

# Sanctuary House Quarterly

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The Issue of Suffering

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*Editorial*

## Moving Down the Narrowing Path

Not long ago I revisited an enormously strong movie about the man, Dr. Jeffrey Wigand, who “blew the whistle” on Brown & Williamson tobacco. It’s the gutsy docu-drama of one man’s slip into the quicksand of loneliness and isolation, a theme well paralleled by the producer of 60 Minutes who helped make his story public.

Most impressive to me about this film was the depiction of the concrete stages of loss which Wigand went through as he battled fear and reprisal. First, the one-time Vice President of Research and Development, was fired for not going along with Brown and Williamson’s plan to make their cigarettes even more capable “nicotine delivery systems”. And to better do that, his company had him testing a blood thinner, so the chemicals added to the tobacco would create a deeper effect by accelerating the nicotine whallop into the bloodstreams.

Then B & W made him sign a non-disclosure document. They then threatened him if he didn’t sign a further such clause, which he didn’t. His severance pay was halted. He was constantly followed. Death

threats covered his computer screen. Then his wife and two children were threatened.

But his concerns had not reached their depths. After testifying in a Mississippi suit as the first state to sue a tobacco company to reimburse state monies spent on its citizen smokers, he came home to

Kentucky—risking arrest in that state—to find his wife had left him and had taken the children.

Rather than drinking or growing suicidal with such direct loneliness, he got a job teaching high-school chemistry.

However, the most difficult stage was yet to come. It happened when Lowell Bergman, his own integrity on the line, told him that CBS News had been ordered to

bow to CBS Corporate’s fear of a vast lawsuit by the tobacco industry. Hence, Wigand’s interview would not be aired. Suddenly, all that Wigand had suffered would seem wasted and without vindication if the story never got to public attention. (The story, thanks to Bergman’s passionate perseverance, finally did air, forcing the tobacco industry to confess its malicious disregard for the health of millions of its patrons.)



*Peace ... continued from cover*

The nearer to truth Wigand dropped, the more subtle were the stages of nakedness he had to face. Surprisingly, the least subtle was the issue of financial security. Then came lifestyle. Then came personal safety. Then came the safety of loved ones. But loss of life did not represent the ultimate stripping away of familiarity and identification. Finally came loss of reputation, suggesting that what others think of us is more at issue than what happens to us.

Identity loss is layered, and the agony associated with each stage increases in scope and intensity. What we most fear is what is most associated with suffering. It is not physical pain that is the greatest deterrent to human freedom, but rather the pain associated with the divestment of who we think we are.

What is our identity? Coming to know more and more the truth of who we are—beyond that which can be taken away—is called wisdom, the timeless antidote for suffering. +

***IF YOUR GOAL IS ONLY TO ACQUIRE,  
THEN WHATEVER YOU GET LOSES  
MEANING AS SOON AS YOU GET IT. YET  
WHEN YOU SEEK TO BECOME, TO DO, TO  
GIVE YOU ENTER A REALM OF EVER-  
INCREASING FULFILLMENT. THE MORE  
YOU GIVE OF YOURSELF, THE MORE OF  
YOURSELF THERE IS TO GIVE....***

*-Ralph Marston-*

Nationally known jewelry designer and friend of Sanctuary House, Scott Keating, has donated handmade Sterling Silver necklaces as a fundraiser for us, featuring the emblem of SH. A primary influence of Scott's jewelry is the same sacred geometry used to create the Dromenon Labyrinth here in our courtyard

**This Scott Keating Design is now available for purchase through Sanctuary House for \$64.00 (Silver).**

*For those interested in more designs by Scott Keating, please visit [www.scottkeating.com](http://www.scottkeating.com)*



## SanctuaryHouse News

\* **'Bapu'–Shri Punitachariji Maharaj**–will not be coming to America for the second time but will remain in his cave at the foot of Mt. Girnar where, as he has always said, he can do the most for the universe and all those to whom he is connected.

