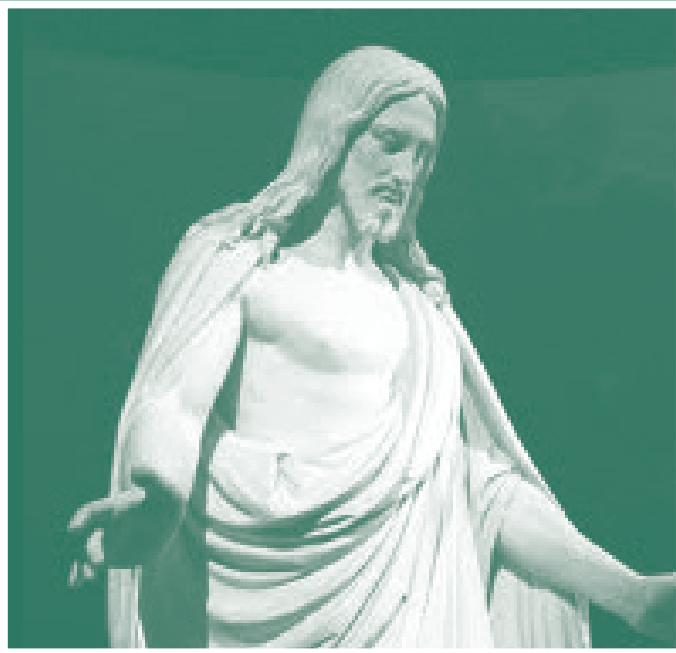




The Sublime Nobility of Suffering

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

A spiritual aspirant lives a life pervaded by a sense of sacrifice. With a Godward vision, adversities are converted into austerities, and persecutions offered by the world are converted into a process of self-purification. Thus an aspirant sacrifices their grosser qualities for the emergence of the subtler qualities of the soul. Just as gold shines when melted, the spirit of an aspirant shines when it is persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

The blazing movement towards the limitless Self is obstructed by the dark clouds of the world of limitation. However, the resistance offered on the path of an aspirant quickens their steps towards the final goal, instead of obstructing them. Simultaneously, this devotee of God sees sweetness in suffering for the Divine Self. With the increasing experience of Divine sweetness, it becomes impossible to return hatred for hatred, violence for violence, and cruelty for cruelty.

When you become aware of the fact that everything you suffer and endure is for the promotion of righteousness, for the sake of God Himself, then you accept your sufferings as blessings from God. When you suffer for the sake of someone whom you love intensely, there is sweetness behind that

suffering. When God becomes that object of your love and you understand that your entire life is a movement towards God-realization, all your sufferings become sweet. So when you are reviled, when you are insulted, when bitter words are spoken against you, you remain calm and composed, enjoying inner peace and serenity. Instead of drawing bitter impressions from the world, you begin to draw from within yourself a sweet awareness of Divine Presence and an understanding that you are worshiping God in all that you do.

When you are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, there is a sense of heroism within your mind, a purpose for which you are suffering. The masses suffer without any purpose, simply feeling the pain of certain difficult situations and circumstances in life. But when you suffer as an aspirant, it has a purpose. You understand that there is a mystic insight to be gained and as a result your feelings become sublime rather than degraded. Therefore, your suffering is not suffering at all.

Both the Eastern and Western scriptures abound with examples of how God suffers for the benefit of humanity. The Christian religion

teaches how Christ accepted the Cross because of the immense love He had for humanity and how His death and resurrection absolved the faithful of all sins. In the light of Vedanta, this implies that Christ has already destroyed all of the demoniac qualities within your personality and has paved the way for your purity leading to God-realization.

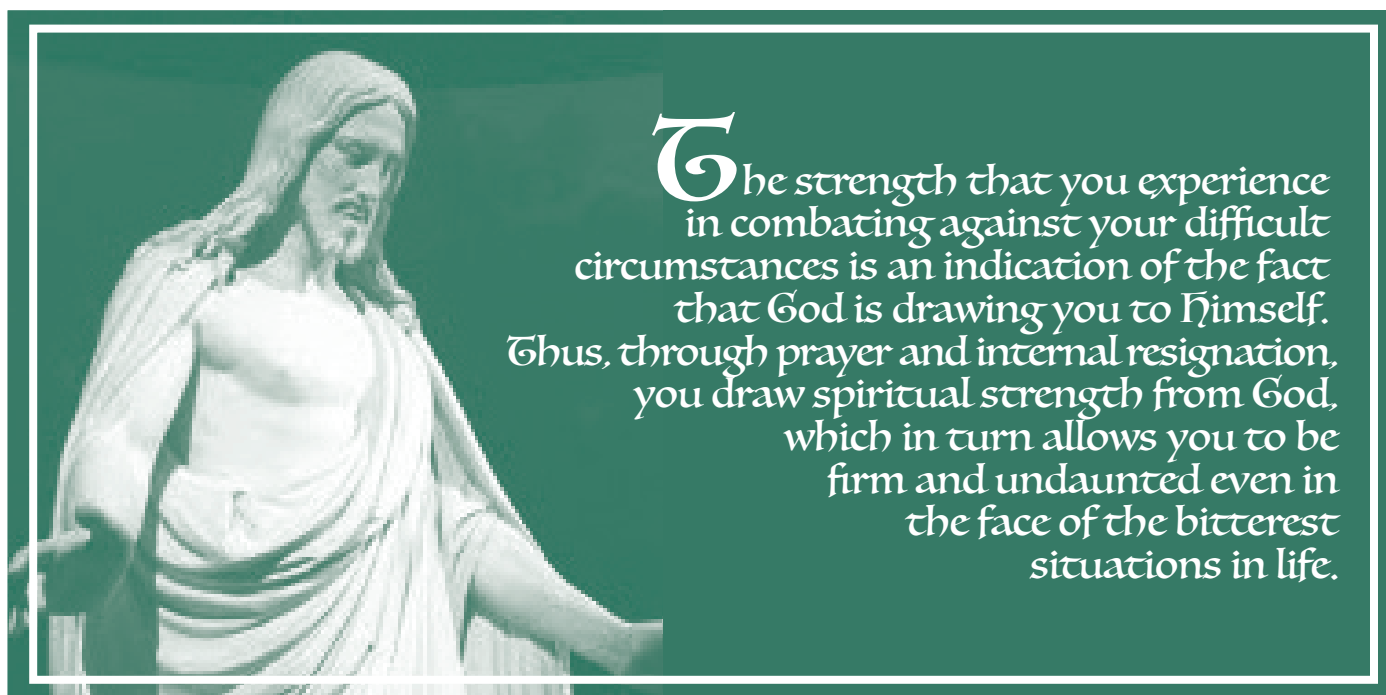
Similarly, in Hindu scriptures, Lord Shiva is mystically portrayed as Neela Kantha—possessing a blue throat. The story tells how once upon a time the milky ocean was churned and during the churning process poison emerged. No one was powerful enough to consume it except for Lord Shiva, who drank this poison and held it in his throat for the greater good of the world.

