

A Pathway to TRANSCEND Your Suffering

Self-Directed Exercises to Overcome the Storm of
Suffering



Licensing: This workbook is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Citation: Cowden, R.G., Zábó, V., Purebl, G., & De Kock, J. (2024). *A pathway to TRANSCEND your suffering: Self-directed exercises to overcome the storm of suffering*. Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University.

Recommended Uses

1. This workbook is for anyone who would like to work towards dealing with the suffering they are currently experiencing.
2. Once this workbook has been completed, it can serve as an excellent reference point for those who wish to reflect on and evaluate the changes that have occurred in their life since they completed it.
3. Because there is no limit to the number of times this workbook can be completed, it can serve as a life-long resource.
4. This workbook is not intended to be a replacement for treatment or care provided by qualified healthcare professionals. If those who engage with this workbook are experiencing extremely severe or unbearable suffering, they are encouraged to seek additional support from a qualified healthcare professional.

Note: This workbook is intended to be used as a Microsoft Word document in which you type your responses, but you may also complete a hard-copy version by printing the workbook. Please go through the workbook using the instructions that are provided.

Setting the Stage

What is the TRANSCEND workbook all about?

Suffering is something that many people have reflected on throughout the course of human history, and there are many different perspectives about the nature of suffering, why it exists, and what can be done about it. This workbook will not address these kinds of issues in detail, but there are a few assumptions that have guided the development of this workbook. We would like to share those assumptions with you before getting started. Here they are:

- We sometimes have expectations that we will not suffer, or we think we must avoid suffering, or we believe we are the only unfortunate ones who are suffering. Drawing on rich insights from history, psychology, philosophy, theology, and contemporary social sciences, our assumption is that suffering is a shared human experience, and most people experience some form of suffering at one time or another in their lives.
- Although suffering can be a very challenging human experience, it is possible for us to make sense of and even grow from our suffering.
- We do not need to be ruled by our suffering. We can look at the suffering we are experiencing as a signal that some form of change might be possible in our lives.
- Whilst in the midst of suffering, we might feel stuck, frightened, or overwhelmed. Despite this, once we realize that we have a choice about how we are going to respond to the suffering we experience, we can begin to shape our journey to overcoming our suffering.

The TRANSCEND workbook is an invitation to work toward transforming your suffering into a learning experience, helping you to live your best life despite the suffering that you encounter. Each letter of TRANSCEND stands for a part of the process that this workbook will take you through:

- **Turn** toward your suffering.
- **Reflect** on the suffering you are experiencing.
- **Accept** what is beyond your control.

- Notice the goodness in your life.
- See the possibility of transcending your suffering.
- Choose the path you will take from this point forward.
- Establish a self-transcendent purpose for your life.
- Name specific goals that align with your self-transcendent purpose in life.
- Dive into your self-transcendent purpose in life.

Each part will be explored in more detail as you progress through the workbook. We have designed the workbook so that the six parts of TRANSCEND work together to take you on a journey toward transcending the suffering you are experiencing.

What is expected of me?

In this workbook, you will complete practical exercises that will help you to engage and work toward addressing the suffering you are experiencing. The choice to take the journey through this workbook is entirely yours. Here are some considerations if you decide to move forward with this workbook:

- Each part of this workbook builds on those that came before, and so it is important that you complete each part in order. Please do not skip any exercises.
- By design, a single exercise does not take much time to complete, so it should not be too difficult to work the exercises into your schedule.
- You can complete the workbook at your own pace, but you will get the most out of this workbook if you are regularly setting aside time to complete it.
- You are likely to benefit the most if you take the time to complete the entire workbook.

What can I expect from completing the workbook?

It is important to note that the TRANSCEND workbook offers just one pathway or resource for dealing with suffering, and completing the workbook may bring more benefits to some people than others. Although we have developed this workbook by drawing on rich insights from history, psychology, philosophy, and theology, we cannot promise that this workbook will fully address the suffering you might be experiencing.

Based on what we have learned, this workbook could help to shift the direction of your life. For some people, this shift might be small, for others it may be more dramatic. This workbook might be the very start of your journey to transcend your suffering, or it might be the very resource you needed to come “unstuck” on a journey that you began earlier.

Turn toward your suffering

“Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes” – Carl Jung

Lesson 1: What is my mindset about suffering?

Exercise 1.1

Everyone has a mindset about different objects, people, and experiences. Here, we are using the term “mindset” to refer to our tendency to evaluate something in a particular way, such as whether it is positive or negative, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, etc. We all have a mindset toward “suffering” that is based on what we have learned and experienced during life. In this exercise, you are invited to explore your mindset about suffering.

Please spend a few moments reflecting on each of the following statements, and then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. If you disagree very strongly with a statement, give yourself a 0 (*Do not agree*). If you agree very strongly with a statement, give yourself a score of 10 (*Completely agree*). Using this 0-10 scale, provide a rating for each statement.

- In general, suffering helps you to become the best version of yourself.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating <u>here</u> :	
---------------------------------	--

- In the long run, you are strengthened by the suffering you experience in life.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating <u>here</u> :	
---------------------------------	--

- On the whole, experiencing suffering gives your life a deeper sense of meaning.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

- Your own suffering makes it easier for you to understand the struggles of others.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

- The suffering you experience in life can be transformed into a positive force for good.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

Exercise 1.2

Because many people find the process of going through the statements in Exercise 1.1 somewhat new and different, it can be helpful to reflect on our responses to those statements.

Thinking back to Exercise 1.1, what did you notice about your general attitude toward suffering? What thoughts or emotions did you experience as you considered and responded to each of those statements?

After you have spent a few moments reflecting on these questions, write a response to them in the box provided below. This is a reflective activity to support you in your journey through this workbook, so please remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

The word ‘suffering’ appears in ordinary language within our conversations. We might hear things like, “he has been suffering from cancer for many years” or “she is suffering from dementia,” and we can immediately sense the burdensome quality of what the person is experiencing.

For the purposes of this workbook, our goal is not to prescribe a set definition of suffering for you. In fact, we think you will benefit the most from this workbook if we allow you to explore your understanding and experience of suffering more freely using some parameters to guide you. With this in mind, we are going to present a brief description of suffering and then use some fictional imagery to give you a sense of how suffering might be experienced.

One way to think about suffering is that it is an unpleasant and undesired experience that feels intense or has persisted for quite some time. A person who suffers is carrying a 'load' that is unwanted and may seem unbearable to them. The 'load' that a person bears under usually arises from some loss, hardship, or negative experience that they face. Suffering can take many different forms; it could primarily be physical, psychological, relational, or religious/spiritual, or it might be some combination of these. Because of this complexity and the personal nature of the experience, suffering is a judgement that can only be made by the person who is experiencing it.

The following are some fictional examples that use imagery to give you a general sense of the varieties of suffering. For some people, suffering is like wandering around in the darkness with a heavily weighted backpack that they did not choose to wear, and the only way they can undo the complex arrangement of backpack straps is by waiting for a source of light that allows them to see how the burdensome backpack can be taken apart. For others, suffering is like a dark and looming shadow that hovers over them constantly, blocking out light that makes it difficult for them to see and experience the richness of the world around them. And others might even experience suffering as something like encountering a jammed lock to the only door of a building they desperately need to enter, but after countless hours of trying are still unable to successfully open the door.

