

UPAYA CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM

Final Learning Project

BEARING WITNESS TO SUFFERING

*"I commit myself to **bearing witness** . . .
. . . . By encountering each creation with respect and dignity, and
Allowing myself to be touched by the joys and pain of the universe."*



'Truth That Arises Through Deep Meditation'

MICHAEL DAIUN MELANCON

~ SECOND COHORT ~

March 2009 - March 2011

“We invoke your name, Avalokiteshvara. We aspire to learn your way of listening in order to help relieve the suffering in the world. You know how to listen in order to understand. We invoke your name in order to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness. We will sit and listen without any prejudice. We will sit and listen without judging or reacting. We will sit and listen in order to understand. We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what is being left unsaid. We know that just by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person.”

~ Invoking the Bodhisattvas' Names

AWARENESS OF SUFFERING

“Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering. We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images, and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy.”

~ Fourth Mindfulness Training of the Order of Interbeing

TITLE PAGE Quote

~ Second Tenet of the Zen Peacemaker Order

BEARING WITNESS TO SUFFERING

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BEARING WITNESS TO SUFFERING

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

What did the Buddha know?

This question has guided my meditation practice and contemplative inquiry for nearly seven years. I want to know what the Buddha knew.

I was introduced to Buddhist meditation practice in 1991. After meditating independently and therefore a bit unevenly for many years, I began practicing under the guidance of my Teacher, Eileen Kiera¹ in early 2004. Eileen encouraged me to invite what she called *Big Questions* into the field of my practice. It was then that I began to wonder about what the Buddha knew and its implications for my own practice. By the time I began formal Zen chaplaincy training at Upaya Zen Institute in early 2009, I had honed and developed my Big Question, as well as my aspiration. The koan that guides my chaplaincy training and my practice has evolved as follows:

What did the Buddha know *that allowed him to step forward into the world to relieve suffering?*

For me, Buddhist chaplaincy is fundamentally about answering this question.

The texts of the Pali Canon tell us the Buddha taught Four Noble Truths concerning *dukkha*. While there is no specific and satisfactory English translation for the Pali word *dukkha*, its commonly accepted translation is *suffering*. I aspire to know what the Buddha knew so that like the Buddha, I too can step forward to help relieve *dukkha* in the world.

After hearing Bernie Glassman Roshi speak at a training course on Inner City Ministry in summer of 2008, I began to think of and relate to the work of Buddhist chaplains, and my own work in particular, as *bearing witness to suffering*. A quote from Roshi Bernie's book **Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Lessons in Making Peace** handily summarizes his definition of bearing witness.

*"In my view, we can't heal ourselves or other people unless we bear witness. In the Zen Peacemaker Order we stress bearing witness to the wholeness of life, to every aspect of the situation that arises. It means being each and every element of this situation."*²

¹ Eileen Kiera is a Dharmacharya in the Mindfulness Tradition of the Community of Mindful Living and was given Lamp Transmission by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh in 1990.

² Bernie Glassman, *Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Lessons in Making Peace* (New York, NY: Bell Tower 1998).

As an ordained member of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, I might just as easily have entitled this work *Interbeing with Suffering*. In words substantially similar to Roshi Bernie's, Thich Nhat Hanh describes Interbeing as "*being in touch with everything that is around us.*"³ In order to bear witness to suffering I must be in touch with everything around me, noticing but not being caught or swept away by the suffering there. It seemed only fitting that *Bearing Witness to Suffering* would be the theme of my Chaplaincy Learning Project, and "*What did the Buddha know?*" would be the interrogatory I would aspire to answer.

Literature Review

For support on the path of bearing witness to suffering, I studied and meditated on English translations of Buddhist texts, focusing on Theravada suttas and Mahayana sutras that pertain to the human condition in relation to suffering. I also studied the writings of recognized masters in the Tibetan, Mindfulness, and Zen traditions of Buddhism. I read commentaries by contemporary Zen and Vipassana teachers, and listened and re-listened to Dharma talks and lectures by authorized dharma teachers in the Zen, Mindfulness and Vipassana traditions.

I also gained a great deal of insight about suffering through the writings and reflections of notorious yet celebrated twentieth century philosopher Simone Weil, who was also a social activist and Christian mystic. I am indebted to my dear friend and Sangha sister Cindy Jennings, who encouraged me to enrich my encounter with suffering by studying Weil's concept of *affliction*, which well exceeds mere suffering and is the sacred domain of perhaps a precious few rare visionaries such as Weil herself.

There are certainly hundreds if not even thousands of books that explore Buddhist perspectives on the cause or causes of suffering and the prospects for its relief. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh are two preeminent and contemporary scholars of Mahayana Buddhism whose prodigious and prolific writings outline the scope of Dharma teachings on suffering. Two of their books were particularly useful in understanding greed, aversion and delusion as the cause of dukkha/suffering. These two books are: **The Four Noble Truths** by the Dalai Lama (Harper Collins 1997); and **The Heart of The Buddha's Teaching** by Thich Nhat Hanh (Parallax Press, 1998). Similarly Ajahn Chah's chapter on the Four Noble Truths in his book **Food For The Heart** (Wisdom Publications, 2002) is a concise prescription for right view as regards the cessation of suffering.

However, the most comprehensive and practical preparation for *bearing witness to suffering*, especially for practicing with my own suffering, is outlined by Phillip Moffitt in his book **Dancing With Life** (Rodale, 2008).⁴ In its pages Moffitt shares "Buddhist insights

³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press 1987) page 1.

⁴ Phillip Moffitt has practiced vipassana since 1983, and teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in northern California.

for finding meaning and joy in the face of suffering.”⁵ As Ajahn Sumedho says in his preface, “**Dancing with Life** is a clear and well written explanation of how to apply the Four Noble Truths to daily life” for the cessation of suffering.⁶

I am deeply indebted to Andrea Fella, an Insight Meditation teacher at IMS Redwood City who also teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Andrea was generous beyond measure in providing me with fifty-one (51) individual citations from the Pali Canon⁷ that outline core teachings on the role of suffering in the Buddha’s discourses and teachings. Listed in the Bibliography at the end of this report, these excerpts contain words and teachings attributed to the Buddha with regard to: dependent co-arising; dukkha; the arising of suffering, (*i.e., craving, aversion and delusion*); and the path to the cessation of suffering outlined in the Eight-Fold Path. In addition, recordings of Andrea Fella's Dharma talks on Suffering and the Four Noble Truths (available at www.audiodharma.org⁸) were of invaluable assistance in identifying and understanding the principles of Buddhist practice for relieving suffering.

Gil Fronsdal, also on the faculty at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, is the primary teacher for Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California. His Dharma talks on Zencast.com⁹ were likewise an invaluable resource, and to him I am profoundly grateful for his clear exegesis of the fundamental tenets of Theravada and Zen Buddhism.

There are vast literary resources available for comparing and contrasting the world’s major religions. Many of these are quite informative regarding the role of suffering in those spiritual traditions. In particular I found the Harvard Theological Review and Patheos.com websites to be of immense value in obtaining a general understanding of the teachings of non-Buddhist spiritual traditions, especially in regard to suffering. According to its home page, “*Patheos connects seekers, students, and believers to faith communities, scholars, and resources for deeper exploration and greater understanding of faith practices, wisdom traditions, and spirituality.*”¹⁰ After hours of web research on this topic, I found Patheos.com to be an incomparable and unbiased library of resources compiled by leading theological experts on the world’s religious traditions. I also consulted Houston Smith’s primer on the history of the world’s spiritual traditions, **The World’s Religions** (revised Harper 1991, original 1957), which played an essential role in my own initiation to Buddhist practice in 1991.

⁵ Phillip Moffitt, *Dancing With Life: Buddhist Insights for Finding Meaning and Joy in the Face of Suffering* (New York, NY: Rodale 2008), Title Page

⁶ Ajahn Sumedho, Phillip Moffitt, *Dancing With Life* (New York, NY: Rodale 2008), ix

⁷ See Bibliography on page ()

⁸ Andrea Fella, Audio Dharma, www.audiodharma.org, AD 113 Four Noble Truths Week 1; AD116 Four Noble Truths Week 2; AD118 Four Noble Truths Week 3; AD123 Four Noble Truths Week 4 (June, 2006), and Exploring the Layers of Reactivity (June 2010).

⁹ Gil Fronsdal, Zencast.org, <http://amberstar.libsyn.com/>, Zencast 193 The Four Noble Truths (Audio Dharma, January 25, 2009); Zencast 244 Suffering (Audio Dharma, January 17, 2010); Zencast 169 The Eightfold Path (Audio Dharma, September 30, 2007).

¹⁰ Patheos.com, <http://www.patheos.com>, accessed December 2009.

Structured Opportunities For *Bearing Witness To Suffering*

As I embarked upon this formal two-year encounter with suffering, I was determined not to turn away from it, no matter how suffering presented itself. I took seriously and literally the fourth Mindfulness Training of the Order of Interbeing, which encourages practitioners to maintain awareness of suffering. It states:

*“Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering. We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images, and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace, and joy.”*¹¹

Further, the second tenet of the Zen Peacemakers Order in which I am preparing for ordination as a chaplain reads,

*“I further commit myself to bearing witness by encountering each creation with respect and dignity and allowing myself to be touched by the joys and pain of the universe.”*¹²

My objective in *bearing witness to suffering* was therefore not to study suffering as an intellectual pursuit or an abstract idea or concept. Rather, in keeping with the precepts, I elected to embrace and bear witness to suffering as a *reality* in the world. I wanted to know and understand suffering from the point of view of others whose paths on the road of life traverse and converge with mine. As I designed my course of study and practice, I couldn't have guessed how this odyssey with *bearing witness to suffering* would bring me face to face with my own suffering. My initial intention, though, was to know about suffering primarily among people whose paths cross and intertwine with my own.

In order to touch and bear witness to suffering in a compelling, intimate and profoundly personal way, I undertook a series and progression of practices that I believed would present opportunities for encounters with suffering. A summary list of these practices and activities follows below:

- I set out to spend twenty (20) two-hour sessions over the course of one year in contemplative observation in my urban downtown Seattle neighborhood. During each session I sat in quiet meditation, observing a wide spectrum of people that ranged from homeless and indigent people, to drug addicts, to tourists and local residents. I sat watching them come, stay, and go on the sometimes mean streets of my community as

¹¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press 1987) page 18.

¹² Jukai Book, Upaya Institute and Zen Center (Santa Fe, NM, ed. 2009) *The Three Tenets of the Zen Peacemakers*, page 10.

they went about their daily lives.¹³ I practiced contemplative observation on street corners, in parks, under freeway overpasses, in soup kitchens, at food banks and in other places homeless and indigent people frequent.

- I soon enhanced and therefore enriched the above-referenced two-hour observation sessions by more actively engaging with people in my community through the *Free Listening Project*. *Free Listening* is the practice of going into a public place with a sign or a T-shirt that reads: **FREE LISTENING - No Judgment, No Advice**. The Free Listening Project is about deliberately creating opportunities for those inclined to do so to verbalize whatever is on their hearts or minds to an unprejudiced listener. *Free Listening* is the practice of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, which is:

*"[. . .] to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness. We will sit and listen without any prejudice. We will sit and listen without judging or reacting. We will sit and listen in order to understand. We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what is being left unsaid. We know that just by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person."*¹⁴

The practice of *Free Listening* is bearing witness to suffering.

- I adopted the practice of giving something to every person on the street who asked. This most often, though not necessarily, resulted in an exchange or offering of money, food or time.
- I volunteered at Seattle's Bailey Boushay House, offering Reiki in a 30-bed hospice/hospital and adult day center for clients who were gravely ill or actively dying, many with HIV/AIDS. I had the profound honor of being present as several of these clients breathed their last breaths. I developed enduring relationships of support and camaraderie with BBH clients, staff and other volunteers.
- I took seriously Roshi Bernie Glassman's admonition to make the meal of my life using *all* my ingredients.¹⁵ For several years I had tried to distance myself from a long and successful career in *organizational effectiveness*. Roshi Bernie inspired me to volunteer to execute an organizational effectiveness project for a Seattle-based non-profit environmental conservation organization. I couldn't have anticipated how the results of that project would include deep suffering for one of the organization's key leaders, giving me the opportunity to bear witness first hand to organizational suffering.

¹³ There are relatively frequent gang related disturbances, drug deals, assaults and even murders on the streets immediately outside my condominium building.

¹⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book: Invoking the Bodhisattva's Names*, pp. 17-18, Parallax Press 2000).

¹⁵ Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields, *Instructions For the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons for Living a Life That Matters*, (New York, NY, Bell Tower 1996).

- I explored a mindfulness practice partnership with a recently released Registered Sex Offender who was seeking to reintegrate into society after seven years of incarceration. I observed first hand the karmic train wreck that follows and accompanies a sex crime, and I experienced the personal disappointment of my practice partner violating his parole and his subsequent return to prison.
- I served and continue to serve on a Care Team that supports a former sangha member who experienced a series of hospitalizations and subsequent rehabilitations as a result of escalating Multiple Sclerosis - MS.
- And last but not least, I joined a *Retreat Of Remembrance* at Auschwitz Extermination Camp to honor someone who has been like a mother to me and whose parents, sister and grandparents were all killed at Auschwitz during the Second World War.

I am acutely aware of the profound impact and influence the aforementioned activities and practices have had on my thinking, my emotions, and my evolving understanding of suffering and response to it. Any one of the above listed practice activities might well have served as the central subject of this investigation and the resulting thesis report. The data points I gathered and the learning I gleaned from these activities and experiences only served to focus my deeper investigation into suffering, as well as my resolve to walk the path of the Buddha.

I subsequently elected to expand the scope of *bearing witness to suffering* in a way that I had not anticipated in my initial Final Project Proposal. This change profoundly effected the course of my investigation overall, and especially this resulting report.

* * *

SECTION 2. SURVEY ON SUFFERING

The Advantages of Direct Engagement

Briefly summarizing the bearing witness practices and activities listed in the previous section of this report, I bore witness to suffering by engaging in contemplative observation in public places, by practicing *Free Listening*, by giving something to everyone on the street who asked, by volunteering in hospice and adult day care, by conducting a leadership effectiveness project for a non-profit environmental organization, by working with a Registered Sex Offender, by serving on a personal care team for a debilitated sangha member, and by participating in a retreat at Auschwitz.

These activities generally, but not always occurred with people I did not know prior to my encounter with them in the context of this investigation. That is, I encountered the majority of the people I was observing for the first time in the context of *bearing witness to suffering*.

As the months of observations progressed I found myself with a growing list of questions, which I was becoming increasingly eager to answer. I found myself wanting and even needing to move from mere observation to a deeper level of interactive investigation. I had the sense it was time to expand my sample population in order to more deliberately include people I *do* know.

I wanted to hear what people I know personally think and know about suffering. I wanted to give my friends, family, co-workers, colleagues, and neighbors opportunities to teach me about suffering through their personal encounters with it. I wanted to hear how they would define suffering as it shows up to them. Equally important, I wanted to know what the people in my life *do* about their own suffering, as well how they respond to the suffering of others. I wanted to hear them share their insights and strategies for responding to suffering in the world.

