

Suffering as a Philosophical Pagan

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How does your spiritual path help you cope with the sufferings of life? Life is tough business, so many things can go wrong at any moment without warning. Things can be great, walking down the street, the sun shining on you. Then wham! A car hits you and you're gone. Ok, let's not get so dramatic. Maybe you slipped and hurt yourself, resulting in long term back pain. You could lose your money in a bad investment, a hurricane can flood your home, leaving you homeless. So many things can go wrong. Little or big there are different ways we suffer in life.

How do I cope with suffering? My spiritual path is ever evolving. Right now I have been spending time reconnecting with my Greek roots by exploring Hellenistic philosophy. I also like to learn about early and medieval Christian philosophy (rooting out the pagan ideas within in).

Suffering can also be called misfortune. We suffer or experience pain when we befall a turn of fortune. Sickness, poverty, setbacks, losses and the rest result in misfortune. In my studies I have come across a philosophical work called *The Consolation of Philosophy*, written by Boethius. Boethius was a man who had it going for him. He has political power and wealth. However, later in his career, he lost favor with the favor with the royal court. He was imprisoned, accused of treason.

The Consolation of Philosophy was written during his imprisonment. In this work Boethius has a dialog with the personification of philosophy called Lady Philosophy. He complains to her about his loss of good fortune. Lady Philosophy says that Fortune has not changed against you in favor, she (fortune) merely has revealed to you her constant fickle nature. Boethius accepted the good fortunes given to him, now he must accept the reversals. Lady Philosophy also reminds Boethius that the goods of fortune do not provide ultimate Happiness. The pursuit of false goods is what leads Boethius to suffer.

True, Good, is Happiness that is put to the end of any other desires. Once you have obtained Happiness, nothing else is left to be wanted. By nature, people seek out Happiness. But people try to find Happiness in the wrong things, false goods. The five false goods that Lady Philosophy identifies are wealth, public office, kingship, celebrity and pleasure. We later learn that God is the Ultimate Good and thus Happiness can be obtain through God alone. We become Happy by uniting with the Divine, becoming Divine as well.

How does this help me? It reminds me that life is subject to change, this idea goes further back in ancient philosophy. The world we live in is in flux, change and is not dependable. We cannot attach ourselves to the material world for Happiness and security. Whatever you have now can be gone tomorrow. When I suffer, I know that most likely the suffering will have an end, all things end. Suffering cannot last forever. If I have something and lose it, I need to try and not mourn the loss. This is hard and tricky.

How does someone not mourn the loss of a spouse, parent or child? How do we not become angry when our house is foreclosed on? Spirituality can seem theoretically fine, but how does it get implemented in real life? Lady Philosophy says our Happiness is with God, the Good. However, if you are like me and do not fully subscribe to an Abrahamic religious world view, then this is a problem you may think. Not so. Where did you think the Christians got the concept of 'The Good' from? Pagans of course! Plotinus, a Neo-Platonist taught that the One was transcendent and without division. The world was created through emanations from the One, an idea adopted into Kabbalah. Happiness, for Plotinus is achieved through consciousness. The pain would not be a bother to man, with the right attention of the higher Good.

This is very hard in our modern world, we are woven into a world built on material goods, marketing tactics that play on our desires. We are pushed to consume more and more. We fall for it because we think our Happiness can be found in the new iPhone or huge television. We need to focus on the right thing to achieve our real Happiness. Having things is fine, I do not subscribe to the monastic lifestyle. The thing is to be conscious that what you have is not the goal of life. What I am trying to learn is not to be attached to things. Hard, but if I lose something I try to move quickly through the initial anger or sadness. Attachment to things leads to suffering when we lose that thing, this is Buddhism in a nutshell. There are parallels in Buddhism and the Greek philosophies.

Relationship with Divinity is important to me. I think it is important for people to develop a relationship with Divinity in whatever form. For me it is a pagan relationship with deities. The ancients worshiped Gods to please them and avoid sufferings. Their main goal was not to piss the gods off. Plenty stories are around which show what happens when you cross the gods. However, philosophically refined paganism does not view the gods as guilty as they are shown to be in mythology. They by nature as gods are moral and righteous. I find that connecting with the Gods allows me to welcome their energy and power in my life. Right now I am drawn to the Goddess Isis. Though she is an Egyptian Goddess, her cult was extremely popular in the Greco-Roman world and she was identified with and combined with other Goddess, known as 'panthea' (all-goddess). Suffering is manageable when you feel you have Divine guidance.

Spirituality is about becoming a better person, growing and learning. Suffering is a part of life by the nature of the world. Our growth depends on suffering, you cannot develop fully as a person without pain. How you deal with the pain is up to you. You can overcome pain, or it will overcome you.