Exercise 2.1

Having read through the previous section, consider what you are going through in your life right now. If you feel as though you are not experiencing any suffering at all, give yourself a 0 (*Not suffering at all*). If you feel as though you are experiencing intense, extreme, and unbearable suffering, give yourself a score of 10 (*Suffering terribly*). Using this 0-10 scale, give a fair rating of the suffering you are experiencing right now:

How much are you suffering, from 0 (*Not suffering at all*) to 10 (*Suffering terribly*)?

Enter your rating <u>here</u> :	
---------------------------------	--

Exercise 2.2

At different stages of this workbook, we will consider the experiences and insights that Boethius describes in his book, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius was a Roman who was born around 480 AD. As someone with “an unusual passion for study,” he found his calling studying all branches of philosophy. He translated many important philosophical works into Latin, including some from Aristotle, which would not be available today if it were not for his translations. Under King Theodoric, Boethius was appointed to a variety of public service positions. By the time he was 30, “he held what was traditionally the most illustrious of all the Roman offices – dignities denied to the majority of men at any age.” Boethius was a significant figure in the Roman Empire during the late 5th and early 6th centuries, which was one of the most powerful states in the world at the time.

During his time in public service, Boethius is wrongly accused of treason. He is sentenced to prison and eventually brutally executed around 525 AD. While in prison, Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which details the lengthy dialogue that he has with Lady Philosophy.

In the first part of the book, we find Boethius in a state of deep sorrow and despair over the injustice of “Fortune’s attack” on him. Shortly after Lady Philosophy mysteriously appears to him, she tells him that “it is time for healing, not lamenting.” She tells Boethius that “if you want the doctor’s help, you must reveal the wound,” which was her way of saying that Boethius would need to expose his suffering before he could transcend it. Boethius then goes on to give Lady Philosophy a detailed account of the circumstances leading to his imprisonment, along with his thoughts and feelings over what he was experiencing because of the situation he was in.

Following the example of Boethius, you are invited to explore and describe your suffering in as much detail as possible. Using the box provided below, please describe

- What do you think is the root of your suffering?
- What does your suffering feel like?
- How have different areas of your life—such as physical health, mental health, relationships, or religion/spirituality—been affected by the suffering that you have been experiencing?

Type your description below:	

Exercise 2.3

You are invited to take the description of your suffering that you wrote in Exercise 2.2 and share it out loud. Identify someone in your life who you can trust and feel comfortable sharing your description, and ask them if they would be willing for you to share what you have written with them. Find a quiet place and time to meet with them, and then read what you have written to them.

Alternatively, you can find a quiet and safe place where no one will disturb you and pretend you are sharing what you have written with someone else using the 'empty chair' technique. Sit on a chair and place another empty chair opposite you, as shown in the figure below. Bring a trusted person in your life to mind and picture them sitting on

the chair. Take a few moments to imagine that they are with you, and then read what you wrote out loud.



Regardless of whether you shared your description with a trusted person or used the empty chair technique, what was it like to say it out loud? How did it make you feel? Describe your experience using the box provided below.

My experience reading what I wrote out loud:

Reflect on the suffering you are experiencing

“The more you try to avoid something, the more you create it” –

Emily Maroutian

Lesson 3: Where does my suffering come from?

For the purposes of this workbook, we are not looking at the question of why there is suffering in the world. This is an interesting question, but it isn't a question we need to answer here. We are instead going to look at questions like 'why am I suffering?' or 'why might I be suffering right now?' These questions focus on your personal experience of suffering, which is what this workbook is going to focus on.

There are many sources of human suffering. Your suffering could be due to something specific, something quite ambiguous, or a combination of different things. One way to think about suffering is whether the source of it is (1) internal or external to us and whether it is (2) controllable or uncontrollable. The figure shows this with examples.

	Internal	External
Controllable	– Selfish choices – High-risk behaviors	– Toxic work environment – Abusive people
Uncontrollable	– Incurable chronic illness – Physical disability	– Natural disasters – Public health crises

In the top left box, we have examples of internal and controllable sources of suffering. In the top right box, we have examples of external and controllable sources of suffering, and so on. Many more specific examples of sources of suffering could be listed. Although not every source of suffering will neatly fit into one of the four boxes, it is a helpful tool for exploring the sources of our suffering.

There are two important things that this figure can teach us about our sources of suffering:

(1) Many sources of our suffering are either external to us or they are not under our personal control.

- Even when sources of suffering are controllable, many times we do not have the ability to directly influence or change the situation that has given rise to our suffering. For example, while there may be a variety of ways you could confront someone who has done something that deeply hurt your feelings, you have little control over how they act toward you. Another example could be living with a chronic condition and not knowing when symptoms may flare up.

(2) Sometimes, the source of our suffering comes from our own decisions or actions that we have personal control over.

- So, each of us would do well to try and be as open as possible to the idea that we might be contributing to our own suffering.

Exercise 3.1

Thinking back to the description you wrote about the suffering that you are currently experiencing, now we would like you to explore the source/s of your suffering.

After you spend some time reflecting on this set of instructions, use the boxes below to type in the source/s of your suffering. Perhaps there is only a single clear source of your suffering, in which case you would only fill one of the boxes with a source of suffering. Or you may identify multiple different sources that can be placed in different boxes, in which case you would fill several boxes with one or more sources of suffering.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, but try to be as honest and thorough as possible.

Type the specific source/s of your suffering into the boxes below:		
	Internal	External
Controllable	— — — —	— — — —
Uncontrollable	— — — —	— — — —

In completing this exercise, what did you learn about the source/s of the suffering you are currently experiencing? Are most within your control or outside of your control?

Type your response <u>below</u> :

You may have listed different source/s of your suffering. What would you say is the main source of your suffering? If you listed multiple source/s of suffering earlier, choose one that you think is the primary reason for your suffering.

Type your response <u>below</u>:

Lesson 4: How is the suffering I am experiencing affecting my life?

Suffering can affect people differently, and it can affect many different areas of our lives. Some people may be affected in some areas and not others, and some people may be affected in more ways than others. In what ways is your suffering affecting you physically, mentally, socially, or spiritually?

In the **orange** spaces below, briefly describe how your suffering is affecting you in each these four areas. If the suffering you are experiencing is not affecting an area, you can skip to the next area.

There are three orange rows for each of the four areas, but you can add more rows if you need more space. We have provided some examples to help guide you, but what you write should reflect what you have experienced.

(1) Physically
In what ways is your suffering affecting you <i>physically</i> ? (List one per row).
<i>Example 1:</i> I can no longer participate in physical activities I used to enjoy.
<i>Example 2:</i> My body feels tired all the time.
Type your response/s <u>below</u>:

1.
2.
3.