Initially, I intended to conduct a series of one-on-one, in-person interviews. I had pre-selected about fifteen individuals, each of whom I perceived as having had a profound encounter with suffering at some point in their lives. I was preparing to begin the interview process when I remembered something I had learned while simply *observing* people in my urban downtown neighborhood. I had learned that simply observing is not enough: I have no way of knowing for certain whether someone *has* suffered or *is* suffering unless I actively engage that person in some level of interpersonal interaction. I learned this when I transitioned from silently observing people from afar and started engaging them more directly via the *Free Listening* process.

In practicing *Free-Listening* in homeless shelters, soup kitchens, shopping malls and office building lobbies, I learned that some people *appeared* to me to be suffering, but when I spoke with them personally they reported they were in fact *not* suffering. I also learned that some people who appeared to me *not* to be suffering, were in fact suffering a great

deal. Looking deeply at the root cause of my misperceptions, I discovered that my opinion that a person was suffering or not, turned out to be little more than a projection of my mind that was rooted primarily in imagining myself in that person's situation.

For example, homelessness would be one of the most difficult things I could imagine happening to me. Yet in the process of *Free Listening* at soup kitchens I learned that some people do not experience homelessness as suffering at all. This was a revelation to me. I learned first hand that some homeless people are homeless by choice. In fact they perceive me as the unfortunate one, doomed to a life of drudgery and conformity, working endlessly to fit in to society's norms and mores. I realize this is more the exception than the rule, and do not presume to diminish the horror that homelessness presents to those suffering with mental illness who are unfit to make such choices.

In other situations I learned that some people with debilitating diseases, deformities, disabilities and even amputations do not consider themselves as suffering and in fact regard themselves as "*blest*" for what they *do* have, rather than preoccupied with the unfortunate aspects of their situations.¹⁶ In yet another activity I learned that unlike myself, there are many people who do not experience holiday shopping as suffering; they actually enjoy being in shopping malls. Some even told me they enjoy complaining about feeling obligated to do it as part of the annual seasonal ritual.

These revelations might be very obvious to most observers, and I suppose on some level I understood the facts of these matters on an intellectual level. But suddenly my *knowing* was because of personal encounters, because of listening to and talking with homeless people, because of working directly with ill and disabled individuals, and because of asking Christmas shoppers directly. *Free Listening* and *bearing witness to suffering* had opened me to an entirely different level of *knowing*. Actually, I experienced it more as *not knowing*.

This all became very clear to me when I began considering whom I would interview for a *Survey On Suffering*. I recognized it would significantly bias my results if I either *included* people because I perceived them as having suffered, or *excluded* them because I perceived

¹⁶ On May 12, 2010 I encountered a man on a downtown street corner. The man asked me for money to buy some bread to make a sandwich. I asked him if I could buy him a sandwich, and we agreed to have lunch together. After ordering our sandwiches and sitting down together, I learned that his name is Ronald. As we sat waiting for our food, Ronald began relating stories from his life. He told me of the terrible car accident that had changed his life several years earlier. He lost one eye and his left arm in the accident. I commented that with such a terrible accident he was lucky to be alive. He stopped, thought about it, smiled and said, "No . . . I'm not lucky . . . I'm blest!!" He went on to say, "If I was lucky, I wouldn't have had no accident. If I was lucky, I'd have won the lottery." He went on listing things that would have happened in his life if had been lucky. "No, I'm blest," he concluded. When I then asked him how he would define suffering Ronald said he doesn't think about it. I asked if he had suffered in his life and he said, "I suppose so, but I don't dwell on it. It's best to take life as it comes. You have to take the good with the bad. Sometimes it's all working okay; sometimes its not." I found Ronald's simple brilliance and radical acceptance completely refreshing, especially in light of his missing eye and arm. Clearly pleased that he had so positively inspired me, Ronald told me I could take his picture and use it and his name in this report. Looking at Ronald's photograph is a regular practice of equanimity for me. Rather than just using his name, I elected to tell his story, dedicating a full footnote to our interaction, which proved to be a pivotal moment in my encounter with suffering.

them as *not* having suffered. Widening my frame of reference, along with my potential survey population, seemed the most appropriate way to achieve unbiased survey participation and results.

Widening the Survey On Suffering Population

My intention for a *Survey On Suffering* was to learn how people I know describe, define and relate to suffering in their lives. I determined that my survey population would be differentiated by and limited to people with whom I have or had some level of relationship at some point during my lifetime. My final list of survey invitees therefore included relatives, family members, high school friends, college chums, fellow chaplains, work colleagues, neighbors, and others with whom I regularly interact (or once interacted with) in the course of my daily life. I identified approximately one hundred forty potential survey participants.

I did not invite responses from my three primary Buddhist Teachers, nor did I include formal teachers, priests or ministers from any other religious or spiritual traditions. I was less interested in learning what we *should* do with our suffering, and wanted to hear what people *actually do* with their suffering. I realize my presumption was that my Teachers and other spiritual leaders practice what they preach, and that is perhaps unfair in retrospect. Nevertheless, my intention was to hear from the *rank and file*.

Write-In Survey On Suffering Via Email

Conducting one-on-one interviews was an appealing approach, but it would have been very time consuming and limiting. I began considering other options for gathering data that would be *less* biased and *more* efficient.

I determined that conducting a written survey would allow me to gather data points more quickly and efficiently, while also significantly broadening my population sample. I reckoned that conducting an *email* survey would facilitate ease in recruiting the people I know and work with currently, and would also give me access to people I have known or worked with in the past and with whom I've maintained contact. In short, using email to both distribute the survey and collect written responses made it possible to quickly recruit and gather input from a broad cross section of potential survey participants.

Five Core Survey On Suffering Questions

I prepared a five-question fill-in-the-blanks survey instrument that asked the questions I had been collecting since starting the various bearing witness practices and activities outlined in Section 1. The *Five Survey On Suffering* questions were as follows:

[SURVEY QUESTION 1.](#)

What is suffering? (That is, how do you define the word *suffering*?)

SURVEY QUESTION 2.

Do you consider yourself to have suffered, either in the past or presently?

Yes / No

SURVEY QUESTION 3.

From time to time, many of us feel out of sync with the world or out of alignment with our own expectations for ourselves.

When this happens for you, does it show up as suffering? i.e., do you relate to this experience as suffering?

Yes / No / Doesn't Apply To Me

SURVEY QUESTION 4.

What do you do to ease your own suffering?

SURVEY QUESTION 5.

How do you respond to suffering in the world?

Request for Demographic Information:

In addition to the five questions above about suffering, survey participants were asked to provide the following demographic information:

- **Spiritual Upbringing and Current Spiritual Tradition**
- **Sex; Age; Occupation; and Education Level.**

Description of Current Spiritual Practices

Survey responders were also invited to describe their current spiritual practice or practices. Many survey participants left this field blank. Others reported this data in an inconsistent manner, which made their answers difficult to tabulate. These data points neither appeared to have any bearing on how responders defined suffering, nor did they appear to have relevance to how anyone answered any of the other questions. While interesting, these data points did not provide any useful information that enhanced or altered the overall results of the survey as reported in the following pages. Therefore those data points are not included or analyzed as part of this report.

* * *

SECTION 3. SURVEY ON SUFFERING PROCESS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Survey Process

Approximately one hundred forty [140] email solicitations were sent inviting people to respond to the Suffering Survey.

Suffering Survey Demographics

One hundred one [101] of the potential participants responded to the invitation to participate in the survey. One of the 101 survey responses was from an invitee who sent two emails indicating her completed survey was attached, however there was no completed survey attached to either email. She was therefore not counted as a survey participant.

Effectively one hundred [100] completed surveys were returned, received and counted. Demographic data points were collected and entered into **TABLE 1. SUFFERING SURVEY PARTICIPANT OCCUPATION, SEX, AGE, SPIRITUAL TRADITION, EDUCATION AND COUNTRY**, which appears on the pages immediately following.¹⁷

Survey participant demographic data were tabulated and the results are presented in **TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF SURVEY ON SUFFERING DEMOGRAPHICS** on page 18.

Answers to the **Five Core Survey On Suffering Questions** were collected, analyzed, categorized and tabulated. Survey results with respect to the Five Core Survey Questions are presented in the subsequent SECTIONS, report, charts, tables and Appendices that follow.

* *

¹⁷ Some survey forms were not filled in completely by the survey participants, which accounts for some tallies not adding up to 100. Where survey participants left a blank field, the absence of an answer is indicated in TABLE 1. by a question mark "?".

TABLE 1. SUFFERING SURVEY PARTICIPANT OCCUPATION, SEX, AGE, SPIRITUAL TRADITION, EDUCATION AND COUNTRY

Occupation	Sex	Age	Spiritual Upbringing	Current Spiritual Orientation	Education	Country
Account Manager	M	54	Protestant	Spiritual: not following one practice	BS	USA
Artist	M	61	Christian/Jewish	Buddhist	BA plus	USA
Chef	M	52	Christian/Alternative 1970s	Buddhist, Isha Yoga	College AA	USA
Chaplain/Oncology Navigator	M	49	Quaker	Buddhist	BA	USA
Sales Rep: Tourism	M	50	Christian/Evangelical	Christian Church of Canada	MS	Canada
Retired	F	?	None	Questioning	?	USA
?	F	49	Methodist	Investigating Buddhism	?	USA
Educator	M	30	None	Not formal	MS	USA
Historian/Author/Chaplain	F	50	Reform Jew	Buddhist	PhD Plus	USA
Software Architect	M	54	Catholic	Agnostic Friendly Cynic	2.5 yrs college	USA
Sales Account Manager	M	54	Presbyterian	Spiritual	BS	USA
Wife, Mother, Licensed Professional Counselor	F	55	Christian	Christian	Masters	USA
Executive Director	F	64	Jewish	Jewish	BA	USA
Corrections	F	43	Christian	Buddhist	MS	USA
Interior Designer	F	49	Jewish	Jewish	?	USA
Architect	M	44	Mennonite	Atheist	Masters	USA
Operations Manager	M	36	Christian Disciples of Christ	Christian Presbyterian	MTSC	USA
Life Coach / Trainer	F	52	Unitarian	Buddhist	Masters	USA
Non-Profit Org Executive	M	44	Catholic	Rom Catholic	?	France
Professor	F	56	Agnostic	Buddhist	PhD	USA
Licensed Therapist/ Faculty	F	52	Catholic	Catholic, plus Eastern Trad.	PhD	USA
College Teacher (Retired)	M	73	Liberal Christian	Quaker, Unitarian, Zen	Masters	USA
Physicist	M	43	Catholic	Buddhist	PhD	USA
Aerospace Professional	M	59	Catholic	Spiritual	BS	USA
Commercial Pilot	M	50	Catholic	Catholic	MS	USA
Therapist-Private Practice	F	55	Catholic Goddess Based	Buddhist	M.Ed	Canada
Doctor of Oriental Medicine	F	43	Lutheran	Loosely Buddhist	MS	USA
Service Delivery Supervis.	F	31	?	Zen Buddhist	MBA	USA
Registered Dietician	F	52	None	Buddhist	Masters	USA

Administrative Assistant	F	60	None / Gr Orth	None/12 Step	?	USA
Householder	M	60	Catholic	Buddhist	PhD	USA
Translator/Artist	F	34	?	Buddhist	MS	USA
Writer/College Instructor	F	64	Unitarian	Unaffiliated	PhD	USA
Self Employed	F	31	None	None	BS	USA
Designer	F	53	Presbyterian	Zen	MS + Doc	USA
HR Executive	F	43	Agnostic	Agnostic	BS	USA
Recruiter	M	58	Catholic	Catholic	Post Grad	USA
Financial Advisor Advocate	M	52	Catholic	Spiritual	BA/BS	USA
Non Profit Elder Care	F	25	Jewish	Jewish Buddhist	BA	USA
Executive Mgt Arts Org	M	63	Catholic	Catholic/Jewish	Masters	USA
Teacher	F	56	Unitarian	Buddhism	Post Grad	USA
Unemployed Student	M	46	Presbyterian	Astrology Numerology	Working on AA	USA
Speech Language Pathologist/Therapist	F	59	Christian	Zen Buddhism	Masters	USA
?	F	56	?	?	BS	USA
Retired	F	68	Catholic	Doing Meditation	BA + Grad Sch	USA
Retired due to illness/ Attorney for 31 years	F	62	?	Zen Buddhism	JD	USA
Housewife	F	49	Christian	Christian & Buddhist	BA	USA
Division VP of HR	F	49	Presbyterian	Loosely Presb.	JD	USA
Airline Executive	M	63	Catholic	Spiritual	BS	USA
Real Estate Sales / Consultant	M	52	Catholic	Spiritual	BA	USA
Non Profit Educator / Art	M	47	Jewish	Nature, Secular Judaism, Pagan	Post Grad	USA
Hosp Chaplain / Comfort Care Therapist	F	56	Quaker	Buddhist, Sufi, Interfaith, Earth-Centered	BA + working on Mdiv	USA
Pediatric Dentist	F	31	Hindu / Jain	Undecided	MS + Post	USA
Photographer, Designer, shop owner, tour guide, Importer, wholesaler, Sommelier	F	44	None + Greek Mythology	Nothing Formal; Spiritual	Level II Master Sommelier	USA
Bus Consultant, Yoga/Med Teacher, Hospice Voluntee	F	62	Protestant	Buddhist	High School	USA
Retired	F	60	Christian	Tibetan Buddhist	BA + Grad Study	USA
Stay At Home Mom/ Musician	F	52	?	Buddhist	4 yrs College	USA
Retired	F	67	Catholic	Buddhist/Yoga	MA	USA
Pediatrician	F	65	?	Buddhist	MD	USA
Bookkeeper	F	55	None	None	AS BusAd	USA
Airline Sales Manager	M	62	Catholic	Zen Buddhist	BS	USA
Clinical Psychologist	F	58	Catholic	Zen / Mindfulness	PhD	USA
Semi-Retired	F	52	Methodist	None	Some Coll.	USA
Retired Hospice Nurse	F	65	Episcopalian	Zen Buddhism	BA/BSN	USA

