

3.7 Suffering

WISE SAYING

Because you wrongly identify with the body, you see the world outside you and its suffering becomes apparent to you; but the world and its suffering are not real. Seek the reality and get rid of this unreal feeling.
(Ramana Maharshi)

From Discourses of Sai Baba

THE VALUE OF SUFFERING

Human life is beset with ups and downs, joys and sorrows. These experiences are intended to serve as guide posts for man. Life would be stale if there were no trials and difficulties. It is these difficulties which bring out the human values in man. Because of the manner in which Harischandra faced all the trials in its life, the story has become a glorious chapter in human annals. Prahlada stands out equally as a great devotee who stood up to all the persecutions of his father.

People pray to Swami to rid them of difficulties and losses. This is a totally wrong kind of prayer. Difficulties must be welcomed and must be overcome. By overcoming trouble the Divine must be experienced. You cannot get the juice of the sugarcane without crushing it. You cannot enhance the brilliance of a diamond without cutting it and making many facets. The body is like a sugarcane stalk. It is only when it goes through various difficulties that you can experience the sweet bliss of Self-realisation. That sweetness is Divinity itself. Where does that sweetness reside in man? It is in every limb and organ. (020991)

Here is a story to illustrate the maxim, "No gains without pain." There was a gardener who used to water the plants in the garden carrying a pot on his head from dawn to dusk. One day while carrying the pot he got a headache and wanted to lay down the pot and go home. At that moment, the pot taught him a valuable lesson. The pot said: "Oh man! There can be no fruit without labour, no pleasure without pain. Learn the lesson from my own story. In the beginning I was just mere dust and mud, trodden upon by people. The potter gathered that mud, turned it into clay by pressing it under his feet, and made a pot from it by whirling the clay on his wheel. And finally I was placed in a kiln for firing. Whoever came to buy me, tapped on my sides with strength to test my hardness. It was because I went through all these ordeals that I earned the privilege of dancing on the heads of people. If I had not gone through all these trials how could I have achieved this eminence? Likewise, only if you are prepared to go through trials and difficulties will you be able to raise yourself in life." (060389)

The devotee should look upon pain and pleasure alike as designed for his good. He will not then be affected by troubles. He will regard them as stages in the evolution of his consciousness. Pain and pleasure are inseparable twins in life. One leads to the other, even as the new moon culminates in the full moon. These are manifestations of the wheel of time, expressions of the Divine Will. *(090188)*

You must become one who is torn by intense suffering to reach the Lord. Suffer the pangs of distress. You must realise that mere suffering is fruitless, without the knowledge of the path to attain the Lord. That is to say, you have to be transformed into a seeker. Analyse the four goals of life – dharma, artha, moksha, kama (action, wealth, liberation from birth and death, desire) -- and realise that liberation is the goal, the culmination. Start craving for that, as the lover of the truest gain. Seek that which, when secured, all else is secured. *(030365)*

TEST IS THE TASTE OF GOD

Never feel depressed when you are weighed down by difficulties. God will never impose on you the ordeals which you cannot bear. He tests his devotees in various ways. Test is the taste of God. Never fear any test. Be ready to sacrifice even your life for the sake of God. Only then God will protect you. *(251292)*

Do not get dejected when suffering comes and estrange yourself from the Lord, blaming Him for it. The loss will be yours and the repentance will be agonising. You have no hunger. If you have a genuine hunger I will not keep you suffering from it. Churn the mind and collect the butter and melt it in the yearning of the heart. When the butter has not melted, the reason is, the warmth of the yearning is insufficient.

I do not appreciate your extolling Me, describing My glory. State the facts. That produces joy. It is sacrilege to state more or less. Demand from Me as of right, the removal of your sufferings. Give Me your heart and ask for My heart; if you give Me only your word, you will get only a word in return. I give you just what you ask for, remember!

When sufferings come, why do you estrange yourself from the Lord? He gives you suffering, for your good, for the advancement of your devotion. If suffering is granted, you seek peace; you search for the knowledge of the mystery; you go to ten persons and they each tell you some aspect of the truth. Without suffering, sweetness cannot arise! When you suffer, if you feel, "The Lord is no longer mine," and stay away, the Lord too will declare, "He is no longer mine!" Beware.