\* **William, as Swami Vishnu Datta**, makes another tour to the Midwest to share the Hari Om Tatsat Jai Guru Datta mantra. His schedule is March 30 in Omaha, March 31-April 3 in Fayetteville, April 4-6 in Fairfield, April 7 and 8 in Madison, and April 9 in Chicago. He and Balaji will offer Spontaneous Meditation in Sausalito and Sacramento in mid-March. Appreciation to all who supported these sojourns!

\* **Our Garden Kutir** is enclosed and ready for stucco and a color coat once the weather's willing.

\* **Sanctuary House has erected** a 33' diameter Growing Dome-a geodesic space for growing greens and veggies and other edibles, plus flowers and maybe a few exotics. It went up (after weeks of preparation) in two days.

\* **To inaugurate** our Growing Dome, Jerome Osentowski, founder of Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture, will offer a **permaculture design workshop** in our dome on May 3 & 4 (\$45/day, lunch included).

\* **Our REGULAR SCHEDULE:**

- \* Chant (Hari Om Tatsat Jai Guru Datta and Spontaneous Meditation on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 7 PM;
- \* Sufi Zikr every Thursday at 7 PM and meshk Sundays at 11 AM;
- \* Morning meditations (three sessions) on every second Sunday at 9 AM till noon.



**The Sanctuary House Growing Dome-erected March 26 &27:**

## – Does Sanctuary Defeat Suffering? –

This is the twenty-fourth in a series concerning the nature, reach and practicalities of Sanctuary.

Imagine a place in which people pray often, have a regular program of meditation, eat together, go on outings together, do projects together, a place of sacred mountains and flowers and a community in which gossip is minimal and appreciation high. Would not such an environment defeat suffering, make it impossible, render it a useless concept?

Can suffering be defeated? And should it be defeated? These are interesting questions, interesting because they reveal an attitude fundamental to our understanding of humanity and of our individual bodies which have been gifted to us.

While no one wants to suffer, the notion that suffering can or should be 'defeated' likely defeats the purpose of suffering. Meaning that suffering is not the enemy, not an enemy at all.

The questions we ask about suffering reveal the attitudes we have about suffering—such as how pejorative suffering is, that suffering is somehow a statement of self-worth, that suffering means we are being punished, that it brings only misfortune and assails our very identity. Questions like, "Can we make suffering impossible?" bring up another question which few ask: "What would a life without suffering be like?" Oh, it would be paradise! we likely feel. But careful consideration reveals two gut-level responses: the first, that life would be so one-dimensional as to be superficial; and the second, that we can't quite imagine such an existence. [Sure, we can see ourselves riding ferriswheels, eating anything and everything without discomfort, enjoying all the activities we find pleasurable, being unencumbered by age or weight (given certain scientific advancements) or lack of finances (given utopia). But there's an abysmal or haunting sense of "then what?"] The first response carries the loss of real purpose—for we somehow know that our personal happiness is not the climax that life is mysteriously heading toward. And the second carries the ring of truth—that suffering is made impossible only when it is no longer necessary, meaning once our identity by grace shifts from finite separateness to all-inclusive, infinite belongingness (beyond the realm of thinking).

Sanctuary cannot 'defeat' suffering, but perhaps can defeat culturally conditioned attitudes about suffering. Such attitudes are born of misplaced internal programs geared around mere temporal happiness and a corresponding sense that anything is legitimate in the cause of self-protection. At some point we mature enough to see that we are capable of every rationale. While sanctuary encourages maturity, justifying whatever we want defeats the very notion of 'sanctuary'.

If we consider that real sanctuary safeguards our very nature beyond the ability of temporality or materiality to harm our person or steal our birthright, then we find our

identity lives beyond personality and our birthright beyond mere monetary wealth. At such ripeness, the truth arises-that all 'suffering' is utilized in bringing us from poverty to true riches, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge and from mortality to immortality. Our 'natural state'-without fear, without loss, and without separation-is not a state in which suffering has been defeated, but rather its lessons have been so integrated as to see that some separate sense of suffering is an illusion, for there is no 'self' that exists as separate from G-D, and, therefore, no one at all to suffer.