Self Employed Pers Asst	F	56	Jewish	Zen Buddhism	MA	USA
Artist	M	69	?	?	BA/MFA	USA
Retired	M	56	Catholic	Golden Rule	Some Coll.	USA
Sales	F	66	Various / Catholic	Prayer & Family Traditions	2 Years College	USA
Senior Director	M	46	Lutheran	Episcopal	BA	USA
Bus Mgt (President)	M	56	Christian	Christian	BS Bus	USA
Lawyer	M	54	Eclectic Presbyterian	Unaffiliated Golden Rule	JD	USA
Sales	F	?	Catholic	Catholic	4 Yrs Col	USA
CEO, Mgt Consulting	F	55	Christian	Christian w/oa	BS	USA
Sales	M	50	Christian	Christian	Masters S	Canada
Health Care Administration	M	50	?	?	?	USA
Artist	F	50	Catholic	Tibetan Buddhist	?	USA
Journalist	M	52	?	?	College	USA
Dir of College Psych Program; Meditation Instr.	F	42	Jewish & Catholic	Jewish, Catholic Buddhist	MS + PhD	USA
College Professor	F	41	Presbyterian	Buddhist	PhD	USA
Health Care Hospital Adm	M	56	Jewish	Jewish	MS	USA
College Student	M	20	Catholic for Xmas	Catholic for Christmas	In Progress	USA
Retired	F	80	Unitarian	None	2 yrs Col	USA
Entrepreneur	M	57	Methodist	Non Practicing Methodist	BS	USA
Retired Diplomat/Active Yoga Teacher	M	58	?	Buddhism Yoga	BS Yoga Certif	USA
Info Tech / Unemployed	M	45	Episcopalian	Agnostic	BA	USA
Accountant / Homemaker	F	63	Christian	Christian	BA	USA
Acupuncture / Chinese Medicine	M	33	Mennonite	Embrace All Traditions	MA	USA
Reiki Practitioner	F	75	?	Buddhist	MA	USA
Tour Guide in Communist China	F	27	None	None	BS	China
HR Consultant	F	53	Christian Lutheran	None	MS	USA
Phone Customer Service	F	58	?	Newly Buddhist	?	USA
Sr. Director of HR	F	51	Methodist	Agonistic	BS + Post	USA
Retired Teacher / Administrator	M	65	Protestant	No Specific Affl. Treat People in Positive Way	MS	USA
Activity Leader Ret Comm.	F	53	Christian	Buddhist	MS	USA
Head of Montessori School	F	54	Var. Christian	Buddhist	BA + Grad	USA
Real Estate Sales -Self Empl	M	47	Christian	None	BS	USA
Design	M	31	None	Love and Respect For All	MS	USA
Corporate Executive / Pres	M	51	Catholic	Nothing Formal	BA	USA
Writer/Editor/Trainer	F	70	Methodist	Subud	MA	USA
Not disclosed	F	64	None	Questioning	BA	USA

“?” indicates survey participant left his field blank

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF SURVEY ON SUFFERING DEMOGRAPHICS

Survey Participation

Total Number of Survey Invitations Sent	140
Total Number Who Responded Affirmatively	101
Total Number of Completed Survey Forms Received and Counted	100

Sex of Survey Participants

Sex	Female	Male
Number of Participants	58	42

Age Statistics for 98 Survey Participants Who Reported Their Age

Category	Age Range	Average (Mean) Age	Median Age	Mode
Number of Years	20 – 80 years	52.42 Years	53 Years	52 Years

Number of Survey Participants by Country

Country	United States	Canada	France	China
Number of Participants	95	3	1	1

Participant Education Level

High School	Junior College/ Some College	College	Masters	Doctorate	No Answer “?”	Other
1	9	38	30	13	8	1 Master Sommelier

TABLE 3. SURVEY ON SUFFERING PARTICIPANTS' RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS - DETAIL

Spiritual Tradition	Tradition In Which I Grew Up	Current Spiritual Tradition		
? (<i>Did not answer this question</i>)	12	4		
Christian	63	17		
Jewish	8	7		
Unitarian	4	1		
Quaker	2	1		
None	9	6		
Hindu/Jain	1			
Agnostic	2	3		
Atheist		1		
Buddhist		33		
Eastern Tradition		1		
Subud (Footnote 18)		1		
Nothing Formal/Unaffiliated		3		
Spiritual / Unaffiliated Love and Respect For All; Treat People In A Positive Way; Golden Rule		8		
Prayer & Family Traditions		1		
Embrace All Traditions		1		
Interfaith		1		
Nature / Secular / Pagan		1		
Sufi		1		
Undecided / Questioning		2		
Astrology / Numerology		1		
12 Step		1		

NOTE: Any person who reported practicing more than one spiritual tradition either growing up or currently was counted under each spiritual tradition s/he listed. The totals in either column will therefore not add up to 100 participants.

Following are summary data points which are not apparent in the Table above and appear to have no discernable correlation with the results **the Five Core Survey On Suffering Questions**, but which are nonetheless interesting:

- Overwhelmingly more survey participants were raised in the Christian tradition than any other.
- Approximately 74% of survey participants who were raised practicing Christianity are now practicing other spiritual traditions or None.
- 8 of the 12 people who left the *Tradition In Which I Grew Up* field blank, now practice Buddhism.
- One person who reported *None* under *Tradition In Which I Grew Up* also wrote *Greek Mythology*.
- One Christian, (a Catholic) also said she was raised with Goddess-based practice.
- One Catholic emphasized that Christmas was the only aspect of Catholicism his family practiced.
- No one reared as Quaker or Unitarian is still practicing those spiritual traditions.
- Subud is an association of practitioners who follow a spiritual practice known as the Latihan Kejiwaan, an exercise of surrender to the divine force within each being. The founder of Subud, Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjo from Indonesia, was born in 1901 and died in 1987. ¹⁸

* * *

¹⁸ Simon Monbaron, *Subud: The Coming New Age of Reality, Volume 1*, (Sutherlin, OR: Simar 1999)

SECTION 4. HOW SURVEY PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBED SUFFERING

What the *Buddhas* Know

During the two year period of my formal chaplaincy training, I set out to apprehend what the Buddha knew that allowed him to step forward in the world to help relieve suffering. The title “Buddha” means *one who is awake*. A foundational tenet of Gautama Buddha’s teachings is that our fundamental essence and nature as human beings is *awakening*. Mahayana Buddhists teach that, regardless of one’s religious view or spiritual affiliation, all human beings are all fundamentally *Buddha* by nature.

The first of the five *Survey On Suffering* questions invited survey participants to define the word suffering. Their generous answers to QUESTION 1 revealed what one hundred of the *Buddhas* in my life know about suffering. In this Section we will begin our review of the *Survey On Suffering* results by examining how survey participants defined “suffering.”

SURVEY QUESTION 1. What is suffering? (How do you define the word *suffering*?)

All one hundred (100) survey responders provided a definition for suffering in response to SURVEY QUESTION 1. Naturally, each definition offered was colored by its author’s personal encounter with suffering. Many of their definitions square with what most of us think we know about suffering. Some are also quite profound and personal. Amazingly, seven survey participants reported that they have never personally known suffering in their lives, yet even they offer an empathetic and sympathetic understanding of what it is to suffer, albeit not by virtue of having suffered themselves.

After retuning the completed survey forms, many survey responders sought me out to talk about their experience of thinking deeply about suffering and responding to the survey questions. I will share their observations and experiences in *Summary Observations* on page 28 of this SECTION of the report.

A surprising number of survey participants wanted to know how other people had answered the various survey questions. In particular they were interested in how other participants had defined suffering. Many participants stressed that the final survey report should include all the definitions of suffering just as the survey participants had written and offered them. As I read through their one hundred definitions of suffering, I couldn’t have agreed more. There is no way I could capture, much less improve upon the heartfelt characterizations of suffering my friends, acquaintances, co-workers and family so genuinely and honestly offered. Therefore the full, unedited and unabridged register of definitions is included as APPENDIX i, which begins on page 51.

However, in the following pages I will summarize the themes and postulates that were intimated and repeated in the full list of survey participants’ definitions of suffering.

Core Themes That Define Suffering

One hundred *Survey On Suffering* participants offered nearly as many definitions of suffering. Survey participants individually and collectively contend that certain things are true about suffering and the nature of suffering. Clear themes recur and are reinforced from one survey participant's definition to another. Assessed collectively, these themes distill and differentiate themselves into the nineteen (19) distinguishable postulates outlined below.

Nineteen Postulates That Define Suffering

- Postulate 1: Suffering is in the eye of the beholder.**
- Postulate 2: Suffering involves physical, mental and emotional pain.**
- Postulate 3: Suffering is the nature of living.**
- Postulate 4: Suffering can be a teacher.**
- Postulate 5: Suffering arises from within and from without.**
- Postulate 6: Suffering is a story I tell myself about my situation or pain.**
- Postulate 7: The source of suffering can be real or imagined.**
- Postulate 8: Suffering is determined by its degree of difficulty.**
- Postulate 9: Suffering is a state of mind or state of being.**
- Postulate 10: Suffering is resisting and rejecting the way things are.**
- Postulate 11: Suffering is sometimes not deserved by those who experience it.**
- Postulate 12: Suffering happens when a painful situation is prolonged.**
- Postulate 13: Suffering seems to have no end, no relief and no resolution.**
- Postulate 14: Suffering is being out of synch with the natural order of the universe.**
- Postulate 15: Suffering is overwhelming.**
- Postulate 16: The opposite of suffering is**
- Postulate 17: There are skillful means for dealing with suffering.**
- Postulate 18: There are infinite manifestations of suffering.**
- Postulate 19: Suffering has serious results and ramifications.**

Detailed explanations of each postulate above are provided on the pages that follow. More critical readers are invited to not be distracted by qualifiers and quantifiers such as *a few*, *several*, *many*, *most*, and *a majority of*. The subtle nuances of each survey participants' definition made reckoning the exact number of responders supporting each postulate difficult, if not impossible. A single person's response might also support and reflect multiple themes or postulates. Identifying and individuating the various postulates was my primary ambition, and I have worked to capture the nuances of each theme in the narrative that follows. Where the number of responders citing a particular theme was apparent and could be counted, that number is indicated.

Postulate 1. Suffering is in the eye of the beholder

Asked to define the word suffering, one survey participant wrote, “Suffering is *NOT* a word. It is a deeply *personal* and *emotional* experience.” That comprised her SHORT ANSWER to survey QUESTION 1. [See APPENDIX i: Definition 66.]

Her LONGER ANSWER [Also see APPENDIX i: Definition 66.] relates a formative experience early in her career where a wise supervisor helped her see that when responding to the suffering of others, the cause or source of someone’s suffering is not necessarily congruent with or proportional to their relative level of distress.

More plainly stated, two different people experiencing *widely disparate* disappointments might experience relatively similar levels of mental, physical and, or emotional distress in response to these widely varying circumstances.

The converse is also true. A *similar* set of circumstances might induce widely disparate mental and emotional responses from two *different* people. In point of fact, the same set of circumstances might draw very different responses from a single individual, given the timing and frequency of those occurrences and the conditions that accompany them. One survey responder wrote, “In my opinion, suffering is subjective. Some folks take the loss and the pain much more in stride” while another responder noted, “the subjective nature of suffering makes it difficult to define in an objective manner.”

This all gets at one of the core themes identified in a fair number of the survey responses. That is, the experience of suffering is completely subjective; or stated another way, suffering is in the eye of the beholder. Suffering appears to be situational and is influenced by a wide variety of contributing and complicating factors. One person wrote, “I don’t have a clear definition, but I know it when it’s occurring.”

Postulate 2. Suffering involves physical, mental and, or emotional pain.

Thirty out of one hundred *Survey On Suffering* participants defined suffering as the experience or state of feeling pain or anguish. Many said that in order to qualify as suffering, the pain and anguish have to be severe or extreme. They said this pain can be experienced and manifested physically, mentally and, or emotionally. Several of these thirty survey participants added that this pain could also be “psychic or spiritual.”

There was little agreement among survey participants about whether suffering is the *cause* of the pain, the *result* of the pain, or the *response* to the pain. Some described suffering as the pain itself, while others said suffering is the hurt that causes the pain. Yet others said suffering is the response or “experience of aversion” to physical or emotional pain.

By way of example, some said suffering is an emotional response to external forces they have no ability to control. One person said that her feeling of loss of control arises out of her low self-esteem. One responder said, “I think of suffering as long-term anger, anxiety or agitation in response to some sort of pain.” Still others suggested that suffering is putting up with that pain over time.

One person said that suffering is anything that causes physical and emotional trauma, while another qualified suffering as the “emotional and physical pain in response to circumstances judged not right.” One person defined suffering as emotional or physical pain from which there is no escape or remedy.

Others identified specific kinds of traumatic events as the cause or evidence of suffering. These included accidents, natural disasters, circumstances, death, persecution or evil in the world. [These are listed in [Postulate 18.](#)]

Postulate 3. Suffering is the nature of living.

A few of the *Survey On Suffering* participants noted that suffering is a common and necessary dimension of the human experience. They said that suffering, whether physical or emotional, is the process of simply living life. People suffer; suffering is an inescapable fact of life, part and parcel of being human and alive.

Postulate 4. Suffering can be a teacher.

A few of the same *Survey On Suffering* participants who said suffering is the nature of living also noted that suffering can be a teacher, so long as they are able to view their suffering through the lens of what might be learned from the experience. One person said that we learn to live and become better people as a result of our suffering. Another said suffering forces us to think about our world and how we live in the world.

Postulate 5. Suffering arises from within and from without.

Survey On Suffering participants who raised the matter of whether suffering originates internally or externally offered widely contrasting views. One person described suffering as “an emotional effect on myself caused by external forces that I don’t seem to have any control over.” Another said, “Suffering is normally, though not necessarily, caused by something outside of one’s control.”

Still others offered that suffering can either be self imposed or caused by outside influences. One other person said, “All suffering is caused by an identification with something that is internal or external to our being.” Along this line others reported that suffering is an internal response to ones circumstances, whether they are real or imagined. [See [Postulate 7.](#)]

Another survey responder spoke for several people who see themselves at the heart of their own suffering. “I judge myself for being in the situation. It’s not the situation that leads to suffering but how my mind holds and deals with the situation. My mind can make hell out of heaven and heaven out of hell.”

Postulate 6. Suffering is a story I tell myself about my situation or pain.

Four survey responders, including the person who offered the quote above in Postulate 5, qualified suffering as either the story or the response to the story they tell themselves about the situation that is precipitating their suffering. All four suggest the “story” they tell themselves is always flawed to some degree. One survey responder offered my favorite definition of suffering when she described her stories as “the extra layer I put on whatever pain, grief, loss, sickness and general fuckedupness I encounter in an effort to explain, justify and give meaning to whatever I am experiencing.” [See [APPENDIX i: Definition 65.](#)]

Postulate 7. The source of suffering can be real or imagined.

Several survey responders stressed that the circumstances precipitating suffering can be real or imagined. Suffering, they noted, can arise out of our thoughts, wholly divorced from the reality of our circumstances. The source of suffering doesn’t have to be real in order to really hurt. One person noted that simply being unclear about a situation can be a source of suffering. Once again, suffering is in the eye of the beholder. [See [Postulate 1.](#)]

Postulate 8. Suffering is determined by its degree of difficulty.

Four *Survey On Suffering* participants noted that pain qualifies as suffering when the pain is: 1) very hard to deal with; 2) uncontrollable; or 3) cannot be relieved or resolved. Several responders noted that suffering makes the activities of daily life seem difficult. Two people qualified *any* experience of unpleasantness no matter how minor as suffering, but this was relatively rare. Most responders said that higher intensity and greater distress is what qualifies pain as suffering. One person however, reported that even very difficult experiences do not cause her to suffer so long as she has a path of action to take to resolve the matter. [See [APPENDIX i: Definition 31.](#)]

Postulate 9. Suffering is a state of mind or being.