(2) Mentally
In what ways is your suffering affecting you <u>mentally</u> ? (List one per row).
<i>Example 1:</i> It has taken away my hope for the future.
<i>Example 2:</i> I think so much about what I'm experiencing that it takes time away from things I used to do.
Type your response/s <u>below</u>:
1.
2.
3.

(3) Socially
In what ways is your suffering affecting your <u>relationships</u> ? (List one per row).
<i>Example 1:</i> I don't spend as much time with my friends and family as I did in the past.
<i>Example 2:</i> It's hard for me to make decisions without the help of other people.
Type your response/s <u>below</u>:
1.
2.
3.

(4) Spiritually
In what ways is your suffering affecting your <u>religious or spiritual life</u> ? (List one per row).

Example 1: I feel more spiritually disconnected than ever before.

Example 2: It has restricted me from participating in my faith community.

Type your response/s below:

1.

2.

3.

Accept what is beyond your control

“One must accept suffering; it is a great teacher.” – Carl Jung

Lesson 5: Where can I begin my journey of transcending suffering?

Let's turn again to Boethius, who we introduced earlier. As we discussed in Lesson 1, Lady Philosophy appears to Boethius while he is in prison on false charges. During their dialogue, Lady Philosophy helps Boethius remember some important things that he was not able to recall on his own because his mind had been “infiltrated by the fever of emotional distraction.” One of the things that Lady Philosophy shows Boethius is that his suffering has less to do with what has happened to him and more to do with his beliefs, expectations, or desires about what should or should not happen to him. By pointing out that “nothing is miserable except when you think it so,” and that “all luck is good luck to those who bears it with equanimity,” Lady Philosophy helps Boethius to become more **accepting** of his situation.

What Boethius learned could also be very helpful to us. If we are able to see that our attitude can have a stronger influence on our suffering than the situation we are facing, we might be able to look at our suffering in a different way. This is especially true, given that in Lesson 2 we noted that many sources of suffering are external to us or outside of our personal control.

Exercise 5.1

In any given situation, there are things we are able to control and things we are not able to control. As you think about your situation and the suffering you are currently experiencing, what aspects of your circumstance do you have little or no ability to

change (they are outside of your control)? And what aspects do you think you are personally able to change or modify in some way (they are within your control)? In the table below, list the things that are outside of your control and those that are within your control. Use the **orange** boxes to list the things that are outside of your control (list one per row). Then use the **green** boxes to list the things that are within your control (list one per row).

You can add more rows to the table if you need more space. We have provided some examples for each list to help guide you, but the things you list will be specific to your situation.

Things that are <u>outside</u> my control	Things that are <u>within</u> my control
<i>Example 1:</i> The way that other people choose to act towards me.	<i>Example 1:</i> The choices I can make about how to deal with my situation.
<i>Example 2:</i> The fact that I have a medical condition which causes me pain.	<i>Example 2:</i> Who I spend my time with.
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Exercise 5.2

Imagine that you have a helium-filled balloon for each of the things you listed in Exercise 5.1 as being outside your control. For example, if you listed 5 things about your situation that are outside of your control, you would have 5 balloons. Imagine that each balloon has a piece of string tied to it, so that you can hold them together in a bunch.

While standing or sitting, imagine you are holding this bunch of balloons. Extend your arm out away from the side of your body and raise your hand above shoulder height, so the balloons aren't bumping into your head or body.

How long do you think you could hold your arm out in that position? Eventually, your arm will get tired of holding the balloons. Even if you could hold onto the balloons like this for a really long time, your ability to do other things is restricted because your hand is holding onto a bunch of balloons that can be challenging to move around.

Would you want to be held back or slowed down because you are holding onto some balloons? While it may be easier to let go of balloons than some of the difficult things that are going on in our life, what if you were able to let go of the things about your current situation that are outside of your control? Is there anything holding you back from letting go of those things?

The final part of this exercise will involve closing your eyes for a few moments. Read through these instructions and then begin when prompted. Close your eyes and imagine that you are holding your bunch of balloons while standing in a large open field. When you are ready, you are going to imagine that you are letting go of all the balloons at once (remember, these balloons represent the aspects of your current situation that are outside of your control). As you gently let go of the balloons, look up as you watch them float higher and higher until they eventually fade away out of sight. As you visualize this in your mind, pay attention to what the experience of letting go of the balloons and watching them float away is like.

****You may now begin the exercise****

What feelings did you experience as you imagined yourself letting go of the balloons (list one per row)? You can add more rows to the table if you need more space.

Feelings I experienced:

1.
2.
3.

Lesson 6: What am I pushing back against?

Exercise 6.1

Even though you may be suffering, are there some things that you might be able to accept about your situation? In Lesson 5, you identified some aspects of your current experience that are outside of your personal control, things that you may not be able to change. As you consider the things you listed in Exercise 5.1, is there anything that is outside your personal control but you haven't been able to fully accept yet? Can you grow in your acceptance of what you are experiencing?

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions, and then use the **green** boxes below to make a list of the ways you think you might be able to grow in acceptance. You can add more rows below the third one if you need. We have provided some examples to help guide you, but what you write should reflect what you have experienced.

Things about my suffering that I can get better at accepting:
<i>Example 1:</i> I need to accept that my suffering was caused by something in the past that cannot be changed.
<i>Example 2:</i> I can get better at accepting that the uncomfortable feelings I have are just a natural part of the healing process.
1.
2.
3.

Notice the goodness in your life

“Wear gratitude like a cloak and it will feed every corner of your life.” – Rumi

Lesson 7: Where can I find some light?

When Boethius is first met by Lady Philosophy, his thoughts and emotions are wrapped up in the troubles of the situation he was in. Because he was focusing narrowly on the negative aspects of his immediate experience, Boethius lost sight of the many good things that had happened throughout his life. At one point in their dialogue, Lady Philosophy tells him that “if you thought of all the things that have happened to you, what kind of things they were, and whether they were happy or unhappy things, you would not be able to say that you have not been fortunate up to now.” Here, she shows Boethius that, despite the unjust and distressing situation he finds himself in right now, he has received many blessings throughout his life and has a lot to be grateful for. By broadening his perspective beyond the microcosm of his immediate circumstances, he could reflect on his life in a more balanced and holistic way.

Exercise 7.1

Take a few minutes to reflect on your life, right from your first memories during childhood to now. Who are the people you are most grateful for?

Using the **green** boxes provided below, list some people who have been a blessing in your life. List one per row. You can add more rows below the third one if you need. We have provided some examples to help guide you.

As you write, you may find it helpful to consider the following:

- Who are you grateful for? Think about family members, friends, or other people who have been an important part of your life.

- Why are you grateful for him/her?

The people that I am grateful for:
<i>Example:</i> My grandmother, who was thoughtful, warm, and loving toward me while I was growing up.
<i>Example:</i> My first grade teacher, who instilled in me a love for reading.
1.
2.
3.

As you reflect on the people you listed in the box above, what feelings or sensations in your body are you experiencing in the present moment? Briefly describe what you are experiencing in the box below.

The feelings or sensations I am experiencing right now when I think back to the people I am grateful for:

Exercise 7.2

We are going to extend the previous exercise by inviting you to take a few minutes to reflect on specific events or experiences that you are grateful for. If you think about your life, right from your first memories during childhood to now, what blessings have you experienced in your life? What has happened in your life that you are grateful for?

