

MYSTIC LIGHT

Suffering

HUMANS HAVE KNOWN suffering for as long as they have been aware of having physical bodies. In fact, the experience of both have a common source, beginning in the latter part of ancient Lemuria, in the willful and unrestrained use of the sex force, which brought about a gradual closing of the etheric world's paradisaal doors and a displacement of consciousness onto the material plane, where childbirth, sickness, old age, and death frame and infiltrate human lives with suffering.

While the Bible cites willful disobedience as the cause of this fall into material consciousness, we may also say that it was necessary, if not fortunate; that its instigator, Lucifer, has become humanity's benefactor; that a curse of perdition has made possible the blessing of redemption; and that an ignorant adamic humanity will, eventually, rise up out of the valley of the shadow of death bearing an individualized Christed consciousness.

In the first Rosicrucian Christianity Lecture, Max Heindel asserts that "There is but one sin—ignorance, and but one salvation—applied knowledge." As Plato said, God is Truth and Light is its shadow. Therefore, if we know Truth and live it, we walk and live in the Light. The first knowing of the material world was brought about in Atlantean mystery temples during the star-regulated times for procreation. Thereafter *knowing* became an expression for the procreative act because it intensified awareness of the physical world.

If ignorance is sin, suffering can be a dispeller of ignorance, a teacher and guide to right living. As



Illustration for Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book III, lines 739-41, Gustave Doré

Milton's Satan is the Western Wisdom's Lucifer, here shown speeding down toward Earth, where, in the guise of "the infernal serpent," he prompts the eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and initiates the "fortunate fall."

Max Heindel describes it in "Lucifer: Tempter or Benefactor?" wisdom is crystallized pain: "Our sorrows, when they are past, and we can calmly view them and extract the lessons they contained, are mines of wisdom, and are wombs of future joys, for by them we learn to order our lives aright, we learn to cease from sin." The educator and author Lionel Trilling has a similar understanding. His felicitous expression is that man learns by "didactic suffering." Psalm 119:71 states that "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes."

Normally regarded as an injustice, if not an evil, suffering manifests on the physical level as pain, on the soul level in myriad trying emotions, and on

the mental level as confusion, conflict, doubt, and the awareness of not knowing.

Suffering can be creative and productive, as when incident to physical birth, generating a work of art, or undergoing personality transformation and individuation. Of course one can suffer from destructive, selfish behavior, but this too, ultimately serves to instruct us in right behavior by functioning as conscience. St. Paul makes this distinction when he says that “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (II Cor. 7:10).

Generally, we may say that suffering serves to effect change. It prods the mind to ask questions, seek answers, analyze assumptions, more clearly perceive, discriminate, and evaluate. Suffering awakens—slowly or abruptly. It shows us the effect of our actions and eventually purges us of wayward desires and false beliefs.

A deep study of the nature of suffering discovers a justification for the existence of God, which is theodicy. For evil, as much apparently gratuitous suffering is termed, and a loving God do not easily admit of reconciliation. The book of Job explores the nature of suffering and concludes that we may not always know why we suffer but that God’s life in us transcends and justifies all that we may experience that is difficult and distressing. Job’s affirmation is absolute: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (13:15).

Sin based in ignorance designates those soul states that must result in suffering because they separate us from God. The first and greatest sin is exactly the assertion of this God-lessness, maintaining the pre-eminence of personal or private being. On pride pivots all negative suffering. Pride insists on individual primacy. But our best and highest is God’s since it is from Him. Thus, one unnecessarily suffers from the feeling of special-

ness and uniqueness, which are founded in the fear and pride that make one a closed book to others. One nurtures unshareable hurt, conceives an inordinate endowment of affliction and a stubborn capacity to morosely endure it, making of it a private feast of misery.

