

## **9/18/16 Suffering: The Law of Cause and Effect – Group Response to Suffering**

*Suffering is an inevitable part of existing in a universe in which change and upheavals constantly take place. Through it all is God's presence. Michal Morewood*

### **Teachings in Chinese Buddhism, Common Buddhist Misunderstandings**

The Buddha told us that “Life is Suffering.” One who does not understand the Truth of this may think that life is meaningless and become negative and pessimistic. Actually where there is happiness, there will be suffering. Suffering and happiness exist in all phenomena. What does suffering mean? The sutras say: “Impermanence therefor suffering.” Everything is impermanent and changeable. A healthy body cannot last forever. It will gradually become weak, old, sick and die. One who is wealthy cannot maintain one's wealth forever. One will lose power and status. When changes come, suffering arises. The highest aim of Buddhism is not only to break through the suffering of life but to transform this suffering life into a life that has peacefulness, joy, freedom and purity.

### **Thich Nhat Hanh, The Heart of the Buddhist Teaching**

Recognizing and identifying our suffering is like the work of a doctor diagnosing an illness. He or she says, “If I press here, does it hurt?” and we say “Yes, this is my suffering. This has come to be.” The wounds in our heart become the object of our meditation. We show them to the Buddha which means we show them to ourselves. Our suffering is us, and we need to treat it with kindness and nonviolence. We need to embrace our fear, hatred, anguish, and anger. We stop running from our pain. With all our courage and tenderness, we recognize, acknowledge, and identify it. After recognizing and identifying our pain, we take time to look deeply into it in order to understand its true nature, which means its causes. Our suffering—depression, illness, and difficult relationships, or fear—needs to be understood and, like a doctor, we are determined to understand it. We practice sitting and walking meditation, we ask for guidance and support from our friends, and if we have one, our teacher. As we do this, we see that the causes of our suffering are knowable and we make every effort to get to the bottom of it. There are many practices that can help us face our suffering, including mindful walking, mindful breathing, mindful sitting, mindful eating, mindful looking, and mindful listening. One mindful step can take us deep into the realization of beauty and joy in us and around us. When the cause of suffering has been seen, healing is possible.

### **Robert E. Douglas, Jr., Elie Wiesel's Relationship with God**

Seen during the Holocaust, to Wiesel God appears cruel. He allowed the pain and suffering to continue for His own cruel purposes. This cruel God is the object of Wiesel's anger. The energy once spent in worship of God was transferred to accusing God, denouncing God, and demanding an explanation from God. Wiesel writes: “In the concentration camp I had cried out in sorrow and anger against God and also against man, who seemed to have inherited the cruelty of his creator.” God played a cruel game, and it destroyed the importance Wiesel had felt about the Jewish role in God's world. Wiesel asks, “What is man? Ally of God or simply His toy?” He feels like he was in the hands of a spoiled and cruel child, rather than an omnipotent, loving, merciful God who should be saving the Jews instead of watching them die at the hands of his other creations. It was as if God didn't care what happened anymore. God does not prevent pain, suffering, and death. God was either ignoring what was happening or approving of it.

A father explains this to his son. “If gratuitous suffering exists, it is ordained by divine will. Whoever kills, becomes God. Whoever kills, kills God. Each murder is a suicide, with the Eternal eternally the victim. This implies not cruelty, but madness on God's part. In which case, there can be no searching for reasons behind the Holocaust, for there are none, as Wiesel discovered. He states:

--The executioner killed for nothing, the victim died for nothing. No God ordered the one to prepare the stake, nor the other to mount it. During the Middle Ages, the Jews, when they chose death, were convinced that by their sacrifice they were glorifying and sanctifying God's name. At Auschwitz, the sacrifices were without

point, without faith, without divine inspiration. If the suffering of one human being has any meaning, that of six million has none. Numbers have their own importance; they prove, that God has gone mad.