Using the **yellow** boxes provided below, list some specific things that have happened in your life that you are grateful for. Try to think of as many experiences as possible. You

can add more rows below the third one if you need. We have provided some examples to help guide you.

As you write, you may find it helpful to consider the following:

- What happened that gives you a sense of gratitude, where did it happen, and who was there?
- As you think about the experience now, how does it make you feel?
- Why are you grateful for what happened?

The events or experiences that have happened in my life that I am grateful for:
<i>Example:</i> The high school I went to, which provided me a lot of valuable learning experiences.
<i>Example:</i> The award I won for most improved player on my football team when I was 10 years old.
1.
2.
3.

As you reflect on things you listed in the box above, what feelings or sensations in your body are you experiencing in the present moment? Briefly describe what you are experiencing in the box below.

The feelings or sensations I am experiencing right now when I think back to events or experiences I am grateful for:

See the possibility of transcending your suffering

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” – Helen Keller

Lesson 8: What have I learned from past experiences of suffering?

Our suffering can sometimes limit our focus to the here-and-now—the immediate circumstances we are facing. But we all have a life story that reaches back into history, and insights from narrative psychology suggest that we can benefit from telling our own story. Here you are invited to take a step back from your present circumstances and think about a ‘redemptive story’ from your own life. In redemptive story, a clearly ‘bad’ or emotionally negative situation results in a clearly ‘good’ or emotionally positive result. The plot progresses from a negative to a positive tone, where bad ultimately turns into good. As a result, the initial negative situation is ‘redeemed’ or by the positive outcome that comes after it.

Exercise 8.1

In the box provided below, please describe a redemptive story from your own life. What happened? Where and when did this occur? Who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling?

--

Exercise 8.2

When people write about a redemptive story from their own lives, they often become more aware of inner strengths that helped them to endure or overcome the suffering they encountered. Using the box below, list the inner strengths that helped you to 'redeem' the event or circumstance you wrote about in the previous exercise:

My inner strengths that helped me to 'redeem' the event or circumstance:
1.
2.
3.

Writing a redemptive story also helps us to become more aware of people who helped us to endure or get through the suffering we encountered. Using the box below, list the names of people who helped you to 'redeem' the event or circumstance you wrote about in the previous exercise:

People who helped me to 'redeem' the event or circumstance:
1.
2.
3.

Lesson 9: What is my current suffering trying to tell me?

You may be familiar with the Yin-Yang symbol, which is an ancient Chinese symbol that is used to represent the interconnectedness of opposite forces. Let's consider for a moment that the circle (the entire Yin-Yang symbol) represents your life. All the red coloring you see is symbolic for suffering, and all the green coloring is symbolic for happiness.



The Yin-Yang symbol provides us with at least four important teachings that we can apply to our lives:

- (1) Our lives are a mixture of happiness and suffering. It is not possible to experience happiness in life without also experiencing some suffering.
- (2) Although we naturally want to avoid suffering, both happiness and suffering contribute to the richness to our lives.
- (3) The small red circle within the green half of the symbol indicates that future suffering often lurks within the shadow of the happiness we are experiencing.
- (4) The small green circle within the red half of the symbol indicates that future happiness often lurks within the shadow of the suffering we are experiencing.**

Exercise 9.1

In this exercise, we are going to focus on the 4th teaching listed above. You may not have thought about suffering in this way before, but let's consider the idea that future happiness is lurking within the shadow of the suffering you are currently experiencing. After you read the following instructions, you will be prompted to begin the exercise.

Instructions:

This exercise will require you to close your eyes for a few minutes. When you close your eyes, your vision will disappear and the colors you usually see will no longer be present. When your eyes are closed, your vision will most likely be filled with a dull shade of grey or appear black. Once you close your eyes, imagine that the darkness you see in your vision represents the suffering you are experiencing. Pay attention to what the experience is like. What feelings do you experience? Does it seem as though all you can see is the darkness?

As you continue to keep your eyes closed, try to visualize a bright color or light source coming through the darkness you see. What color do you see? How bright is it? What shape is it? Try to focus all your attention on the color or light source. Does it change shape? Does it get bigger or smaller?

Now imagine that this color or light source represents your future happiness that is lurking in the shadow of the suffering you are experiencing. As you consider this idea, what feelings do you experience? Are there any words or phrases that come to mind?

****You may now begin the exercise****

When you have completed the exercise, describe what you experienced in the boxes below.

When I closed my eyes and imagined that the darkness I saw in my vision represents my suffering, I experienced:

--

When I visualized a bright color or light source coming through the darkness I saw, I experienced:

When I imagined the color or light source as my future happiness, I experienced:

Lesson 10: What resources can I draw on as I encounter my current suffering?

Returning once again to Boethius, an important theme in *The Consolation of Philosophy* is the way in which Boethius was able to process and come to terms with his suffering by drawing on what he had learned and experienced at earlier points in his life. In this lesson, we are going to explore this kind of theme in your own story.

Exercise 10.1

In Lesson 8, you wrote about a ‘redemptive story’ in your own life and identified some sources of strength and support that helped you to redeem the circumstance you faced. Which of the inner strengths that you listed in Exercise 8.2 do you think could help you

now. For each strength you list, provide one or more reasons why you think they it could be helpful in dealing with your current suffering?

My inner strengths that could help me deal with my current suffering:
1. Reason/s:
2. Reason/s:
3. Reason/s:

Exercise 10.2

Let's consider once more the 'redemptive story' that you wrote about from your own life. Spend some time reflecting on the difference between the demonstrably 'bad' or emotionally negative experience you had initially and the demonstrably 'good' or emotionally positive outcome you experienced some time later. Think about the differences between the way you felt or the thoughts that went through your mind at those two points in your life. What lessons did you learn from this redemptive experience that you think would be uplifting to other people?

Using the box below, write a summary of about 100 words describing the most important things you learned from the 'redemptive story' that you experienced in your own life. Pretend that you are writing to someone who is an important part of your life, such as a family member or friend. You may wish to share what you have written with this person.

Lessons I learned from the 'redemptive story' I experienced in my life:
--

--

Choose the path you will take from this point forward

“Your journey doesn't look like anybody else's, so stop asking other people for directions to places they've never been.” –

Glennon Doyle

Lesson 11: What can I do about the suffering I am experiencing?

Although we might prefer to go through life without having to experience any suffering, the reality is that suffering does exist and is a part of our existence as humans. As we discussed earlier, we often don't have much influence or control over this. Accepting this can be difficult because we like to have full control over things that happen in our lives, but this doesn't mean you don't have any power at all over suffering. What you do have some control over is the choice that you make about how you are going to respond to your suffering. What do we mean by this?

It may not always be easy to see it, but you have the power to choose to meet your suffering in one of two ways, like one of two paths one can take when you come to a fork in a road. One path you can take is to respond in a way that will ultimately make your suffering worse. The other path you can take is to respond in a way that potentially helps you overcome your suffering. Notice that the second path may not necessarily resolve your suffering, but the possibility of overcoming your suffering is a far better alternative to the path that ends up making your suffering worse.