Four *Survey on Suffering* participants described suffering as a state of mind. Several others described it similarly as an intellectual or mental state, while others said suffering is a state of being.

One person clarified, saying that suffering is a state of mind created by difficult situations. Another still further explained, “Suffering is a state of mind when the body or spirit feels a need or a lack that it can’t fulfill.” He went on to identify the mechanism by which suffering manifests, saying that suffering arises as a result of trying but failing to meet that need or fulfill that lack. Another responder said suffering is “a state of being that I cannot accept,” while another qualified it is a state of being that arises when things don’t seem to be going well in one’s life.

One female responder summed it up, saying, “My suffering is my mind. My Ego. My suffering is my divided mind.” [See [APPENDIX i: Definition 7.](#)]

Postulate 10. Suffering is resisting and rejecting the way things are.

Three survey responders said that suffering is rejecting or “raging against” what *is*, demanding instead that the world be different than it is at this moment. Suffering, they agreed, is quite simply wishing that things were different than they are. One of these three individuals said that suffering is “the mental agitation and anguish that occurs when we want our current experience to be other than what it actually is.”

Another three survey responders said that suffering occurs when they can’t change or end a painful situation or feeling, and, or are unable to shift their emotional charge relative to that situation or feeling. Another said that her suffering is actually her resistance to pain. Wanting or desiring a particular thing is one way of raging against things as they are by wishing they were different. One person said that suffering is any sense of *dis*-ease and failure to realize or attain what we desire. Others said that suffering occurs when life treats us unfairly, implying belief in an underlying principle of fairness that has somehow been violated.

Postulate 11. Suffering is often not deserved by those who experience it.

Several, but not many survey participants suggested that suffering is often inflicted upon those who deserve it least and did nothing to invite it. These responders note this is particularly the case in situations such as natural disasters, and even of the innocent victims of manmade disasters. Along this line of reasoning some responders noted that people are wounded *by* and suffer *from* the unjustified opinions, prejudices and actions of others.

Postulate 12. Suffering happens when a painful situation is prolonged.

Some *Survey On Suffering* participants said that pain changes to suffering when the pain is prolonged. These people differentiated pain as temporary or more short-term, while suffering, they said, is long-term pain. One person wrote, “It’s like carrying a burden that continues to torture us past the actual incident.” Others noted the enduring nature of the anguish as what qualifies an experience as suffering. One responder stipulated that suffering occurs when we haven’t dealt with our problems. “They don’t just go away, but come back to haunt us.”

Postulate 13. Suffering seems to have no end in sight, no relief and no resolution.

At least six people reflected on the seemingly interminable and unmanageable nature of suffering. They said that suffering is having no hope that it will ever end and having no ability or way to alleviate the pain that is causing the suffering. One person said he suffers when there is no way to solve the problem or resolve the situation. Several suggested that in the moment of suffering, it feels like it will be forever, even when one knows intellectually that it will come to an end. A few people noted that time is the great healer of suffering, suggesting that sometimes one must simply outlast the suffering.

Postulate 14. Suffering is being out of synch with the natural order of the universe.

Five people said in one way or another that suffering is being out of synch with the natural world. On its face this postulate sounds similar to Postulate 10, which is about being dissatisfied with the way things are, but is subtly different. These responders postulate that there are natural laws and principles that govern the physical universe and the circle of life. They believe that when we violate these laws, we experience the consequences and that can be painful. Several people implied they suffer simply anticipating the eventual, logical consequences of abusing our environment.

Postulate 15. Suffering is overwhelming.

Five *Survey On Suffering* responders reported that suffering is the inability to deal with circumstances that are either outside of one's control or beyond one's ability to cope. One said, "Feeling out of control can fall into the category of suffering as well." Suffering is the overwhelming helplessness of feeling either that one's circumstances are out of control or one's self is out of control.

Postulate 16. The opposite of suffering is . . .

Several survey responders offered ideas on the opposite of suffering. They said that suffering is the opposite of ease, comfort and happiness.

Postulate 17. There are skillful and unskillful means for dealing with suffering.

Several *Survey On Suffering* participants suggested that pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional. One person reported that he or she had heard this, but is not sure it's true. One person expressed the opinion that most people deal with suffering by distracting or deluding themselves in order to escape it. Several intimated that there are skillful means for dealing with suffering, and several others reported that it's possible to transform and cease suffering. In defining suffering one person said suffering results from having an untrained mind, adding that "the mind can be trained to overcome suffering and the hardships of life." Another said that accepting and dwelling intimately with pain can transform suffering into bare sensation without an accompanying judgment.

How to ease and respond to suffering are the subjects of other Core Survey questions and will be covered in detail in SECTIONS four and five of this report.

Postulate 18. There are infinite manifestations of suffering.

At least thirty-five participants defined suffering by the specific ways it manifests in their lives. While one person said that suffering has "infinite causes," others were very specific about the way suffering shows up in their own lives.

Following is an excerpted, abridged and summarized list of specific experiences *Survey On Suffering* participants qualified as constituting suffering. Number(s) at the end of each line cross-reference to the complete list of survey definitions in APPENDIX i.

- Suffering is not having the basic essentials of life (food, shelter, clothing) to survive. 54
- Suffering is physical . . . examples are hunger and pain. 91
- Suffering arises with aging as physical issues trigger fears of the future. 44
- Suffering arises with fear about death and impermanence. 44
- Suffering results from ill health or the loss of health (with no quality of life).
- Suffering is discomfort, disease, sadness, loss and pain or a combination. 42
- Suffering is *Welschmerz*, i.e., weariness of the difficulties of life. 100
- Suffering is everything that feels bad, from the most intense and unbearable agony to the subtlest feelings of irritation or judgment. 58
- Suffering is experiencing something unpleasant. 61
- Suffering is usually caused by some kind of loss or injury. 87
- Suffering is the loss of something highly valued and precious, resulting in loneliness, misery and wanting. 54
- Suffering is losing a loved one. 78, 93, 69, 12, 94
- Suffering is anxiety about physical or mental issues.
- Stress is suffering. 80
- Suffering is the affective dimension of pain. 70
- Suffering is ongoing, acute unhappiness. 70
- Suffering is sadness, grief, anguish, pain and a feeling of hopelessness. 64
- Suffering occurs when we can't control our emotions. 37, 41
- Suffering is characterized by sadness and regret. 44
- Suffering is feeling separate and closed in mind, body and heart. 2, 30
- Suffering is not getting what we want.
- Suffering is getting what we don't want.
- Suffering is being separated from one's intrinsic goodness. 85
- Suffering is psychological . . . profound shame, hating oneself. 91
- Suffering is failing to see that something causes others harm. 91
- Suffering arises when empathizing with the suffering of others. 45
- Suffering occurs when I continue to make choices that are not good for me. 90
- Suffering is a lack of freedom in mind or heart. 30
- Suffering is being unable to relieve the suffering of others. 30
- Suffering occurs when a solution to our troubles evades us. 30
- Suffering is the result of a traumatic situation that depletes one's resilience. 50
- Suffering is the inability to see past pain to a broader perspective. 44
- Suffering is feeling out of control. 67
- Suffering involves feeling stuck. 24
- Suffering is when you have pain and can't do anything to relieve it. 93
- Suffering is going through a challenging experience. 69
- Suffering is things that are unfair, hard to change or can't be changed in my lifetime. 60

Postulate 19. Suffering has serious results and ramifications:

One person said that suffering has tragic consequences, but didn't specify or give examples of what those consequences might be. Another said that suffering causes a sense of disconnection from the world and from others, while another suggested it causes us to feel out of synch with the flow of life. One person said that suffering is seeing the natural world as broken, resulting in an inability to experience oneself in harmony with time and life. Still another said suffering "takes something out of you," depleting one's resilience. Several others either defined suffering as *fear* or said it causes fear. One person concluded that prolonged suffering makes the activities of daily life difficult, and it affects one's ability to behave normally.

Summary Observations About Survey Participants' Definitions of Suffering

The core themes outlined in the *Survey On Suffering* participants' **19 Postulates That Define Suffering** are not new knowledge, new data or new information. They are as old as human history. They are representative of and chronicled in the annals of collective human knowledge and consciousness. They are typified in the teachings of the world's spiritual, religious and cultural ideologies. For example, a majority of the **19 Postulates That Define Suffering** can be identified in the Buddhist scriptures known as the Pali Canon, which are listed in the BIBLIOGRAPHY on pages 67 through 69.

In the days, weeks and even months after I distributed the *Survey on Suffering* to one hundred forty potential participants, many of those who agreed to participate reported back to me that the survey had sparked deeper contemplation and rumination about the subject of suffering.

Several survey participants told me that they had never thought about these questions before. Many said they had to really think about how they would define suffering. Others said they had never stopped before to think about whether they had suffered in their lives.

As you will see as you read on, quite surprisingly some participants reported that they had *never* suffered, according to their own definitions of suffering. Other's said they'd always just assumed a level of suffering in their lives, while still others reported that they had never thought of the sensation of being out of sync with the universe or out of sync with their expectations of themselves as suffering.

I did not categorize survey answers according to the religious traditions reported by survey participants, although given more time this would have been interesting to examine. I did note however, that people who were raised as Christians and still practice Christianity tended to describe suffering as the result of major life traumas, such as natural or man-made disasters and terminal illness. Christians tended to be among those who reported that being out of alignment with their expectations of themselves does not classify as suffering. [See SECTION 5, TABLES 4 and 5.]

Even among the approximately forty potential survey participants who did not return the survey, a fair percentage sought me out to discuss the survey. Most who talked with me about not completing the survey said that they had intended to reply, but just hadn't been able to find the time. Many of these people also admitted that they had never given much consideration to the survey questions before.

During the first weeks and months after the survey was disseminated, I was surprised at how often one of the survey recipients initiated a group conversation about the survey, inviting others into discussions about one or more of the survey questions. Several survey recipients told me that they had been raising the survey questions with friends and business associates, both in one-on-one and group settings. To my delight it seems the survey inspired a lot of critical thinking and conversation about suffering.

Finally, I was surprised that no one defined *loneliness* as suffering or equated suffering with loneliness. The American Association of Retired Persons - AARP commissioned a June 2010 survey of adults 45 and older. The survey concluded, "More than 44 million [American] adults *suffer* from chronic loneliness."¹⁹ The AARP article explores the serious consequences on health and longevity that result from unmitigated loneliness. The article also coincidentally identifies a list of options and activities for mitigating loneliness. The AARP strategies for mitigating loneliness mirror the very strategies *Survey On Suffering* participants reported for responding to suffering, including volunteerism. These strategies for mitigating suffering are outlined in SECTIONS 6 and 7 of this report.

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¹⁹ Brad Edmondson, "All The Lonely People," [AARP The Magazine](#) November/December 2010: 53-78.

SECTION 5. RELATING TO SUFFERING

Survey Participants Reveal Whether They Perceive Themselves As Having Suffered

Survey On Suffering QUESTION 2 inquired,

“Do you consider yourself to have suffered, either in the past or presently?”

Tallies of *Survey On Suffering* participants’ answers to this question are presented in [Table 4](#) below.

TABLE 4. HAVE YOU SUFFERED?

	Survey Participants	Yes, I Have Suffered	No, I Have Not Suffered	Did Not Respond
Female	58	54	3	1
Male	42	37	5	0
Total	100	91	8	1

Interesting statistics and observations relative to the answers to this question:

- 99 out of 100 people who participated in the *Survey on Suffering* responded to this question.
- 92 participants reported having experienced suffering at some point in their lives.
- 7 participants, 3 of whom are female and 5 of whom are male, reported that they do not consider themselves as ever having suffered, based on their own definitions and descriptions of suffering. It would be interesting to follow up with these individuals for further investigation.

Survey On Suffering QUESTION 3 inquired,

“From time to time, many of us feel out of sync with the world or out of alignment with our own expectations for ourselves.”

“When this happens for you, does it show up as suffering? i.e., do you relate to this experience as suffering?”

Yes / No / Doesn't Apply To Me

TABLE 5. LACK OF ALIGNMENT EQUATES TO SUFFERING

“Being Out of Sync = Suffering”	Yes	No	Sometimes	Doesn't Apply To Me
	57	37	3	0

Interesting statistics and notes relative to the answers to this question:

- 97 out of 100 people who answered the survey responded to this question.
- All 7 persons who reported never having suffered in SURVEY QUESTION 2 (as recorded in **Table 4** on the preceding page) answered “No” to SURVEY QUESTION 3. Considering themselves as never having suffered, they replied “No” to this question rather than that the question did not apply to them. Once again, this perception of having never suffered among this small but significant group of survey participants is intriguing and deserves additional investigation and follow-up. These 7 responses are further explored in the following SECTION, under Strategy 8 of SECTION 6 on page 37.
- Most interesting is that 3 responders wrote in an answer that wasn't offered. They volunteered that they “*Sometimes*” experience feeling out of sync as suffering, and sometimes they do not. They explained that they used to experience feeling out of sync as suffering but have trained their minds not to do this any longer.
- The variation in how people answered this question belies a basic problem with how the question was posed.

* * *

SECTION 6. RESPONDING TO OUR OWN SUFFERING

Responding to Our Own Suffering

Survey On Suffering QUESTION 4 inquired, “**What do you do to ease your own suffering?**”

All one hundred (100) of the *Survey On Suffering* participants responded to the fourth survey question. In response to question number 4, survey participants shared their insights and strategies for easing their own suffering. Their survey responses were tabulated, then grouped and categorized according to common themes [see Appendix ii, on page 60]. Analysis of their answers revealed the following eight strategies, which are listed below and then described in detail on the following pages.

Survey Participants Employ Eight Strategies to Ease Their Own Suffering

- Strategy 1.** **Exercise Acceptance and Equanimity**
- Strategy 2.** **Seek Refuge in Contemplative Practices**
- Strategy 3.** **Palliate Physical Pain and Promote Physical Healing**
- Strategy 4.** **Nurture Deeper Understanding of the Situation**
- Strategy 5.** **Take Skillful Actions that Promote Self Care and Release**
- Strategy 6.** **Do Things For Others**
- Strategy 7.** **Resist or Ignore the Situation; Give Up**
(Emotional and Behavioral Transference)
- Strategy 8:** **No Need to Ease My Suffering, Since I Have Never Suffered**

Strategy 1. Exercise Acceptance and Equanimity (Turn Toward The Suffering)

In facing their own suffering, 30% of the *Survey On Suffering* participants reported exercising acceptance and equanimity in the midst of physical, mental or emotional hardship. They note the importance of acknowledging when they are suffering. They allow their suffering to rise, then be with it, and then let it pass.

Survey responders who exercise acceptance and equanimity practice embracing the present moment just as it is. They sit with or turn toward their suffering. They allow themselves to feel sadness and grief, and open themselves fully to experience their suffering. Others nurture a sense of spaciousness around their suffering, saying, "I accommodate it all, allowing myself to settle into my immensity."