### **Gary Zukav, Spiritual Partnership**

Avoiding the pain of powerlessness [suffering] continually determines our perceptions, intentions, and actions. We use people and things to make us feel valuable, worthy, complete, and whole, for example, a spouse, a child, or a job. Whatever you use, it is very important to your sense of security and value. Some people use fame, others use wealth, others use their education, and yet others use their intelligence, humor, or political opinion. When you use anything to influence, manipulate, and control others in order to feel safe and valuable, you are avoiding the pain of powerlessness. If a spouse or a child dies, for example, you conceive or find another; when a business fails, you build another; when a relationship falls apart, you find another partner. Many may choose clothing, cars, and hairstyles to make themselves more attractive, competent, or sexual. They are proud of their strength, intelligence, beauty, education, wealth, fame, anything that makes them feel valuable and safe. All may share the pain of powerlessness. All may flee it by attempting to manipulate and control circumstances. This is the pursuit of external power.

Human history-individual and collective-is a chronicle of the pursuit of external power (avoidance of suffering). The story is the same –safety and comfort in the ability to manipulate and control, danger and distress in the absence of it, and competition to obtain it. Cultures, religions, and nations pursue it. Businesses, cities, and neighborhoods pursue it. External power enabled five-sensory humanity to survive. Now the pursuit of it creates only violence and destruction. This is a very big change. What was once good medicine has become toxic. The result has been ecological devastation, horrifying weapons, caste systems, genocide and global exploitation. If five-sensory humanity had pursued external power with reverence, its short history and relationship with the Earth would have been very different.

### **Diarmuid O’Murchu, Quantum Theology**

Creation is an unbroken whole, a totality within which everything, including darkness, chaos, pain and suffering, plays an interdependent role. Creation is essentially good and not evil. Original blessing, rather than original sin, characterizes life in its fundamental essence. So called negative forces such as suffering, pain and chaos ensue from the free, indeterminate nature of evolution itself. In Teilhardian terms, suffering may be understood to be the byproduct of an open and free creative process. Much of the meaningless pain and suffering is directly, often deliberately, caused by human beings. The greatest and most meaningless sufferings ensue from human pain on others. Nonhuman violence, devoid of this conscious malice, is more easily tolerated and integrated. If the human contribution to the world’s pain was eliminated, or at least diminished significantly, the meaning, relevance, and necessity of suffering would be a great deal more apparent. We humans are the great enigma of the cosmic, evolutionary drama. Dualist thought patterns and the major institutions which thrive on dualistic value systems, exacerbate the meaningless of pain and suffering in the world. Instead of striving to befriend the dark, we continuously split it off, counteract it in antagonistic fashion and empower its destructive impact. We have so alienated negative forces that we eventually personalized them into a supreme divine evil force (often called Satan, the Devil or Lucifer, which ironically, means ”bearer of light”). We have invented yet another false god to idolize the very thing we are called upon to diminish by befriending.

Throughout the centuries, the subject of sin and salvation has dominated Christian theology. How the suffering and death of Jesus atoned for human sin, in a once-for-all manner, is a cherished though poorly understood tenet of Christian theology. People (and creation) are portrayed as hopelessly flawed and totally dependent on an external, superhuman agent if they are to be rescued and saved. The negative is projected onto a divine, patriarchal scapegoat, thus creating a theological polemic which modern theologians call into question. Atonement chistologies flow out of the belief that humans are born with a tragic flaw, traditionally called original sin. Therefore, we must be dependent upon the perfect father to show us the way to a restored

relationship with God and with each other. The punishment of one perfect child has to occur before the father can forgive the rest of his children and love them. The son suffers the consequences of evil created by his wayward creation. The emphasis is on the goodness and power of the father and the unworthiness and powerlessness of his children, so that the father's punishment is just, and the children are to blame.