Suffering is not defeated. Ignorance is defeated and defeated completely. Indeed, it vanishes+

**You've traveled up ten thousand steps in search of the Dharma.  
So many long days in the archives, copying, copying.  
The gravity of the Tang and the profundity of the Sung make heavy baggage.  
Here! I've picked you a bunch of wildflowers.  
Their meaning is the same  
but they're much easier to carry.**

**-Hsu Yun-**

## ***Anatomy of the Human Condition***

By William Howell

Here we are in human bodies, living what is called 'life'-yet no one knows what life is. No one has a definition that will satisfy everyone else. We speak about consciousness, about choice, about reason as separating ourselves as humans from the rest of G-D's creation. We are determiners, and we are sufferers, perhaps in a unique way. I believe that it is precisely because we human beings hold such promise-for our very nature is unlimited-that it is we who also know such suffering.

What follows is a discussion of a subject too vast to just dive into, so it's Suffering's F.A.Q.s.

### Is Suffering Necessary?

To respond 'yes' is too easy and ultimately untrue, while to respond 'no' fails to honor the process of coming to real maturity as a human being. No person is born utterly pure into this earth realm. And, because the purpose of taking a body is to unite all opposites into constant, supple and unflappable compassion, then it becomes rather obvious that-on the way to the goal of uniting Love and Truth and Humility-we will be tested and will undergo purification. That amounts to some experience of suffering. Is it necessary? From the Reality of G-D, no. From the reality of coming to G-D, it is unavoidable, useful and the prime

*Anatomy of the Human Condition...continued from page 5*

motivation for transformation.

Can We Avoid Suffering or Simply Choose Not to Suffer?

We can avoid the sufferings to come and we can ease the suffering that is upon us. But we cannot avoid suffering as long as there is an 'I' wanting to avoid suffering. The same 'I' that thinks it can choose not to suffer is the same 'I' that's suffering.

What Are the Mechanics of Suffering?

Identification with limitation: emotionally, intellectually, bodily. Dishonesty about what injures ourselves and others; cover-ups and denial about our own selfish agendas; failure to forgive-all these keep us in the milieu of corruption. Limitation is kept enthroned by language, viewpoint and allegiance to social structure. Even the act of thinking reinforces our notion of separate identity. Separation equals suffering.

We were born into families whose members were to some extent bound in their consciousness, slaves to their past actions and unwise in their desires. We who looked so innocent as babes made (were in a sense forced to make) choices, huge choices, to either go along with the crowd and the way that life was presented to us-or to react to our role models in withdrawal or attack. We likely did both.

Thus, we wove an airtight case that either life had to look a certain way in order to work for us or that life was a ridiculous realm of insensitive idiots playing strange and even meaningless games.

Is Our Suffering a Punishment?

While suffering may well seem like we are being punished, suffering is simply an old way of perceiving and acting whose difficult message is forever trying to let us know that such restricted points of view are useless and have run their course. Suffering is one of the most eloquent invitations to fresh understandings.

But Job is scriptural proof that suffering is not a punishment for 'bad' actions. Suffering is a positive event which we all too often cast in negative terms.

Can Suffering Be Beautiful?

From Joan of Arc to Abraham Lincoln to Helen Keller to Dr. Martin Luther King to Mother Theresa of Calcutta to likely someone you yourselves have met-someone grows beautiful in our eyes through the way that person has born his or her particular trials. For a soul to be beautiful in suffering requires that such a person has necessarily accepted his/her unique package of talents and shortcomings, cross given precisely for personal growth and transformation. Any soul who truly grows truly becomes more beautiful.

Can We Go Beyond Suffering?

A tricky question. Yes and no.

