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The Guide to Learning Series

LEARNING TO FACE SUFFERING

Mayan Revelation Number 275

Monograph Five

Why Do Men Suffer?

Does Understanding Help?

Courage to Endure Pain

Faith to Surmount Despair

Make Suffering Your Servant



ELOVED PERFECTOR:

As an advanced student of Mayanry you endeavor every day to live on the heights. You tap mental and spiritual resources with the hope that they will enable you to overcome discouragement and despair. When moods of despondency descend on you, you study more intently and repeat your affirmations more earnestly. When physical pain hampers you, you employ these same techniques and often - to your great joy and relief - the headache, or cold, or neuritis becomes less annoying and you find that you are able to fulfill your responsibilities.

These victories of the spirit over the body are encouraging. We would be like ostriches, though, if we did not recognize that some suffering is very difficult to alleviate. A young father is the victim of a fatal heart attack, leaving his wife with two boys to raise. How can she face her suffering? A beautiful child contracts a crippling disease, and the parents are told that their little girl will be an invalid for all of her life. What words of comfort can we say to them?

This Lesson deals with the type of suffering that is severe. It may come to a righteous man or woman, as well as to a person who has been self-indulgent, or sinful. You may escape it, or you may at some time be called upon to face up to it.

Grapple with the problem of undeserved suffering. This will prepare you to meet it, whether it comes into your own life, or into the lives of those you love.

We approach this Lesson humbly, admitting that our finite minds can never fully grasp the encompassing plan of the Almighty. Join me in the PRAYER:

Dear Father, Open my mind that I may comprehend more of Thy divine Truth. Strengthen my will that I may never succumb to despair. Stretch my heart that I may share the pain of all who suffer.

When I become a victim of suffering, show me, Father, how to bear it gallantly. Teach me how to use suffering as a doorway to new avenues of joy and service.

- Amen.



WHY DO MEN SUFFER?

We need to summon all our intelligence if we are to understand the meaning of suffering. Even then we find that some of God's purposes are beyond the reach of our human minds. We can only partly comprehend the Divine Plan of the universe. But peace will come to our hearts as we live by the insight we do have, and then

put our trust in the ultimate wisdom and goodness of our Creator.

Perhaps you are asking the question: "If God is Love, and cares for us as a Father, why does He allow us to suffer?"

There is no fully satisfying answer to this question. The best we can do is to approach it from several angles and to see how suffering fits into the plan of our world. This will dispel the temptation to allow suffering to serve as an excuse for denying the existence of God. It will help us to avoid some suffering. It will enable us to break the crippling power of pain and to use it as a ladder to new mental and spiritual heights.

First let us see how suffering is involved in our freedom. If the Creator had made men who were without the ability to choose - had made them so they were always virtuous and kind - the suffering of mankind would have been avoided. It is quite evident that some pain is caused by man's selfishness and cruelty. Free will, however, is one of our priceless possessions. Without it, we would be like puppets.

If God pulled the strings and made men decide not to wage war, not to poison the air with foul fumes or radioactive matter, and not to drive recklessly, a great deal of human suffering would be eliminated. If greed and selfishness were wiped out of man's minds, all the pain that can be traced to these causes would not exist.

But would we choose to have God dictate our decisions - force our tongues to say honest, kind words, and our hands to do the right things? No! Man's free will sometimes brings calamity upon us, but without it we would have no personality.

Let us not blame our Creator for evils we cause ourselves. Let us, rather, ask God to help us choose what is good, and then give us the strength to attain it.

"But what about earthquakes, and cyclones, and disease germs?" you ask. There is no complete answer to this question. But it is wise to remind ourselves that the God Who put the stars in their places and established all the laws of the universe, does not set them aside even to save the life of a saintly man.

The reason for natural disasters is puzzling. It seems as if God did not want to put us in a world that is safe; He made it part of man's task to learn to subdue nature and to gain a spiritual strength by battling against difficult situations.

We are tempted to ask why the One Whom Jesus taught us to call Father should not give us more protection. A small child who has fallen down stairs may wonder, "Why did Daddy put those stairs there?" A child who has burned his hand, or scraped his knee, may think his parents should have protected him from harm. It is remarkable, though, that while he may be perplexed because he was not sheltered from suffering, a child still believes that his father and mother love him.

Although we cannot understand why God allows us to suffer, we can still trust His love. We can still believe that His final purpose for our lives is not

ill, but good.

This calls for a firm belief in eternity. While we are striving to make this present life as glorious and rewarding as possible, and trying to ease the pain of others, it gives us both hope and stability to know that life here is only the beginning of an infinite life. We come closer to seeing misfortune, grief, and death in their right proportions when we know that what we experience today, and what we see on this earth, is only a part of some far vaster plan of our Creator.

There is a third element that must be taken into consideration when we seek to understand the nature of suffering. It is expressed by the question: "Why should those who have led virtuous lives suffer, while those who are wicked or selfish escape punishment?"

