

The Way of Suffering



READINGS FOR
AN ENLIGHTENED LIFE

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Introduction

*You scream,
I scream,
We all scream
For ice cream.*

Anything to find relief from “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” Ben & Jerry’s Cherry Garcia or Peanut Butter Chocolate from Häagen-Dazs. It doesn’t matter. We’ll do anything to escape suffering. Medicine, money, sex, power, fame, or even ice cream to dull the ache of anxiety. It doesn’t matter. Nothing works for long.

We live in a dualistic world of good and bad, pleasure and pain, darkness and light. We can’t have one side of the coin without the other. One will follow the other as surely as a black and white horror film follows a technicolor fairy tale at this crazy drive-in movie theater we call the world. We all scream many times in life, not for ice cream but for an end to our bouts of suffering.

Buddha observed that suffering in this world is inevitable, the natural result of our insatiable desires, our wanting this and not wanting that, our not getting what we want

THE WAY OF SUFFERING

or getting what we want. The enlightened response to suffering, said Buddha, was compassion and loving kindness, to ourselves as well as others. Jesus showered compassion on all who suffered, and raised the dead and healed the sick and above all showed us all that we, like him, could transcend sufferings. “In this world you shall have trials and tribulations but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus went on to emphasize that whatever he did we could do also (John 14:12).

To overcome the world is to rise above it with our feet on the ground, to realize that, in truth, “we live and move and have our being in God” (Acts 17:28). God is not a magic man in a place in the sky but the always-everywhere-active, unconditional Love in which “there is no change or shifting shadow” (James 1:17). The remedies of this world are counterfeit. Only “perfect love can cast out fear” (1 John 4:18). And that love is nearer to us than hands and feet. It is the ground of our being.

The stories, essays, and poems in this book are not quick fixes or elixirs. They acknowledge the experience of our sufferings, unsparingly. Taken as a whole they are like fingers pointing in the direction of the moon. The fingers are not the moon and these chapters are not God, but together they form a compass needle that can guide us to enlightenment, a spiritual understanding of God and our relationship to God and all beings that grounds healings.

Dr. Thomas Hora, a psychiatrist whose practice was infused with spiritual teachings, counseled that there are only two ways to become enlightened, through wisdom

Introduction

or through suffering, and that for most of us it is suffering that motivates us to turn away from the things of the world for relief, and to turn to God for healing. “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen lasts forever” (2 Corinthians 4:18). To see with the eyes of the soul is to choose Love and glimpse the face of God.

The Way of Suffering is the fourth in a series of writings on values that transform us. First was *The Way of Gratitude*. Then *The Way of Kindness*, followed by *The Way of Forgiveness*. Like the Star Wars movies where the first one (*A New Hope*) was really the fourth, and the fourth (*The Phantom Menace*) was really the first, *The Way of Suffering* might best be first to read because it begins at the beginning, with our broken world. As poet Leonard Cohen sang, “There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

Nobody said enlightenment is easy.

But it happens to all of us, if only for brief moments, moments we always remember, that reassure us everything is all right, and that see us through till the next time our whole being screams out to God for another miracle. It has happened to you before. *The Way of Suffering* and its companion volumes say be patient and choose love, forgiveness, gratitude, and kindness. Miracles will happen again.

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