

Beyond Suffering

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is a great privilege and honour for me to have this opportunity to address you at the TOS Session of the 143rd annual convention.

First, I would like to point out that TOS efforts reflect the Theosophical Society's world-wide spiritual maturity and altruistic devotion, just like selfless devotion and service for the sake of common good is a measure of the spiritual maturity and disciple qualification or efficacy of each individual aspirant, including each of the TS members.

Certainly, we perform our service not only as a part of TOS activities, and this, by the way, should not be ignored. For example, currently, in our country, Ukraine, the voluntary movement associated with the long military and humanitarian crisis has widely spread. However, there is a tendency not to present such TS voluntary service activities as TOS.

Now, I would like to talk about what suffering means. According to Wikipedia, "suffering" is *a set of extremely unpleasant, burdensome or painful sensations experienced by a living being which are associated with physical and emotional discomfort, pain, stress or torments*. According to the Explanatory Dictionary, suffering is *a physical or moral pain or torment*.

Suffering is familiar to each person. It's unlikely that someone succeeded in escaping it. Many people think that suffering is never-ending, an endless labyrinth. In the course of suffering, the person makes efforts to get rid of suffering. However, very often, these efforts bring in even more suffering subsequently, both to the person himself/herself and to other living beings. We beat about the bush if we place the blame for our suffering on external circumstances and other people.

The Biblical myth maps the source of suffering back to the eating of the Apple of Discord and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. The first discomfort they felt was their nudity which made them hide from God. Thus, suffering is a tool of evolution which allows one to get trained, to get experience on how to overcome this unpleasant condition. What is the nature of suffering? We will try to categorise information about the nature of suffering. If we look at animals or at early humans, the basic source of their suffering included: illness, physical trauma or threats to their very life. These conditions generated pain and fear. These were the dominating causes of suffering. After the individualisation of man, in the process of the development of the psychic sphere of life, mental experiences began to prevail over physical ones.

Even in recent history, we see how medieval customs led to the loss of honour and dignity of people, which became a source of suffering, torment and grief. We are familiar with a genre of French romance novels describing suffering due to unrequited love, infidelity or jealousy. Contemporary youth perceives these stories with irony. Times have changed. Today it is

possible to define broken self-respect or hurt false pride as the dominating tone of suffering. The suffering associated with so-called "creativity torments" are increasing.

We can see that the evolutionary progress of humankind is associated with the change of the dominant in the very nature of suffering. Is there any consistent pattern in such a development? Can we say that suffering causes us to move in a certain direction?

When I was informed that the topic of this session was 'Beyond Suffering', I first looked up the meaning of the word 'BEYOND' in the dictionary. The word 'suffering' was familiar to me. However, I would like to the variety of nuances which is emphasised in the 'beyond suffering'.

Let's look at the Christian Doctrine of Christ teaches us accompanies humankind in it is a result of his/her sins. sinfulness is not only an feature of humanity.

<p style="text-align: center;">BEYOND</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Further away than On the far side of Later than / After Greater than In addition to In the distance Above / Over Outside / Outward</p>
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thank the English language for provided by the word 'beyond' combination of the words

concept of suffering. The that suffering inevitably the course of his/her life and that Suffering is inevitable because acquired, but also, an inherited Christianity teaches us that

suffering purifies the soul and considers suffering to be a ladder for spiritual ascension. Christianity teaches us to be merciful to those who suffer, calls for giving alms to the needy. It offers relief from suffering and sins through repentance and forgiveness. These recommendations have powerful transformational potential; they can awaken the conscience and cause the internal moral code of a person to awaken its latent, internal divinity.

This is the way **OUT OF** the position of suffering, which is just being dissolved. Why are the results achieved in two thousand years so modest? Maybe because despite the deep truth which is embedded in this formula, the Christian church makes money from selling indulgences.

Now, let us turn to the Buddhist tradition. Buddha also taught us that suffering is inevitable in life. Desires, passions, as well as ignorance, lack of knowledge of the true nature of things, are the causes of suffering. Compassion towards the sufferer is a duty of each true follower of the Buddhist Doctrine. In order to get rid of suffering, it is recommended one gets rid of desires and acquires the ability to distinguish between various manifestations of the surrounding world. These recommendations also possess internal transformation potential and induce the person to establish control over his/her lower nature, to shift the focus of consciousness to the mental level, to the level of an observer. As well as, to take a position **OUTSIDE** or **APART** from things that deliver suffering.