All forms of suffering are borne, alleviated, and healed by honesty, acceptance, forgiveness, patience, humility, and love. Which is to say that suffering is best met with longsuffering. As the apostle Paul says, charity bears all things and endures all things, and charity never faileth. It is said that before the eyes can see they must become incapable of tears, and that before the ears can hear, they must have lost their sensitiveness. What

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kind of person can do this? The soul that can consciously negotiate the desire world must have attained an equilibrium which cannot be shaken by personal emotion. As Mabel Collins writes in *Light on the Path*, “no man desires to see that light which illumines the spaceless soul until pain and sorrow and despair

have driven him away from the life of ordinary humanity. First he wears out pleasure, then he wears out pain.” It is an immature soul that will not take its pleasure and its pain with like equanimity.

In sensation no permanent home can be found because change is the law of this earthly vibratory existence. Those who lust for life experience the most intense forms of suffering until, aroused from their stupor of consciousness, they step over the threshold into a place of peace where the vibration of life looses its power of tyranny. The sensitive nature must suffer still, but the soul has freed itself and stands aloof, as another person.

One begins to develop the vital body through exercises designed to dissociate the Ego from both physical appetites and automatic emotional programming. Increasingly one’s life is regulated by

charitable acts, willed service, controlled thought, and an attitude of prayerful quietude and sober optimism. One is fully present in the daily bedlam, but not deflected in his course by firefly apparitions, verbal land mines, or emotional tempests.

It becomes clear that one who desires to escape the meshes of mortal suffering must develop a far greater capacity to tolerate pain and sorrow, not as an experiment in masochism, but by a reorientation of the soul, by a girding of the loins of the mind, enabling one to take seriously that most salutary invitation from the Man of Sorrows: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." The yoke is the cross, material existence in all its ramifications—splinters, dead weight, inflexibility—which one learns to bear with poise and tranquillity. In time we discover that it is Christ Who bears the cross and we who bear the Christ. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

In *right suffering* lies our liberation from the endless cycle of cross carrying, from the tempting torture of the two-dimensional, pleasure-pain polarity of self-centered material existence. We learn not to defend our personal selves, not to shore up our vanity and inflate the balloon of our self-image. We become permeable to insult, pain, and privation. It comes. We accept it. It goes, we accept that too—the coming and the going, the lean and the fat, the loss and the largess, the desolation and the joy—not as numb catalepts but as the three who stood in the fiery furnace, as Daniel in the lion's den, as Elijah in the cave of his own soul at the mouth of which stormed the ferocious elements of his passions—until he heard, in lull of his surrender, the still, small voice of his Ego-God.

Suffering can draw up the blinds on hidden truths, break down the ramparts of our narrow understanding, and expand our consciousness. It promotes detachment from the partial and particular and fosters identification with wholes and unities.

Suffering can be a kind of sustenance or nourishment, as suggested by Isaiah's phrase, "the bread of adversity and the water of affliction" (30:20). We deprive ourselves of their benefit when we seek to avoid or ignore all forms of difficulty.

Conscience is the analogue of pain on the mental and emotional level. Conscience is a triggering of our moral and spiritual nerves. Its Old Testament antecedent was the brazen altar, where salt was applied to the sacrificed animal flesh to signify the searing pain of genuine remorse.

Some suffering comes to us as a testing or probation, to prove our mettle, as in being "tried by fire." In Isaiah the Lord says, "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (48:10). Peter tells us that, given our calling, we are naive not to expect suffering: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12). Or, as Abbé de Tourville



Frederic Shields

The Prophet Daniel

Daniel receives the Messianic vision (Dan. 10:21) from the angel after chastening himself before God. At the seer's feet the lion typifies past dangers overcome through the intervention of God's angelic ministers.

observes, "There is nothing in this world without its difficulties, and we must accept them with tranquillity and wisdom,"

learning to be content with lack of contentment.

What do we believe? How firmly and how deeply do we believe it? Life gives us ample opportunity to demonstrate our convictions and to hold fast to what is deemed right and true. If we compromise to escape various forms of pain—public disfavor, loss of material benefits, challenge to our beliefs—then we are re-presented with tests to determine if we have attained to the courage of our convictions. For courage it often reduces to, stoutness of heart, moral stamina to endure various forms of adversity.

And what of the meek? Isaiah says that the meek who suffer for no deeds of their own doing shall be given “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (61:3).

