

## Chapter One

### THE LOVE OF SUFFERING

*It is very difficult to sacrifice one's suffering. A man will renounce any pleasure you like, but he will not give up his suffering. Man is made in such a way that he is never so much attached to anything as he is to his suffering.*

**Gurdjieff.**

*Existentialists remain lost in the wasteland of their own minds. There IS a place beyond.*

**LU**

*Talent is easy. It comes free with the genes. Living for love, courage and creativity is a bitch. It takes work to transform talent into productive genius. Burn-outs are a dime a dozen.*

**LU**



**JK**

**Sometimes It Feels Good to Feel Bad**

. . . . I don't know about you, but there is something in me that dearly loves feeling down. I've never quite understood it, but there is a sort of pleasure in feeling unhappy, pensive, sad, a kind of sweet yearning for an unattainable beauty or state of being, a kind of sorrowful sweetness in offering myself comforting care for not being able to get what I want, or be what I want, especially if it has to do with love or attainment or psychological adequacy. In perhaps a perverse sort of way, it just feels good to hang out in those dark, sad zones, and maybe help them along with music or other dream-enhancing intoxicants.

Nourishing feelings of loss seems to enhance my sense of self, strengthening it, giving it more substance and definition — loss of beauty, youth, ability, love, time, friendship, whatever — as if feeling depressed gives identity and helps me make it through the day (or night or week or month). Some of my best writing has come out of that zone (some of my worst as well). I don't know if I'm making sense to you. Does any of this make sense? Sometimes it feels good to feel bad.

Unfortunately — or perhaps fortunately — one can grow to like it to the point where the pleasure of it becomes a kind of addictive need. Perspective becomes distorted, conduct gets warped, and pretty soon one's health begins to deteriorate, and then, well boo-hoo, it's easy to find oneself in what is oddly called "a pickle." It can be unfortunate, because it can lead to situations from which it is extremely difficult to extricate oneself. On the other hand, it can be fortunate because in order to get out of it, one must pass *through* it, and in passing through it one can gain all sorts of insight, becoming a deeper, richer, wiser and more loving human being in the process. . . .

**DS**

## **The life-saving rope from the far shore**

. . . . I am convinced that the great malaise of our time is the lack of meaning. The lack of meaning is the place just before transformation. A lot of us cling to that place. We don't really want to jump. We want to feel the misery (and righteousness) of meaninglessness, the "ethical homelessness" you mentioned. Existentialists remain lost in the wasteland of their own minds. There *is* a place beyond.

In this potential jumping upward point from meaninglessness to recognition, we pause. We endure isolation behind a fog cloud of deceptive linguistics, tricking others into nodding their heads when in fact they haven't understood a word we've said, and then we wrestle with the prongs: superiority/contempt for those who would presume to understand us, and isolation/rage at being unable to disclose ourselves directly and honestly to another, perhaps even to those closest to us. Maybe especially those closest to us.

But when we talk to ourselves in the night, holding on to the mattress to keep from sliding away, as you so accurately and poignantly put it, and lurching between the desire to be understood and the fear of disclosure, a wonderful possibility is born: through our guilt and self-doubt the solution appears: *speak from the heart*.

It of course immediately disappears, buried under an avalanche of fear, self-contempt, shame, inadequacy. But it is never entirely silenced. That thought in the dead of night is the life-saving rope from the far shore.

## **SL            Suffering, Service, & The Need to be Needed**

. . . . Quite often we enter into relationships that are unhealthy, usually because they fit into a psychological mind-set implanted in our heads when we are very young. A parent, for example, may be violent, self-centered, cruel, even vicious in his or her demands and criticisms, rather like yours were. If we deny our own needs for love, and serve abusive parents like slaves, we receive their little crumbs of approval. Since we're starved for even the slightest gesture of affection, we gratefully gather up those crumbs, even though we have been psychologically beaten down, demeaned, crushed and humiliated in payment for them.

