

Spiritual Suffering and its Loving Guidance



*I saw grief drinking a cup of sorrow
and called out,
it tastes sweet, does it not?*

*You have caught me, grief answered,
and you have ruined by business,*

*How can I sell sorrow,
when you know it's a blessing?*

Rumi

Suffering is an inseparable part of human existence and it serves as the main motivation to enter the spiritual path. Sometimes we speak of spiritual longing as a different and more exalted emotion than suffering, but longing can also be considered a form of suffering, a deep yearning that we feel inside for something missing; what was called 'sweet misery' by Rumi. Some of the main traditions of enlightenment have the transcendence of suffering through attaining Moksha or Nirvana as their main spiritual goal. They see self-realization as a release from the pain of human existence. However, suffering is much more complex than just being something to be eliminated, and not all suffering is the same. Even an enlightened being continues to experience physical and psychological suffering. Suffering is an essential part of the polarities of this physical dimension. Without a minus there is no plus, and our reality is based on complementary opposites which attract and repulse each other.

Purpose of Spiritual Suffering

The purpose of spiritual awakening is not to eliminate all suffering, but to transcend spiritual suffering, which is the type of suffering caused by being separated from our pure nature. Spiritual suffering is the most profound suffering there is, but only those who are more spiritually evolved are able to recognize it for what it is. People who are not spiritually conscious will not be aware of this suffering. In this sense, the spiritual path is designed with something of an inbuilt alarm for those who are sensitive to their disconnection from their spiritual source, signaling to them that they are at last ready to regain their true nature. Buddha's description in his Four Noble Truths of the causes of suffering (old age, sickness and death) did not include the spiritual one, indicating that this was intended for a more general, less evolved, audience.

Many seekers have the goal of ending suffering, but usually more in the context that Buddha spoke of, rather than from any real idea or experience of what spiritual suffering is. We will not have truly entered the path until we have a higher perspective on suffering, which comes from being in touch with the deep pain of separation from our pure nature. Part of the path itself is becoming spiritually conscious enough to be aware of our incompleteness because of this separation, and this is felt in the suffering and yearning which are the signposts pointing and motivating us.

Since awakening is not a single state, a question may arise as to which type of awakening allows one to reach emancipation from suffering? It is an important question that has not yet been properly addressed by past traditions. To answer it, we must transform our perception of the path from seeing it solely as a means of transcending suffering to include the evolution of suffering as an integral part of the journey.

The correct definition of spiritual suffering is suffering that is felt because of being incomplete. As long as we are incomplete we will suffer. This is a fact. But to really understand incompleteness as the reason for suffering, one must first recognize that one is incomplete.

When someone first awakens to pure consciousness, it may initially appear that the gates of heaven have been opened and one has indeed achieved freedom. However, as one matures in the state and becomes more accustomed to it, one realizes that one is still suffering spiritually. This is because it is rare that those who awaken to pure consciousness experience the complete state of it; usually horizontal absorption is only partial and the state has not yet been stabilized or embodied. This means that the state is fluctuating, and these fluctuations themselves are suffering. Furthermore, relative consciousness is still not unified with pure consciousness in these cases, so there is suffering because of consciousness not being united.

A whole separate article could be written about the various reasons for the continuing suffering of a person who has realized pure consciousness. Even if the state is fully

realized, meaning it has become permanent, and horizontal samadhi attained, one is still far from being complete as a soul, and so there will still be further suffering.

The Art of Recognizing our Spiritual Suffering

The ability to recognize that one's suffering is because of one's spiritual incompleteness comes together with an instinctive sense for the next step. In pure consciousness on its own, one is incomplete because only one dimension of the soul has awakened (assuming that pure me of consciousness has been embodied), and one has not awoken being, the heart, or the absolute state. Additionally, one is not experiencing true rest because the vertical depth (absence of being and the absolute state) has not been opened, so consciousness cannot surrender. So, with these different incompletions, one continues to suffer, but now less than an ordinary person who is still living in — and identifying with — the mind. These different levels of incompleteness point to what is meant by the evolution of suffering: from gross, to subtle, to even more subtle, and up to the most subtle level before reaching non-suffering.

Assuming that one has awakened fundamental consciousness (the unity of conscious me and pure consciousness), as well as the heart and being, is one still suffering? Yes, one is, and it is important to understand the why of this in order to be able to go further. At this point, one is suffering for different reasons: one can identify the suffering on the level of being because one is still separated from the absolute, so the energy of being keeps fluctuating, preventing one from the realization of pure rest. Additionally, one can also identify imperfection and suffering on the level of consciousness, because neither pure me nor conscious me are in vertical absorption. So, even though one is experiencing a holistic awakened state (of consciousness, being and heart), and one obviously feels much better than one who has only awakened pure consciousness, the suffering — albeit more refined — still continues.