Some exercise equanimity by remembering that suffering is inevitable. They notice and resist the natural urge to rush to fix things to try to bring a swift end to their suffering. They remind themselves that suffering is impermanent, and therefore temporary and transitory. They remember that suffering will change and pass. They patiently allow time to mitigate their suffering.

Strategy 2. Seek Refuge in Contemplative Practices

Nearly 40% of one hundred *Survey On Suffering* participants indicated they seek refuge in some form of contemplative practice in response to their own suffering.

Twenty-eight out of one hundred survey responders said they meditate or sit with awareness of their suffering and, or breathe with it. Seven responders, representing the spectrum of religious traditions, reported that they pray. One person said she works through her personal suffering through Latihan, a spiritual practice of the Subud religion in which one "surrenders completely to the power of almighty God."

[See: [Subud and Footnote 18 on page 19.](#)]

Four survey participants said they take refuge in their faith. Others said they have faith in their spiritual practice, the precepts of their spiritual tradition, or the recitation of sutras. Seven participants said they seek solitude, silence, stillness and grounding in times of suffering. One person noted that stillness in contemplative practice is the context in which she receives inspiration.

Seven people reported that they immerse themselves in love or Metta (loving kindness meditation). Some said they nurture feelings of loving kindness, "especially for myself," and one person noted that this practice helps reduce fear.

One person reported taking refuge in meditation retreats, while two others take refuge in the practice of mindful walking or walking meditation.

One person reported the importance of stopping the obsessive thinking that accompanies suffering. Another two others reported that shifting their awareness from mental activity to the physical experience of those thoughts somewhere in their bodies.

Strategy 3: Palliate Physical Pain and Promote the Healing of the Body

A full 17% of survey responders emphasized the importance, and even primacy, of palliating physical pain, before attending to mental distress or emotional pain.

Survey On Suffering participants recognized two broad categories of pain and suffering. They differentiated between *physical pain* that accompanies illness, disease, disaster and misfortune, as compared with *mental or emotional pain and anguish*. Survey responders agreed that overwhelming physical pain has to be controlled in order to have any hope of attenuating the accompanying mental or emotional pain and suffering.

Survey responders noted the importance of seeking timely medical care and following a prescribed treatment plan if one is recommended. Some survey responders said they actively participate in the physical healing process by holding the intention to heal, as well as taking the appropriate medications to promote healing and relieve pain. They stressed the importance of getting rest and having solitude and quiet in healing from physical infirmities.

Strategy 4: Nurture Deeper Understanding of the Situation

The majority of *Survey On Suffering* participants said in one way or another that a critical step in addressing their own suffering is nurturing their understanding of the situation that precipitated their suffering. A full 63% of responders identified a practice that contributed to this theme.

Survey responders said they work at examining the reasons they feel like they do in order to understand their suffering. This practice involves identifying and understanding the root cause of their suffering.

One responder noted the importance of seeing “into my story about the suffering,” meaning that he stops to consider what he simply accepts as fact or reality about the cause or the experience of the suffering. Three people said they get concrete, drop their illusions and look at the situation rationally. Two people reported that they reset their expectations of themselves, and another said she doesn’t judge herself. Three people said they remind themselves not to identify with their feelings because the feeling is not who they are. Another said, “I forgive myself and I forgive others” for the situation.

Seven participants noted the importance of widening their perspective as a way to attain a balanced or realistic view of their situation. One person said he has a poster of the solar system on his office wall and uses it to regain perspective. Three people said they remember that being separate or alone is an illusion.

Six responders said they nurture joy and gratitude with a focus on the positive things in their lives. Three said they are thankful their situation and suffering are not worse, noting that others have much more cause for suffering in their lives.

Survey responders whose QUESTION 4 answers underscore this strategy said they open themselves to look for what they can learn from the situation so as to not repeat behaviors or choices that lead to suffering. They said they notice their habit energies, rethink their approach, and identify specific things they can do to change the situation. Another responder said he seeks to discern and distinguish between what he can and cannot control. He then strives to accept the things he cannot control, and works to change the things he can. Two people said they look for answers and solutions inside themselves rather than outside. Another responder said she devotes herself to working it out, where two others said they decide whether to hold on to the suffering or let it go.

Two responders reported reminding themselves that pain and suffering are not the same thing. They work to distinguish which is which, and address each accordingly.

One person reported exploring on-line for ideas that might serve the situation.

Strategy 5: Take Skillful Actions that Promote Self-Care and Release

A majority of *Survey on Suffering* participants listed one or more ways they make time for themselves or do something they enjoy in order to respond to and relieve their own suffering. Making and taking personal time are the assumed and self-evident prerequisites for many of the activities that are assembled under this practice strategy.

Connection . . .

A full 34% of survey participants referenced the importance of connecting with another human being as a primary way of responding to suffering in their own lives. When faced with situations of personal suffering, thirty-four survey responders reported that they talk to a friend, spouse, partner, sibling, counselor, therapist or priest. One person confided that the “story” she tells others about her suffering is never as loaded with emotional charge as the story she tells herself.

Two survey responders noted the importance of renewing relationships with those they perceive as causing or influencing their suffering. One responder said she connects with others in her same situation. Another said she seeks out positive social situations, while another said she takes refuge in her spiritual community. One person noted that she plays with her child. Three others reported that they spend time with their pets or animals.

Nature as nurture . . .

The second most reported skillful action people offered for responding to their own suffering was being in nature. Twelve people noted the healing quality of taking walks or hikes outdoors, and several noted the healing power of activities such as watching the clouds and listening to birdsong.

Exercise . . .

Another ten survey responders identified ways of getting exercise like riding a bike, doing kung fu, and running, as an important energetic outlets for managing their own suffering. Four said that they do dance, yoga or movement, and two said they garden.

Accomplishment . . .

One person said he uses the energy of suffering to get things done. Four people said they take steps to address the root causes of their suffering, while two others stated the importance of identifying things they can control and then doing those things. Another responder noted the importance of doing something that has a productive result, just so she can point to at least one thing in life that is going well.

Creative Expression . . .

An equal number of responders said they address their own suffering by reading or writing. Six responders said they write, write in a diary, or write in a journal. Six others said they read books or poems, read books about their spiritual tradition, or read something inspirational. Three people reported that they express themselves creatively, presumably artistically.

Letting it out . . .

One survey responder confided that her response to personal suffering is to panic, while six others reported that they cry and two others noted that they scream. One of these two reported that she practices the primal scream in order to release endorphins.

Nobody knows like Jesus . . .

One survey participant reported that she relates her suffering to Jesus' suffering, and four others said they give their burdens to God, Jesus or Angels.

Rewiring . . .

Two survey responders reported listening to music as a way to relax, while another practices deep relaxation, and yet another takes hot baths. A fifth person uses neurofeedback. One person said she smiles to her suffering and another said she does things to touch her suffering, like "completing this survey."

Primitive as can be . . .

Four survey participants reported easing their suffering by having media-free time, where they avoid the use of technology including TV, phones, computers, email, etc.

Strategy 6: Do Things for Others

Nineteen percent (19%) of *Survey On Suffering* participants reported that shifting their focus *off* of themselves and *on* to others is an important way they ease their own suffering.

Survey responders who underscored this practice strategy noted the importance of grounding themselves through focusing on the needs of others and taking care of others. For them, taking care of others is not a strategy of distraction; it helps them put their own suffering into perspective. Five responders reported finding such an outlet by volunteering in some capacity. Two responders said they achieve this by going to an actual geographical location where others are suffering, such as a war zone, and bear witness to the suffering of others. One survey responder, a bona fide entrepreneur I have known since college,

reported that faced with his own suffering, he will start initiatives and even new companies that address the root causes of his and other people's suffering, and, or he will inspire others to do so.

Strategy 7: Resist or Ignore the Situation, Give Up

(Engage in Emotional and Behavioral Transference*)

While survey responses listed under Strategy 6 are about compassionately redirecting the energy of personal suffering into bearing witness to and mitigating the suffering of others, the activities grouped together under Strategy 7 primarily reflect distraction, resistance, resignation and defeat.

Distraction . . .

Eighteen out of one hundred Suffering Survey participants reported circumventing their own personal suffering by distracting themselves, staying busy, diverting their attention away from their suffering and engaging in mental escapism. Six people reported that they deal with their suffering by buying and consuming food, drugs, alcohol, tobacco and marijuana; self-medicating as more than one person put it. Two people reported that they go shopping or go shopping with friends.

One person reported that she reads escapist novels, while another said he explores on-line as a distraction. A third admitted that he used to watch pornography as a way to temporarily escape his troubles. Three others said they watch TV, cartoons or DVDs.

Work, work, work . . .

Three people admitted that they respond to their own suffering by plunging into their work. Another confided that she tries to avoid conflict at all costs. One person said, "I know when I'm suffering, because I talk too fast."

Complain . . .

One person said she whines about her situation to others and another said he "wallows in it." Though no one out-rightly said they blame others for their suffering, one person said suffering is imposed from the outside and another said, "When I am suffering, there is nothing I can do about it."

Strategy 8: No Need to Ease My Suffering, Since I Have Never Suffered

Seven *Survey On Suffering* participants reported that they have never suffered, and therefore are unacquainted with strategies for easing their suffering. Three of these responders are women and four are men. One female responder said if she ever found herself suffering, she would distract herself by focusing on other activities. Another said she would depend upon her mental strength to overcome suffering. The third female responder said that when she feels down, she pulls herself out of it. She emphasized that she does not qualify "feeling down" as suffering.

One male responder said he wasn't sure what he'd do about it if he ever suffered. The other males said the question simply doesn't apply to them and that they lead a charmed life. The fourth male in this category said he experiences "setbacks" from time to time, but does not qualify these setbacks as suffering. He reported that he uses these setbacks to understand his relationship to the world.

One might argue that at issue here is disparity of agreement on a broad or narrow definition of suffering. This might tempt some readers to dismiss or explain away these seven outliers as simply issues of semantics. Indeed some of those who reported never having suffered tended to define and describe suffering in more catastrophic terms. Others who reported they have never suffered, however, did not define suffering as requisitely extreme or catastrophic.

In the spirit of simply *bearing witness*, I have elected to accept their answers and perspectives without criticism or challenge. Moreover, 7% of survey participants reporting they have never suffered is statistically significant, and bears acknowledgement and probably further investigation.

This finding is particularly interesting, considering many of the people who readily reported having suffered in the course of their lifetimes could not let a simple "YES" suffice in answer to SURVEY QUESTION 2. Some qualified their answers with phrases like, "of course," or "who hasn't?" and "would anyone actually say they have never suffered?"

People whose frame of reference is that *everyone* has suffered at some point in their life will be surprised that seven out of one hundred responders said they had never suffered. Some readers will likely find themselves disbelieving or at least doubting these seven individuals. I invite my readers to take refuge in *not knowing* and explore how this particular finding might change your perspective, as it did mine.

* * *

SECTION 7. RESPONDING TO THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

What Survey Participants Do About The Suffering of Others

Survey On Suffering QUESTION 5 inquired, “How do you respond to suffering in the world?”

All 100 of the survey participants responded to the fifth survey question. In response to question number 5, participants shared their insights and objectives for responding to the suffering of others. Their survey responses were tabulated, then grouped and categorized around common themes [see Appendix iii, pg. 63]. Analysis of their answers revealed the following seven objectives that survey participants work to achieve in response to suffering in the world. These Seven Objectives are listed below and are then described in detail on the following pages.

Seven Objectives For Responding to the Suffering of Others

- Objective 1: Exercise Acceptance**
- Objective 2: Express My Compassion Through Contemplative Practice**
- Objective 3: Care For Myself to Maintain Balance and Resilience**
- Objective 4: Hold Compassionate Intentions and Aspirations For Self-Transformation**
- Objective 5: Take Compassionate Action**
- Objective 6: Grieve; and Nurture Connection, Empathy and Emotion**
- Objective 7: Actively Avoid and Resist The Suffering of Others**

Seven Objectives for Responding To The Suffering of Others

Objective 1. Exercise Acceptance

Exercising acceptance is one of seven core objectives that surfaced among responders to the *Survey On Suffering*. Of one hundred total survey participants, seventeen indicated that exercising acceptance is a fundamental aspect of their approach to responding to the suffering of others.

Several reported that they try to open themselves as much as possible to the suffering of others, not turning away or running away from it. They used affirmative reflections such as “I allow it,” and “I be with it.” One person wrote, “I acknowledge my habits of aversion in order to transform fear and resistance into openness.”

People who exercise acceptance reported that they acknowledge and accept suffering as a natural part of life, noting that it is in our nature as human beings to suffer. Four responders acknowledged that they suffer when others suffer, and said it is important for them to acknowledge that their own suffering arises because of the suffering of other beings. Three responders said they practice seeing other’s suffering as their own.

Objective 2. Express My Compassion and Gratitude Through Contemplative Practices

Expressing compassion through contemplative practice is an inner practice directed outwardly with the intention of benefiting others who are suffering. The objective here is to offer contemplative practice on behalf of others.

Six out of one hundred responders said they pray for those who are suffering, and several reported they pray specifically that the needs of those who are suffering will be met.

Twenty-three survey participants reported meditating on or contemplating the suffering of others, and fourteen of these said they offer Tonglen or Metta (loving-kindness meditation). One person categorized this practice as “sending compassionate vibes.”

Five responders said the suffering of others reminds them to nourish gratitude for not having more suffering in their own lives.

Two responders reported they seek stillness and quiet in response to others’ suffering, while another said she contemplates to assess the problems that cause and are caused by suffering.

Objective 3. Care for Myself to Maintain Balance and Resilience

Survey On Suffering participants noted a third core objective for responding to the suffering of others. It is the importance of maintaining balance and resiliency. Thirteen out of one hundred survey responders said they try to not let the suffering of others overwhelm them. Instead they actively working to maintain their equanimity and “re-stabilize” themselves. One person said it this way, “I keep my own head on straight.” Two others acknowledged that they work to not get caught in dualistic notions such as *good and evil*, or *victim and perpetrator*.

Two participants reported they take solace in the small but meaningful differences they make in the lives of others, while four responders acknowledged they see the situation from a place of balance; they do what they *can* do and “don’t feel responsible to fix the whole worlds ills.” One responder said she doesn’t feel responsible for things she cannot impact.

Finally, another participant acknowledged knowing “when to rejuvenate myself,” and two others reported knowing when to “do a media fast.”

Objective 4. Hold Compassionate Intentions and Aspirations For Self-Transformation

Practices listed under this objective are inner or contemplative activities that are directed toward self-transformation. Those who practice in this way hold the intention that their own self-transformation will either help relieve the suffering of others or will at least not increase the suffering in the world.

Twenty-one out of one hundred *Survey On Suffering* participants (21%) reported that they live or try to live in a way that doesn’t perpetuate or create suffering. One person said it plainly, “I work on myself.” Another said, “I try to make choices on a daily basis with how I spend my money and time, and how I get from here to there that will have an impact on global suffering.” He also wrote, “The essence of my spiritual life is to live lightly.”

Five responders who identified as Buddhist reported that their practice, study and attempt to follow and embody the Buddhist precepts are ways they respond with intention to the suffering in the world. One of those five said, “I take my guidance (for responding to suffering) from the precepts.”