In this kind of context, we are systematically taught that we are no good, unworthy of love, respect, or honor — unless we serve their needs and demands at the expense of our self-respect and our own needs. That same dynamic often transfers into our adult lives, and there we are: locked in a mutually dependent relationship, one suffering and making demands, the other trying desperately to help and serve and nourish precisely because of her own profound need to be needed.

At first, we're in the post-parental co-dependent relationship because it fulfills the pattern the parents instilled. It feels good for a while. It feels right and true. Then we may begin to suspect that it's an unhealthy relationship, although we may not know quite why. Then, as you have, we begin to *see* why and how and in how many various specific ways the demands and manipulations are manifested. Pretty soon, the clarity becomes too much: we know why and how we're unhappy in this mutually dependent relationship, and how we're being manipulated through guilt

and our own needs.

Your Irish friend is not alone; you are contributing to the suffering she inflicts on you. It comes from your side too. And then comes the moment you experienced in September: you see things clearly; you fully recognize the destructive two-way nature of the relationship: she demands and manipulates, and you keep going for it. When you suddenly see it clearly, you are confronted with a painful choice: to stay in it, or give it up and leave it behind.

These things take time, S. You know everything you need to know about her and yourself. Feel compassion for her and for your emergent authentic being. Give yourself love and understanding as you make these difficult decisions. They don't fulfill themselves over night.

Don't let yourself be manipulated through guilt, a sense of unworthiness, or through your own deep-seated need to be needed. You do not have to be a slave to a self-centered, neurotic tyrant in order to be a worthwhile person.

In fact, it seems clear to me that you have outgrown her, which you know; and you are emerging into a new stage in your life, in which love, creativity, insight, emotional equilibrium and your own insightful wisdom lead the way forward. You can assert yourself with strength and dignity, as an independent human being who is choosing her own freedom. Your friend may whine and rail and call you names, but you do NOT have to accept her judgments. Those are projections of her own mind, which remains as it always has been. You have every right to detach from the situation, assert yourself honestly, even harshly if necessary, and to spread your own wings in your new-found freedom and perceptual clarity.

The recent clash proves itself to be a beneficial example of who and what she is, what your own role in the relationship is, and what you want and need to do about it. There is hope. There is a better way. And you know which way it is!

**MR**                      **A Single Strong Ray of Life-Light**

Hello, M!

Please accept my apologies for not getting back to you immediately. Your discussion about the dark and light side of life was most insightful, I thought, and raised some good questions.

Nutshelling: I think if one falls into the pit of despair and self-destruction, it may well lead nowhere except to the grave (as it did for Tim). If, however, the other force within — the desire for change, growth, love and creativity — is not absolutely destroyed, it may awaken at the last second and propel one into a new mindstate: toward evolutionary psycho-spiritual ascension. It all depends on how far down one has drifted, and how strong the urge to awaken is.

If a single strong ray of life-light penetrates the darkly depressed psyche, there is a chance for a turnaround. Two things must happen simultaneously: boredom and disgust with self-destruction, and a strong desire for positive change. (This is why Alcoholics Anonymous talks about "reaching one's own bottom," and why

psychotherapy seems most effective when one has reached "the end of his rope.")

But there is a trap in here. It's the notion that one **MUST** descend into hell, dissipation, self-destruction and the deepest, darkest pits of the psyche, in order to finally discover light, love, compassion, mental and physical health, the heart, goodness, beauty and creativity.

I used to believe that, and I used that belief as a driving motivation to sink into oblivion and the kinds of drugs-and-alcohol madness that nearly killed me, and did indeed kill Tim (and Jimi and Janis and Jim Morrison and hundreds of known and unknown others).

I fueled that belief with novels, poetry, and music that celebrated darkside thinking and darkside conduct (everybody from Rimbaud to Kerouac, from Charlie Parker to Art Pepper, from David Crosby to Jimi Hendrix). Jazz and rock 'n' roll are overrun with people waving flags for mental illness, unhappiness, rage and self-destructive behavior.

