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‘To Survive is to Find Meaning in Suffering’: A Call to Celebrate Life

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Abstract: Suffering is part and parcel of human life. As long as we sustain in human life, we are bound to experience sufferings in various ways. Nature around us teaches us in different ways to manifest growth with the experiential knowledge of suffering. As suffering is perceived as the pavement for growth, survival can be attained. Survival is second nature to living beings other than *Homo sapiens*. They adapt to difficult situations around them and survive as long as they can. They have a great lesson to teach us. If we can draw a leaf out of the book of these creatures in nature, we can certainly find meaning in suffering.

Keywords: Suffering, Experience, Survival, Inevitability of Pain, Logotherapy

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It was the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who claimed: 'To live is to suffer; to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.'

The very life begins from the suffering that a mother undergoes when giving life to a child. As the mother witnesses the birth of a child, she feels very much satisfied and happy. In spite of undergoing so much suffering, she exhibits joy as she could find meaning in suffering. The life of a child begins from the cry of its birth. It tries to find the meaning of suffering in its own way. The struggle of a butterfly to come out of a cocoon enables it to become a nature trained one with strong wings. Unless it experiences suffering, it can never fly. Buddha's first teaching stresses the fact of universality of suffering and on finding meaning in suffering (Nithiyanandam, 2002).

Suffering as Inevitable

We need to accept the fact that suffering can take place at any instant of our life. The life history of any great person enables us to understand that suffering was part and parcel of their lives. Their focus on goal helped them to find meaning in their suffering. Life goes on in spite of obstacles and sufferings. M. Scott Peck (2014) starts his book *The Road Less Traveled* with this sentence. "Life is difficult, as soon as you are going to accept this as a matter of fact the easier will be to go through life, to face and solve problems." It is also our perception of life that takes our journey of life forward. Life in its plenitude has sufferings as part of it. As we take sufferings to the awareness level, we find meaning in them. Life rolls on its wheels with a variety of challenges. Being half alive is torture. When we are aware of certain aspects of our lives like our physicality, we tend to long for pleasurable things. As a result, suffering impinges a blow on our lives. In order to mitigate this

suffering, we look for every kind of possible pleasures. Instead, if we can bring in various aspects of lives like spirituality, etc., we can certainly find meaning in our lives. As a result, we persevere in our lives finding meaning in our lives.

The insight on suffering and death, and the elimination of every kind of desire for the world affected thereby can put an end to the chain of suffering. This can bring about a radical change in our present lives. Then we can experience deliverance during this present life itself. It's not only the question of survival but also the aspect of taking a step forward in our lives. Suffering is a moment where we take pause and look into past the things that were responsible for it and accordingly move forward in our lives. It's also a moment where there is the possibility of losing hope. If we can manage to gather strength and rejuvenate our hope at that moment, it certainly provides the impetus for our future growth. Then it begins with the aspect of survival but moves ahead in our life journey. When we are fully alive in various aspects of our lives, we never regret suffering at one aspect of our lives. But instead, we revive our strength in other aspects of our lives and consequently move forward.

Suffering and Meaning

Nietzsche says, "Gradually, man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfil one more condition of existence than any other animal; man has to believe, to know, from time to time why he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life." In order to maintain sustenance, we need to fulfil certain duties. As human beings, we long to prolong our race and at the same time be in the present moment for a longer duration of time. This implies that we are bound to face suffering at one point and overcome it to

satisfy our inner longing to survive. According to the famous pessimist German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, it is the inevitability of suffering combined with the awareness of the inescapability of death that creates the need for there to have a meaning for life, including suffering. Inspired by him, Nietzsche combines the need for there to be a meaning to life as intimately related to the need for there to be a meaning to suffering. In his book, *On The Genealogy Of Morals*, Nietzsche (2011) wrote, “Man, the bravest of animals, and the one most accustomed to suffering, does not repudiate suffering as such; he desires it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far.” More specifically Nietzsche believed that meaning for life is caused by the fact that this life is filled with pain, loss, suffering, fear, anxiety and ends not in happiness but death. Thus, in order to endure the hardships of human existence, individuals must believe their suffering has a purpose. At the same time, for certain people in life, there are certain moments of blissful utter serenity and joy. These moments leave a permanent mark in their lives. In this life journey, individuals work ceaselessly to satiate their goals and desires in hope that suffering and pain would disappear in his/her life and they will be left with lasting happiness. Soon they realize that in this earthly existence, utopian happiness is an impossibility. Rather as human beings, suffering seems to be an inescapable part of life with complete relief possible with the annihilation of our existence i.e. death. This seems to be closer to be nihilism.

Conclusion

As Mother Teresa affirms, “Pain and suffering have come into your life, but remember the pain, sorrow, suffering are but the kiss of Jesus – a sign that you have come so close to Him that He can kiss you.” If we can bring in the deeper aspect of our

lives, we can certainly find meaning in suffering. When we accept this suffering as part of our lives, our destiny cannot be perturbed. We do survive and based on our survival we manage to find meaning in our suffering. This meaning is what makes our suffering bearable. This meaning, further, enables us to enjoy life in its fullness, despite the suffering present all around and within us.

So the challenge before us is to recognize suffering in our lives; experience it intensely; discern the meaning of the suffering and finally be capable of relishing our lives. Thus we can truly celebrate life, with its suffering and pain.

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