The ocean refers to the unconscious mind. The path of *sadhana* is like a churning process, and out of it emerges nectar—symbolizing virtuous qualities, as well as poison—representing demoniac qualities. When you advance in *sadhana* on the spiritual path, you realize that you have the same strength as Shiva and are able to handle the various negative manifestations within and transform all of them into Divine qualities that beautify your personality.

At the highest level all sins and impurities have already been destroyed by God Himself. This idea instills great faith in your mind as it leads you to feel God's presence and support in your spiritual movement. Essentially the Self is untouched, unscathed, and ever pure. The impurities you find within yourself come from the veil of illusion that tells you, "I am this body-mind complex." Once you begin to understand Who you are, you realize that there is neither one who can sin nor one who can be persecuted, since the Self is beyond these concepts of the mind.

The trials, tribulations and sufferings that you endure on the path of righteousness are blessings in themselves. St. Peter says in his epistle,

God will bless you, even if others treat you unfairly for being loyal to him. You don't gain anything by being punished for some wrong you have done. But God will bless you, if you have to suffer for doing something good. After all, God chose you to suffer as you follow in the footsteps of Christ, who set an example by suffering for you. (CEV-1 Peter 2: 19-21)



Every time you suffer for a righteous cause, each time you face tribulation for promoting peace, every time you sacrifice for the good of others, you are drawn closer and closer to God. The strength that you experience in combating against your difficult circumstances is an indication of the fact that God is drawing you to Himself. Thus, through prayer and internal resignation, you draw spiritual strength from God, which in turn allows you to be firm and undaunted even in the face of the bitterest situations in life.

Urging His followers to remain unaffected by trials and tribulations, Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad,
for great is your reward in Heaven,
for so they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.*

Jesus taught that if one faces persecutions or adversities with the Kingdom of Heaven as his goal, he will rejoice. If the Kingdom of Heaven is not one's main goal, then even in prosperous situations one will be miserable.

Why should one rejoice in the face of adversity? This is a very important spiritual point to be reflected upon and understood. In adverse situations your ego is being challenged—and that challenge is essential for genuine spiritual evolution. Human beings cling to their egos so tenaciously that they cannot let go of the ego unless they are thoroughly frustrated by life. Although you may have heard about the Kingdom of Heaven, and you may even have glimpsed the majesty of being One with the Universal Self, still your ego stands in the way as a tremendous barrier.

In daily life your mind is constantly dominated by the voices of the ego. In the early morning you meditate, “I and God are One.

The Kingdom of Heaven is within me.” You then open the door and start mingling with people. Immediately, someone does not say “good morning” to you; someone does not give you the right type of appreciation. You are thrown off your rootedness in the Universal Life. Sometimes events are insignificant and sometimes they are major. Yet, according to Lord Jesus, all major events are insignificant. When something jars your ego, you begin to understand how ego can be an obstacle, and that your task is to sublimate it. Thus, you learn to consider every jarring situation as a blessing.

It is similar to having a splinter lodged somewhere in your body, which only becomes evident when it is pressed. The pinch you feel reminds you of the need to remove it. Therefore, it is a blessing when someone gives your ego a pinch; it tells you where the thorn is.

The moment you understand that you are living to transform your ego, living to transcend the world of relativity and plunge into the Universal Self, you will begin to rejoice. It should therefore become your project to soar wholeheartedly into the transcendental realm. Each time someone provokes your ego, rejoice. Every time there is an adversity, rejoice. The ideal before you is to enjoy communion with God even in jarring situations, not only when you are seated in meditation. Keep that ideal in view, and rejoice.

When you follow this project of transcending the ego, you begin to discover the Light of your soul—which has been veiled by the ego. Referring to this most inspiring discovery, Lord Jesus said:

*Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
(KJV Matthew 5:16)*