Five survey responders noted that they hold the intention to relieve suffering in the world in order to awaken their own hearts to offer healing in whatever ways they can. Another noted an intention to maintain awareness of suffering in order to nurture sensitivity. Four others said they seek to understand the truth of the situation, and then act out of that understanding. One of these four described this objective, saying, “I sit and listen to the cries of the world in order to allow a response to arise.” Two survey participants said they hold the intention to end suffering in the world without attachment to the outcome or any particular result. Another reported that she dances for universal peace.

Objective 5. Take Compassionate Action

This objective incorporates and synthesizes a plenary list of specific ways *Survey On Suffering* participants help relieve suffering in the world.

Do something . . .

Forty-four out of one hundred survey responders (44%) reported in one way or another that they respond to the suffering of others by doing whatever it is they can do. Eighteen people reported that they look for ways to help or ask what they can do, and then do it. Several referenced engaging authentically and doing good works. Two of these said, "I ask why?" and "I ask what do I do next?" Five of these forty-four participants described getting involved directly and doing something active. Another said, "I get involved and see what unfolds." The point they all stressed is doing at least *something* to mitigate the suffering of others.

One person said she responds to the suffering of others by just being there for them. Others said they seek to understand and then do whatever someone needs from them in that moment. Another said, "I connect with that (suffering) person," while another said, "I offer aid and comfort." One responder said that all the suffering in the world makes her kinder to the people she encounters throughout her day. Six of the forty-four said that, relative to the suffering of others they think globally and act locally.

Listen . . .

Nine survey participants said that one of the ways they respond when others are suffering is by listening. "I make myself available to listen," wrote one, and "I compassionately acknowledge their pain," said another.

Give . . .

Nearly half of the people who responded to the *Survey On Suffering* reported that they give money to charities and causes they care about it. Forty-seven people said they give directly to a variety of local, national and international causes, including relief organizations, the Red Cross, Christian organizations that work in the world to help others, food banks, as well as to those who have simply fallen on hard times.

One woman noted that giving at least allows her to feel she's at least doing something, but she still feels sad about the suffering of those she is supporting. On the shadow side of giving, one responder acknowledged giving out of guilt, while another said he said his financial gifts are in part to ease his conscience. [See also Objective 6.]

Work the system . . .

Seventeen survey responders reported that they respond to suffering in the world by engaging politically. They said they vote, write letters, protest, and get involved in social justice issues. One person summed it up, "I elect compassionate people who support human rights."

Volunteer . . .

Fourteen people listed volunteering as a way they respond to suffering in the world. Most were not specific about how or where they volunteer, or even how much time or how often. One noted that she drives seniors to appointments, and two others reported that they serve on the boards of health and human service organizations. Several responders serve on boards or committees of their spiritual communities.

Livelihood . . .

Four survey responders reported that they either have or had a livelihood in a service profession. One reported “living life in response to global suffering.” An acupuncturist/Chinese medicine doctor wrote, “My profession helps preserve ancient knowledge, tools and techniques for relieving suffering.”

Focus where I have influence . . .

Two responders reported that suffering in the world sharpens their focus on devoting the effort to make their own family healthy and stable.

Educate and enlist . . .

Two survey responders said that they educate themselves, reading about “hotspots” of suffering around the world. Four others said they educate others about the situations of people who are suffering, and then they enlist others in responding to these causes. One person, an entrepreneur, said he promotes and spreads ideas he believes will lead to social and political change, while simultaneously recruiting others to bring these ideas to life.

Offering help that isn't welcomed . . .

One person reported that she involves herself in other people's lives with good intentions, but it isn't always welcomed.

Objective 6. Grieve; and Nurture Connection, Empathy and Emotion

The responses that constitute Objective 6 arise among people who experience a profound emotional connection with other beings that are suffering. Where Objective 1 is about *accepting the reality* of others' suffering, Objective 6 is about cultivating bodhicitta, an enlightened and limitless heart-mind relationship with those who are suffering.

Four *Survey On Suffering* participants reported that the suffering of others causes them to cry or weep. Another five reported feelings of deep compassion toward those who are suffering. Four other responders said either, “My heart aches for them,” or “their suffering tugs at my heart.” An additional five reported they feel sad or bad, while one of these five further described the feeling as “a sense of heaviness in my body.”

Two survey participants said they feel frustration or righteous anger when confronted with the breadth and scope of suffering in the world. Two others said they empathize with those are suffering, while another said he tries to understand their situation. One responder reports that his own suffering is a reminder to connect with the suffering of others, meaning that he's aware that he's not suffering alone. One person said he notices that by

nurturing his sense of connection with those who are suffering, his “compassion increases over time.”

Objective 7. Avoid and Resist the Suffering of Others

Twenty-five out of one hundred survey participants said, in one way or another, that they turn away or distract themselves from the suffering of others and the suffering in the world. For these twenty-five individuals, their primary objective relative to the suffering of others is to protect themselves from it, walling off the suffering of others and distracting themselves from feeling anything in relation to it. Objective 7 is the single most unanticipated result of the *Survey On Suffering*.

Six responders reported that in response to the suffering in the world, they “shut it out, tune it out, turn away, close down or isolate” themselves. Six others said they turn away in order to protect themselves from drowning in it or being overwhelmed by others’ suffering. Three others said they hold suffering away from themselves, and another two reported they ignore it. One of those two wrote, “With hunger, poverty, injustice and illness, I feel overwhelmed and ignore it.” One person said, “I do things to distract myself from thinking about sad things,” and three others said, “I don’t watch TV news” or “I change the channel.” Three responders acknowledged that the suffering of others results in their feeling guilty.

One person admitted, “I’m not as aware about suffering as I should be,” while seven others reported feeling overwhelmed by suffering. Four of these further clarified by saying all the suffering in the world leaves them feeling “useless, hopeless, helpless and, or angry.” One person stated that when it comes to the suffering of others, “I don’t think globally,” while another said, “I am indifferent.”

One responder said, “I notice my reactivity and rejection of other’s suffering, and wonder.” Another said she just watches as a spectator, thinking she should do something. One person reported not knowing what to do about others’ suffering, while another said, “I put blinders on, as I feel I can’t do much (too help them).” Another said she responds poorly in situations where she doesn’t know the suffering person or persons on a personal basis. One male responder reported that he is cynical and stoic, believing that happiness is up to the individual. Another concluded, “I can’t help them.”

One survey participant said she responds to the suffering in the world by surrounding herself with positive people and another said, “I allow my family priorities to outweigh my inclination to get involved.”

* * *

SECTION 8. SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

What the Buddha Knew . . .

During two years of chaplaincy training the following practices have been my teachers:

- ✚ Being with homelessness, indigence, hunger and every manner of ill-being through contemplative observation;
- ✚ Offering *Free Listening* without judging or reacting;
- ✚ Being a friend and fellow practitioner to a registered sex offender;
- ✚ Serving on personal care teams for sick friends;
- ✚ Offering Reiki in hospice and adult day care for those who are ill and actively dying;
- ✚ Freely sharing my time, skills and other resources with deserving individuals, as well as organizations.

Bearing witness to suffering has subtly but surely transformed my practice, my work, and therefore my life. It has heightened my sensitivity to the suffering in and around me. Simple, bare awareness calms my heart, then quietly informs my thoughts and invites me to take small, natural and logical actions throughout the day.

These actions may make only tiny differences in the lives of my fellow beings. But what amounts to minor differences in others' lives is adding up to an enormous shift in my own consciousness. I am learning to walk more lightly on the earth, a little less distracted. Not selfless by any means; just not as *self-anchored*.

At the beginning of this paper I wrote that I couldn't have anticipated how chaplaincy training and the above referenced practices would bring me face to face with my own suffering. Roshi Joan Halifax²⁰ often says that Upaya Zen Institute's Chaplaincy Program is a *karmic accelerator* for its chaplaincy students. Somehow, earnestly preparing to do this work in the world escalates the urgency with which students on this path confront the shadow side of their own habit energies. This certainly proved true for me personally.

My practice, my teachers and my coursework all conspired together to engage me in owning and working through life-long blockages that were steeped in unrecognized *and therefore unresolved* personal suffering.

²⁰ Joan Halifax Roshi is Founder, Abbot, and Head Teacher of Upaya Zen Center, a Buddhist monastery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

With this wealth of personal, observational and practical experience informing me, I somehow expected my thesis paper to practically write itself. I couldn't have been more wrong.

When I sat down to write, the words just wouldn't come. Writer's block continued as days became weeks and weeks became months. I fell far behind the schedule of writing milestones I had set for myself. It wasn't lost on me that I was *suffering* under a burden of self-imposed and therefore somewhat arbitrary performance expectations. Suffering Postulate 1 reminded me that suffering is in the eye of the beholder. That is, suffering with the inability to express two years of learning in writing felt very real to me.

I expressed my frustration to my two primary Buddhist teachers, Eileen Kiera and Roshi Jack Duffy.²¹ In response, Jack suggested I stop trying so hard to write about *what I know* about suffering. "Forget about what you *know*," Roshi urged. "Write about what you *don't know* about suffering."

So that's precisely what I've done. From start to finish, this paper outlines what I *don't know* about suffering and bearing witness to it.

It's about *not knowing* if someone is suffering until I interact with her or him. It's about *not knowing* how the homeless person will spend the money I gave him or her. It's about *not knowing* whether the Registered Sex Offender I entrust will offend again. It's about *not knowing* what the hospice client needs from me as I walk through his hospital room door. And it's about *not knowing* whether the carefully considered constructive feedback I gave the CEO of the environmental organization will make him a more effective leader.

It's also about *not knowing* that my decision to give something to everyone on the street who asks would so actively engage my husband and partner, Glenn Johnson in bearing witness to suffering. When I first explained the practice to Glenn he said, "You already stop and talk to half the people we pass on the street. Now you're going to stop and talk to *everyone* who asks us for money?!?" However, as this practice became part of our regular routine, it wasn't long before Glenn began saving his quarters and dimes for me to give away as we walked the streets of our downtown neighborhood. Then he started carrying extra pocket change for me in case I ran out, and as time went on, if Glenn noticed someone I had missed, he would say, "Did you get *this* guy? Did you get *that* woman?" Finally, Glenn really swelled my heart one day when I called him from New Mexico during one of my on-site training periods at Upaya. He told me that on his walk to the gym that morning, he had given money to all the people we usually encounter on our way to the gym.

Bearing witness is about *not knowing* whether any of my actions have even the slightest impact on relieving suffering in the world. It's *not knowing* whether anything I do makes

²¹ Jack Duffy Roshi is a Teacher in Robert Aitken Roshi's Diamond Sangha tradition; I regard him as one of his primary teachers and influences. Jack and Eileen Kiera are the primary teachers for Mountain Lamp Community in the Mount Baker foothills of northern Washington State.

any difference whatsoever, *but doing it anyway*. It's living with the intention to help relieve suffering, but not knowing how it will turn out.

Many of the *Survey On Suffering* participants quoted in this report defined *bearing witness to suffering* as simply *allowing* the suffering inherent in each moment, without any preconceived notions about *what* it is or *how* it is, for others or for ourselves.

Bearing witness to suffering is the willingness to be with the wholeness of life, just as Roshi Bernie suggests when he says that bearing witness is "*being* each and every element of the situation."²²

Bearing witness to suffering is including everything, while excluding nothing. Together, *not knowing* and *bearing witness* engage us in "looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now," while "dwelling in stability and freedom."²³ *Not knowing*, *bearing witness* and *taking compassionate action* embody our highest intentions, yet without attachment to the outcomes.

A far as I can tell, this is precisely what the Buddha knew that allowed him to step forward into the world to help relieve suffering.

When I began this two-year period of formal chaplaincy training, I expected that a clear role in chaplaincy work would reveal itself to me. I hoped that by the end of my chaplaincy studies I would somehow sense a calling to a particular area of service, such as end of life care, homelessness or world hunger. When I first sensed the gravitational pull of chaplaincy work, I felt certain the calling would not involve prison work, organizational consulting or environmental activism. Yet my chaplaincy training has drawn me into fulfilling work in each of these areas.

If anything, rather than focusing my interests, formal chaplaincy training has broadened the range of options and expanded my awareness of the nearly limitless possibilities for putting my skills to work in the service of others. Rather than acceding to the beguiling urge to specialize, I am drawn by the breadth of experiences and unrelenting needs that entreat the *generalist*.

I know now for myself what my various teachers have been telling me in one way or another for nearly twenty years. "*Only don't know.*" "*Bear witness.*" And in *not knowing*, step forth confidently and "*take compassionate action.*"²⁴

²² Glassman, *Bearing Witness*

²³ Bhaddekaratta Sutta, *Majjhima Nikaya* 131

²⁴ *Jukai Book*, Upaya Institute and Zen Center (Santa Fe, NM, ed. 2009) *The Three Tenets of the Zen Peacemakers*, page 10.

My walk as a chaplain will be the work of a generalist. In order to help relieve suffering in the world I simply live with mindful awareness, ready to respond to the next opportunity that presents itself. I'll *know* it when I see it.

Better yet, I'll *not know* it when I see it.

* * *

**What the Buddha knew . . .
that allowed him to step forward in the world
to help relieve suffering:**

Only Don't Know

*Taking refuge and entering the stream of engaged practice,
I am determined to plunge into the unknown,
giving up fixed ideas about the universe and myself.*

Bear Witness

*I further commit myself to bearing witness
by encountering each creation with respect and dignity and
allowing myself to be touched by the joys and pain of the universe.*

Take Compassionate Action

*I invite all hungry spirits into the mandala of my practice
and commit my energy and my love to the healing of myself,
the earth, humanity and all creations.²⁵*

* * * * *

²⁵ Ibid.

MORE QUESTIONS / FURTHER STUDY

A dear friend and fellow chaplain, Sharon Ghamari told me that a thesis paper is a once in a lifetime opportunity to wholeheartedly invest time, as well as the mental and physical energy necessary, to thoroughly investigate a difficult, deep and personally perplexing question. Sharon warned me though, that while a well executed thesis will provide some answers, it would absolutely generate *more* questions.