The trap is this: one begins with an unconscious, tormented, self-annihilating psychological orientation (usually rooted in dysfunctional childhood experience), and then gravitates toward brilliant, talented, emotionally and intellectually exciting role models to justify acting out one's own neurotic self-destructive tendencies (usually rooted in unconscious anger, pain and self-contempt).

The downward slide into excessive sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll and all the insanity that goes with it becomes easier and easier, because one thinks he is being "creative," "rebellious in the name of art," "superior," "daring," "exploratory." All the other

great writers and musicians did it, one reasons (and rationalizes), so I'll do it too — and thereby I will become as brilliant as they were. (Of course "all" the great writers and musicians did NOT do it, only the ones I selected to justify my need to fail and fall.)

As you know, orthodox religion is rife with these folks too, hundreds of so-called saints who led a dissolute youth and then "saw the light" and became prophets, priests, preachers, cardinals and popes. Yes, they may well have "seen the light," but not BECAUSE they spent time wallowing in darkness, pain and mud.

See how things gets turned around?

So, yes, I know Blake's famous phrase, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." That is, one can drop down into the darkest pits of hell, and then might find a moment of sanity that leads upward toward recuperation; out of psychic fragmentation into wholeness; out of self-contempt into self-love; out of ignorance into psychological clarity and spiritual growth — but the descent is not *necessary*. It is *not* a prerequisite! In fact, to think of it that way only strengthens one's own fears and weaknesses and empowers the underlying, unconscious neurotic forces that fiercely oppose growth, consciousness, love and creativity. The palace of wisdom may well turn out to be nothing more than a hospital bed.

However, I think, I know, people can begin wherever they are — perhaps in excellent mental and physical health — and grow and develop and deepen and expand from there. As a matter of fact, the journey out of unconsciousness into consciousness, perhaps especially by means of psychotherapy and meditation and related processes, can take place any where at any time.



success. He got too drunk, threw up all over the studio soundboard, couldn't finish the demo, and left. A few years ago, he wrecked his car (drunk and stoned) and wound up in a hospital in a coma. His mother came out to San Francisco and got him and took him back to Atlanta, where he remains in a hospital more or less awake [at this writing], but pretty much out of it.

My friend sent me a black and white picture of Billy, circa 1962. Billy is dressed all in black, sitting on a rock playing his twelve-string when he was young and strong, incredibly handsome, the future still ahead of him.

I like the picture and keep it in my files, but I also found myself feeling angry about this kind of lifestyle in general, angry about the way self-destruction is so romanticized and celebrated in contemporary culture, angry about the way marvelously bright, talented, creative people like Billy and Tim and so many others fall into the trap I talked to you about earlier.

So I sat down and wrote the following couple of pages to my friend, which helped me sort out my thoughts and give them wings. To be sure, my position is not a popular one, and is certainly not widely shared among the people I used to hang out with (all of whom of course despised anybody who left the fold, straightened up, got it together and found a new way of life based on love, laughter, compassion and creativity). Nevertheless, my perspective needs to be seen and heard by others, perhaps especially by others who are just beginning to pull out of similar tailspins.

Here is the letter—

Hi, Ol' Buddy,

Very kind of you to send me a Xerox of the Billy R. photo, circa 1962. He sure looked good, didn't he? And what a great guitar player, singer and songwriter. I deeply appreciate your gesture, and thank you for it. The picture set me to thinking.

If you would be so kind, let me share some of these thoughts with you.

As you know, I've known a lot of Billy R's in my life — Tim, Fred Neil, Jimi, Janis, hundreds of others either directly or indirectly. They all know how to do one thing well. They know how to suffer. Whatever music comes out of this suffering is a by-product of natural talent, and that talent is eventually flailed and ultimately destroyed by their love of suffering, sadness, misery and pain. Everybody loves the pain, the angst, the wallowing. They claim they don't, but in fact they do. Feeling bad feels good.