We do not lack for wise counsel to help us stay our course. Baron Friedrich von Hugel notes that “to suffer well is far more difficult than to act well...Holy suffering is the very crown of holy action.” Consider Christ Jesus and learn the power and nobility of suffering. Further, he writes, “it is only suffering meekly accepted, willed, transfigured by love of God, of Christ—it is only such that will purify or cure anything.”

Whereas it is never God’s will *that* we suffer, it is His will that we know *why* we suffer so that we may desist from what causes it. Abbé de Tourville advises, “We are not responsible for our feelings but for our decisions. What does it matter if our sensible nature feels upset? If we act rightly, then all is well.” And, “we are never so near God as when we have to get on as well as we can without the consolation of feeling His presence.” Meister Eckhart has attained to deep wisdom. He knows

that “so long as created things console you and can console you, never will you find true consolation.”

We come to better understand the significance of the many alchemical processes that require fire for extracting and volatilizing the essence of a thing from its material host. This fire is the pain and suffering incident to separating the spirit from all its manifestations. It may take the form of physical disability and infirmity, which help loosen the connection between the Ego and its physical instrument. Max Heindel’s brushes with death seemed to bring him closer to his Teacher and the spiritual worlds.

The Old Testament is, among other things, a saga of suffering, and the book of Ecclesiastes cites “the wandering of desire” as its cause: “the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing” (1:8). St. John’s New Testament echo points to “the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16) as prime sources of suffering. However, not just man but the very

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earth, “all things are full of labor.” But the apostle Paul makes clear that this is the labor of birth, of the gestation of the etheric body. In fact, not only mankind but “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together”; by which we infer that we mistake much of our pain as something done *to* us, whereas it is something done *for* us, as the stretching of the mother’s womb makes possible the birth of a new being. We are experiencing the protracted labor of the birth of the higher Self. It is a labor of love, a spiritual travail, attended and midwived by transformative suffering. Likewise the very earth is in embryonic preparation for its etheric embodiment in the Jupiter Period, occasioning Paul’s rousing reminder that “the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in

us” (Rom. 8:18). Thus can he “glory in tribulation.”

In fact, Paul contends, and his contention is echoed by Max Heindel in *Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine*, that we are sparks of divinity to be made perfect *through* suffering. Thomas à Kempis writes that “he who knows how to suffer will enjoy much peace. Such a one is a conqueror of himself and lord of the world, a friend of Christ, and an heir of heaven.” Much suffering, then, is a blessing. For “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” How does he chasten? Largely through His minister Saturn, who is the *agent provocateur*, the adversary (which is the meaning of *Satan* in Hebrew), whose beneficent mission is to bring sorrow to dampen our arrogance, to tempt us that our imperfections may be brought before us to be corrected. Saturn/Satan is the great disciplinarian.

We understand why Saturn is dignified in the cardinal earth sign Capricorn, where manifested actions become our teachers, and exalted in Libra, where his corrective influences help restore physical, emotional, and mental balance. Confirmed in the knowledge that all things work for good because God knows our every need, Sir Thomas Browne can survey all the occurrences of his life and “perceive nothing but an abyss and mass of mercies....Those which others term crosses, afflictions, judgments, misfortunes, to me, who inquire farther into them than their visible effects, they both appear, and in event have ever proved, the secret and dissembled favors of his affection.”

An ennobled and chastened Parsifal, no longer the pure fool, enters the grounds of Montsalvat where the hermit Gurnemanz asks him whence he has come: “Through search and suffering I came,” and by them he developed moral discipline, spiritual fortitude, and wisdom, enabling him to administer the Holy Grail and to wield the Holy Spear,



Planet Art

Tempera on panel, 42-1/2 x 33-3/4 inches, c. 1565, Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), Brera Museum, Milan

Pieta

One of the most moving depictions of the mourning of the crucified Jesus, the Bellini Pieta, executed with confident command of Renaissance realism, shows the Madonna and St. John, who is now Mary's Christ-appointed spiritual son.

both signifying the attainment of etheric powers.

Evelyn Derry, in her book *Growing up in Religion*, observes that the pain of feeling lonely is essential to the development of inwardness in the growing child. It is the source of religious feeling and through it the necessary sense of selfhood awakens.

