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- *Why suffering?*
- *Soul growth through affirmation, your own or others'*
- *Fear drives much suffering*

It is the spirit of God's presence that comforts, supports, and embraces each of you and all of those for whom you pray.

Your discussion tonight surrounded many of the concerns you are experiencing on a daily level—concerns about health, about relationships, about humankind, about the reality of daily human life. Those concerns are obviously not moments when you feel closely connected to God's presence. The question was asked, "Why does there have to be so much suffering in the world among all people? If God is indeed present and love is constant, why do humans go through such difficulty? Isn't there another way that our souls can grow and evolve without the accompanying human suffering?"

These are very real concerns that are experienced by all. It is from these concerns that the religions of the world were created. What is the meaning of life? Why does it have to be as it is? Is there purpose to any of that? Those are crucial questions, and the answers are difficult to grasp and yet are the only answers that are fully the truth.

Human life is difficult. Human life has its tragedy. Human life has its challenges, its ugliness. Human life has its anger, envy, and jealousy. Human life has its need for the expression of authority. Human life is characterized in great measure by a need to prevail. In the early history of human life, human beings had to prevail to survive, for without controlling and manipulating life around them, survival was impossible. That sense of wishing to dominate, to prevail, and the frustration when such efforts are not successful have always been part of what it means to be human.

Each of you reflected on the reality of uncertainty and the difficulty that comes from living with uncertainty. Is all of that necessary? Is that what it takes for that portion of God's creation which is permanent to grow?

It is always difficult to hear assertions that growth comes through suffering. In fact, growth evolves in the most significant ways through the experience of affirmation. When humankind has dealt with suffering for its entire existence, where is the affirmation that is so important for growth? Affirmation comes not merely by being told by others of one's value. Affirmation comes most importantly from one's own experience of growth and development, the establishment of values that are truly important.

You can say to someone, "You are important," but those words in themselves are empty and temporary. To be truly affirmed means you must feel affirmed. You are not in a condition of affirmation based on the words of others. Yet, that sense of affirmation that is offered by others can provide a context within which self-discovery takes place. That is an important component, for in the absence of the affirmation of others, it is easy

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to feel one's life to be meaningless. But with affirmation, a context is provided, and it is through the context of affirmation that human beings, through their own reflections, can come to a place where they recognize their own value, and in turn, the value of all human beings. Context is important, for it leads to a perspective, and that perspective is a kind of petri dish that allows the true self to expand.

Yes, human life is challenging and filled with events that are not affirming. Those events may be threatening. They may cause you to question all you believe. When you interact with others, it is helpful to step back for a moment and realize that another shares those same needs of understanding life's purposes that you deal with. Fear is at the center of much that you experience. Fear can find its expression through anger, through total discouragement, through a sense of meaninglessness. That fear can be so all-consuming that all life seems pointless, but it is fear that drives so much of the suffering. When the suffering is caused by others or by acts of nature, that fear can go through phases of hopelessness, and when there is hopelessness, there ceases to be meaning for anything.

To stop that cycle of destruction, one must look carefully at the issue of fear. When you are concerned about health, there is fear. When you are concerned about safety, there is fear. When you are concerned about disagreements with others, there is fear. Fear is at the core of much that makes what happens in life feel so dark and pointless.

When there are natural disasters, there is great suffering, and that suffering is not the direct result of fear, for what caused the suffering simply happened. But the impact of what happened is itself controlled by what is considered fearful. For human beings, fear of the unknown, the fear of what comes next, is such a central component to what life can generate.

But the presence of fear in life is not unavoidable. You cannot completely eradicate fear from your life, but you can take the fear that does exist, and you can transform part of it into an energy that is indeed built from Light. We have spoken of Light and of the energy of Light, the energy of life. When you pull away the shrouds of fear, even for a moment, you can feel the light enter. You can sense that somehow life will find its proper balance.

Healing at its essence incorporates an elimination of some level of fear. The suffering that humans endure in life can be mitigated, but it is never fully eliminated. There is no human life that has existed void of suffering at some level. Even at the earliest stages of human life, suffering exists whether it is felt emotionally or physically or even on the cellular level. When a human being is infected by disease, the cells in the body respond. Sometimes that response is sufficient. Sometimes it isn't, but the response is a response directed toward overcoming whatever threat exists.

Human life, therefore, is not so different from the life at the cellular level. There is the need to overcome. The cells respond in a way to overcome whatever is a threat.

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Human beings respond to overcome what is perceived as threats. Your abilities to find strength, as you overcome what challenges you, are enhanced by your sense of hope and your sense of being connected in some way to the creative energy that is God. The soul grows not because you suffer. The soul grows because you reach out to overcome; you reach beyond the challenges. It is in the reaching that the soul is strengthened. It is not in the suffering.

Human life has its own challenges. The lives of other animals on the planet have their own challenges. The lives of plants have challenges. All that exists faces challenges. Anything that is different than being in perfect balance is a challenge.

Your souls, as you know, are permanent. The physical manifestation of your own forms of energy are not permanent. They evolve, grow, change, and are transformed and become something new. The energy is there. The appearance and nature of the energy is what changes, but the spirit is continuous, and it grows.

Your relationship to spirit, the flow of that energy, is in two directions, for as you experience the effort to connect to God, you are in turn giving strength to spirit. It is the presence of spirit that gives strength in return to your efforts.

All lives are blessed, even those who experience great suffering. They may believe their suffering is unfair, out of balance with others, unreasonable, and yet there is something within each individual that takes that suffering and transforms it into an awareness—whether that awareness is intense or subtle, long-standing or temporary—that awareness that there is a connection to a form of energy that is beyond the bounds of human life.

When you are in agony and suffer, you may feel abandoned, unfairly judged, forgotten, unimportant, singled out. All those expressions of suffering are known to God. All those feelings have with them an accompanying strength that can be engaged. There is no difficulty, no suffering, no anxiety, no fear that exists beyond the possibility of hope. It is not a blind hope. It is a hope that is generated from the spirit within. It is the outreach of spirit, of your soul, to the creative energy that is the collection of all that exists. It is a connection to God. It is a connection to one another.

We cannot say if you feel fearful to forget about that, put it behind you, for fear is an important emotion. Allow yourself that anxiety, but accompany that anxiety, fear, suffering, and the unknown with a commitment to search as you can search, to open your eyes as you can open your eyes, to open the heart as you can open the heart, so that God's Light is invited into your being, and be grateful.

You are blessed; all are blessed. You experience the negative presence; all experience the negative presence. You can be open to God's presence; all can be open to God's presence. Rest in the pure knowledge that God's Light is present, comforting, nourishing, and provides all that is truly necessary.

Amen.