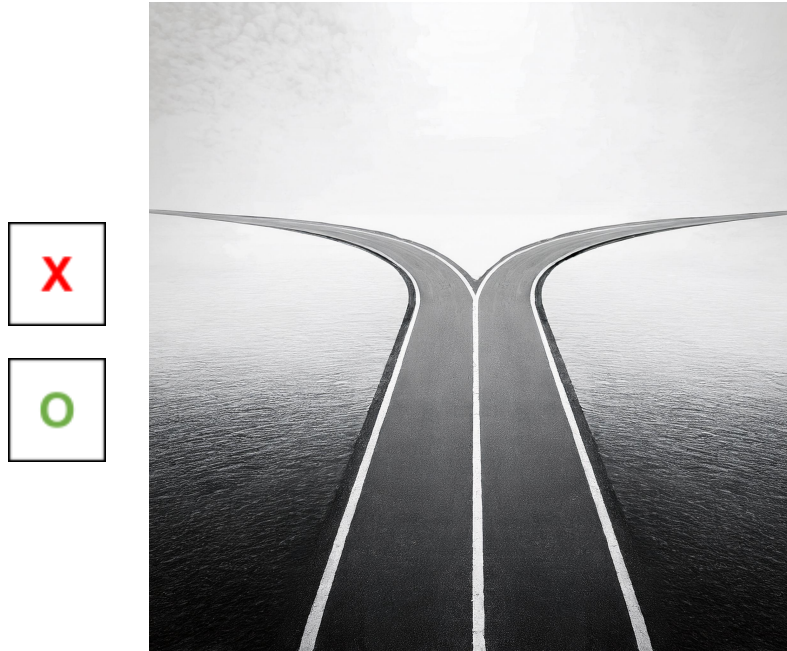
The path you take is a choice that you have the power to make. Although there are only two paths, many different responses could take you down each path. We have listed a few examples below.

Examples of responses on the path to worse suffering	Examples of responses on the path to potentially overcoming suffering
– Negatively ruminating on what you are experiencing. – Abusing alcohol or other substances to escape suffering. – Withdrawing or isolating yourself from other people.	– Accepting your suffering without bitterness. – Confronting your suffering to see what you might be able to learn from the experience. – Seeking counsel and support from people who care about you.

It may not always be clear to us which responses will lead us down one path versus the other. If you aren't sure about what how you should respond to your suffering, or you feel as though the path you are currently on is only making your suffering worse, it can be helpful to spend time reflecting on what you are experiencing because it could reveal some things that help set you on the path to overcoming your suffering.

Exercise 11.1

The figure below contains an illustration of a road with a fork in it. Let's consider the road that veers to the *left as the path to worse suffering*, and we'll consider the road to the *right as the path to possibly overcoming suffering*.



Thinking about the suffering you are experiencing and the way you have responded to it so far, where would you locate yourself on this road? Are you just before the fork in the road, where you have a choice to make about whether to take the road on the left or right? Or have you already started to make your way down either the road on the left or right? You may have just passed the fork on the road, or you may be further down the road on the left or right.

Next to the picture of the forked road, there is a red “X”. Click on and move the red “X” to part of the road that you are currently on.

Now, let’s consider where you are on the road and where you would like to be. Does the “X” that you placed on the road match up with where you would like to be on the road, or would you like to be on a different part of the road?

Next to the picture of the forked road, there is also a green “O”. Click on and move the green “O” to the part of the road you would like to be on.

Lesson 12: What things can I change to move closer to where I would like to be?

Exercise 12.1

In Exercise 5.1, you created a list of the things that are part of your current experience of suffering that are outside or your control, along with a list of things that are within your control. Here we are going to focus on the list of things within your control.

To begin, copy and paste the aspects of your current experience of suffering that you listed in Exercise 5.1 as being within your control into the **green** boxes below (one per row). You can add more rows to the table if you need more space. We have pasted one of the examples from Exercise 5.1 as a guide.

Things that are within my control (copied from Exercise 5.1):
<i>Example:</i> The choices I can make about how to deal with my situation.
1.
2.
3.

If we say that something is within our control, it means that we believe we have personal agency to change or modify it in some way. There may have been one or many reasons why you listed each of the things in the table above as being within your personal control.

Let's return also to the illustration with the fork in the road that was part of Exercise 11.1, in which you placed onto the road a red "X" (where you are currently) and a green "O" (where you would like to be). What change/s do you think you can make to each of the

things listed in the table above to move you closer to possibility of overcoming suffering?

Use the **orange** boxes in the table below to describe what change/s you can make to each of the things that is within your control. You can add more rows to the table if you need more space. We have provided one example that follows from the table above to help guide you, but the change/s you list will be specific to what you have listed above.

Change/s I can make to the things that are within my control:	
<i>Example:</i> When I start to get down and find myself focusing on what is negative about my situation, I can shift my attention to the good things in my life.	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Now that you have identified what change/s you can make to each of the things that are within your control, how will you go about making those changes? Is there a specific step or steps you can take to make these change/s?

Use the **yellow** boxes in the table below to describe what you plan to do to make change/s to aspects of your current situation that are within your control. You can add more rows to the table if you need more space. We have provided one example that follows from the table above to help guide you, but the steps you list will be specific to change/s you have listed.

How I plan to make the change/s I have control over:	
<i>Example:</i> To help me keep me grounded in gratitude, I will keep a daily gratitude journal in which I list at least five things I am grateful for from the day.	
1.	
2.	

3.

Establish a self-transcendent purpose for your life

“Suffering presents us with a challenge: to find our goals and purpose in our lives that make even the worst situation worth living through.” - Viktor Frankl

Lesson 13: What is my purpose in life?

It is not uncommon for people to ask themselves: “what is my purpose in life?” Most of us wrestle with this question at some point in our lives, and many of us return to this question at different points during the course of life. This is a very personal question because your purpose in life is something that is specific to you; it is not something that can be answered by anyone else but you. It is also an important question for us to ask because our purpose in life can guide important decisions we make, influence our behavior, shape our goals, offer us a sense of direction, and imbue our life with meaning even during the darkest of times.

Exercise 13.1

For some people, their purpose in life is quite clear and became clear to them at an early age. For others, their purpose in life has often felt vague to them, and they’ve never truly felt as if they knew what their purpose in life is. There is also a wide range of people in-between these two ends of the spectrum. Regardless of where we are in our understanding of our purpose in life, what all people share in common is that our purpose in life is something we discover.

Do you feel as though you have a clear understanding of what your purpose in life is? After you have taken a few moments to reflect on this question, use the 0-10 rating

scale below to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that you have a clear understanding of your purpose in life. If you feel as though you do not have a clear understanding of your purpose in life, you will give a rating closer to 0 (*Do not agree*). If you feel as though you have a very clear understanding of your purpose in life, you will give a rating closer to 10 (*Completely agree*).