Wherever you are, when you wholeheartedly seek to do obeisance to Me, My feet are there, before you. "Hands and feet everywhere," it has been announced. "Lord, do you not hear my prayer?" If you feel poignantly, My ears are there! "Don't you see, oh Lord?" If you cry out My eyes are there that instant. *(SSS Vol.2 1961 115)*

Whatever happens to you, be it profit or loss, pain or pleasure, have the resolute faith that it is good for you. When a person suffering from malaria consults a doctor, he will be given the

bitter quinine medicine. Unless he takes the bitter medicine, he cannot be cured of the fever. Likewise, have the firm conviction that difficulties and suffering are the ways and means by which God purifies you. There is a reason behind whatever God does. Without understanding the principle of cause and effect, people blame God for their suffering. Understand the truth that you yourself are responsible for the pain or pleasure that befalls you. Do not feel sad if someone were to criticise you, because criticising others amounts to criticising oneself as the same Atma exists in all. You should develop this equanimity. Identify yourself with the Atma, not the body which is temporary like a water bottle. (211199)

There are some who ask: "I have surrendered everything to God. Why, then, am I subjected to so many trials and tribulations?" One who has truly surrendered to God will not raise such questions. To say that, "After I have surrendered I am put to suffering", itself shows that the surrender is not real, because where is the place for 'I' after surrendering everything? To the person who has completely surrendered, everything that he experiences (good or bad) is a gift from God. (231187)

EVERY ACTION HAS A REACTION

Some people blame God for their suffering, ignoring their own defects. They argue, God does not keep His word. But God will never go back on His promise. Man does not understand this truth. Being fully immersed in physical and worldly feelings, he blames God for his suffering. God will never make anyone suffer at any point of time. But, each has to face the consequences of his actions. Every action has a reaction. It may take place immediately or in a few hours or in a few days or in a few months or in a few years or in a few births.

Good or bad, you cannot escape the consequences of your actions. Then you may question, why should one pray to God? One should pray to God not for the alleviation of suffering, but for peace of mind. Once you have peace of mind, all your problems will vanish. You can even escape the consequences of your actions if you have God's grace. After the expiry date, the medicine loses its potency; similarly, once you acquire God's grace, the consequences of your actions will have no effect on you. In order to make the consequences of your actions to 'expire', prayer is essential. You have to pray wholeheartedly. (290998)

It is only when you recognize your own faults that you can begin to understand the ways of the Divine. What we witness today is the tendency to forget one's own faults and go about blaming God for one's sufferings. Every action, however small or trivial, has its reaction. Nothing happens without a cause. Every object has its reflection. The Lord awards fruits according to one's deserts. Good actions earn good returns. Bad actions result in bad consequences. That is why the Lord is described as the dispenser of the fruits of action. (030587)

Man suffers because he has developed hunger as vast as the sky, with a throat as narrow as a needle. His throat must become as vast as the earth; his heart must blossom wide through peace and forbearance; that is, through equanimity and fortitude. Then the desire of man for full, lasting, undiluted happiness can be attained.

Once a being has evolved into man, there is no relapse for him into lower forms of life, for man alone is capable of discrimination and wisdom. When he suffers, he worries why suffering has become his lot. He concludes that the cause must be sought, not in the vagaries of God or the whims of others, but in himself, if not in the present life, then in previous lives. Man alone can analyse his mental reactions and feelings and draw conclusions therefrom.

There are millions of stars scattered all over the firmament, but we have only darkness at night; during the day, the sun which is a minute dot of light when compared to most of those stars gives us brilliant illumination. The reason is: the stars are far far away; but the sun is near. The star of highest wisdom is far far away; we do not bring it near, nor attain nearness to it. We are content with the dusk, that information, skill, scholarship and intelligence provide. We do not seek the magnificent vision that intuition clarified by spiritual practice can confer. *(251066)*

People suffer because they have all kinds of unreasonable desires and they pine to fulfil them and they fail. They attach too much value to the objective world. It is only when attachment increases that you suffer pain and grief. If you look upon nature and all created objects with the insight derived from the Inner Vision, then attachment will slide away, though effort will remain; you will also see everything much clearer and with a glory suffused with Divinity and Splendour. *(020258)*

BE AWARE OF THE INNER TREASURE

Man is suffering because he is not aware of the treasure he has in himself. Like a beggar ignorant of the millions hidden under the floor of his hovel, he is suffering dire misery. *(SSS Vol.7 1967 230)*

God is not far from you, or away in some distant place. He is within you, in your own inner altar. Man suffers because he is unable to discover Him there, and draw peace enjoyed from that discovery. A washer-man, standing knee-deep in a flowing river, washing clothes therein, died of thirst because he failed to realise that life-giving water was within reach. He need only bend and drink. Such is the story of man. He runs about in desperate haste, to seek God outside him and dies disappointed and distraught, without reaching the goal -- only to be born again. *(010167)*

It is the combination of the Atma and the body which explains the human predicament. By forgetting the Atma and involving himself in the claims of the body, man in subjecting himself to endless suffering. He grieves about things which are not worth lamenting over and does not grieve for the things that ought to make him sad. This state of delusion is the result

of his identifying himself with the body and forgetting his inherent Divinity. If he realises that he is one with the Omni-Self, he will have no cause for sorrow. He will be aware that truth and bliss are inherent in his spiritual reality. *(090188)*

Life is fraught with vicissitudes, trials and tribulations. The world looks attractive but it is the abode of suffering. Life is like a water bubble on a lotus leaf. The lotus is born in water, grows in water and depends on water for its existence.

