracing stillness or learning to work with routine. Welcoming discomfort in our day to day can look like addressing a difficult conversation rather than avoiding it endlessly, or following through on a small everyday commitment rather than convincing myself and others of my tiredness. It is to act based on what is right, good and true, rather than what is easy and convenient for me, starting with the small everyday moments.

***If all of life is in a constant state of growth and movement, could it really be that our purpose as human beings is to get through life with the least amount of effort and movement possible?***



While stepping out of the familiar and the easy will always challenge us, can we say that staying in our comfort zone makes us happy? "Yes!" we may exclaim impulsively - to avoid the uncomfortable, to choose instant gratification, is after all, how we are conditioned to respond to life today. We bury difficult emotions with a comforting bowl of ice cream, we avoid endless to-do lists or difficult conversations by numbing our restless minds with the endless scrolling of social media. So much so that we wait for the opportunity to unwind by doing "nothing" - vegetating on a beach, or yearning to shut down our thoughts and emotions by allowing television shows or idle gossip to passively dictate our emotions and ideas without exerting any initiative.

The easy and comfortable certainly give us short term refuge from unsavory situations, but they also leave us weak -

hampering our ability to navigate our lives in the direction we choose and see as right, and making us passive products of our circumstances. The habits and attachments we are so accustomed towards become heavier shackles, holding us back from blossoming into the person we would like to become. And we become disconnected from the natural flow of life. If all of life is in a constant state of growth and movement, could it really be that our purpose as human beings is to get through life with the least amount of effort and movement possible?

So perhaps, in reality, we need discomfort. Facing adversity enables us to know ourselves, to strengthen ourselves and make us upright and accountable - able to stand for what is right rather than to be a slave to our personal conveniences or fancies.

## The practice of embracing the less pleasant or convenient in equal measure to life's highs, allows us to engage with life fully and deeply.



The practice of embracing the less pleasant or convenient in equal measure to life's highs, allows us to engage with life fully and deeply. The pursuit of only the pleasant is to go through life with blinkers - experiencing life partially and selectively, accepting only what one would like to accept and avoiding the more inconvenient realities; when in fact, it is the difficulties that allow us to truly appreciate our victories and good fortune, and it is these very successes that allow us to bring meaning by extracting learnings from our challenges.

And I would even dare to say, as an aspiring philosopher still taken at times by the promise of comfort... that the practice of learning to find joy in embracing discomfort, even if with a hint of reluctance, can allow us to live with more contentment. To face life with the spirit of a philosopher or adventurer - to seek truth even if it is uncomfortable, to see life for what it is, in all its nuances, enables

us to encounter a happiness that is much deeper than a fleeting pleasure of comfort, but rather, one that engenders a sense of living with more meaning, purpose and initiative.

Stepping out of our comfort strengthens our identity, it allows us to encounter who we are, and enables us to discover that we can count on this identity when encountering the uncomfortable. It shows us that what makes life meaningful and beautiful is when pain and pleasure, challenges and victory coexist in harmony. If we can truly challenge this notion of comfort as an ultimate human goal, perhaps, we will be able to discover a more profound direction to life - of growing, evolving, coming closer to our human potential, for which, perhaps our strongest foe is the illusory companion of comfort. ☺☺

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