Fall/redemption theology reinforces rather than resolves the forces of evil. It turns evil into a type of divine, alien force and projects it onto a divine scapegoat. Those who exploit, manipulate, and oppress learn to project their guilt on to the divine scapegoat, often in the name of Christianity, (or Islam, Judaism, Hinduism) and consequently oppress others. This has led to the most outrageous atrocities of war and barbarity every known in human history.

To befriend the dark we must engage with the truth that liberates. In embracing the chaos, all humans are invited to recognize the interdependent nature of light and darkness, sickness and health, death and rebirth. By learning to befriend the chaos of our world we interact with, and integrate, our personal chaos in more authentic ways. Instead of seeking to escape our pain and suffering by addictive behaviors of denial and scapegoating, we begin to engage with it, listen to it, and learn from it. Redemption is about reclaiming the darkness, nothingness, and chaos of our world and celebrating the potential for new life and wholeness.

### **Barbara Ehrenreich, Blood Rites: Origin and history of the passions of war**

In war, men and woman are expected [to suffer] and to "offer their lives" and sometimes make the "supreme sacrifice." This rhetorical convention links war and religion in a far more literal way than one might expect. Sacrifice first appears in the historical record as a well-defined religious ritual, varying in detail from culture to culture, but almost always featuring, at its climactic moment, an act of public bloodshed; the killing, suffering, torture, or mutilation of an animal or a human, followed by the ritual disposal of the blood, or many cases, the consumption of the dead. Ritual sacrifice is the most clear-cut instance of violence made sacred. When the victim is nonhuman, the central act of violence is essentially a familiar and understandable one; the slaughter of animals for food.

Few religions today openly practice blood sacrifice. The idea is repulsive to most modern Western people, who prefer the slaughter of animals to go on unceremoniously and out of sight, in thoroughly secular "meat packing plants." But contemporary historians of religion remind us of what religious practitioners often prefer to ignore or forget: That blood sacrifice is not just a religious ritual, it is the central ritual of ancient and traditional civilizations. The temple that housed the altar, or raised platforms or stone circle that constituted a holy place, was also an abattoir. Suffering and sacrifice, including human sacrifice, remains a central theme of the Jewish and Christian texts. In the Old Testament, the decisive event, and the one that defines the relationship between Jews and Jehovah, is the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham. In the New Testament, it is the sacrifice of Jesus by his father. And throughout the first five books of the Old Testament, with obsessive regularity, huge numbers of animals are sacrificed as "offerings" to God.

Sacrificial killing, the eminent Swiss classicist Walter Burkert tells us, "is the basic experience of the sacred. Before war became a widespread and massive enterprise, it was probably through ritual suffering and killing that humans approached the experience of the transcendent—that something "larger than ourselves which uplifts the patriot at a pro-war rally. Hence, for example, the linguistic link between the words that touch on *holiness*—sacred, sacrament, sacerdotal, sacrilege—and sacrifice, which denotes ritual violence. All are cognate with *saklais* or *shaklaish*, the ancient Hittite meaning "rite."

### **Matthew Fox, The Coming of the Cosmic Christ**

Mother Earth is dying. Are we our mother's keeper? Is Mother Earth herself not the ultimate anawim, (the oppressed, the marginalized, the vulnerable) the most neglected of the suffering, voiceless ones today? And along with her, the soil, the forests, species, birds, and waters are not being heard where legislators gather, where judges preside, and where believers gather to worship. Is the human race involved in matricide that is

also ecocide, geocide, suicide and even deicide? Are we being kept in the dark by our media, government officials, educational and religious institutions? Mother Earth and her pain and suffering are so much greater than patriarchy's limited agenda. Patriarchy cannot measure up to Mother Earth's immense blessings, (nor neglect her immense suffering) which we so easily take for granted—until tragedy strikes. As poet Rainer Maria Rilke put it:

In spite of all the farmer's work and worry  
he can't reach down to where the seed is slowly  
transmuted into summer. The earth bestows.

Yes, Mother Earth does bestow. But are humans responding to this immense act of blessing, of bestowal?