

## 41. The Problem of Suffering

Considering the problem of suffering from the commonsense point of view, there is nothing abstruse about it and it does not involve any high metaphysics. The problem is universal and very wide; in fact, there are some who equate suffering and sorrow with life. The poets have called this Earth the "Sorrowful Star." The Path towards Perfection is itself described at times as the "Path of Woe". The problem looms large in our thoughts and we are constantly battling with its variegated phases.

Suffering in the abstract may be said to have started with manifestation, as manifestation means and involves limitation and bondage, a thing which clogs, blocks and restrains and hence causes suffering. The ultimate liberation from suffering has been the aim of the teachings of many a World Teacher. The Lord Buddha, for example, attempted to solve this eternal riddle of sorrow, its cause, its ending and the path towards that ending. The philosophy and ethics of Buddhism constitute a rational attempt to find a solution to this great problem of sorrows, and the Noble Eightfold Path deals with it in a practical manner.

The idea of suffering is common. We know almost intuitively what it is for almost everyone has tasted it in one way or other, perhaps in varying degrees of intensity. But is there "Suffering"? Is this real or merely illusory? I suffer. But without the "I" that feels the suffering there is no suffering. So it is that philosophers sometimes call this illusory, having no absolute existence. What appears as suffering or discomfort to one person may bring comfort

and joy to another. Why, even the same thing may bring comfort or discomfort to one and the same person according to circumstances; for example, warm clothing which is uncomfortable in summer, may bring great comfort in winter. It all depends on how an individual reacts to a given set of circumstances. From this point of view the duality of joy and suffering, of happiness and misery, of comfort and discomfort ceases to have any objective validity.

We live under certain irrevocable, inviolable, absolute laws of nature in manifestation. We have also our free will; without this free will there can be no question of responsibility, no morality or Ethics, no idea of good and bad, of right and wrong and so on. This free will is apt to react in varying ways to the different laws of nature. When it reacts in consonance with the laws, the experience is joy. When it reacts against these laws, there is suffering. Suffering is due, really, to our not living in harmony with the laws of nature. In the inviolability of these laws lies our safety. We can utilize or manipulate these laws so as to produce any pre-meditated effect, because we are certain of the working of the laws. Are we not using the law of gravity to enable us to fly? We get more knowledge and therefore more power as we study and understand these laws, and our free will may be used to derive maximum joy and satisfaction by working in harmony with these laws. It is all a question of being in tune or out of tune with the laws of nature. And the most fundamental Law, the Basic Law of the Universe, of which the other laws are only partial phases, is the Law of Unity. Any one who lives in tune with this Law is assured of pure joy.