I was that way too, so don't get me wrong. Don't think I'm on some kind of moral high ground, looking down a Puritanical nose at our lost, tormented and tortured poets, singers, dancers, jugglers and clowns. They are all beautiful, and my heart has gone out to them ten thousand times along the way. All I am saying is, Billy loved the suffering, just as I did, just as the others did (and still do, and always will, forever), and he never had the stuff *to get past it*.

I feel enormous heart-wrenching compassion for all of us. At the same time, I wonder why don't more of us get tired of it, sick of it, bored with it. Why don't more of us stop sacrificing our talent and our art, brutalizing it, exploiting it just so we can get loaded and laid one more time? Why don't more of us respect it and treasure it and nourish it so we can give more beauty, hope, love and strength to this miserable human race? Why don't more of us have guts enough to stop whining, mewling, puling and destroying ourselves, and do something honest, courageous and creative with our lives? See what I mean?

God knows, I've shed enough tears for myself and Billy and Tim and the rest of us. I've plumbed the depths of that overly romanticized so-called "dark side," and after exploring it at length I found it merely common, tedious, repetitive, banal and highly over-rated. Everybody does that stuff. Music, movies, TV and novels base their whole trip on it. There's nothing new about it, or in it, nothing whatsoever, and

yet how many Billy's of the world have fortitude enough to pull out of it?

How many take the rare, uncommon, exciting, original and extremely difficult road to mental health, creative living, artistic productivity? How many have guts enough to stop hating themselves and to stop destroying their talent? How many evolve to the point where they want to turn the whole thing around, transforming it into light, love, laughter, compassion, and beauty that celebrates the best and highest of the human spirit instead of the worst and most degraded?

What is the perennial obsession with the tedium of prolonged and sloppy suicide, and society's rationalization of it as "poetic heroism" and the romanticizing of self-destruction by calling these folks "artistic outsiders" or "geniuses leading the way"? Doesn't anybody see it clearly? Are nearly all who play this game doomed to waste their talent, youth and sanity, before lying broken and battered and wheezing on stained sheets in some god-forsaken slime-green hospital room the way Billy is.

Suffering is easy. Boozer and druggie pain is the ultimate selfishness. Is self-destruction not stupid, wasteful, and heinously disrespectful of life itself? Billy's life, and the life I lived for so many years, and the life Tim, Fred, Jimi, Janis, Morrison and the rest of them died from is nothing more than the Great Lie, perpetrated by corporations who sell dead poets, dead madmen writers, agonized musicians and volatile youthful morbidity in all of its forms. The so-called "poetic rebellion" of the Arthur Rimbauds, Kerouacs and Dean Moriarties, the Billy Roberts and Lee Underwoods and the rest of them, is a stupid neurotic fantasy.

These folks aren't "outsiders" in my sense of the word. Although they have written or played brilliant and often beautiful works, they nevertheless are not spiritual rebels ascending from mind-misery up to Higher Consciousness. *They are socialized insiders*, reacting against the very society that created them, distorted their minds, that worships them, and that sells them on MTV like manically dancing Barbie Dolls. Non-conformists remain entirely *within* the society that they react

against, even as that same society breaks their back and throws them away.

It doesn't take courage to stay in the social context or to murder one's talent or wind up a burnt out drooling cripple in some last-stand sanitarium. To the contrary, it takes courage to look this syndrome in the eye, see it for the deluded sham that it is, and then make the heroic effort to pull out of it. It takes *courage* to affirm life with enough strength and conviction to get off the booze and the drugs and the underground music lifestyle. It takes courage to say Goodbye to the easy, familiar, comfortable, romanticized "dark zone," and get one's ass into gear on the hard road to change, growth, evolution and rebirth into healthy-minded creative independence. Jackson Pollock did his best work *after* he sobered up. Did you know that?