This is one of the oldest questions in the world. The book of Job was written as an answer to it. But the question has still puzzled men and women in every age, including our own.

We only deceive ourselves if we believe that when we serve God, He will intervene and protect us from misfortune and pain. God did not even save His beloved Son, Jesus, from the Cross!

Much misunderstanding and mental torture could be eliminated if we did not cling to the erroneous idea that if we live uprightly, go to church and pray, God will spare us all trials. God does not promise us a physical shield, but a shield of the spirit.

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DOES UNDERSTANDING HELP?

Misunderstanding on the human level erects a barrier that makes communication difficult, or even impossible. A misunderstanding of the divine plan and purpose can cut one off from fellowship with God.

This was graphically illustrated in the life of Jim, a young friend of mine. He had been kind to his invalid mother, but devoted to his father. When a stroke caused his father's death, Jim became not only bewildered, but rebellious. He railed against the Almighty. Of course, anger made prayer impossible, and his perplexity and loneliness increased. Resentment sapped his strength, and he dragged from day to day. Although time gradually eased his sorrow, the young man never fully surmounted his mental anguish. When Jim faced a crisis, he needed help that he did not have.

Insurance will not protect your car from damage, but if you have an accident it will help to pay for repairs. An understanding of the nature of suffering is one form of faith insurance. Acquire it, so when trials or disaster come you need not flounder. Realize:

1. God never interferes with divine law to spare any individual from harm.
2. God loves you and He wills that ultimately

you shall have what is best.

3. Suffering can be like refiner's fire; misfortune can be made to serve some high purpose.

An understanding of the nature of suffering, while it protects us from the torture of doubt, also saves us from an absorbing self-pity. Pain, quite naturally, tends to make us focus our attention upon ourselves. Knowledge of the place of suffering in the whole world and of God's infinite plan, can free us from self-interest and enable us to find ever-widening avenues of service.

When suffering comes, do not despair. Believe that God still loves you and shares your heartache. Then you are prepared to receive divine guidance and strength.

Say with the Psalmist: "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Come humbly to the Good Shepherd and receive healing oil for your aching body, or your wounded spirit. An understanding of God's ultimate purposes will prompt you in any hour of need to turn to Him in prayer. It will make it possible for you to receive the help that God offers to all who are ready to accept it.

Dante said: "In His will is our peace." Peace, which all of us so earnestly long to possess, comes as we understand God's will and make it our own. First we must recognize that God's laws are unchangeable, and sometimes conditions have been created that make suffering inevitable. Then we must work with God to bring good out of that ill. When we do this, His peace will dominate our minds and still our hearts.

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COURAGE TO ENDURE PAIN

As understanding brings peace, it also serves as the basis for courage. We gain assurance from the knowledge that we do not struggle alone. We are inspired by the belief that suffering can actually be the alchemy that will transform our common life into something far more noble.

Think of the frail little woman, crippled by arthritis, who is not able to step out of her house; yet, whose spirit is so brave and gay that all who visit her go away humbled and inspired to make less of their own suffering. Think of the couple whose income is so meager that their furniture is old and they have few modern conveniences, but they still are wonderfully happy. Think of the scientist who was stricken by cancer and, during the years he had to endure the slow progress of the disease, continued his research, dragging himself to his laboratory on the very day of his death. Their lives, and those of countless others, evidence the courage of which we are speaking.

Realize that your mind and soul are more important than your physical body. Fill your life with mental power and soul-force, even when you are subjected to disappointment or pain. If you are deprived of former strength, courageously acquire new skills and seek new opportunities for service.

Build of trouble a platform on which you can mount to a higher vantage point. Then - as when one is in clear mountain air - you will find that you are able to do the things that before seemed too difficult for you to even attempt. Through suffering, you will have found both courage and endurance.

Do not overlook the special brand of courage that comes to men and women who catch a vision of world need. It is courage to gladly suffer for the sake of those who are less fortunate than we are. We are willing to become involved in others' problems and to walk into situations where we know there will be pain and discomfort, when we believe that life's worth is not measured by momentary ease or comfort, but by eternal values.

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FAITH TO SURMOUNT DESPAIR

All too often, our suffering is magnified by a subconscious longing for sympathy. This is not easily dispelled. We may determine to rise above self-centeredness, make some progress, and then find ourselves once again becoming obsessed with our own weaknesses and limitations.

If you have this problem, strive to broaden your interests. Look out, and look up. A concern for the welfare of others, combined with faith in God's goodness, will greatly alter your perspective. The belief that God will support and strengthen you will give you hope. It can give you the will to surmount illness and despair.

One person is hampered by a heart condition. Another is crippled by alcoholism. Many are bound by less tangible suffering, such as that which comes from self-consciousness, resentment, or guilt. Whether a person's ills are physical or mental, suffering can cause him to become so low in spirit that his work is less efficient, his family life is distorted, and his personal satisfactions are meager.

