

Suffering Can Teach Us (Excerpt)

by Thich Nhat Hanh

When the person you love so much says something or does something that hurts you, you suffer quite a lot. Because if it were another person who said something or did something, you would not suffer that much. But this is the person you love most in the world, and he just did that to you, he just said that to you. That is why you cannot bear it. You suffer one hundred times more.

When you suffer and you believe that the person who makes you suffer is the person you love the most, you want to be alone. You want to lock your room, and cry alone. You don't want to see him or her. You don't want to talk to him or to her. You don't want to be touched by him or her. Leave me alone! You don't want him or her to touch you. This is very normal. It's very human also. Even if the other person tries to approach and to reconcile, you are still very angry. You say: "Don't touch me. Leave me alone. I don't want to see you, to be with you." That's the real feeling at that moment. You may need the help of all other people, but you don't need his help. You want to be independent. "I don't need you." That's what you want to say. That is the trouble; because you are deeply hurt. That's why you cannot go to him and to her and ask for help. Your pride is deeply hurt.

You have to go to that person, that very person, the person you love the most, who just hurt you very deeply. You go to him or to her with full awareness, with full mindfulness and concentration, and you utter "Darling, I suffer, please help." This is quite difficult. But if you train yourself, you can do so. It seems that you don't want to do so, because you don't feel that you need his help or her help. Your natural tendency is to tell him or her that you can survive without him or her. You can be independent. You will not die because you lack his or her love. That is a natural tendency.

But if you know how to look at the situation with wisdom, you see that this is a very, very unwise thing to do. Very stupid thing to do. Because when we love each other, we need each other, especially when we suffer. It would be unwise to do the opposite.

You are very sure that your suffering comes from him or her; you are so sure. But maybe you are wrong. She has not done that, she has not said that, in order to hurt you, but you misunderstand. You have a wrong perception. Wrong perception is the word.

A wrong perception can be the cause of a lot of suffering, and all of us are subjected to our wrong perceptions every day. That is why we have to practice meditation and look deeply into the nature of our perceptions. Whenever we perceive anything, we have to ask the question, "Are you sure your perception is right?" To be safe, you have to ask, "Are you sure of your perceptions?"

We are subjected to thousands of wrong perceptions like that in our daily life. It may be that the other person did not have the intention to hurt you, yet you believe that she has done that in order to punish you, to make you suffer, to destroy you. You carry with you a wrong perception like

that, day and night, and you suffer terribly. Maybe you keep your perception until you die, with a lot of hatred toward a person who may be innocent. That is why meditating on perception is a very important practice.

Practice walking meditation. Practice sitting meditation. Practice breathing in and out mindfully to restore yourself. Then you go to him or to her and you practice the mantra. "Darling, I suffer so much. You are the person I love most in the world. Please help me." Without pride. If you let your pride stand in between you and her or him, it means that your love is not really true love, because in true love there is no room for pride. If pride is still there, you know that you have to practice in order to transform your love into true love.

If you do not know how to make use of suffering, if you do not know how to learn from the suffering, then suffering cannot be a holy truth. We can sink into the ocean of suffering, we can be overwhelmed by suffering, and suffering is not a holy truth; it is only something destructive. That is why contemplating on suffering is a very important practice in Buddhism. Contemplating suffering, you will know how that suffering has come to be, because everything is born from conditions. And the contemplation on the nature of suffering will bring us insight on how that suffering has come to be, and the conditions that have brought this suffering to us.