

Pain and Suffering

Question: If God exists, and if His actions are perfect, then why do we feel pain and suffering?

The following are some of the thoughts generated during the discussion:

During the discussion, many devotees shared stories and their experiences with the group. One such devotee shared the story of a blind man. He explained that a man saw a blind man on his travels one day. He approached the blind man and asked how long he had been blind. The blind man replied that he was blind from birth. The man was perplexed by this and asked his Master why this man, who was also a devotee of God, was born blind, where he was likely to experience difficulties in his life because of his condition. His Master replied that, devotees experiencing some form of difficulty or hardship will turn to God and their faith for strength. Ultimately, this will strengthen and bring them closer to God.

Similarly, another devotee explained that for a caterpillar to become a butterfly, the caterpillar must wrap itself up in a cocoon, and in due course, when fully developed as a butterfly, it will be able to fly out of the cocoon. The devotee explained that during the caterpillar's time in its cocoon, it will experience some form of discomfort and pain. However, if a passing individual were to see the butterfly struggling to get out of the cocoon, and resort to cutting the cocoon open, assuming that the caterpillar will be spared from pain and suffering, he or she will actually be hindering its progress as it will not be fully developed and may not be able to fly or may not develop as a butterfly should. For the butterfly to have fully developed wings and a beautiful body, it requires a certain amount of time, hence discomfort and pain, in the cocoon. Furthermore, we must allow the butterfly to emerge from the cocoon using its own wings and strength, to allow it to strengthen further. Similarly, we in our lives, will also experience a degree of hardship or situations which will lead to pain, however, by turning to God for support, we will get through these hard times and will emerge as stronger souls who are able to help and support others through similar situations.

One member of the group questioned that, if God created everything and everyone, why didn't He make us perfect beings free from pain and suffering? The group replied that God has made humans perfect, and that we are His 'greatest creation' blessed with consciousness. However, as humans, we tend to use our perfections in ways which benefit only ourselves and not others. We must use our perfections in a way that can allow humans to peacefully co-exist. Any pain and suffering that we do experience are 'perfect' experiences and that it is important to see them as an experience and not be phased by them. His Holiness has said that individuals do not look at the positive things in life, but focus on the negative; it is all about our perception of situations; we must try to look for the positive in everything. Once we do this, we will lead peaceful and content lives, experiencing the same set of emotions in seemingly happy or sad times.

The group was then asked why they felt that those who sin enjoy all the amenities of life, whereas those who lead good lives experience suffering? One member of the group used the example of a log floating down a river. He explained that as the log floats

down a river, it collects more water and so becomes heavier, ultimately sinking to the sea bed. Similarly, when individuals commit sins and keep doing so, they will eventually 'sink' and will be forced to repent their sins.

As for God realised devotees, although it may not seem fair, difficulties, pain and suffering are 'human experiences' which are to be experienced by all at some time or another. The difference however, is that devotees will deal with the situation given by God by turning to Him for strength and faith. This strength and faith in Him will grow with each step they take through their experience. It was expressed that if God takes you to something, He will get you through it too, it is a matter of keeping faith in Him.

Again, it was questioned that if you pray at all times and do what God asks of you, as God realised souls, why would you have bad times? However again, the answer was that, it is how you perceive the situation you are in; we need to learn how to see the positive aspects in life and not focus on the negatives.

'When the world pushes you down to your knees, you're in a better position to pray'
(quoted by a group member)

There are times, when we need reminders from God, that we are blessed with 'happy times' in our lives. In order to realise these 'happy times', God may send reminders in the form of pain and suffering, so that we are able to value and thank God for the good things he has given us.

When we experience bad times in our lives, we cope in different ways, one way, which is seen to be the most effective, is to turn to God for support. It is often repeated that a God realised soul will use and turn to God to get through their pain and their pain will pass, whereas a non-God realised soul will use their mind and think of ways to get through their pain themselves, which is not always effective.

Another view was put forward by a member of the group that perhaps we need to experience some form of pain and suffering so that it serves as a reminder during our lives. If we look at the history of mankind, the human race has been at war with one another since we have been on the planet. Although there have been many atrocities committed by man against his fellow man, we have not learnt from these examples and continue to do so even still. Perhaps the pain and suffering we experience is there to remind us to lead good lives, and until mankind has learnt to live as God intended, then we shall continue to be reminded in this way.

The discussion was concluded with a summary that everyone experiences pain and suffering in their lives for one reason or another as this is merely part of life. The important thing is how we view these problems, overcome them and use these examples to improve our lives and show us the strength we can receive through God's grace.