

Suffering — the postman

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Abstract

The Creator shines through each aspect of his creation. As this is the case, then each and every darkness and challenge must hide a divine Truth within. Let us explore the darkness of suffering and see what the hidden message is, veiled behind the dark and unpleasant façade. Can we allow, in faith, to go intimately close to suffering and see its roots, origins, its reason for manifestation, for being there? Let us engage in each experience of life as an exploration, to dig deeper, further, on and on. For only this progression, this adventure, this exploration is a never- ending joy.

“Pain is the hammer of God to break
A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart... (1)”

Emotional pain and suffering are words which may sound very familiar. Each one of us reading these words has been through, or may be going through, some or other kind of suffering in life. Let us explore deeply into this problem of our day-to-day suffering, which often becomes a lifetime of suffering with only a few respites in between.

Origins of suffering

When do I suffer? When I feel that I am in a certain life- situation, and I don’t want to be there, I just want to be somewhere else. The situation does not agree with my image or notion of what must have happened. I may be going through a broken relationship, or a disease, or loss of a person in life, and

something in me resists that happening. That something in me would say: ‘This cannot happen, how can it be? What about my plans? How would I be able to live now? What bad have I done in my life to deserve this?’ All these are thoughts which spring up in resistance to the happening of life, to the ‘isness’ of life. Whenever I become the resistance and support the resistance further, suffering is present. Wherever there is a resistance to whatever *is*, suffering will inevitably be present. In the absence of this resistance from within the being, the suffering cannot exist. Challenges of life will still be there, difficulties may still be there, but suffering would have no reason to be present. It seems that suffering and resistance to the flow of life are entwined with each other. An animal does not suffer; a plant or a bush or a tree does not suffer. It may rot, wilt, die away and become mud. Animals may go through

pain, but there is no one saying from within them, 'Why me? Why has God done this to me?' In their innocence they are saved from the suffering.

More often for us, suffering continues in some form or another, for many years before we even become aware of it as 'suffering.' We often see that yes, life is a struggle, life has stress, tensions, conflicts, issues and problems, and hence I also have struggles, suffering and stress, what is the big deal about it? So, instead of taking the message from the postman (suffering), I make suffering a way of life, I pull the postman inside my home and give him a permanent residency there. I feel that yes, life is sorrow, not only for me but for everyone, so why should I even try to find out a way and investigate suffering? I never take enough care to go to the root of suffering. I rarely investigate and question my own belief-system, my own mental, emotional patterns which may be from behind the scenes, responsible for the suffering.

Hence, a perpetual misery continues, first appearing as mental suffering, then emotional, and slowly converting and lodging in the physical cells of the body, and surfacing as physical manifestations, like chronic illnesses. What is really happening?



Suffering as the postman

It feels like the Universe is so much in love with each one of us that it cannot see us suffer. And therefore, it gives us indications, hints, clues, pointing out, 'Hey, no need to attach yourself to that mental image, or concept'; and it communicates to us by creating suffering. Why suffering? Because we cannot avoid noticing it, we cannot ignore it owing to its intensity, we will have to pay attention to it, sooner or later and listen to the message of the Universe. It feels like suffering is nothing but a side-effect or a symptom of knowing myself wrongly as a separate limited person, identifying myself with the body, with a mental image, with conceptions and identifying myself with the feelings. It seems like the intelligence of the being gives us a red signal, in the form of suffering (which is hard to ignore), whenever we attach ourselves mistakenly to a concept or an idea about ourselves.

Can we see it like that? Can I see that, whenever suffering is there in my life, it is nothing but a signal that I am mistaking myself to be the body, or to be the thought or the feelings? If I begin to look at myself as the allowing space that allows all of the drama and melodrama to happen, in which the drama can arise and fade away, then I see that I do not suffer. I may be going through an illness, and suffering may arise saying, 'When will this end, why is God so cruel to me, why me, will I ever get better, what will happen to my close ones after me, etc?' Is it possible that when I know that the body has got a certain illness, I see that yes, the illness is there, but I am still here, being a witness to the body changing; my thoughts cannot be me, because the thoughts keep on

changing; my feelings cannot be me, as they too keep on changing. So, I clearly see that I am certainly not the body, the thoughts, the feelings. I see that there is something more to me than all this, what is that? Is that not this unflinching witnessing of all the happenings of life? Is that not this untouched, ever-present witnessing that goes on and on, even when I am seemingly unaware?

