

Suffering With Solidarity

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The contemplative or mystical soul is sensitive to suffering, and experiences the violation of the sacred in its depth. Since the soul feels more profoundly than the body, acts that injure sentient beings, damage Earth, destroy communities, perpetuate war, and inflict other types of violence open a wound in consciousness. This capacity to experience mystical solidarity with others' suffering is inherent in people who have a compassionate heart. At the same time, the heightened sensitivity to and compassion for others can be confusing, because a person may not be able to separate the pain of the world from his or her own.

An anonymous medieval author, in a chapter titled, "How the Friend of God Suffers," describes four ways that a true friend of God suffers: in one's actions, will, soul, and in God. Here he writes about soul suffering:

The third suffering of a friend of God occurs in his soul when the spirit is seized by the divine spirit. God's garment of love is so wrapped around her [the soul] that she relies on it and this bond becomes so pleasant that she finds everything else unpleasant. If the friend of God then meets anything which does not spring from the Holy Spirit, it causes him pain. And all that he sees and hears, all that is not divine, pains him and causes him suffering.¹

The above quote conveys an important theme for the monastic-type person: the wise author knew that those who love the Divine share in whatever wounds the Holy. They feel God's suffering in their souls; they experience the desecration of the sacred in their bones; they lament the death of innocence in their hearts. Like prophets they cry out, demanding that people awaken.

The mystical personality, attuned to the subtle vibrations of sentient life, tends to be a healer, absorbing the anguish and affliction of the world around him or her without conscious intention or volition. Such a person cannot help being united, one, with life. But it is therefore vital that the monastic grow in spirit by harnessing meditative and prayer practices, which stabilize the heart and expand the person's inner light.

¹ Anonymous, *The Book of the Book in Spirit: By a Friend of God. A Guide to Rhineland Mysticism*, edited and translated by C.F. Kelley (New York: Harper & Brothers, no date), 236.

Excerpt from, "The Monastic Personality," Beverly Lanzetta, Monastic Retreat 2008.

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