Self-delusion is a coward's trick, perpetrated on everyone, most of all on one's self. The journey toward self-understanding and self-realization is the heroic venture, a journey almost none of the inaccurately named "rebels" ever manage to even begin, much less complete. Talent is easy. It comes free with the genes. Living for love, courage and creativity is a bitch. It takes work to transform talent into productive genius. Burn-outs are a dime a dozen.

That doesn't mean I don't feel aesthetic respect and deep compassion for my compatriots. I do. I love them. But we could use a few more Pollocks, Kris Kristoffersons, Joe Pass's, Lee Underwoods, a few more people who have visited hell, checked it out, then had enough love of life left to summon up the strength and sustained effort to fulfill themselves and their talents instead of beating themselves up until they die an early and usually ugly, pathetic, wasteful death.

Thanks again, ol' buddy. Appreciate the picture, and you, and the gesture of sending it. I also appreciate the thoughts the picture generated. Thank you for that too. Billy was a beautiful guy. He's still in the hospital, not even dead yet, but I doubt if he'll be with us very much longer. I miss him already.

I have often wondered about something. Perhaps you have too —

People like Buddha, Lao Tzu, Krishnamurti, Osho and others have peered deeply into the human mind and heart. They have explored our misery, seen where it comes from and why, and have given us guidelines and ways and means out of the madness. They have entered suffering without being frightened away by its terrors, and emerged with insights that could light up the world in love, compassion, serenity, bliss, heavenly joy.

So why is the world still miserable? Why are individuals still crippled with personal sufferings? And why are peoples and nations still destroying each other?

Have the enlightened ones failed us? Combine them with Western depth psychology, and what on earth is preventing human beings from emerging from these dark sorrows and spreading our wings in the light, like the angel you painted, or like your friend swimming far out at sea with the turtles? Have the Everests of consciousness let us down?

No. They have not let us down. The sad fact is, *we have not tried them*. They stand like statues in graveyards — present and available, but ignored. Why is that? They have given us insights and answers to our problems. Why do we insist on persisting in our personal and global madness? Why do we insist on clinging to our misery psychologically? Why do we cling so adamantly to the very doubts and

conditionings that prevent us from spreading our wings in light and joy and beauty?

Alas, I think it's because *we do not WANT* to change. We do not *want* to upset our routine, give up familiar ways of thinking and feeling, exchange the known for the unknown. We would rather suffer than embark upon the evolutionary journey that would lead us from sorrow into serenity. At least our suffering is ours, and we are familiar with it, and feel safe and comfortable with it. This "journey" stuff I talk about is just too scary.

No condemnation. No judgment. No guilt, shame, none of that. I am just saying there are ways out of the torment. No guru can do it for us, but every enlightened teacher can help us see more clearly, deeply, truly. No psychologist can do it for us, but every skilled, compassionate therapist can help us work our way through the mind-maze. No god can do it for us, because there are no gods the way the ancients conceived them. No belief can do it, because every belief is a product of mind, and mind is the problem to begin with.

In other words, a good therapist, a qualified, authentic psychotherapist, can be enormously helpful in coping with psychological complexities. And the seers I have mentioned to you can be equally helpful in terms of transcending worldly entanglements and soaring into those domains for which you yearn. You know how to suffer. Are you willing to learn how to love, laugh, enjoy once gain? Herman Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* had a lot to say about this subject. Perhaps you have read it? Are you willing to give it a try?

Everything I prattle about is wasted, of course, if you do not want to move, change,

or grow. *Wanting* to is the first step. Wanting to is everything. Wanting to is your freedom. Freedom is not something that emerges in the end, after a long struggle. Freedom is the very *first* step. Freedom is our fundamental condition. But it must be recognized, courageously affirmed, and acted upon, otherwise it disappears.

Whatever you choose is good. Whichever way you decide to go is the way most suited for whatever you need in this very moment. I trust it, and hope you trust it, too. Sometimes things take a little time, and I know you are fragile, dear one. My heart is with you. Don't give up, don't give in. Keep on keepin' on.

Every day, week, month, year, I am with you.

From the heart. . . .

Lee