- I have a very clear understanding of what my purpose in life is.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

When people provide a response to this statement, they often realize that they have some room to grow in their understanding of what their purpose in life is. Regardless of what numeric value you placed in the box above, this workbook is designed to help you strengthen your understanding of what your purpose in life is.

Lesson 14: What is a worthy purpose for my life?

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl describes what he learned about being human from the cruel and undignified experiences he and others went through while he was imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. At one point in the book where Frankl describes the despairing psychological state of the prisoners, he writes: "The thought of suicide was entertained by nearly everyone, if only for a brief time. It was born of the hopelessness of the situation, the constant danger of death looming over us daily and hourly, and the closeness of the deaths suffered by many of the others." Although Frankl spends a great deal of time in the book helping the reader to better understand the suffering that people endured while imprisoned, what he is especially interested in showing us is that there was some light that emerged from the darkest of places.

One of the brighter things that Frankl discovered on his journey of enduring tremendous hardship is that we can only reach our highest potential by serving a greater good that is beyond ourselves. He put it this way: “The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.” It was through his experience of suffering that Frankl realized our suffering gives person a chance to re-imagine a more self-transcendent purpose for their lives in which their main aim is to contribute positively to something that is greater than themselves.

In this lesson, we are going to go through some activities that will help guide you to formulate a self-transcendent purpose in life statement that you can see yourself pursuing going forward. A self-transcendent purpose in life statement a specific statement that reflects your plan to pursue something that you’re passionate about for the greater good of the world around you. In other words, the two key ingredients to a self-transcendent purpose in life is (1) it centers on something important to you and (2) it is pursued in order to contribute to something beyond yourself.

While we would like to formulate a self-transcendent purpose in life statement that guide us in our journey for many years to come, we should not treat it as something that we cannot change, modify, or refine. By the end of this lesson, you will have formulated a transcendent purpose in life statement that you will use for the remainder of this workbook, but that should not restrict you in the future from returning to your purpose in life statement and refining it further as you see fit.

Exercise 14.1

In this activity, we’re going to focus on the first part of a self-transcendent purpose in life by exploring what you are most passionate about. As you reflect on your journey in life, think of the activities and interests that have stayed with you over time. In the box below, write a paragraph describing an enduring passion of yours. As you write, you may find it helpful to consider the following:

- What exactly do you do when you are engaged in that passion?
- Why do you think this is an enduring passion of yours?

Description of my enduring passion:

Now that we've explored an interest or activity that is an enduring passion of yours, in what ways do you think this enduring passion makes a positive contribution to something that is bigger than you? Use the box below to write your response; here are some additional questions you may be helpful to you:

- How can or does this enduring passion contribute positively to the lives of others?
- Describe a moment or a specific activity when you experienced that this enduring passion of yours had contributed positively to the world around you. How does that make you feel?

Ways in which my enduring passion contributes to something beyond me:

Exercise 14.2

In this activity, you will reach out to at least three people who know you well and ask them the following questions:

1. What is the unique way that you contribute meaningfully to their lives?
2. What is one thing they would turn to you for and nobody else?
3. What is one thing that they would be missing if you were not part of their lives?

Here are some guidelines to use as you ask people to respond to the three questions:

- Ask each person to remember and tell one story that connects to their answers. Encourage people you ask to dig deeper and be as specific as possible. For example, if a friend of yours responds saying, “You are a great friend,” ask them “What makes my friendship great and unique?”
- Make sure that these are people around whom you feel like you reveal your true self. Some people can be observant and insightful by nature, so you can also approach those kinds of people even if you have not spent a great deal of time with them.
- Try to avoid asking people with whom you have a role-based relationship. If you are a parent asking your children, they are more likely to say, “you provide me love or you protect me.” If you choose to ask the questions to these individuals, ask them to go deeper beyond your role.
- If you are employed, try to get someone from your workplace to answer the three questions. When asking them, you could modify some of the questions to focus more on work, such as “What is the unique way that you contribute meaningfully to the life of the organization you work for?”
- It can sometimes be useful to ask people to provide written responses to the three questions, such as via email, text message, or chat apps. This can give them a bit of time and space to formulate their thoughts before answering.

- Some people may not be able to answer right away. You could give them 1-2 days to respond so they have some time to think about their responses. You may also want to ask more than three people to answer the questions, and then use the ones you receive after 1-2 days.

Below are three boxes that you can use to paste the responses to the questions you received from three different people. If you asked more than three people to complete the questions, you can add other boxes below and insert their responses.

Response from person 1:

Response from person 2:

Response from person 3:

Using the responses you received, write a paragraph summarizing what they told you about yourself. As you write, can you identify specific or common themes across people? Which theme feels most exciting and true to you?

What people told me about myself:

Exercise 14.3

In this activity, we are going to bring together what you have discovered in Exercises 14.1 and 14.2 to formulate a self-transcendent purpose in life statement. As a reminder, a self-transcendent purpose in life is about pursuing something important to you in service of making a positive contribution to the greater good of the world. We will

There are many different approaches we can use to formulate and write a self-transcendent purpose in life statement. You should not feel restricted by the guidelines offered here, but here are some things to consider as you formulate your statement:

- To help keep your statement clear and focused, try to write it in a single sentence.
- Try to formulate a statement that is something you can pursue over a long period of time regardless of how much you have succeeded in pursuing it; your statement should be broader than a goal (which is more specific and targeted) but not too broad that it is unmanageable or too abstract.

- Even if you do not feel entirely ready to commit to a self-transcendent purpose in life statement, write something down for now and you can continue to refine it over time.

Using the **yellow** box below, write down your self-transcendent purpose in life statement. We have provided some examples to help guide you with formulating your own, but you should not feel restricted by the structure of these examples.

My self-transcendent purpose in life statement:
<i>Example 1:</i> My purpose in life is to create unique pieces of art in order to bring happiness and inspiration to others.
<i>Example 2:</i> My purpose in life is to become the best version of myself so that I can serve my family well.
<i>Example 3:</i> My purpose in life is to do everything I can to support parents with children who have a disability.
My purpose in life is to...

Exercise 14.4

Go back to the people that responded to the three questions in Exercise 14.2 and share your self-transcendent purpose in life statement with them. Ask them to share any feedback they have about your purpose in life statement. Here are some potential questions to ask them, but you can add others to these:

Here are some guidelines to use as you ask people to respond to the three questions:

- How well does my purpose in life statement align with who I am?
- Do you think this purpose in life statement is something I can pursue over a long period of time, perhaps even for the rest of my life?
- Are there any ways you think I should consider refining my purpose in life statement?

Summarize what the people you asked told you about your purpose in life statement.

--

My refined self-transcendent purpose in life statement:
My purpose in life is to...

Read your self-transcendent purpose in life statement out loud to yourself three times. What thoughts or feelings came to mind as you did this? Describe your experience using the box provided below.

[illegible]

Name specific goals that align with your self-transcendent purpose in life

“Goals allow you to control the direction of change in your favor.”

– Brian Tracy

Lesson 15: What goals should I target?

