

Rising above suffering

Rising above suffering doesn't mean to ignore or numb yourself from all pain, but rather to appreciate and respect every inner and outer experience that comes as part of the glorious dance of your life, whether pleasant or painful.

With a spiritual approach, when you're experiencing one pain or another, you feel the suffering, sadness, unhappiness, or other emotions that arise. However, at the same time, you're remembering spirit. You're remembering beneficial guidance. You're remembering that a new door will open to let in the sunlight of happiness once again. You sit with the pain for a short time and then come out of the darkness to walk on with hope in your heart and a trust in the divine presence that walks with you.

Consider

When you grow spiritually to the point where you are watching your life as a divine play, then you experience all the events, lessons, challenges, and growth as part of this divine play. You are in the events of your life while also watching as what the Indian scriptures call *sakshi bhava*, or *witness consciousness*. You are in the world, but not of it, suffering yet not suffering.

Experiences of pain and suffering depend on the individual threshold of the person who is experiencing them. For one person, small inconveniences can cause more distress than major disasters do for another. I've watched an actress friend get more upset about a bad hair-tinting job than do others who are dealing with devastating tragedies.

Challenges affect you according to your understanding, beliefs, and state of mind, along with the arms of divine grace that come to carry you above the hottest sands and deserts of life.

When those inevitable difficult moments come — such as when you've lost someone or something precious to you, or if you don't achieve a goal you've been working toward, or when your mind, body, or spirit are in a state of pain or suffering — you can see such times with some objectivity. Even while taking intelligent steps to alleviate the suffering, you can remember that you are spirit having a physical experience, a child of the eternal who is currently enrolled in this "school for the soul" called life (see Chapter 4).

Don't Forget

With a spiritual perspective, even if you have some agitations here and there, you can still be aware of the part of you that's free from agitation. T.S. Eliot called this place "the still point of the turning world." It's the eye of the storm, the peaceful inner cave of your heart that remains positive and peaceful even in the midst of a full and eventful life. From that positive, peaceful place, you know that after every storm comes a chance to awaken into a new golden sky with colorful rainbows that will delight your heart, nourish your soul, and rouse your spirit.

Something to talk about

A new priest came to town, and during his first confessional, an elderly woman came to confess her sins.

“Father, I have sinned. Fifty-three years ago, I committed adultery.” The woman went on to describe various details about the event.

The priest was moved to hear that after so much time, this woman was finally confessing her sin. He gave her some penance to do and left the church feeling especially buoyant and cheerful. After all, his purpose in joining the priesthood was to relieve people of their burdens and sins.

The next week, the same elderly woman came for confession. Once again, she confessed the same adultery sin from so many years ago. The priest wondered whether her advanced age had made her forget that she’d already confessed the same sin a week earlier, or maybe she was feeling so guilty about her adulterous affair that she felt a need to confess it again.

Three more Sundays came, and each week, this woman arrived to confess the same transgression of adultery from 53 years ago, always in great detail. The priest finally decided to speak up and told the woman, “You’ve already confessed this same sin several times, and I assure you that through the grace of Our Father, your sin has been forgiven. There is no need to keep confessing it every week.”

The woman responded, “I know, but I like to talk about it.”

Like this woman, many people enjoy talking about not only their salacious sins, but also their terrible troubles. Some people practically become tabloid shows about themselves — sharing every detail of each dramatic challenge over and over with various friends.

Spiritual Wisdom

The more you move towards the goal, all sorrow will cease. Even if there is sorrow, you will become impervious to it. It will not touch you. There will be an inner strength created within you where even sorrow will not have a meaning for you. You will smile even at misfortune and suffering.

—Chidananda