In his Christianity lecture “Astrology, Scope and Limitations,” Max Heindel maintains that “all our sorrows and pains are the result of ignorance.” The Rosicrucian Fellowship Opening Hymn explains that man’s ignorance of cosmic law brought discord, resulting in sorrow, death, and woe. And with reason’s torch we search for truth to restore harmony and life. Contrary to the popular saying, ignorance is definitely not bliss. Yet the Old Testament Preacher claims that “in wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (1:18). How explain the contradiction? Christ had yet to come to annul the sting of death and give value to deeds done in the body and to open the way to supersensible knowledge and spiritual attainment. So we may say that lack

of wisdom was the Preacher's malady, the source of his suffering. Unlike Isaiah, he had no foreknowledge of Christ's redemptive mission.

A preview of the cessation of sorrow and pain will first be experienced in the Sixth Epoch of the Earth Period, the New Galilee, which will be a precursor of the New Jerusalem, the life described in the book of *Revelation* that shall constitute existence in the Jupiter Period.

One who is uniquely in a position to know has said of Christ that the three years during which He was gradually penetrating the human sheaths of Jesus' body was a period of "unceasing, perpetual pain, but pain that was transmuted into Love, infinite, ever deepening, Love." Herein we touch on the deepest mystery of our subject. Deepest pain has the power to transmute itself into a love which does not work in the manner of ordinary love but through the mere presence of the one who loves. It is not a surge of feeling but a consistently radiating power. The catharsis of the desire body effects a transformation of passion to compassion, the fire that burns unto death becomes the fire that heals and gives life. The fever that purges portends the fire that illuminates and creates.

The earthly ignominy of physical suffering, rejection, and misunderstanding symbolized by the crown of thorns, a dying to and an overcoming of the world, make possible the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, where the liberated spirit is crowned with wisdom and glory and power. As colors are the sufferings of light, so physical embodiment tinctures the spirit with suffering. It also brings self-consciousness, knowledge that we are Gods-in-the-making. At present the cost of suffering seems inordinate. But this assessment shows a failure of imagination and a paucity of faith.

John the Evangelist reminds us that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. If we desire the high, we must do battle with the low. If we would be resurrected in spirit, we must be conformable to death and participate in the liberating fellowship of Christ's suffering (Eph.3:10). Thomas à Kempis asks, "Whence shall thy patience be crowned if thou meet with no adversity? If thou wilt suffer no opposition, how wilt thou be a friend of Christ? Suffer with Christ and for Christ

if thou desirest to reign with Christ."

Our acceptable expectation is to know how to be abased as well as to abound, to know need as well as plenty, and to further know that this is all possible, nay, assured, because we can do all things through Christ Who strengthens us. As Jean-Pierre de Caussade counsels, "make God an offering of the sorrow that imperfection brings you...[and] let patience be your weapon." The victory that overcomes the world, even our faith, is tried in the fire of suffering. Suffering, then, brings vision and, with vision, knowledge. Then we know that He that is in us is greater than our mortal self that is in the world.

Hannah Hurnard reminds us that to love is to become vulnerable to pain:

*I'll turn my hands upon thy Heart
And purge away the dross.
I will refine thee in my fire,
Remake thee at my cross.*

This is Christian alchemy. This is the path to interior Christening. We are anointed with sorrow. When the spirit is liberated from the body through initiation, the etheric nails are pulled from the flesh, the spear is withdrawn from the desire vortex, the crown of thorns becomes a diadem of potent, radiating light. We advance toward this prospect, armed with high knowledge, fortified by enlightened will, bent on being optimally useful, knowing that our strength is made perfect in weakness, aspiring even to glory in our infirmities, that the love-power of Christ may be instilled in us to the glory of the Father; reminded also that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17).

Corinne Heline writes,

*In the heart of today
Lives the world of tomorrow,
And the builders of joy
Are the children of sorrow.*

Godly sorrow builds toward the day of liberation, when, as inhabitants of the New City of Peace, all tears shall be wiped from our eyes. So knowing, attainment awaits our doing. □

—C. W.