

SUFFERING *as a* WAY OF LIFE

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ONLY YESTERDAY you were walking in laughter and vigor; suffering was a far-off shadow. Then suddenly suffering struck. It unhinged you, brought you to a world of sorrow. And now you are alone in agony, an unwilling initiate into the fellowship of pain.

Your reaction is to rail fretfully against fate, to resent bitterly such untimely interference with life's routine. Yet your sufferings can confer many substantial benefits. It sharpens your mental and spiritual perceptions, permits a much clearer perspective of your life.

Suffering should be regarded as an opportunity to think of our inner selves and to contemplate that mere laughter and happiness cannot possibly bestow what we seek for in life. I'm not speaking of those chronic sufferers whose sufferings doom them to a life of invalidism. The late President John F. Kennedy was a triumphant prototype of a conqueror of pain. During his presidential campaigns, Kennedy suffered physical pains so acutely that his health was made an issue by those who contested his candidacy. On top of that he was racked by a major issue; his being a Catholic. Yet despite these obstacles, he won and became the first Catholic president of the United States.

But our interest here centers on the ordinary mortals who are stricken less harshly. Some sufferers rarely learn to make the most of suffering, regarding it

only as a visit of bad luck. Like any other experience of life, pain and suffering change us. How? Well, one thing is that we are temporarily relieved from the pressure of happiness in the world of temptations. But suffering takes many forms. It may be physical, mental or emotional. Illness, for instance, knocks a lot of nonsense out of us. It enables us to throw a searchlight upon our inner selves and to discover how rarely we rationalize our failures and weaknesses. When we are sick, we realize that we are not of this world. We think of God, discover that eternal life cannot be attained here and that this is only a way to heaven. We enter into the realm of introspection and self-analysis. We think perhaps for the first time about our present and future. We discover secret depths of our own life-stream.

Pain and suffering confer spiritual insight, a beauty of outlook, a philosophy of life, an understanding — a quality of serenity — that can hardly be acquired when we are in normal conditions. Suffering is a cleansing fire that burns away triviality and restlessness. For every suffering there is always joy. Student life, for instance, is not easy. We have to burn midnight candles in order to pass. In this many students, especially the poor ones, encounter obstacles. We meet different types of instructors and professors. There are the hypocrites, who do not realize that

they themselves were students once. Then there are lousy ones, and the strict type. With this diversity of instruction we have to undergo different pains before we can succeed. There are also students, particularly the rich ones who do not realize labor and suffering, until they suffer failing grades.

When suffering comes in, it is time to think. We make plans and we definitely decide upon the things we still put into action to recover our failure, in short we regret our errors. Because of suffering, our concentration improves tremendously. We are astonished to find how easily we can think a difficult problem through to its solution. Why? Because our instincts have speeded up. Time becomes an unimagined luxury. Time to think, time to enjoy, time to build air castles, time at last to express the best and deepest part of human nature.

Suffering is one of the greatest privileges of life; it whispers that man's destiny is bound up with transcendental powers. It takes off the non-essential parts of life and leaves one with the essence of it. We should remind ourselves that suffering may teach us something valuable, something that we could not have learned otherwise. It may change us for the better course of life. Yes, suffering is a way of life, a pathway to success, a gateway to heaven. #