In *The Voice of Silence*, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky describes seven gates through which the traveller should pass, the traveller being an individual who has the courage to follow the spiritual way. It's just the middle, the fourth gate, Vairagya, which opens a way to acquiring the indifference to pleasure and suffering. Certainly, in this fragment, the internal way is described and the indifference concerns, firstly, the personal suffering of humankind. The

point is that in order to develop the wisdom of perceiving various life lessons and the understanding of causal relationships, the person should drain the cup of his/her grief and should reach the threshold of suffering. Such indifference is a consequence of the life experience; thus, for such a meaning, the word combination ‘**AFTER** suffering’ is more appropriate. In addition, we should not forget that it is only the middle of the Spiritual Way.

What does the overcoming of suffering and going beyond suffering bring about? Compassion, mercy and sympathy. Suffering refines the soul of a person and makes his/her heart open.

Suffering allows a person to clear and pacify his/her personal nature, in order to enable the manifestation of his/her divine qualities, higher merits and virtues. It is only then that we can help others rise above themselves. In today's world, a lot of people are ready to show compassion towards the needs of humankind and other kingdoms of nature on our planet; they form associations for common causes, and the influence of such associations steadily increases every year. It is part of modern globalisation. Our planet is called a vale of grief; however, it is also a forge for Bodhisattvas.

On the one hand, suffering can be understood to be the manifestation of one person's weakness, lack of ability to control him/herself, to soberly evaluate the circumstances and his/her own capabilities, to take over the responsibility for his/her deeds. In addition, it often happens that a person succumbing to such weaknesses runs into depression or apathy. He/she accuses the entire world, begins drinking or taking drugs because he/she is unable to cope with him/herself.

It results in a loss of control over him/herself when strong-willed efforts cannot make a way through a veil of gloomy thoughts and feelings. Under such conditions, the Atman does not have the power to affect the personality. To be more exact, the personality becomes unreceptive to its own higher nature. Sometimes, a good-willed but short-sighted person starts consoling a friend and takes over the responsibility for solving the problem that causes the suffering to their dear one. For example, what is the reaction of parents when their child does not know how to fasten his/her shoelaces? Often, being in a hurry, the parent him/herself fastens the shoelaces. Because it's easier for him/her. He/she thereby offers his/her help to the dear one, which only makes the child weaker and more dependent on other people and circumstances. Or after a strong emotional outburst, the best option for compassionate help is to wait quietly and kindly, and then, follow with a friendly discussion. In the case of chronic depression, it is recommended to gradually return the person to the positive perception of the world through dialogue with the Beautiful arts, music, nature or poetry.

On the other hand, suffering can be perceived as the manifestation of a person's strength. It is a kind of check of his/her virtue of stability, indestructibility or firmness. By overcoming suffering, the person becomes more human, more loving and wiser. He/she comprehends his/her strengths and weaknesses better and becomes a master of his/her personality. It goes without saying that it is possible and necessary to help him/her during such efforts. What could be compassionate in such a case? I would like to refer to the classics. The *Bible*

provides a perfect example. God tested Job and delivered a terrible blow to him. All Job's children died. His body became covered with ulcers, and he appeared sitting on a mound of manure. Then, his friends arrived to console him. However, what did they do? They sat down at a distance from him, and they said not a single word to him for seven days. It was a manifestation of compassion containing the power. In this case, we can use the following words: to rise **OVER** the suffering. Such compassion is demonstrated by a surgeon, experienced psychologist or lawyer. Such strategy is often applied by spiritual guides to their disciples.

Now, my dear friends, I would like to establish the association between what I've just said about suffering and the activity of the TOS. Charity is an internal need for many of us. Moreover, at a certain stage of the spiritual path, selfless aid for the sake of the common good becomes a natural life-style, the path of least resistance. Such a life becomes an art piece, rather than just work or a fulfilment of mere duty. We should always focus our efforts on the elimination of the causes of suffering, and not just on the correction of consequences. The causes are in the sphere of a person's perception of the world. We should learn how to make our charity, both individual and collective, not indulging the weaknesses of a person, not creating his/her dependency on other people or circumstances. Our aid and participation should promote the finding of the power of love by those for whom it is assigned.

I think that the objectives of charity include nurturing and education, enlightenment, and public involvement in joint, creative or charitable activities.

In summary, it is necessary to emphasise the following:

- The suffering of humanity is inevitable; it is associated with the very nature of our self-being. This is the way our personal nature is reacting to the impact of the surrounding world and is comprehending this world and itself.
- The experience of suffering develops the spiritual sphere of a person by opening his/her heart to love, compassion and mercy.
- To show compassion to another person or to nature is not an easy task, which requires experience, wisdom, patience and ingenuity.

I would like to wish that each of us develop such qualities and skills for implementing them successfully in our work for our Order of Service.

Let's master this art of compassion together.

I wish a lot of success to all of us!