In the previous lesson, you developed a self-transcendent purpose in life statement that you can pursue moving forward. In this lesson, we are going to go through some activities that will guide you to formulate a set of short-term and longer-term goals that align with your purpose statement. A goal is something specific that we can work towards. Goals are narrower and more targeted than a purpose statement, and they are usually tied to clear outcomes. Goals help move us forward in pursuit of our purpose in life; they provide the steppingstones that can keep us aligned with our purpose in life, especially when we encounter challenges, setbacks, and suffering.

There are different approaches that you can use to establish goals. You are going to use the SMART acronym to formulate your goals, which means that your goals should be:

- **Specific** (What do you want to achieve? Why is it important? Who will be involved? Where will it happen?)
- **Measurable** (How will you know whether you've met your goal? Can you clearly measure whether you have achieved the goal?)
- **Achievable** (How can I accomplish this goal? Is the goal realistic?)
- **Relevant** (Does the goal align with your self-transcendent purpose in life statement? Is it the right time for this goal?)
- **Time-bound** (What is the deadline for achieving the goal?)

Exercise 15.1

In this activity, you are going to formulate three short-term goals that connect to the purpose in life statement that you developed in the previous lesson. You may find it useful to have a copy of your purpose in life statement close by as you work through this activity.

As the acronym suggests, you want your goals to be time-bound. For the purposes of this activity, let's apply a three-month timeframe to the short-term goals you formulate. You may fulfill some goals much sooner than three months, whereas for others you may need all three months. What is important is that you establish short-term goals you believe you will be able to achieve within three months from now.

Let's take a look at three short-term goals that connect with the following purpose in life statement that was included as an example in the previous lesson: *My purpose in life is to do everything I can to support parents with children who have a disability.*

Example short-term goals for the next three months:
1. Volunteer in the free local support program that is being provided to parents of a child with a disability.
2. Make three written posts on my Facebook page giving evidence-based advice to parents of a child with a disability.
3. Identify a certification course I can complete to strengthen my knowledge and expertise in providing support to parents with a child who has a disability.

Based on the purpose in life statement given above, these goals appear to be specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant.

Now it's your turn to formulate three short-term goals. What goals do you think you could establish and work towards over the next three months that align closely with your purpose in life statement? Use the **green** boxes below to list your short-term goals (one

per row). Remember that they should be specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant to your purpose in life statement.

My short-term goals for the next three months:	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Exercise 15.2

Now you are going to formulate three longer-term goals that connect to the purpose in life statement. Let's apply a one-year timeframe to the longer-term goals you formulate. You may find it useful to have a copy of your purpose in life statement close by as you work through this activity.

Let's take a look at three short-term goals that connect with the same purpose in life statement that we used earlier as an example: *My purpose in life is to do everything I can to support parents with children who have a disability.*

Example longer-term goals for the next year:	
1.	Start my own local support program for parents of a child with a disability.
2.	Create a website that provides evidence-based advice to parents of a child with a disability.
3.	Complete a certification course to strengthen my knowledge and expertise in providing support to parents with a child who has a disability.

Based on the purpose in life statement given above, it is reasonable to believe that these longer-term goals are specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant.

Now it's your turn to formulate three longer-term goals. What goals do you think you could establish and work towards over the next year that align closely with your purpose in life statement? Use the **yellow** boxes below to list your longer-term goals (one per row). Remember that they should be specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant to your purpose in life statement.

My longer-term goals for the next year:
1.
2.
3.

Lesson 16: What should I do if I encounter obstacles and setbacks?

While we try our best to plan and establish suitable goals, we need to accept that we may face obstacles and setbacks along the way. If we approach our goals knowing that we are likely to encounter roadblocks and difficulties at some point, it can free us up to approach our goals with a degree of flexibility.

Now that you have established three short-term and three long-term goals that align with your purpose in life statement, let's plan a schedule that you can use to return to your goals periodically, evaluate your progress, and decide whether any of the goals need to be modified.

Exercise 16.1

For your short-term goals, use the date templates in the table below to list at least three dates between today and three months from now on which you plan to review your

goals. You could space the dates about one month apart, or you could review your short-term goals more regularly if desired. You can add more rows to the table if you need more space.

Dates I will return to my short-term goals and re-evaluate them:
Date 1 – DD/MM/YY
Date 2 – DD/MM/YY
Date 3 – DD/MM/YY

When you return to your short-term goals on the dates you have listed, you can evaluate each goal against the progress you have made. Which goals have you achieved? How much progress have you made towards achieving the other goals? Are there any obstacles or setbacks you've experienced in trying to achieve certain goals?

If any unforeseen things have happened in your life since you last reviewed your goals, and your ability to achieve one or more of the goals has or will be affected, these review dates might be a good time for you to consider modifying or replacing affected goals with alternatives that might be more realistic under the circumstances. Although we ideally do not want to modify or replace these goals unless it seems absolutely necessary, what is most important is that you have short-term goals you can make progress towards because your goals are the steppingstones that aim you towards your self-transcendent purpose in life. If modifications or replacements are going to be helpful in this way, then it may be worthwhile doing so.

After you have accomplished your three goals, you may want to establish another set of three short-term goals following the same process as in Exercise 15.1.

Exercise 16.2

You can follow a similar approach to Exercise 16.1 for your longer-term goals. Using the date templates provided in the table below, list at least four dates between today and one year from now on which you plan to review your goals. You could space the dates about three months apart, or you could review your longer-term goals more frequently if you would like. You can add more rows to the table if you need more space.

Dates I will return to my longer-term goals and re-evaluate them:
Date 1 – DD/MM/YY
Date 2 – DD/MM/YY
Date 3 – DD/MM/YY
Date 4 – DD/MM/YY

When you return to your longer-term goals on these dates, you can evaluate each goal against the progress you have made. You can ask yourself similar questions to those that you used for the short-term goals: Which goals have you achieved? How much progress have you made towards achieving the other goals? Are there any obstacles or setbacks you've experienced in trying to achieve certain goals?

If any unforeseen things have happened in your life since you last reviewed these longer-term goals, and your ability to achieve one or more of the goals has or will be affected, these review dates might be a good time for you to consider modifying or replacing affected goals with alternatives that might be more realistic under the circumstances. We only want to modify or replace these goals if it seems absolutely necessary, but what is most important is that you have longer-term goals you can make progress towards because these goals have been established to serve your self-transcendent purpose in life. If making modifications or replacements will be helpful in this way, then it may be worthwhile doing so.

After you have accomplished your three goals, you may want to establish another set of three longer-term goals following the same process as in Exercise 15.2.

Dive into your self-transcendent purpose in life

“I am able to enjoy living fully because of my capacity for self-transcendence.” – Paul Wong

Lesson 17: How can I stay committed to my purpose in life?

Below is a picture of a broom tree, a desert shrub that grows in the arid conditions of Arabia where few other plants are able to survive. A picture like this brings up many questions, including what it takes for a tree like this to thrive in such a barren environment? Here, we will explore some possible lessons that the broom tree can teach us about maintaining our commitment to the self-transcendent purpose we have established.