Following are questions this thesis process on *bearing witness to suffering* has generated:

- **The opposite of suffering is _____?**
Even the wise teachers of the various spiritual traditions I studied differed on this topic. The Dalia Lama wrote that the opposite of suffering is happiness.²⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh and Philip Moffitt²⁷ contend that the absence of suffering is holding no view whatsoever. They assert that even happiness contains the seeds of suffering.²⁸
- **How is suffering a teacher?**
Survey On Suffering participants reported that suffering can be a teacher, but did not necessarily explain the conditions that have to be present for this to happen or the mechanism by which it occurs.
- **What are the consequences of long term suffering?**
Survey participants alluded to suffering having significant and severe consequences. It would be interesting to delve further into people's perceptions about the long-term consequences of unmitigated suffering.
- **Is suffering the pain itself or our response to the pain?**
Survey participants were conflicted on this issue. Perhaps it is both. The topic deserves a closer look. Is suffering the karmic result or logical consequences of our choices and behaviors? In *Every Patient Tells A Story* by Lisa Sanders, she attributes a pithy distinction to Eric Cassell. "Pain, according to Cassell, is an affliction of the body. Suffering is an affliction of the self."
- **Is it possible to be out of synch with the universe or out of synch with nature?**
We can't be out of synch with the universe. We are expressions of the universe. What we do is a natural expression of the universe. Whatever we do the earth accepts it. It may have consequences. Is it human hubris to consider humanity as being extra-natural and therefore unnaturally impacting nature?
- **What is the mechanism by which bearing witness to the suffering of others lessens our own suffering?**

²⁶ Rajiv Mehotra, ed. *The Essential Dalia Lama* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin Group 2005)

²⁷ Phillip Moffitt, *Dancing With Life: Buddhist Insights for Finding Meaning and Joy in the Face of Suffering* (New York, NY: Rodale 2008)

- **Is suffering a choice?**
Some survey participants implied or insisted that suffering is a choice. This postulate deserves further scrutiny and investigation.
- **Why do some people turn away from the suffering of others, while others turn toward it?**
One of the most startling results of the *Survey On Suffering* was that nearly 25% of survey responders reported that they turn away from, ignore or distract themselves from having to deal with the suffering of others in the world. I'd like to know what makes one person turn toward the suffering of others, while another person thinks only of turning away.

What I learned from the doing the survey and would do differently:

I would use Survey Monkey.

Collecting and tabulating the typewritten surveys was time consuming and very complicated. I invested upwards of 75 hours simply sorting the survey answers.

I would simplify the survey questions and not ask open-ended essay questions.

I would give people multiple-choice options making it easier to tabulate.

I would include one-on-one interviews for a selected number of participants.

The results of the *Survey On Suffering* reignited my interest in conducting in-person interviews to look more deeply into suffering.

I would further explore volunteerism.

I am inspired to learn more about the ways people volunteer their time, energy and material resources. I know there are lots of details available from the US Bureau of labor and statistics, but their records include only volunteers in official capacities.

My favorite quotations from *Survey On Suffering* participants:

"We're squishy and every thing else is hard."

"To me, suffering is the extra layer I put on whatever pain, grief, loss, sickness and general fuckedupness I encounter in an effort to explain, justify, give meaning to whatever I am experiencing."

APPENDIX i.

ANSWERS TO SURVEY QUESTION 1. WHAT IS SUFFERING?

The following list contains the full, unedited and unabridged register of definitions *Survey On Suffering* participants submitted in response to the question:

What is suffering? (How do you define the word suffering?)

1. *Suffering to me is a basic experience of unpleasantness. Another word might be pain and it can be associated both physically and mentally or emotionally.*
2. *Ill-being; feelings of separateness, tension, being closed in mind, body, heart.*
3. *A state of being that I cannot accept*
4. *Suffering, for me, is the lack of freedom brought about by ignorance.*
5. *To me, suffering is an emotional state people are in when they are hurting physically or emotionally.*
6. *Ongoing physical or emotional pain.*
7. *My suffering is my mind. My Ego. My suffering is my divided mind. "Suffering," the word that defines all of life.*
8. *A state (either physical or emotional) whereby a person is living the process of life. Suffering is part of human nature and coupled with the ideals of happiness allow us to live our life - we learn to live and become better people as a result of suffering, ultimately helping us to open our eyes to a world far beyond what we see on an everyday basis. Suffering forces us to think about our world and how we live in our world.*
9. *Emotional and physical pain in response to a circumstance judged not right.*
10. *Suffering is the state of feeling real pain. It can be physical, emotional, or a combination. When people lose a loved one (including a pet), they frequently enter into a state of mourning which entails great emotional suffering. When folks experience a significant trauma (war, physical attack, or even divorce), they frequently enter a period of suffering, which usually results in them becoming more hardened emotionally. In my opinion, suffering is subjective with most people allowing it to overwhelm their state of being for a while. Some folks, however, take the loss and the pain much more in stride and use the difficulties to rise even higher in their lives.*
11. *Suffering to me is a basic experience of unpleasantness. Another word might be pain and it can be associated both physically and mentally or emotionally.*

12. *The definition in my computer says "...to experience something or be subjected to something unpleasant." Wow, quite a mild definition. I would say suffering is the state of high distress or discomfort experienced from an outside source. Generally, suffering is not thought of as deserved yet something to endure. We suffer the bad opinions of others; we suffer from an unwanted illness; we suffer from emotional wounds inflicted by others; we suffer when loved ones die or are ill; we suffer when innocent people experience evil.*
13. *I think of suffering as having no relief or hope of relief from anguish and pain; physical, mental and emotional. Suffering feels unending, devastating with tragic consequences.*
14. *Suffering is emotional and intellectual states that put us in a sense of disconnection from the world and others.*
15. *I define it on a personal level as being in a situation that causes me either physical or emotional pain, or both.*
16. *The suffering can be caused by outside influences or self-imposed. That is probably also true of global suffering.*
17. *To suffer is to experience severe mental or physical anguish and not know if or when that anguish will end. I think it is a word like 'hero' that people in our 'comfortable' society tend to overuse and oversimplify. Growing up gay (and knowing it) in a town of 1,500 in southeastern Idaho was fucking miserable but I wouldn't call it suffering.*
18. *I think of suffering as long-term anger, anxiety, or agitation in response to some sort of pain; it is akin to grief. It is the opposite of ease, comfort, or happiness. For me the long-term part is key; it has to either be lasting in-and-of-itself or result in lasting pain that is not easily resolved.*
19. *Raging against "what is" - demanding the world to be somehow different than how it is in any given moment.*
20. *All suffering is caused by an identification to something that is internal or external to our being. We don't feel "suffering" when we lose something or someone towards whom we allow to be "free", something that we never tried to possess. Our suffering means that our happiness depends from this "thing" or this "person", at least relatively. We are so used to this dependence that an opposite idea sounds unrealistic. Suffering allows us to be in contact with the reality. When illusions are in contact with the reality there is suffering. Suffering is in a certain way very connected to our inner freedom. We cannot be more self-centered than when we suffer. Of course this has no relation with physical suffering stemming from famine or diseases.*
21. *Actually suffering has a contextual nature for me. There is the theoretical perspective of prolonged pain and distress. This definition I use when having conversations about nations and people who live in a climate that causes extended damage to mental and physical well being on a global nature. There is situational suffering. This is suffering based on a temporary situation such as an accident or loss of some kind. Then there is personal suffering...that which impacts our mental and physical well being and interrupts our spirit from full engagement with ourselves and our world.*
22. *A state of mind*

23. *Suffering is mental or physical pain or discomfort that is ongoing and may, to the person experiencing it, seem to have no hope of ending. In this sense it is more than just pain, which may be very temporary and with a clear expectation that it will end (e.g., we know we'll get over a painful sunburn).*
24. *I don't have a clear definition, though I know when it's occurring. For me, it often involves a feeling of being stuck internally, with little flow to my emotions and thoughts. Everything seems difficult. This unease is frequently compounded by the awareness that the difficulty is self-created. Though that doesn't help alleviate the suffering. I judge myself for being in this situation. My idea of suffering is almost exclusively concerned with my mental attitude towards what is happening in the moment and not in the content of the moment itself. In other words, I believe that it is not a particular situation that leads to suffering but how my mind holds and deals with that situation. My mind can make hell out of heaven or heaven out of hell.*
25. *I define the word "suffering" as a sad and uncomfortable feeling or state of being when things do not seem to be going well in one's life.*
26. *A very painful experience to someone, that is normally (but not necessarily) caused by something out of their control.*
27. *Suffering is an intense form of pain, be it physical, emotional or mental anguish. Suffering has an aspect of enduring for a sustained period - such as an emotional pain which is not processed or worked through - may become suffering. It is possible to transform and cease our suffering although not necessarily so with pain.*
28. *The physical, emotional, and/or mental infliction (and can be self-inflicted) that can be current, or from the past that stays with us and causes us, at a minimum, to be unhappy, and certainly more than that. It's like carrying a burden that continues to torture us past the actual incident.*
29. *Pain or distress caused by circumstances, either real or imagined.*
30. *Un-ease; dis-comfort; lack of freedom in mind and heart. Ultimately, the feeling of being separate, apart. Much of my own suffering stems from the feeling of being unable to fix things, to solve things, to free other beings from suffering.*
31. *I would generally feel this is when things/life gets too out of control, due to one's own actions or from things out of your personal control. It can be actual pain (disease or injury) or it can be emotional – when you just don't know how to fix/solve problems or just the number of problems is overwhelming. It can also be plain heartbreak from lost love or problems with children (my own personal past issue). I think suffering usually comes when I feel there is no clear action for me to take or really nothing I can do about a problem/situation, but wait as it is out of my hands. If there is action I can take, I don't feel like I'm suffering. Life may be a bit hard until the situation is fixed/over, but I don't feel like I'm suffering so much and there is usually a time frame that you can know the situation will be better in X number of days/months, etc.*
32. *Suffering is a hurt; may be physical pain or emotional pain.*
33. *I would define suffering as the mental agitation and anguish that occurs when we want our current experience to be other than what it actually is.*

34. *Experiencing pain, whether physical, emotional, psychic, spiritual...*
35. *To me, suffering can manifest in either a physical or emotional form, and sometimes both. In a physical form, suffering would inflict bodily pain and harm. For example, starvation or a gunshot wound may constitute as physical pain. With regards to emotional suffering, I would define this as something that would cause deep psychological effects. It would have such long term damage/impact that our decisions, actions would be affected and render us incapable of behaving 'normally'. This could be a death in the family, abuse from someone, etc.*
36. *I hear that there will be pain and disappointment in life but suffering is optional. I am not so sure about that as my experience persuades me to regarding it as fundamentally existential... and the circumstances (which are not all equal in their degree and distribution among individuals) only seem to either amplify the suffering – or temper it. And then, most cultivate distraction and/or delusion to escape the suffering of deep life.*
37. *When we can't control the emotions we feel based on a negative experience, the emotions linger, and are negative.*
38. *"Suffering" is being in a state of pain - physical or mental.*
39. *When the mind creates a false scenario regarding importance, desires, other people or events; or when I believe I am a body. (Of course, when I watch a movie, I understand that I am to believe the situation on the screen is 'real!')*
40. *Suffering is holding on to pain, being in physical pain, having an untrained mind in dealing with the hardships of life.*
41. *The feelings, both emotional and/or physical, that come from the unexpected and unwanted withdrawal, imposition or denial (loss) of something or someone that is highly valued.*
42. *Discomfort, disease, sadness, loss, pain, both emotional and physical, or any combination of them.*
43. *I would describe suffering as an emotional effect on myself caused by external forces or situations that I don't seem to have any control over. I believe this is caused by my low self-esteem and feeling "less than" about myself. If the situations are bad enough, the emotional effects will turn into physical pain, which will manifest in me as panic attacks.*
44. *Psychological and physical pain that can be based on direct experience of life or based on more complicated less accurate perceptions that lead to feelings of overwhelm and fear, feelings that seem unmanageable and that result in a lack of awareness of what is really going on in the moment. My particular suffering at this point in my life is often characterized by sadness and regret caused by times when I lack awareness and the ability to act with compassion and caring. Also since I am now almost 60 my body experiences real aches and pains that often trigger fears of the future and impermanence, resistance to pain and an inability to see the beauty in the midst of daily/momentary discomforts.*
45. *Pain, heartache, it is felt physically as well. I feel it in my gut. It is accompanied by sadness or*

crying. One can also suffer physical pain or emotional pain. It can be empathy that accompanies the suffering of your child or patient or friend and you experience it as well.

- 46. I see suffering as on the 'heavy' end of a continuum of discomfort, when I want to but can't readily change my feelings.*
- 47. Suffering is mental and /or physical pain that is hard to deal with. I have not suffered that much compared to most people because I have had a great life. Right now, however, I'm having trouble with suffering by having fear of my future of not being able to breathe. This is suffering that is outside of expectations for myself because I always thought of myself as being healthy.*
- 48. An uncomfortable or painful feeling you would end if you could, but you are not able to at the moment.*
- 49. An intense experience of unpleasantness and aversion associated with pain, harm or threat of harm.*
- 50. Suffering is the result of a traumatic situation - a death, a loss, an emergency - something that happens that takes a little something out of you.*
- 51. Suffering is either an Emotional or Physical pain/condition that you cannot escape or find remedy for.*
- 52. Suffering is a state of mind when the body or the spirit feels a need or a lack that it can't fulfill. It can be physical (as in pain, illness or hurt), psychological (yearning for love, need for community) or spiritual (need to be grounded, find a connection to the spirit). That lack/gap/hole causes a sense of suffering.*
- 53. Feeling out of sync with the flow of life, physical pain, mental anguish. Disconnectedness. Seeing the natural world as broken and misused, unloved.*
- 54. Suffering to me is not having the basic essentials to survive. Food, shelter, clothing, happiness. Or having something precious to you at one point in time and then it being taken away from you, making you lonely, miserable and wanting.*
- 55. To be overwhelmed by pain or grief. Outwardly manifested in many different ways. Infinite causes. Often difficult to self-diagnose when one is in the middle of it. No known solution except for time and love and more time.*
- 56. Suffering is a mental condition where whatever is arising or appearing as internal or external conditions are unacceptable by an individual. As human beings when we experience pain we naturally want it to go away, making these feelings unacceptable. However, while pain may be inevitable, suffering is not. When we accept and dwell intimately with pain, it can be transformed into bare sensation without an accompanying judgment.*
- 57. I consider all of samsara (life) to be suffering, even that which we consider happiness. It is the physical, mental and emotional pain all sentient beings feel. That which we consider pleasure also is suffering as it in itself does not free us of pain. The more and more of it we have, the more and more pain we experience. Suffering is part of life and death. It is the First Noble Truth. I am responding to this question, as I have believed for about 12 years while being in the Tibetan*

Buddhist Tradition. However I am currently in a transition and am reconsidering some of it. Listening to Thich Nhat Hanh, I am wondering if there are other ways of interpreting this. I have not studied his view, or Zen enough to know how it is interpreted for that tradition. While I have not discontinued this view, it is not working for me at this time.