The Atmic principle is the basis for everything in creation -- its origin, growth and dissolution. Considering the evanescent body as permanent and real, and leading a life devoted to worldly and mundane pursuits, man is lost in delusions which cause sorrow and suffering. Ignorance of his true nature is the root cause of all sorrow. When ignorance goes, there will be freedom from sorrow. *(260688)*

KEEP YOUR FAITH IN GOD

Whatever difficulties or trials may occur, they can be overcome with faith in God. People may not readily accept this, but there is no surer recipe for peace than this faith. Even if they do not have full faith, a small fraction of it will be of help. *(170391)*

Human life will find fulfilment only when one acts with courage and conviction in the face of adversity. Never get disheartened and never retrace your steps.

Everything happens according to God's will. Man who has been created by the Divine Will should sanctify his life by following the divine command.

No matter what others say or do, have unflinching faith in God. Only the good face obstacles in the path. Whatever happens is for your own good. Difficulties are part and parcel of human existence.

Once Kunti prayed to Krishna to give her difficulties in life so that she could remember Him always. She said, "Krishna, when my husband, King Pandu was alive, hardly I remember You because I was immersed in pleasures and comforts. After his death we were put to untold suffering, as a result of which we remembered You always. Now I realize the value of difficulties. They help me to remember You always. I am ready to face any hardship, but kindly ensure that my love for You never diminishes". *(140100)*

Whatever your difficulties, whatever the ordeals you have to undergo, in any situation, do not give up God. God is one. Whether you are affluent or destitute, whether you are a scholar or an ignoramus, whatever troubles you may be faced with, whatever spiritual practice you may adopt, whether you are regarded as a sinner or saint, "Do not give up God and realise God is one." *(290788)*

One should not allow one's faith in God to be affected by the ups and downs of life. All troubles should be treated as tests and challenges to be faced with courage and faith. We

should learn from the example of Ranthi Deva, who retained his faith in God and exhibited his compassion for the suffering despite the extreme privation to which he was reduced by the vicissitudes of life. To feed a hungry man, he and his family gave up the meagre food they had gathered and denied themselves, even water to relieve the thirst of a man crying for water. The Divine had subjected him to these ordeals and later blessed him with grace. (*SS April 86, 100*)

Whatever troubles you may face, whatever ordeals you may encounter, you should not allow your faith in God to weaken to the slightest extent. You must learn a lesson from the Chakora bird. There may be terrible thunder and blinding lightning in the sky, but the Chakora bird will follow the cloud to catch the raindrops in the sky and will not go to any other source for water. Nothing less than the pure raindrops from the cloud will satisfy the Chakora. Likewise, you should yearn always for the bliss of nearness to God, whatever difficulties or joys you may experience in life. (*100486*)

OVERCOMING SUFFERING

Suffering can be overcome only by yearning for the Lord. You must yearn to be free, to be rid of the chains that are binding you now -- the iron chain of poverty or the golden chain of riches. Yearn as helplessly as a baby which cries for its mother, as desperately as a calf mooing for the cow, as pitifully as a starving beggar prays for a morsel of food. Let the cry come from the depth of the heart, a heart that cannot bear the chain of attachments any longer. The Lord will not be drawn by noisy pomp or empty show. He will yield only to the claim of kinship, the call of Individual Soul to the Supreme Soul. (*231061*)

Whatever trouble you may face, you must learn to feel happy in any circumstance. If you're stung by a scorpion, you must console yourself that you were not bitten by a snake, and when you are bitten by a snake, you must console yourself that it has not proved fatal. Even if you are not able to own a vehicle, be happy that you have got your legs intact to enable you to walk. Even if you are not a millionaire, be happy that you have enough resources to feed yourself and your family. This is the way to experience joy even while in adverse circumstances. (*210794*)

Seek the light always; be full of confidence and zest. Do not yield to despair, for it can never produce results. It only worsens the problem, for it darkens the intellect and plunges you in doubt. You must take up the path of Sadhana (spiritual practice), very enthusiastically. Half-hearted, halting steps will not yield fruit. It is like cleaning a slushy area by a stream of water. If the current of the stream is slow, the slush cannot be cleared. The stream must flow full and fast, driving everything before it, so that the slush might be scoured clean. (*020252*)

Man today is racked by all kinds of troubles. Are these troubles designed to make man miserable or to elevate him to a higher level of existence? Every trouble is really a step in elevating man. If there are no troubles, man will have no proper lessons. Troubles constitute

good lessons. Trouble and pleasure are inexplicably mixed and cannot be separated from each other by anyone. Pleasure has no separate existence. It is the fruit of pain. This basic truth is not recognized by man. When grief smites him he succumbs to it. He gloats over some happy experience. His entire life is bound up with these varying experiences of pleasure and pain. Therefore, man has to cultivate a sense of equanimity in pleasure and suffering. There is joy in sorrow. There is suffering in happiness. It is only when man cultivates the sense of equanimity in all circumstances, in pleasure or pain, that he will be able to experience peace. *(100592)*