

# **TOS: Beyond Suffering**

*By Suvralina Mohanty*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

While I share my views on this topic, would like to put up the questions that come to my mind:

- What is suffering?
- When / Why do we suffer?
- How do we deal with suffering?

We humans are different from animals because of our consciousness, which gives us the ability to harbour and interpret memories and project visions for the future. Our extraordinary minds allow us to live far outside the reaches of our present moment and circumstances. Because of this, we get the opportunity to relive and sensationalise the negative events of our past and anticipate catastrophic misfortune in our future.

The damage we do to ourselves often far exceeds that of the actual events. The suffering we create in our mind is only taking away precious moments, so the better we manage negative emotions, the better we make each day.

## **Thoughts and Actions**

Whatever we see around today is an outcome of thoughts and actions of past years and a certain amount of effort has gone into this. Hence whatever we do today will add to the future.

## **Action vs. motive – we suffer more for our motives, not actions**

Almost every action we take is driven by an underlying motive. This can be social recognition, love of work, service, security, fear. So, motives differ and thus actions can be either externally or internally driven. If we closely observe our motives, we can very clearly see and check if we are doing something with an expectation. While our motive is to gain something by a particular action by keeping an expectation, we will, for sure, suffer if it is not met. When we work for the sake of work and nothing else, there is no expectation, no anxiety and no fear. We simply accept the work at hand and keep on doing it.

## **All is in the Self**

The One is recognised everywhere. The first great step towards the attainment of this realisation is the Law of Duty. It is progressive, as evolution is progressive. We must begin by studying our own place on the great ladder of evolution, by studying our circumstances that show our *karma*, by studying our own powers and capacities, and ascertaining our weaknesses. To all and each one that we meet, we owe a duty. No one comes within the circle of our life, but we have a duty towards that person. The world is not ruled by chance; no fortuitous happenings come into the lives of humans. Duties are obligations we owe to those around us, and everyone within our circle is one to whom we owe a duty.

## **Operating from a solution zone**

When we are ready to take up responsibility, we operate from a different mindset. We, no more, see problems as problems but each crisis becomes an opportunity for us. When we are ready to serve, we are no longer in the problem zone of life. We shift from the problem zone to a solution zone instantly. For every little suffering we see around us, we visualise the bigger picture and extend it to “what can be done” to do away with suffering. We get action-oriented.

When we operate from a solution zone, we convert a bigger problem into a smaller one. That gives us confidence; it changes our perception. That makes us realise that every problem we are given to solve has its due importance. Problems are meant to be solved.

If you notice, generally, when someone talks about a problem in a group or simply shares with someone else, the instant response of others is to add more anxiety, more fear, more worries and make the problem bigger. Does that really help? Our focus must be on the solution and not the problem. The moment we shift the thought to what could be possible solutions, we get a fresh outlook. If we are not a part of the solution, we are a part of the problem. The choice is ours.

## **Purpose**

Helping and enabling are two different dimensions of service. Helping is short-term and enabling is long-term. And to enable someone means we need to make them understand the basics of life, like the purpose of everything that happens around us, laws that relate to Cause and Effect, and the Evolution of Life.

When we see people suffering, we get concerned. At times we think about doing something and sometimes we even reach out to help. In some cases, we are less bothered by what is happening around us, as we get into a different thought process, in which we assume that we are not the right person to address the issues or we are not capable enough to do the needful. But when we start thinking that for every problem, every disconnect, every suffering of humankind, there is a way out, we get involved in taking the right approach and measure to contribute towards the wellbeing of all. The very question that we ask ourselves, “What are you doing for others?” shows us a new way of life. Our life has a purpose and we must live that purpose. We are part of a great plan of evolution. And we have a definite role in this plan. The purpose of life is not just to be happy but to be useful.

With this awareness we serve selflessly and effectively, as we lose concern about the results of our efforts, but we keep on causing good. We also don't evaluate how grand the service is, as compared to certain individuals or groups doing work for society. Rather we focus on the ‘work at hand’ and create greatness at every single service we give. We are all equal and deserve equal treatment in the society we live in. Wherever there is suffering out of poverty, sickness, unavailability of resources, an immediate remedy is needed and that is our responsibility, and we cannot ignore that. Whether we are channeling the services directly out of our capabilities or route them through certain other groups of people or organisations, at the end, what matters is the ‘service given’ so that there is no disparity. A wholesome society should be our final goal if we are aiming at serving. We should work towards involving as many people as we can, so that we address the issues effectively and create a ‘world of serving.’

## **Choices**

While we deal with suffering we need to understand and have clarity on a few things at an individual level, for us to relate to the world in a better way and respond to situations properly.

## **Pain vs Suffering**

### **Why is there pain?**

God's plan is evolution. We live and evolve in the lower 3 worlds: Physical, Emotional or Astral and Mental.

Evolution happens by experiences gained in these worlds. Since these are worlds of relativity, not of absolute truth, duality or polarity is the nature of things. This is the reason that in these worlds we cannot know sweetness if we don't know bitterness, cannot know success if we don't know failure, we cannot know happiness if we do not know pain. Having said this, it naturally follows that pain is not only inevitable but is necessary for evolution.

### **Does this mean we are condemned to suffer?**

The answer is – No, suffering is a choice because it depends on our response to pain. This is the most important difference between pain and suffering. To focus beyond suffering means to choose not to suffer despite there being pain or to enable others not to suffer despite them experiencing pain.

Choosing not to suffer when there is pain

- Teaches us that pain is inevitable and it has to be taken 'AS IS'
- Makes us realise that 'happiness requires struggle'
- Exposes us to the very truth of life that wanting a positive experience is a negative experience and that accepting a negative experience is a positive one.

