

## Why pain and suffering? (Saint Paisios the Athonite)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The world is full of pain, fear and suffering. These feelings, without any exceptions, are experienced by all humans. It's what causes our heart to ache, our mind to go hay-wire, and our emotions to become distorted. People often wonder: How have we had to handle all these problems? Why God allows these tragedies to happen? Some times the questions are complicated and the answers very simple. Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, famous for his spiritual teachings, provides encouragement and support to those who are suffering afflictions.



## **The struggle to sanctify the soul**

*..Life of course, is no summer camp; it has joys but also sorrows. The Resurrection is always preceded by the Crucifixion. The blows of life's trials are essential for the salvation of the soul, for the soul is refined through them. Just as with clothes; the more we rub them in the wash, the cleaner they become. Even with the octopus, the more it is beaten, the more it is cleaned and tenderized. And the fish, too, appears so graceful when alive and swimming in the sea, or even when displayed in the market with the scales and entrails intact. But it becomes useful only once it is cleaned and made to look less appetizing on the outside before it is broiled. It is much the same with people; when a person sheds all things secular-his scales, if you will- it may seem that he is losing life, his worldly liveliness, but in fact, he is merely removing all useless matter in order to be " broiled". Only then is he made useful...*

Elder Paisios, *Spiritual awakening*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. II, p. 105.

## **What Helps Spiritual Progress**

*People who have been buffeted by rough winds, either because God allowed it in order to rein them in, or because of the devil's envy, are in need of much sunshine and spiritual refreshment before they can blossom and bear fruit. They are like trees that have grown bold during winter's halcyon days, only to face the cold north wind afterwards; they will need constant spring sunshine and showers for their sap to circulate again and to blossom and bear fruit.*

*...Trust in God, simplicity, and struggle with philotimo will lead to inner peace and security and then the soul fills with hope and joy...*

*Christ helps those who are fighting the good fight that all Saints embraced in order to subdue the flesh to the spirit. Even when wounded, we must never lose our composure, but should instead ask for God's help in continuing with the struggle courageously. The Good Shepherd will hear us and rush to our aid, just as a shepherd responds to the bleating of a lamb that is lost or wounded, or threatened by a wolf.*

Elder Paisios, *Spiritual awakening*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. II, pp. 106-107.

### **Divine Energies are Omnipotent**

*...God never abandons us; we are the ones who forget and abandon Him. When man does not live spiritually, he is not entitled to divine help. But when he does live spiritually and is near God, he is entitled to it. Then if something happens and he dies, he is ready for the other life, in which case he gains both in this life and in the next.*

*God's help can't be obstructed, neither by men nor demons. Nothing is difficult for God or a Saint. The obstacle for us humans is our lack of faith, which prevents the great divine energies from coming to us. And while there is such a great power next to us, we, because there is such a great amount of the human element in us, cannot understand the divine energies which exceed all of the world's human powers, because they are omnipotent.*

*We sit for hours on end in vain, trying by ourselves to find solution to a problem, using all of our inexperience. Our head spins, our eyes burn, sleep escapes us, because the little demon has hooked us with obsessive thoughts. We may finally find a solution, but later God will find for us a better solution, which we had not thought of, leaving us with the headaches and the sleepless nights. No matter how right our thought might be, if God is not foremost, the head will tire and ache, while prayer with trust in God brings restfulness. For this reason, we can leave to God those activities which are difficult to achieve by human means and not be*

*dependent upon our human efforts, reassured that God will do what is best.*

*For everything you think of doing, remember to say, "God willing"*

### **A good disposition**

*-Geronda, what will become of the kind people who don't believe?*

*-...Benevolent God will find a way for these kind-hearted people, either with trials and tribulations, with illnesses, hardships, with an earthquake, a lightning bolt, a deluge, or even some word, to bring them around and in the end to lead them to Paradise....*

Elder Paisios, *Spiritual awakening*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. II, p 326-328.

### **Divine consolation**

*...With the people I went through so much pain! I didn't pass over their problems lightly. I was pained by them, I sighed over them, but with every sigh I turned the matter over to God and in the pain I felt for the other person God provided consolation. That is to say, divine consolation came with the spiritual approach, because the pain which carries with it hope in God also has divine consolation. Otherwise how is one to endure! How could I possibly get through all the things that I hear? Yes, I feel the pain, but I also think of the divine reward in those who are suffering. We are in God's hands. Since there is divine justice, divine reward, nothing is lost. The more one is tormented, the more he will be rewarded. Although God sees so much suffering upon the earth, even things which we cannot imagine, He never falters. "You have suffered more?" He asks, "I will provide you with more in the other life", and He rejoices. Otherwise, how could He endure so much injustice, so much evil that exists? But He keeps in mind the reward of those who suffer and, in a manner of speaking, endures that great pain. We don't see the glory to be received by the other person and so we feel compassion for him, and for this God rewards us with divine consolation...*

Elder Paisios, *Spiritual awakening*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. II, p. 348.

Elder Paisios notes that God allows a calamity to happen due to our fault.

### **Sins Brings Calamities**

*Locusts, wars, drought and disease, they are all scourges. They're not God's way of educating human beings but the result of our moving away from God. They happen because we stray from Him. God's wrath comes to make us remember Him*

*and ask for help. It's not that He arranges and orders, so to speak, these calamities to happen. Rather, God allows them to happen because He sees how far human evil can go and how unwilling we are to change our ways, and so He tries to bring us to our senses. But they are not of His own making...*

*...It is good to know that the faithful who obey the commandments of God receives His Grace, and that God is, shall we say, obliged to help them in these difficult times....*

### **Whatever God allows is out of love for Man**

*-Geronda, why does God allow a calamity to happen?*

*-There are all kind of reasons. Sometimes God will allow something to happen so that something better may come out of it, and other times He wants to educate us. Some people are rewarded others pay a debt; nothing is wasted. You know, whatever God allows, even when human beings perish, it is done out of love for man, because God has a "heart".*

Elder Paisios, *With pain and love for contemporary man*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. I, p. 118-121.

### **Injustice draws the Wrath of God**

*Most bad and harmful things happen when we wrong other people. For example, when a fortune is made unjustly, the owners may live a few years like royalty, but in the end, they will spend all their money on doctors. Remember the saying "What is gathered by the wind is also scattered by the wind." Or remember what the Psalm says, Better is a little that the righteous hath than the abundance of many wicked. What they collect is spent, blown away. Rarely will an illness, a bankruptcy and so on be sent as a trial from God...*

Elder Paisios, *With pain and love for contemporary man*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. I, p. 87-88.

Elder Paisios spoke of various signs of the Times and noticed that we need to make spiritual preparation for the events prophesied.

### **The Antichrist**

*...the anticipated Antichrist will, in some manner, be the incarnate devil, who will present himself to the Jewish nation as the Messiah and will mislead the world. Difficult years are ahead; we will be tested very severely. The Christians will suffer great persecution. And, you see, people are not at all aware that we are living during the signs of the times, that the sealing is already advancing. It is as if*

*nothing is happening. This is why the Sacred Scripture says that even the elect will be deceived. Those without a good disposition will not be enlightened and will be misled during the years of apostasy. For whoever does not have divine Grace, does not have spiritual clarity, just like the devil.*

Elder Paisios, *Spiritual awakening*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. II, pp. 198-199.

### **Difficult times lie ahead**

*...with God's permission, a strong jolt will come our way. Difficult times lie ahead. We will be greatly tasted. We have to take this warning seriously and live spiritually. It is circumstances that are forcing us and will force us in the future, to labour spiritually. But we should try to do so by choice and joyfully rather than by necessity when various sorrows come upon us. Many Saints would plead to live in our times so that they would have the chance to struggle for Christ...*

Elder Paisios, *With pain and love for contemporary man*, Souroti: Holy Monastery Evangelist John the Theologian, vol. I, 39-40.