“That is usually the ordinary sensation of the being, to be so tied to this outer form that when one thinks of ‘myself’ one thinks of the body. That is the usual thing. The personal reality is the body’s reality. It is only when one has made an effort for inner development and tried to find something that is a little more stable in one’s being, that one can begin to feel that this ‘something’ which is permanently conscious throughout all ages and all change, this something must be ‘myself’. But that already requires a study that is rather deep. Otherwise if you think ‘I am going to do this’, ‘I need that’, it is always your body, a small kind of will which is a mixture of sensations, of more or less confused sentimental reactions, and still more confused thoughts which form a mixture and are animated by an impulse, an attraction, a desire, some sort of a will; and all that momentarily becomes ‘myself’—but not directly, for one does not conceive this ‘myself’ as independent of the head, the trunk, the arms and legs and all that moves — it is very closely linked.

It is only after having thought much, seen much, studied much, observed much that you begin to realise that the one is more or less independent of the other and that the will behind can make it either act or not act, and you begin not to be completely identified

with the movement, the action, the realisation — that something is floating. But you have to observe much to see that.

And then you must observe much more still to see that this, the second thing that is there, this kind of active conscious will, is set in motion by ‘something else’ which watches, judges, decides and tries to found its decisions on knowledge — that happens even much later. And so, when you begin to see this ‘something else’, you begin to see that it has the power to set in motion the second thing, which is an active will; and not only that, but that it has a very direct and very important action on the reactions, the feelings, the sensations, and that finally it can have control over all the movements of the being — this part which watches, observes, judges and decides. That is the beginning of control. When one becomes conscious of that, one has seized the thread, and when one speaks of control, one can know, ‘Ah! Yes, this is what has the power of control’ This is how one learns to look at oneself (2).”

Using the intensity of suffering as a tool

Is it then possible to utilise, to use the very presence of suffering wholly, fully, in order to receive the message it has for me? For how long shall I continue to miss the message? As long as I continue to miss the message, the Universe will keep knocking at my door through an infinite number of ways. The intelligence of the being will not rest without making us aware of our mistaken identity as body, mind and feelings.

So, we can see this very clearly, that suffering is there for a reason, if not for any reason, it would have no purpose to be here at all.

Having personally gone through suffering and finding light through it, it seems plausible that suffering is just a disguise of the love of the Universe towards us. Just like physical pain is the intelligence of the body telling me that something needs to be taken care of at the body level, emotional/mental suffering is the intelligence indicating to me that I have mistaken myself to be the thoughts/concepts/ideas/body/feelings/emotions, while in truth I am much beyond and more than all that.

So, shall we use suffering to become very intimate with our own self? Usually we are found escaping from ourselves, as if we really cannot stand ourselves at all. But when suffering is there, we cannot ignore it. It is just too much, too huge, too hard to ignore. It is good that it is that way and very intense, else we will continue mistaking ourselves to be something else; and owing to the lack of signal, never really know who we truly are.

Imagine that I am looking for a temple, and I enter a lane or a street and a guy there tells me, 'Babe, not this street!' And then another fellow in another street says, 'Babe, not this street.' And owing to all these rejections (which can be called suffering), I finally end up finding the right street in which the temple is. So, all the rejections I got, and I may even suffer owing to those rejections, are for my own good; as they do not let me settle for anything less than my true self, the temple. All that we learn, owing to all the rejections we get from external people and situations have the potency to send us deeper within, into the true home. These sufferings gradually show us that our peace and happiness lie within as our true nature, and they cannot be given by some external agents or situations.