There may come a time when you are tempted to despair, to settle down in the dark pit of discouragement. If so, don't yield. Remember the company of gallant souls who have lived triumphantly in spite of adversity. Think of those who were able to "fight the good fight" because they had faith.

You will recall that Paul said: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (II Corinthians 12:10)

Some Biblical scholars think Paul suffered from epilepsy. Others think he was the victim of severe and prostrating headaches, or of a malarial fever. We are not positive just what malady the Great Apostle had, but we do know that God did not spare him from the torture of a "thorn in the flesh." Paul prayed that this might be taken from him. God answered his prayer, not by taking away the infirmity, but by giving Paul strength to bear it.

Through faith, Paul carried on his work while tormented by pain. Through faith, Paul continued on his journeys in spite of physical weariness. Through faith, Paul was able to stand up to opposition and to go forward even when threat-

ened with imprisonment and death.

The first century Christians were men and women of indomitable will. Trusting in God's care, they surmounted opposition and despair.

In our generation, also, we see some who - sustained by divine Power - daily rise above stupendous difficulties. Think of Albert Schweitzer, and Frank Laubach, and Marion Anderson. Think of the heroic victim of cerebral palsy who with his teeth makes "Matchstick Designs" for greeting cards and so maintains his independence. These, and many others who have not received public acclaim, exhibit a heroism which springs from faith.

God has so made us that in times of weakness we can seek and find Eternal Strength. Every day of our lives, we tap God's current of Power. In hours of extremity, if we seek for more of this Power, we will receive a larger portion.

So, when you are bowed low by trials, or battered by pain, never attempt to rely upon your own strength alone. Remember:

God knows your needs, even before you ask.

God never expects of you more than you can do with His help.

You don't have to rely upon your own strength alone.

With God's help, you can accomplish miracles.

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MAKE SUFFERING YOUR SERVANT

A study of world history reveals the fact that many great leaders suffered from some severe handicap, or disability. This is true in the fields of politics, of science, of art, and of sports, as well as of religion.

Think of a few outstanding examples, and see how suffering in some way served to drive men and women to greater achievements than they would have made if ease and perfect health had been their lot. Abraham Lincoln let his struggle for education and security bring him an understanding of the longings of the common people. Raised under the lash of suffering, when he came to a position of power he called for: "Malice toward none - charity for all." Tschaikowsky said that if he had not suffered so greatly from disappointment and frustration, he would never have written the "Symphonie Pathetique". Charles Darwin declared: "If I had not been so great an invalid, I should not have done the work I have accomplished."

Perhaps you would like to make a list of outstanding persons whom you feel not only surmounted some infirmity, but actually let it serve as a spur to outstanding accomplishments. Napoleon's small stature and speech defect prompted him to work fanatically to acquire the qualities that a leader should possess. Edison's deafness gave him an excuse to shun social life and to devote himself exclusively to the research that became his all-absorbing interest and his deep satisfaction. No doubt it contributed to the amazing number of inventions that

add to our comfort and pleasure.

You will think of many others who not only bravely endured suffering or infirmity, but actually became individuals of stronger character because of its stimulus. Giant souls carry on bravely under stress. As they nobly struggle, they find they are able to extend their areas of service. Suffering increases their industry, their concern, and their vision.

True greatness, we know, is found among the obscure as well as among those listed in "Who's Who". The ability to make pain one's servant is not restricted to those who have remarkable talents. To your list of men and women who have grown through suffering, perhaps you could add the names of several of your acquaintances.

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I think of a Mayan Companion whose sorrow has lifted her to new heights of understanding. The loss of her only daughter, followed by the untimely death of her husband, robbed her of both financial and emotional security. She might have become obsessed with her own pathetic situation. Instead, she grew increasingly sensitive to the needs of others. The newcomer, the shut-in, and the aged found her eager and willing to bring cheer. Always she expressed genuine concern. Her words of hope and encouragement were more convincing because people knew how great was her own suffering and loss.

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It is easy to be cheerful when everything is going well; but when hard times come, courage and faith are required to turn our losses into gains. This calls for intelligence, perspective, and a belief that the mind and soul can snatch spiritual victory from physical disaster.

Some people are able to bravely endure suffering. Others make it serve as a tool to shape their lives. These are the spiritual giants of any generation - whether they become famous, or are known only in their own towns and villages.

You can become one of them. You can become not the victim of suffering, but its master. Learn and practice the following rules:

1. Believe in the ultimate goodness of God, even when you don't see why you should have to suffer.
2. Let physical suffering, or mental anguish, be a spur to new endeavor.
3. Transform the friction of pain, or adversity, into power for accomplishment.
4. Put your roots deep into faith, so you can stand firm under

stress.

5. Avoid dwelling on your regrets. Look forward to tomorrow.
6. Think of some positive use for each hour of trial. This requires intelligence and imagination; but if you will keep looking, you will see how to bring gain out of loss.



AFFIRMATION

With God's help I will live victorious-
ly, even when subjected to suffering.

Blessings,

YOUR INSTRUCTOR.