## **I am not special**

- When I understand and claim that "I am not special"
  - That helps me observe that everyone is unique and so am I
  - That stops me from special entitlements:
    - I'm awesome and the rest of you all suck, so I deserve special treatment
    - I suck and the rest of you are all awesome, so I deserve special treatment.

I would like to share a real life story. This was through a television show which was about recognising the people who made a difference. In that show a middle-aged lady was awarded for her contribution to underprivileged children and while she was interviewed on how she started her journey, she was narrating her story of her life. Her husband was an Army Officer and both of them were involved in charity work. The husband died young and before his death this couple had planned a charity show in which both had to perform. Initially the lady was reluctant and was not able to think through how to manage everything. But with the help of some of their common friends she finally got ready. More than the event and her contribution to the charity work she still continues to do what I still remember from her interview as something that gave a beautiful spark of thought.

While she was narrating how she accepted the sudden death of her husband she said, “when I experienced that, it was like a huge mountain on my head. I was not able to move that at all but there was something which helped me convert that mountain to smaller chunks of actions that I could possibly figure out to move on. That was an instant thought ‘Why not me?’ Very often we see people giving the reaction ‘why me?’ when they suffer from any such incident. But the “why not me?” was that particular thought which gave me all my answers.”

See how beautiful it is to live with such a thought, “why not me?” Why should I claim to be special? Why should everything be all right with me every single time? Embracing every event of life becomes easy when we look at things with a fresh outlook, with fearlessness, with completeness.

### **Choices to Habits**

We keep learning every moment and so make a variety of choices. Unless we make those choices our habits, we will not do justice. Choices must be lived.

- We have to create a space in which we can operate, no-one else will create it for us
- We have to choose whether to be on the side of the problem or the solution
- Pain is inevitable but suffering is a choice
- The rules of life are the same for all, we must accept that.

### **The motto of the TOS**

The motto of the TOS is “A union of all who love in the service of all that suffers.”

When we are ready, at an individual level, to spread awareness, right knowledge, serve without any selfish motive, our day-to-day acts will be meaningful. As we connect with all, we get concerned about all, we truly start caring for all and, gradually, there arises a sense of responsibility for all.

We must remember that all beings are living and that the life-force in everyone is the same, though it seems different. This thought once kept in the back of our mind will always help us in connecting with everything that we see around us.

Once realised, we will always look for opportunities in every challenge. We will be positive throughout and will be ready to spread positive vibes wherever we go. With positivity comes selflessness, comes a giving attitude and finally comes the willingness to serve.

In short, Union is beyond suffering, Love is beyond suffering and Service is beyond suffering. Let us choose to live life with this very thought.

Pain is experienced in the same space in which we are evolving physically, emotionally and mentally.

- Physical pain – lack of material and physical comforts, such as: shortage of resources, poverty, ill health, disease, injury.
- Emotional pain – negative feelings caused to one another by: insensitivity, greed, jealousy, lack of empathy, understanding and compassion or death of a loved one.
- Mental pain – negative thoughts created by: memories, future anticipation, prejudices and unfulfilled expectations.

Suffering arises out of all these 3 types of pain, which shapes the general behaviour of people. In most cases, their behaviour gives rise to more pain, creating a vicious circle.

To break the circle, address Suffering:

Physical suffering – Basic survival needs must be taken care of. This requires financial resources. The TOS, as well as most NGOs, renders service primarily in this space.

But to truly go beyond suffering, the emotional and mental suffering must also be addressed. Does this seem more difficult than removing physical suffering? With the right knowledge, this is not difficult at all. First, understand that all emotional and mental suffering is due to ignorance. Removal of this ignorance is the most important service that the TOS can render.

We can remove this ignorance by putting into our own practice the timeless Truths proclaimed by Theosophy. These Truths give us the right knowledge: There is only One Life. The Universe is guided by the immutable laws of Love and Justice.

The Law of Love heals the soul, ceasing all emotional and mental suffering. Give love to every child, show compassion to the poor, speak a kind word to the sick, and watch how their souls heal. When you behave kindly and compassionately with emotionally injured people, they get healed and, in turn, will behave kindly and compassionately with other people. This is how it spreads. This doesn't need your money, only a willingness to serve from the heart.

The Law of Justice requires us to accept our circumstances. This is the theory of Karma, of cause and effect. Perform duty or work without expectation. Accept your present as the result of previous causes that were put into motion. Accept death as part of the circle of life in the great plan of evolution. Educating people about these truths removes ignorance and consequently leads them beyond mental and emotional suffering.

The best way to educate is to practise what you preach. Therefore, always put into practice these truths in the service that you perform. Leading ourselves and others beyond suffering enables each one to understand God's Plan, which is Evolution and the ultimate purpose of Life.



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Suvralina is a Post-Graduate in Maths and PG Diploma in HRM. She has more than 20 years of Industry experience. Her core areas of expertise are Strategic HR Management, Research and Delivery in Training and Development.

She has helped many start-ups and SMEs in setting up HR practices, organisational restructuring, competency mapping, performance management, training, etc. Her key competencies are people management skills, flexibility to interact with people from various educational, social, emotional and psychological backgrounds.

On the personal front, she possesses a positive outlook towards life and is a life member of The Theosophical Society of India. She has addressed youth camps on motivating and leading youth. She is associated with NGOs and organisations working for holistic development of children. She believes in simplicity and her attitude towards accepting people as they are has made her lead a balanced life. Her versatile experience and experimental acumen has truly made her an excellent mentor who understands core issues, shares real life experiences and cares about people she associates with.