'Yes' in the sense that we were not born to suffer-that is not the purpose of human life. And, while that is inevitably the experience, it does not constitute the ultimate experience. To experientially gain the full dimension of human potential-which most definitely

*Anatomy of the Human Condition...continued from page 6*

transcends all suffocating limits of the ego-is to know the timeless value of life/reality/being. That eternal 'now-ness' is bliss, is the peace that passes all understanding, is the freedom from limitation and suffering. And 'no', because as long as we think of ourselves as a personality, a role, a duty, a body, etc, then we will be to some degree engaged in giving and receiving injuries. And, even if we are graced enough to establish our identity in the Eternal while in this human body, still this body suffers and others dear to us suffer, and we will always be dealing with and experiencing suffering. We'll never get away from it, but that doesn't mean we can't get wise about it.

However, it can well be argued that an enlightened soul-by virtue of her or his deeper ability to perceive and feel-will have a widened range of all abilities, including the ability to suffer.

#### Are Pain and Suffering Different?

A useful distinction, perhaps. I've heard it said that suffering is the dimension added to pain when it is mixed with our attractions and graspings, our worries and judgments, our inability to let go into humility. Otherwise, there is only pain, a more impersonal, more factual dimension. For example, if someone's finger meets fire, that person will feel the pain of the burn, but also may experience fear or judgment or guilt. Those aspects of our faculties which are connected to physicality, to relationships, to ethics and moralities experience difficulties born of the mind: attitudes and beliefs, which lead to judgments and rigid positionalities. Yet such a distinction personally feels somewhat academic. For example, there's certainly a difference between hitting one's finger with a hammer and having a child lost to disease or drugs. The better distinction, in my opinion, comes from asking, "Who is suffering?" Then we have a chance to see that there is a part of us that is unidentified with the body, the fruits of action, the past and the future-with all that's transitory. Understanding greater contexts and time spans also ameliorates suffering.

#### Why Is Suffering So Central to the Human Experience?

Part of the vastness of suffering, quite frankly, is the even vaster nature of human potential. Which is to say that every obstacle to consciously and continually experiencing that which is beyond time, space and boundary wants-by virtue of the very reason for Creation-to be brought to the surface, be seen and be released. And, finally, we will have to give up everything to gain Everything.

#### Will There Always Be Suffering Here On Planet Earth?

Not wishing to enter the realm of the prophetic, I will wager that this realm is a realm in which most real growth is and will continue to be via the nearly illimitable manners and degrees and realms of suffering-for all the forces of Creation converge here on this teaching planet.

#### Why, When We Pray For The Easing of Suffering, Are Our Prayers Not Always

*Anatomy of the Human Condition...continued from page 7*

Answered?

Side-stepping the possibility that prayers are always answered and we simply don't accept or can't perceive the 'answer(s)', I will simply postulate that the purpose of life is not the cessation of suffering, and that suffering will continue as long as there is work to be accomplished. Which is to also say that human growth is so potentially great that, in a sense, whatever means can accomplish that growth are allowable.

It is said that tragedy is more ennobling than comedy (though I maintain that Life is, finally, a comedy), and that we learn more from our mistakes than our failures (though there is no way that we can fail, if we learn from such opportunities).

One secret of prayer is to know the object has already been accomplished. Such confidence belongs not to mere visualization or positive thinking, but to the realm of pure faith, which is beyond this realm and, therefore, beyond suffering.

Are There Any Intelligent Strategies We Can Employ to Minimize Suffering? Lord, what if the answer were 'no'!

Being forgiving, meditating, being honest, gaining humility, eating healthfully, walking, playing music, writing poetry, journaling, exercising, extending compassion...the list is, thanks be to G-D, long.

"Knowledge," my first teacher said, "is the greatest purifier." It's mighty helpful to read the scriptures, to come into contact with timeless wisdom. And also to gain self-knowledge: the penetrating insight into the untenable ways of the personality.

*My religion consists of a humble admiration  
Of the illimitable superior spirit  
Who reveals himself in the slight details  
We are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.*

*-Albert Einstein-*

“Small Miracles” –

## ***HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US***

This regular feature of the SHQ depends on you sharing the “small miracles” that are in our very midst.

When I think of a miracle that happened because of suffering, I think of every miracle. The manifestation of Almighty love, power and mercy occurs precisely because someone or some group is suffering.

Take, for example, the Jews in captivity in Egypt. They were for years subjected to such difficulty in their exile, and, via a divine tour de force (plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire, manna from heaven, as well as the tablets of the Commandments) were led by the prophet Moses (Moshe) to the land of milk and honey. Granted, they had to spend 40 years in the desert, but that was so all their members whose negativity could not support their new life in the promised land would have passed from the limitation of the body. The Jews are the only people who as a people have witnessed miracles.

Take, also, the example of St. John of the Cross. While he was already well-developed as a soul, his enlightenment came when he was imprisoned. In the darkness of his damp bare cell, having undergone great tortures at the hands of his captors, John was gifted with the fullness of G-D, such that the understanding that made him a Doctor of the Church was realized in this time of agony. His dark nights in that cell were the direct radiance of G-D, and his great poems have illuminated the lives of millions.

Take, as well, the mother of the small boy who, sure in her heart that there was a cure for her son’s illness, defied the medical community’s certain voice that such a condition could not be alleviated and developed Lorenzo’s oil, which has ministered to so many lives.

And yet, at the same time, it is the nature of life itself to use suffering to transform those who suffer, which is to say that ‘miracles’ associated with suffering are not miracles at all, but simply the way life works, thanks be to G-D.

It is, therefore, one of the hallmarks of our times that souls who suffer then, once having gone through such difficulties and making sense of them, generate the means to minister to others who are undergoing the same tribulations-whether it be alcoholism or some other addiction, various diseases or injuries (from Lou Gehrig’s disease to rape to loss of limbs), certain conditions (from having quadruplets to having been in concentration camps), and spiritual tests and afflictions (from kundalini to cults).

There is hardly any greater testament to the resilience, versatility and restorative capacities of the human nervous system and its faculties than the alchemical quantum leap which moves a life of desperation into a life of service and meaning through the earthly catalyst of suffering and the heavenly catalyst of grace. +

## **The BLISS of SUFFERING for CHRIST**

It is not an uncommon attitude in Christian stalwarts that we best come to terms with our suffering to the extent that we realize we are suffering as Christ suffered. In this way there is a dedication of our suffering to Christ, and know that we are united with Christ in our suffering. To understand that Christ Jesus, the complete human being, also went through such difficulty helps us make sense of and accept our human condition without reacting to it. This point of view, therefore, rides on a deep nobility, as well as a solid wisdom of contextualizing the difficulties that we experience. Human beings seek happiness. Which usually means that we are well programmed to avoid pain and run toward pleasure. Yet, if we read the Beatitudes as Jesus' instruction manual about how to be happy, we can conclude that human beings rarely gain real happiness, which goes a long way to explaining human misery and whatever chaotic state the world is in. The Beatitudes help aspirants wishing to follow Christ to live in accord with their deepest purity and goodness. The suffering that will surely come then serves to further ennoble them, bringing them ever closer to their Beloved. St. Francis of Assisi, one of the truly great saints and perhaps that soul who most followed the example of Christ Jesus, once told Brother Leo that his greatest joy was to suffer on behalf of the Lord. Such a statement reveals one of the greatest of human achievements: a state of unity in which that which most people avoid with all that's in them becomes their truest infusion of bliss. It can only happen when one's attention is so on the Lord that there is no demarcation between oneself and the divine. Then everything, even pain and suffering, is holy and serving only to increase the connection with the All-Loving. It is in most Christian circles a given that Christ Jesus suffered. Indeed, it is well understood that, by virtue of His station as the Son of G-D, He suffered more profoundly than any other soul and, concomitantly, that He suffered everything that could be suffered, taking on the entirety of the egoic nature of the human personality and transforming it in His own heart through His utter capacity to be human and His nature of unlimited compassion.

Without denying that sublime sense of redeeming all souls, another dimension of interpretation offers significant spiritual insight: Jesus was that supremely developed human being who, by his station and the Grace of G-D, was unified in a state of total enlightenment with non-separation, which is the highest bliss. Therefore, even on the Cross, Christ Jesus did not suffer. Surey the body experienced pain, unbelievable pain. However, there was no suffering in Him, for He knew Who He was-that infinite and eternal consciousness and Being that is inseparable from G-D. In G-D there is no suffering. Yet, without doubt His body was pierced with a crown of thorns, four nails and a sword. And the psychological dimension of being treated as a criminal, humiliated as a mock king and deserted by those who had seemed so stalwart was deflating to the hilt. Yet He did not suffer, He was not deflated, for how can infinity and eternity be humiliated? How can G-D, Who is the All, be anything else than everything in every moment?

We will never understand Christ Jesus as long as we identify with our limited human personality: the thoughts and feelings and actions and forms perceived through a field of 'me-ness' that gives us only continual messages in every direction that we are separate-from others, from G-D and, indeed, from our very nature. However, even in the throes of ignorance, we can move strongly toward wisdom's authenticity by committing ourselves to suffer-whenver suffering visits us-in companionship with the one Who gave everything for Love.

May we be so blessed as to wake to the truth of who we are, that, unified with Christ, we will gracefully endure any and all sufferings that are gifted to us-without being involved in the suffering or identified with any limitation. +

## DRESSING BEFORE DEATH'S DOOR

In the catalogs, the seamless garment  
I long for is not pictured, unmentioned  
On any page—you know, the one different  
From all others, simple, not cumbersome,

Something ideal, spotless for the tomb.  
I imagine an elfish woman spinning  
Into the pure night in a wombish room  
Long rhythms of sackcloth while she's  
singing.

Yet, finding nothing fitting, I've put on  
Fashions that button, snap, tie-attentive  
To cost, cut, color and cloth. At the dawn  
Of death, I still try to be inventive,  
Still enjoy the nod and rare compliment.

I, of little stature, will one day strip,  
Stand erect and without aggrandizement  
Present myself to be sized, upper lip  
Trembling. Hah, robes I'll be shown,  
vestments, crowns,  
Every sort of cape and elegant cane!  
Having long pumped as well as played  
both clowns,  
I'll scrap all dress  
and sport a foil-backed pane:  
Souls will howl, rejoice,  
all their doldrums slain.

*William Howell*

## READING RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Eye of the I

*By David Hawkins* *Veritas*

This sensational work reveals the knowledge of how to determine the consciousness of anyone, any idea, any action or point of view. More than that, however, is perhaps the clearest of insights into ignorance and enlightenment. This book is a transmission and reading it is transformational.

### The Human Condition

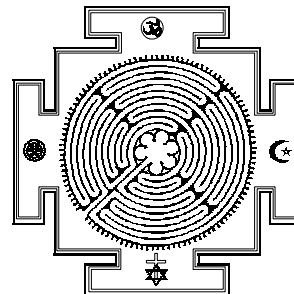
*By Thomas Keating* *Paulist*

In this small book containing two talks given by Fr. Thomas Keating at Harvard University you will receive one of the clearest understandings about our human condition. In its very clarity comes the revelation of the ways we can intelligently respond.

### No Death, No Fear

*By Thich Nhat Hanh* *Riverhead Books*

In his latest book, this world-renown Buddhist monk offers his deepest wisdom yet. Facing directly the fullest and most latent concerns of souls on the spiritual path, he offers comforting wisdom.



**HOW CAN I SUPPORT SANCTUARY HOUSE?**

**If you wish to support our unique yet universal effort, here are three ways:**

**First,** *come retreat with us and enjoy the intention, power and beauty here.  
Your depth and silence and vitality empower this work;*

**Second,** *come offer us your labor or books or any of the dozens of needs  
we didn't include on our "Wish List";*

**Third,** *make a tax - exempt donation, earmarked if you wish, to:  
Sanctuary House [501(c)3 religious/educational non-profit].*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

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