Also, the fact that none of us really likes to suffer, must indicate a deeper truth to us that suffering is not our true nature, but a signal.

What is required of us then to use suffering as a tool, as a signal?

Honesty and sincerity come first.

"Do you know what perfect sincerity is?... Never to try to deceive oneself, never let any part of the being try to find out a way of convincing the others, never to explain favourably what one does in order to have an excuse for what one wants to do, never to close one's eyes when something is unpleasant, never to let anything pass, telling oneself, 'That is not important, next time it will be better (3).'"

If I am not even honest and sincere to admit and acknowledge that yes, there is suffering in my life, I cannot really help myself much. So, it seems that the first cornerstones of this pathless way to our own self are raw honesty and sincerity. Sincerity and honesty about my present condition of suffering and all the subtle movements in my life, in my being.

Then comes a willingness and courage to investigate and go to the depths of suffering. One almost needs to have a love for this investigation, this deep dive. Without love for investigation one cannot go too far. And when, with honesty, sincerity, willingness and courage, one walks on this path in investigating one's own suffering, one sees that the veils of ignorance are gradually shed, one by one. One realises that one has known and identified oneself to be the body, which one is not, to be the thought, which one is not, and to be the feelings, which one is not. With this gradual process of negation one arrives

at one unchanging element in one's being, a deeper truth, the light of understanding, the light of awareness, the light of a witnessing ever-present presence. One sees and knows and realises for oneself, not in theory, but in practice that one is that. And in knowing and identifying oneself as that witnessing light of consciousness, suffering ceases to be. It just sublimates. It has done its work. It disappears like smoke.

Only now, knowing oneself as that witnessing presence, can one begin a new life. A life lived from a different space, a space which is forever untouched by the happenings and changes of life. Only now one can even think of being a master of oneself. Before this it is just all a fantasy, a day-dream. Even that phase may be a necessary stepping-stone in the journey of this evolution of consciousness, which is always progressive, never lasting. Only now can life become a conscious, joyful and ever-progressive unfoldment of truth, a supreme adventure, full of challenges and a will to go through those challenges in joy and surrender. Now, we can slowly begin to see what thoughts are serving us well and what thoughts are just a pattern, repeating themselves in a loop and sticking to the mind and making it heavy and burdened. And one can reject those patterns with self-mastery.

And now, we can gradually meet our feelings closely, emotions closely, without being afraid of them, or without being swayed and thrown off by them here and there and everywhere. It seems that only now, can one truly begin to be sensitive and to feel. It seems that only now one can truly love, one can know what it is to care and what it is to have sensitivity towards oneself and others. This discovery



inevitably puts one on the path of Integral Yoga, and refinement of sense perceptions towards a purer life.

Let us begin the adventure

Shall we begin on this journey then? Not hiding, not escaping, not suppressing. Because we have done that long enough, haven't we, for eons, for lifetimes, for years? Can we embark now on this new adventure, an adventure of a collaboration with the Divine/the supreme Truth, and declare that yes, we are ready! No matter what the stakes are, we are ready. No matter what challenges may lie ahead on the path, it is the only path worth embarking on. For what is it to live, if not for this unfolding adventure, these so-called failures and the investigation of those failures so that we can reach the depths of our being and be guided throughout by the light of our own being?

As a mystic Italian monk once said, *'Thou art the Love with which I Love Thee.'*

The Divine is the Love with which we look for the Divine in the depths of our being. We always were and will never be away from that. The only thing that is required of us is the effort to wake up to our own sublime

truth, so obvious, so omnipresent.

Let us do this. We deserve this beauty and joy each moment of our lives.

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References

1. Sri Aurobindo. *Birth Centenary Library. Volume 29.* Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust; 1970, p. 443.
2. The Mother. *The Collected Works of the*

3. The Mother. *Collected Works, Volume 6;* 1979, p. 132.

Suggested Reading

The Mother. *Collected Works. Volume 2;* 1978, pp. 43-44 (*The Supreme Discovery*).

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