What can one do? To begin to tackle this issue, one must possess an understanding of human spiritual evolution, along with the requisite maturity and sincere intention to grow into one's pure nature. It is absolutely essential to have a correct vision of the path, or else one will remain stuck at one's particular level of attainment without the least idea of where to focus one's efforts. For example, one might assume that it is time to surrender consciousness and practice vertical absorption. But this cannot work if the foundation of the absolute is absent. In order to progress beyond the suffering caused by our state being imperfect, we have to be knowledgeable of the next step. As an analogy, if one were in a desert, dying of thirst and hunger, quenching one's thirst has a far higher priority than eating; so finding something to drink becomes one's next logical step.

Based on knowledge of the path from the map of awakening, after all the three centers of the soul are activated, one has next to work toward opening the doorway to the absolute in order to reduce suffering even further. Reaching the absolute makes our suffering even more subtle, since we now have access to the bliss of immaculate repose in the source.

Yet, some suffering on the spiritual level still remains, because consciousness is still not in the state of absence. Presence without absence is suffering.

Evolution of Suffering

So, with each stage of our evolution, our suffering is attenuated and becomes more and more subtle. This makes the identification of the remaining imperfections of our state increasingly more difficult. It is for this reason that each seeker has to keep deepening his sensitivity and discriminatory powers.

A good number of seekers are content with a partial, and often low, level of attainment. Many never appreciate how incomplete they still are, and it may take others years before they realize that their suffering continues. It is common among those who are relatively advanced on their paths to fall into an evolutionary lethargy or apathy because they appear to be suffering less on the spiritual level. Often, seekers who have reached this stage feel they can retire from further seeking and live as if they have gone beyond the duality of their inner and outer realms. If those who are in this situation truly wish to progress, they must rouse themselves and learn to tune in to the continuing, but more subtle, suffering they are still experiencing so they will have further incentive and motivation.

Our spiritual evolution must always go hand in hand with a growing sensitivity for spiritual orientation, including the ability to sense one's increasingly subtle suffering. This is how suffering is our guide on the path. We must learn to listen to its silent whispers, showing us where we are still incomplete and signposting the directions to even more profound realizations of our pure nature.

Some seekers fall into states of suspension, in which they assume they are free from suffering, but how long can one live in suspension? Sooner or later such illusory freedom evaporates and one falls back to the hard earth of reality. In other cases, there are seekers who stop at identifying with an impersonal realization and then dwell in emptiness, making the assumption that the attainment of such a state is the end of suffering. But how can one be free of suffering if one's self-realized state is not embodied by the soul?

In all of these cases, there is still no one home and, even though one may have convinced oneself that one is free, the soul continues to suffer. Spiritual suffering is only fully transcended when we become whole and reach unconditional samadhi in universal subjectivity.

Suffering and Growing Out of Incompleteness

The wisdom of suffering is that it tells us where we are still incomplete. Based just on conceptual knowledge, a newcomer to the path may assume that he is suffering because of being separated from the source (not having awakened being or accessed the absolute)

but this is nonsense. One cannot be aware of suffering because of not having achieved a state which is significantly more advanced than one's own stage on the path.

The first logical step for every soul on the path is to awaken their me and establish at least a basic identity in consciousness. So, someone in the process of doing this as their next step will feel suffering because of having no abiding place beyond the mind and, for that very reason, for being fragmented and lost in the mind.

One's stage in evolution determines one's suffering, and the real suffering one experiences, as opposed to imagined suffering, cannot occur ahead of one's spiritual timing. Suffering is discriminative and it will correspond with our spiritual purpose and our readiness to move to the next step in our evolution. As a general overview, we first suffer because we have no abiding place in consciousness, and then because we have no abiding place in being, and, after that, because we are disconnected from our spiritual heart, and then because our consciousness is not absorbed in the source, or because our human consciousness is not merged with the soul. Not everybody needs to follow exactly the same sequence of evolution, but these general steps apply to most who seek to become whole. Each soul will be sensitive in a unique way to her incompleteness and the urgency regards her next evolutionary step.

Wisdom and Timing of Suffering

The timing of spiritual suffering is very discerning. An example of this is that the average person is not aware that he or she is living disconnected from their light. Such unawareness should not necessarily be seen as a mistake or even as a sign of ignorance – such people are just not ready for a more advanced level, and first need to mature in the human realm before beginning to wake up spiritually. There is timing in our sensitivity to types of suffering as they relate to our next step on the inner path.