Exercise 17.1

The broom tree prospers in the desert climate by stretching its roots deep and wide to source water that is hidden far below the earth's surface. While many other plants and trees would struggle to survive in this terrain, the broom tree seems to embrace the challenge of desert dwelling and thrive under these conditions.

Spend a few moments reflecting on the picture of the broom tree. Try to think about the tree's journey from a tiny seed to the flourishing tree you see in this picture. What characteristics do you think helped this tree survive and thrive in the desert?

Using the **green** boxes below, list the characteristics that come to mind (one per row). You can add more rows to the table if you need more space. We have provided an example to guide you.

Characteristics of the broom tree that help it survive and thrive in the desert:
<i>Example:</i> The ability to persevere through difficulty and uncertainty.

1.
2.
3.

Exercise 17.2

As we reflect further on the broom tree, one might say that the broom tree perseveres in the desert toward its goal of obtaining water for survival by stretching its roots deep down into the soil where few other trees are willing to go. Let's pretend for a moment that the broom tree represents you, the desert represents the suffering you experience in life, and the water represents the goals you have established in service of your purpose in life.

The broom tree shows us that we can choose to remain dedicated to the goals we have set out in line with our purpose in life despite the difficulties, setbacks, and suffering we experience along the way. While our journey may not be easy, the broom tree demonstrates that if we can persevere then the desert-like situations we face have the potential to be transformed into something positive.

This idea has been reflected in the lives of many people during the course of human history. We can look to Viktor Frankl as a relatively recent example. Even after the horrific experiences he had as a prisoner of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II and learning that his parents, his pregnant wife, and brother did not survive the concentration camps, Frankl insisted that the most suitable response to everything he had encountered was to say, "yes to life." This phrase has become an important part of Frankl's legacy. It signals his commitment to embracing life and persevering on his personal journey despite the immensity of the suffering he experienced.

We can apply Frankl's message to our lives in different ways. One way we can do this is by choosing to remain fully committed to the purpose we have established for our life,

regardless of the circumstances we might face. Here you are invited to take the first step by completing a pledge of commitment to your purpose in life.

It is important for you to know that completing this pledge of commitment does not mean that the purpose statement that you have established is now fixed or cannot be changed. There may be points in your life where you will want to return to your purpose statement and re-evaluate it, which is entirely fine. The reason you are being invited to complete this pledge today is that it will help you to remember the moment you expressed your commitment to the purpose you have established for your life.

Use the template below to complete your pledge of commitment to the self-transcendent purpose you have established for your life:

Pledge of Commitment to my Purpose in Life

I declare to myself that as of the date [INSERT MONTH AND DAY], [INSERT YEAR], I have decided to dedicate myself to the purpose I have established for my life: [INSERT THE LIFE PURPOSE STATEMENT YOU WROTE WHILE COMPLETING LESSON 14].

Signed:_____

Lesson 18: Where do I begin the journey of pursuing my self-transcendent purpose in life?

In this lesson, you will complete some exercises that are designed to be stepping-stones on your journey of pursuing your self-transcendent purpose in life.

Exercise 18.1

In Joseph Campbell's writings on the "hero's journey," the hero returns from their quest—where they transcended suffering—to share what they have learned with others. Campbell points out that we all have the potential to be a hero in our own story, and the lessons we've learned from the quests we take on in our own lives can be a source of inspiration and encouragement to others.

Your quest to complete this workbook is a type of "hero's journey" that you have chosen to undertake. Now that you are nearing the end of this workbook, write a personal testimony reflecting on your experience going through the workbook. Try to write as though you are writing to a person who is experiencing the same suffering you did when you started this workbook. As you write, you may find it helpful to reflect on the following questions (though you should not feel restricted by them):

- What are some of the most important things you learned that you think others should know about?
- Did you discover anything new about yourself as a result of going through the workbook?
- Did the process of completing this workbook prompt you to make any important changes to your life?

My personal testimony:

Exercise 18.2

Using the boxes below, list the first names of three people that you know well (e.g., relatives, friends, coworkers) who do you think would benefit from learning about your personal testimony.

Three people I know well who would benefit from my personal testimony:
1.
2.
3.

Of the three people you listed above, choose one person with whom you will share your personal testimony. You can decide when, where, and what format might be best to share your personal testimony with this person. You could share your personal testimony in person, over the phone, or over a video call, and you can make it as formal or informal as you would like. For example, if the person lives in the same household as you, you could find a convenient time to read your personal testimony to them. If the person is a friend who you see regularly, you could make plans to meet in a quiet place where you could read your personal testimony to them. If the person is someone who lives far away from you, you could read your personal testimony to while talking to them over a phone call or video call.

Record the basic details of sharing your personal testimony with the person:

I shared my personal testimony **[SELECT ONE: FACE-TO-FACE/OVER A PHONE CALL/OVER A VIDEO CALL]** with **[INSERT PERSON'S FIRST NAME]** on **[INSERT MONTH AND DAY]**, **[INSERT YEAR]**.

Exercise 18.3

- How did it make you feel to say your personal testimony out loud in the presence of another person?
- What part of your interaction with them stands out to you?
- Based on what they said to you after you shared your personal testimony, was there anything you said that really resonated with or stood out to them?

My experience sharing my personal testimony:

By sharing your personal testimony to encourage and uplift another person, you have also taken a step towards the essence of your self-transcendent purpose in life—serving or contributing to something beyond yourself. Even if sharing your personal testimony isn't exactly aligned with your self-transcendent purpose in life, may the process of supporting another person through your story inspire you to take another step forward in pursuit of the goals that you have formulated in pursuit of your self-transcendent purpose.

Summary

Congratulations on completing the TRANSCEND workbook. This completed version of the workbook can be a resource that you can come back to in the future. You could review this completed workbook to reflect on the changes you have experienced since completing this workbook, or you might use it to remind yourself of the self-transcendent purpose statement and goals you've established. You may also wish to recommend the workbook to other people, now or in the future. As you conclude this workbook, take a few moments to go through the final few activities.

Near the beginning of this workbook, we discussed the idea of mindsets about suffering and you responded to a few statements that reflected this idea. Without looking at the responses that you gave at the beginning of this workbook, consider and respond to each of those statements now that you have completed this workbook.

In general, suffering helps you to become the best version of yourself.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

In the long run, you are strengthened by the suffering you experience in life.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

On the whole, experiencing suffering gives your life a deeper sense of meaning.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating here :	
---------------------------------	--

Your own suffering makes it easier for you to understand the struggles of others.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating <u>here</u> :	
---------------------------------	--

The suffering you experience in life can be transformed into a positive force for good.

0 (*Do not agree*) to 10 (*Completely agree*)?

Enter your rating <u>here</u> :	
---------------------------------	--

How do you think your mindset about suffering has changed compared to before you started this workbook? Use the box below to describe what has changed for you.

Ways in which my mindset about suffering has changed since completing this workbook:

Let's fast-forward into the future for a moment and pretend that it has been a year since you have completed this workbook. What thoughts and feelings do you think will come to mind as you reflect back on your experience completing this workbook and the things that have happened in your life since completing it?

The thoughts and feelings I might have as I reflect on my experience with this workbook a year from now: