

The artist's suffering

[Dedicated to the creative, the nurturing, and those who want to learn to truly feel]

An artist is always in pain: we are in pain when our artistic inspiration is trying to express itself. As long as the pain is unexpressed, we suffer. We suffer because the joy and beauty within remains unborn. And when the time is right, we suffer like a mother breathing forth her child. Giving birth is always painful, but any loving mother would declare that the suffering is well worth it. For it brings new life and love into the world.

True beauty can only arise in one way -- from pain -- like a diamond in the fire of the earth's heart. But here, to know pain is not to suffer -- at least, not for the artist -- to know suffering is to know oneself and the world, to know life, to know truth and beauty. It means that there is still an imperfection waiting to be perfected, an uncut diamond waiting to be cut, polished and set in beauty. To be able to express this pain is to taste truth and shape beauty.

The artist in us sees perfection hidden by the imperfection of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, moving, thinking and feeling. We have a direct vision of that perfect beauty in the moment, and seek the tools in our own hearts to express, give birth and life, to this vision of beauty that others may enjoy it, too, seeing happiness and meaning in it.

How do we as the artist truly know beauty that is hidden away in the imperfection of the senses? We can only truly experience beauty and good by "seeing" beyond the senses. We must abandon all these sensings that hold us down to the dirt and pain of false realities. We must see, hear, smell, taste, touch, move, think and feel with the inner eye, the heart. Doing so, we free our hearts to see from high above a bigger picture than ourselves, bigger than anything any of us can ever think or imagine.

We must learn to see the impermanence of beauty pulsating in everything we sense or feel. The pattern is so clear that, in time, it becomes our own second nature. At first, it seems such a great burden to bear such a nature, as it appears to one other than our own. As such, we have to disown this second nature, to free it from our self.

For, we cannot own these visions. They must totally overwhelm and consume our being until we are nothing. All that we think we are or have, we were or had, will be or will have, simply evaporate. We are truly nothing, a boundless space, empty yet capable of holding everything that is true and beautiful.

Beauty then is what pulls and holds us directly into the true nature of things. Once we are caught in its gravity, there is no way we can get out, but only to follow its flow and lose ourselves in it senselessly. We see beauty, but it sees us with eyes closed. We hear beauty, even when not listening we continue to hear it. We smell its fragrance that wafts against the winds. We taste its sweetness and stay forever satiated, knowing neither hunger nor thirst. It moves us in a spiral beyond our wildest imaginations to the heights of speechless joy.

To know pain is to see beauty waiting to be born; we must struggle to touch that pain to taste its reality. The artist understands how suffering arises when his pain remains unexpressed, not knowing how to express it. Ignorance is ugliness; it hides truth, falsifies knowledge, disfigures beauty, oppresses joy. It makes us look for truth and beauty where there are really none.

When we look for truth where there is none, we are only chasing after our own shadows. Most of us blindly run after shadows, wanting to embrace shadow after shadow in the dimmest light. The only way we can catch those shadows is to remain as still as we can. We can only outrun them by closing our eyes. With eyes closed, we see better.

For these shadows are cast by the light of our own being. The light shines out the way to us, but we keep looking in the wrong way, away from the onward path beyond shadow and dimness. We only need to turn around and face that light. Then the shadows are no more.

We need to look right into the heart of this light. For it is not a light for the eye, but for the heart. It embraces us, pervades us and tears us apart into the very elements that we have come from. The earth that we are is the same earth around us; the water flows back into the water everywhere; the

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fire burns like any fire; the wind flows without need of breathing. We become the very space that holds us, and our heart is in everything.

In due course, we need to stand on the earth beneath us again and to walk and work as life dictates. We seem unchanged outside, but within is boundless space that joyfully yearns to embrace all. But most people are moving too fast to be embraced; even to smile at. They only see what eyes see; only hear what ears hear; only sense what nose, tongue and body sense: they only think that they are ahead.

They see us joyful, but are blind to it. They hear our cries, but heed us not. They speak to us but are never with us. They think of us but see us as shadows of their past. For, they do not feel, who only live by their body's senses. To feel is to live now, to love the moment. To love is to fully learn; to know that we can have nothing, that we can only be what is before us here and now.

To love is to see that what we can have and hold is impermanent, changing, becoming other. All we have are ideas, ideas, ideas: our ideas of people, of things, of ourselves. So we must love no thing; we can love no one. There is no lover, only loving. If all is loving, then we're all one, flowing along, a river of breath into the sun-lit sea of bliss.

If we have yet to see this sun-lit sea, we can still dream of it. We must dream so that we might wake. When we wake from this dream, sights are sights, sounds are sounds, smells are smells, tastes are tastes, touches are touches, thinking is thinking. But we smile deeply at all of them. We now joyfully know them for what they really are. That's all there is to know: what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think.

The foolish often despair at this. We create things out of them; we aggrandize them into philosophies. We worship them as Gods and demons, as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; we aimlessly talk about them as if we really know them, as if we are awakened. Yet we slumber on, sleep-talk, sleep-run. We are all asleep talking in our sleep to the sleeping. Our lives are dreams; we do not even know this.

We begin by awakening in our dreams. We see others, but they do not see us. We call out but no one hears us. We love but remain unloved. Yet we remain untroubled. To know our dreams is to prepare ourselves for a joyful awakening. If we forget our dreams, we lose our way. To hold our dreams, we must forget ourselves.

The waking wise forget themselves. This forgetting is to see all things as if for the first time, that we know others for only a thought-moment; then it is gone. We cannot only know a person by the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or even mind: these are but doorways to the person's heart. Yet there is nothing more to know than forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts, and, above all, the feelings behind them.

Everything we are conscious of is nothing but feeling: liking or disliking or neither. To feel is to know; to know is to think; to think is to see what we lack; then we seek to fill this lack. But if we look for what is lacking outside of us, we will only despair. We have become hollow men with holes that need to be filled.

We need to only look deep into these waves of liking, disliking and unfeeling. This is where we begin to awaken.

We must look at our liking, disliking and unfeeling like an artist who sees a beautiful image in a shapeless marble. Our love will chip away all that hide this beauty. Love is the power that drives us to free the truth and beauty within. We suffer to chip away the pain that hides truth and beauty.

Suffering frees the artist from pain. We become this artist when we face pain with all our heart and smile at it to set it free.

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