There is a period of celebration which should be enjoyed when one has attained and is established in the absolute state. However, it would be contrived and false if, just after shifting into the absolute, one were to focus straightaway on the suffering caused by consciousness not being vertically absorbed. This would indicate a very poor relationship with the newly awakened state and psychological (as well as spiritual) immaturity and restlessness. It is only after one becomes fully used to and integrates a new state that something in the soul is able to open toward her next evolutionary step, and this is signaled by an awareness of the next level of suffering coming from a new sense that a further important inner completion needs to be addressed.

There are rare cases of seekers who are able to accelerate their evolution more quickly than the usual timing through identifying incompleteness ahead of the stage they are still working on. This is a result of what we call 'higher impatience' that is experienced by more evolved souls, who are more in touch with their destiny and future. Such higher impatience, when it is genuine and not forced, can be a positive aid expediting our journey to completion.

Role of a Teacher in the Transcendence of Suffering

The assistance of a spiritual guide is usually required to help the seeker both to identify his next step on the path and to take it. Why would one help someone who is not even aware of his own suffering by pointing out his next step to him? In some cases the teacher will help a seeker because the teacher can see that, even though the suffering may not be recognized on a conscious level by the seeker, his soul is in intense pain. However, this assistance and a part of the teaching itself is not just about going beyond the suffering, but also to help the student be able to become aware of his suffering. A spiritual guide must help those he is working with to deepen their inner discernment and sensitivity as respects their suffering. Even though most seekers suffer, they often do not know the source of their suffering, or they may interpret their suffering in a completely wrong way. Some seekers are aware of suffering without knowing what its cause is. And there are those who are suffering without being aware of it, and the role of a teacher is to bring consciousness to their suffering.

Beyond Suffering – Evolution in Perfection

When suffering has performed its role and one is fully emancipated from spiritual suffering, the motivation for further progress comes from a deeper evolutionary instinct. From this point on, one does not evolve because one is suffering or discontent with one's level of attainment, but because such further evolution is the nature of spiritual reality. Continuing unfoldment, with revelations of new depths and mysteries of truth, is simply a natural part of the divine plan.

What does an end to spiritual suffering mean? Here, we need to be careful to differentiate clearly between the transcendence of suffering and self-deception. As noted, it is common among seekers who reach a degree of awakening to think that they are free from suffering, but this is because they do not have sufficient sensitivity to identify what they are still missing inside. To be truly free from suffering, the soul has to move beyond completely and merge with the realm of absence. She needs to be in samadhi with her whole identity. If only her being is in samadhi (as in the absolute state), those parts of her which are not in samadhi will continue to feel the fundamental discomfort and pain which are inevitable consequences of separation.

While spiritual suffering is different from our psychological suffering, for the soul to be released from the dimension of separation, she must also transform and surrender her human consciousness. For instance, even if one is in samadhi through all of the three centers (consciousness, being and heart), if the observer has not yet been integrated, this continuing separation and fragmentation will cause part of the soul to remain vulnerable to the pull and negative influences of relative consciousness. To reach perfection, and thus freedom from suffering on the level of the soul, as much as is possible of the human dimension has to be integrated with the state of samadhi in the inner realm.

Spiritual completion does not eliminate non-spiritual suffering, but it does minimize it to a large extent. The need for integration of the human with the soul requires psychological maturity and purification as an essential part of the path. Since much of the non-spiritual suffering is mental and emotional, the majority of it is removed with the purification of the subconscious. As regards physical suffering, no one has control over bodily discomfort or pain, other than by developing patience and a certain disidentification with the body. Once the human becomes transparent only the natural – non-self-generated – psychological suffering, such as during a bereavement, is occasionally experienced. If such suffering is excessive, it is an indication that either the human has not surrendered to the soul or the psyche has not been purified.

Conclusion

Instead of viewing suffering as our enemy, we must embrace it as our valued companion on the spiritual path, without whom we would not have sufficient pointers and clarity for our next steps. Our future contains treasures of unimaginable value which can only be actualized if we rebel against imperfection, incompleteness, and separation.

The soul walks the path of divine discontent, for she seeks to reflect the perfection of the light of the beloved with the totality of her existence. She cannot rest until she fully embodies the immaculate nature of pure subjectivity, together with her absolute rest in transparent unity with the divine source.

The soul does not evolve out of greed or ambition for evolution, or because she lacks appreciation for whatever level she has already attained. Each level of awakening must be cherished. Just entering the realm of pure subjectivity is an astonishing blessing and sign of grace. But, whatever one's attainments and level, it is the soul's instinct to continue seeking complete freedom and transcendence from the realm of illusion.

Blessings,

Anadi

For a full glossary of terminology, you may refer to our glossary: www.anaditeaching.com/glossary