- 58. Everything that feels bad, on physical, emotional, and mental levels, and any other levels I may have forgotten about. Everything from the most intense and unbearable agony to the subtlest feelings of irritation or judgment.*
- 59. Suffering is unpleasant. It's a response/reaction when there is wanting, not wanting and ignorance. It is emotion/sensation without awareness.*
- 60. I think suffering is just the process of living and specifically the parts of life on this planet that I don't like both for myself and for others. Things that are unfair, that are hard to change or perhaps cannot be changed in my lifetime.*
- 61. Suffering is to experience or be subjected to something that is unpleasant. (i.e. "the daughter suffered her mother's dramatics")*
- 62. Suffering for me has 2 distinct components. First, is physical suffering – pain, and the physical discomforts of ailments, accidents and growing older. The second component, to me, is much more prevalent it seems. That is the suffering caused by desire – the desire for life to either be different than it is, or for life to remain the same. It's the suffering in my life when I "live" in the past or the future and not in the present. This type of suffering manifests itself in me as a place devoid of peace – essentially devoid of acceptance, happiness and gratitude.*
- 63. For me, suffering is the painful awareness of my inability to experience myself in harmony with time (the present moment) and all of life (interdependence).*
- 64. Suffering to me means "not being/feeling well". Sadness, grief, anguish, pain and a feeling of helplessness are some words that come to mind when I think of the work suffering.*
- 65. To me, suffering is the extra layer I put on whatever pain, grief, loss, sickness and general fuckedupness I encounter in an effort to explain, justify, give meaning to whatever I am experiencing.*
- 66. SHORT ANSWER: Suffering is not a word - it is a deeply personal and emotional experience.*

LONGER ANSWER: I learned this when I began my clinical internship (many, many, many years ago) I had just left a VISTA job working with poor people and their housing issues - usually emergency situations. My last VISTA client came into the office crying - a very young (probably late teens/early 20's) mother of 2, she had just discovered her food stamps were stolen from her mailbox and she had no money for food for her children for the month. The food stamp office did not believe her and she needed assistance dealing with them as well as her landlord who was required to put locked mail boxes on rentals.

My first client at the university counseling center internship site was a very beautiful young woman (probably about the same age as my last VISTA client). She was dressed well, had a groomed but natural looking hair-style and had made an emergency appointment for that day. She entered my office and tears immediately welled up in her eyes. The cause for her upset was

that she hadn't received the promised weekly check from her father - which, to her, meant she could not purchase the new blouse she wanted, which she had seen in one of the most exclusive shops in town, and therefore she couldn't go to the party she was planning on Friday night.

Well, I managed to sit through that session but I flooded with judgment regarding this young woman's situation. I actually felt a lump in my throat, and anger pushing the surface. Naturally my poor client who was afraid she could not feed her children for the month was prominently on my mind.

As soon as the session ended I walked directly to my supervisors office and told her I did not think I could do this work and why. She listened carefully. After I was finished she asked if I had put both my poor and rich clients on bio-feed back machines how would their suffering be scaled.

I said, "the same," and I couldn't come to terms with it. She simply and kindly asked me: Who are you to judge the clients level of suffering, and (she) encouraged me to inquire deeper with my university client during her next session.

That university client never returned to see me again. I suspect my judgments were not as veiled as I had thought! Later I learned this student returned to the counseling center the following year to work on issues related to being sexually molested by her father and how he paid her to keep the secret. This was a great learning for me that I use each time my personal judgments poke through... and as I have engaged in this practice of noticing my own judgments I have noticed they have diminished.

- 67. Suffering for me is anxiety about physical or mental issues. Feeling out of control can fall in the category of suffering as well.*
- 68. Suffering, to me, is the state of mind when there is little or no relief to assuage a situation that causes depression, sadness, health issues or...probably many other maladies. It seems to me that most suffering is the inability to deal with circumstances that are either out of one's control or beyond one's ability to cope with them.*
- 69. Suffering is going through the troubling/challenging experiences happening to a loved one, the loss of a love one ~ someone I care very deeply about; I really don't associate it with my personal being.*
- 70. Suffering is the affective dimension of pain, whether physical or mental. The simplistic way I would define it is ongoing acute unhappiness.*
- 71. Suffering is a form of mental or physical pain caused by circumstances in one's life.*
- 72. Putting up with pain, mental or physical, with no present ability to alleviate it.*
- 73. To bear an extreme amount of pain or heartbreak. An overwhelming feeling that makes day-to-day activities seem difficult. I also believe there are different levels of suffering.*
- 74. Emotional suffering is a terrible inner pain that is intense because you cannot affect or change it – you can't "make it better". It's sorrowful. It's loss that cannot be recovered.*
- 75. To me, suffering is an emotional state people are in when they are hurting physically or*

emotionally.

- 76. Boy is that a big question! I'm going to try and offer a succinct, if not especially illuminating answer. Suffering is a physical and/or emotional discomfort to one's own circumstances or to the circumstances of another or others. The subjective nature of suffering makes it difficult to define in an objective manner.*
- 77. Pain - emotional, physical and implies to me that this pain is not controllable.*
- 78. Loss of health (no quality of life) and the loss of a loved one.*
- 79. Suffering is the response we have to an experience of pain.*
- 80. I define suffering as a general sense of dis-ease and the feeling of not experiencing what one seems to desire whether it is a desire for pleasure, quiet, accomplishment, etc. I also define suffering as a mental and physical phenomenon. I most often seem to experience stress as suffering.*
- 81. I define suffering as ongoing pain, either physically or emotionally. This past Tuesday I lost my beloved dog of 15 years; I am very heartbroken, to loose a loved one results in suffering, until time helps to heal such wounds. Physical pain must result in horrible suffering.*
- 82. Suffering, to me, would be anything that causes emotional or physical trauma. Anything that causes one to live life in a way they had not intended to and have no desire to (whether it be long or short term) or that causes one to become out of sync with their own body or mind (ie, your mind says you should be somewhere or do something but your current situation makes that impossible...same goes for physical suffering as well).*
- 83. When you are in pain, physically or mentally.*
- 84. Mental or physical pain & or acknowledged mental or physical harm .*
- 85. Suffering is when one gets separated from their intrinsic goodness. In Hinduism it would be when one does not realize that 'Atman' is within them. In Buddhism it would be when one cannot detach enough from ego to "witness." In Christianity it would be when one feels like a sinner/is not in a state of Grace.*
- 86. Suffering is the experience of pain, emotional or physical, to the extent that it has a negative and ongoing effect on well-being.*
- 87. Suffering involves pain, usually caused by some kind of loss or injury. It can be emotional, or physical. It can be caused by accident, natural disaster, circumstances, death, persecution or evil in the world.*
- 88. Suffering is the experience of pain. This could be emotional or physical.*
- 89. Suffering is a mind state created by difficult situations.*
- 90. Suffering to me means I am doing something that I hate but for some reasons I just need to do it or I am with a man that I hate, but can't leave him. This kind of life to me is called Suffering.*

91. *I would describe suffering as physical - hunger, pain, etc. and/or as more psychological - profound shame, hating oneself, kicking oneself repeatedly for making mistakes/failing to see something that causes others harm.*
92. *Wishing things to be a lot different than they are.*
93. *To me, suffering is when you have pain and can't do anything to relieve it. It can be physical or emotional pain. Sometimes suffering will continue throughout your life on the same physical condition or emotional issue. All of us will suffer for several big issues throughout our lives. A death of a loved one comes to mind first. The pain and grief are so intense at points and eventually lessen with time only to come back at odd times in a wave of sorrow and loss.*
94. *A reaction to something unpleasant, be it physical or emotional. One can suffer from severe and debilitating pain as it limits activity, and/or one can suffer anguish over the loss of family/loved ones through death, distance or friendship.*
95. *Unpleasant feelings based in the body or mind.*
96. *For me suffering is the story that I add on to the situation, or to what is.*
97. *In my opinion "suffering" would be great distress caused by some event in one's life that is out of his/her control; like death or serious life-threatening illness. Can be to one's self or to a loved one. Suffering is much more significant than an agitation or discomfort.*
98. *Blank (This question was left blank by a young person who has suffered greatly. He answered all the other questions.)*
99. *Suffering is being in pain or distress over any significant issue – whether real or perceived.*
100. *The Germans have a word that means weariness of life. The word is 'Welschmerz' and it means weariness and sadness over the evils of the world. Suffering arises when we repress anger and grief. Suffering comes as we age because we become concerned with end of life issues like who will be there for us and the afterlife.*

APPENDIX ii.

WHAT SURVEY PARTICIPANTS SAID THEY DO TO EASE THEIR OWN SUFFERING

Listed below are themes abstracted from *Survey On Suffering* participants' responses to Core Survey question number 4. What do you do to ease your own suffering? The narrative derived from these themes is presented in **Bearing Witness To Suffering Section 4. Easing Our Personal Suffering.**

Bold text indicates major themes, i.e., themes that survey participants broadly supported. Numbers without parentheses indicate the number of participant statements that endorsed a primary theme, while numbers within parentheses indicate statements that support the primary theme above. If 1 or no number appears at the end of a line of text, it indicates that one survey participant offered that theme or supporting statement.

Strategies For Easing My Own Suffering:

1. Exercise Acceptance and Equanimity (Turn Toward My Suffering)

Notice I am suffering 2

Acknowledge I am suffering 3

Turn toward the suffering 2

Accept the moment just as it is; sit with it 7

Focus on the present moment; embrace the present moment

Allow the suffering; allow myself to fully experience the suffering; allow the sadness 6

Allow myself to grieve 1

Accommodate it all; settle in to my immensity 1

Let the suffering rise, be with it, and then let it pass 1

Allow spaciousness and let time heal me 3

Be aware of and short circuit my habit to jump in with both feet to fix things

Remember that suffering is impermanent and temporary 4

Remember that suffering is inevitable; don't try to fix things 4

2. Seek Refuge in Contemplative Practices

Seek solitude, silence, stillness and grounding 7

Take refuge in a retreat 1

Meditate: sit in meditation; sit with awareness of my suffering, be with it, breathe 28

Mindful walking 2

Take refuge in my faith; have faith in my practice and the precepts; recite sutras; 4

Pray 7

Immerse myself in love – Metta 7

Nurture feelings of loving-kindness especially for myself; this reduces fear

Shift my awareness to the physical experience of the pain or suffering in my body 2

Notice and stop my obsessive thinking 1

Allow myself to receive inspiration

Practice Latihan, a spiritual practice where one surrenders completely to the power of almighty God 1

Footnote #15

3. Moderate Physical Pain and Discomfort

Hold the intention to heal and actively work to heal or relieve the pain 10

Seek medical care 4

Rest and get solitude 1

Follow the treatment plan

Seek solitude 1

(Omitted: Invite or allow others take care of me)

4. Nurture Deeper Understanding of the Situation

Work to understand the suffering 10

See into my "story" about the suffering (1)

Understand the root cause of the suffering (2)

Examine the reasons I feel like I do (1)

Widen my perspective (7) (*Poster of solar system and specks*)

Open myself and look for what I can learn from the situation; Do what I can do to change the situation; notice my habit energy; rethink my approach; allow a resolution to arise 15

Discern necessary changes in my life so as to cause myself less suffering 1

Discern and distinguish what I can control from what I can't control 1

Accept the things I cannot change or control 1

Don't look for solutions outside myself 1

Do look for solutions inside myself 1

Decide whether to hold onto the suffering or let it go 1

Devote myself to working it out 1

Nurture my joy and gratitude; focus on the positive things in my life 6

Think strong positive thoughts and live with high intention 1

Am thankful it is not worse; realize others have much more suffering 3

Non-attachment; don't identify with my feelings; (this feeling is not me and doesn't define me) 3

Remember that being separate is an illusion 3

Remember pain and suffering are not the same thing; distinguish what is pain and what is suffering; 2

Reset my expectations for and of myself 2

Get concrete; drop illusions and delusions; look at the situation rationally 3

Not judge myself 2

Forgive myself and forgive others for the situation 1

Explore on-line for ideas that might serve the situation 1

5. Take Skillful Actions of Self-Care and Release

Talk to a trusted therapist, counselor, friend, spouse, partner, sibling, parent, priest 34

(I'm more reasonable and rational in telling my story to others than just telling myself)

Renew relationships and practice Thich Nhat Hanh's beginning anew 2

Be in nature: take walks or hikes; watch the clouds and birds 12

Exercise; go for a run, do Kung Fu, ride a bike 10

Do something that has a productive result (prime the pump) Have at least one thing go well 1

Take steps to address root causes of my suffering 4

Focus on what I can do or can control; accomplish those things 2

Surround myself with positive people 2

Make and take time for myself

Use the energy of suffering to get things done

Take refuge in the Sangha (Spiritual community) (No one said church)

Seek out positive social situations 1

Connect with others in my same situation 1

Play with my child 1

Start new companies that will mitigate the causes of suffering 1
 Take care of myself 1
 Cry 6
 Primal Scream releases endorphins 2
 Panic 1
 I relate my suffering to Jesus' suffering 1
 Spend time with pets or animals 3
 Give my burden to God, Jesus, angels 4
 Read Books, read books in my spiritual tradition; read something inspirational 6
 Fill out this survey on suffering (do something to actively look into the nature of suffering) 1
 Yoga 1
 Dance or movement 3
 Sleep 1
 Garden 2
 Listen to music 2
 Neurofeedback 1
 Write, Write in a diary or journal 6
 Care for myself like a baby 1
 Allow time to heal me
 Do something I enjoy doing 1
 Have Media-free time: No TV, audio, phone, computer, email, etc. 4
 Express myself creatively and artistically 3
 Practice deep relaxation 1
 I take hot baths 1
 Smile 1

6. Do Things For Others

Go to a place (actual geographical location) of suffering (war Zone) and bear witness 2
 Focus on others; take care of others; ground myself by taking care of others 12
 Volunteer 5

7. Resist or Ignore the Situation (Engage in Emotional and Behavioral Transference*)

Distract myself; stay busy; don't think about it; divert my attention; mental escapism 18
 Circumvent
 Buy and consume: Eat, take drugs and drink alcohol, smoke, self medicate 6
 Go shopping; go shopping with friends 2
 Do something I enjoy doing that is pleasant, and will make me happy or cheer me up 3
 Gallows Humor 1
 Plunge into my work; work, work, work 3
 Watch TV, cartoons, DVDs 3
 Pornography 1 very honest or all alone
 Read escapist novels 1
 I try to avoid conflict at all costs 1
 Explore on line as a distraction 1
 Complain and Feel Sorry For Myself 3
 Whine about my situation to others (1)
 Wallow in my suffering (1)
 Blame others or events for my suffering (no one & 2)
 When I am suffering there is nothing I can do to ease my suffering (1)
 Suffering is something imposed from outside (1)

8. No Need To Ease My Suffering, Since I Have Never Suffered

Doesn't apply to me (Seven survey responders reported that they have never suffered) 7

APPENDIX iii.

WHAT SURVEY PARTICIPANTS SAID THEY DO ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

Listed below are themes abstracted from *Survey On Suffering* participants' responses to Core Survey question number 5. How do you respond to suffering in the world? The narrative derived from these themes is presented in **Bearing Witness To Suffering Section 5. Responding To The Suffering of Others.**

Bold text indicates major themes, i.e., themes that survey participants broadly supported. Numbers without parentheses indicate the number of participant statements that endorsed a primary theme, while numbers within parentheses indicate statements that support the primary theme above. If 1 or no number appears at the end of a line of text, it indicates that one survey participant offered that theme or supporting statement.

1. Exercise Acceptance

- I open myself as much as possible to the suffering of others 10*
- I do not turn away or run away from other's suffering (2)
 - I allow it; be with it (2)
- I acknowledge and accept suffering as a natural part of life; it is our nature to suffer 4
- When others suffer, I know I suffer also 4
- I see others suffering as my own (3)
 - I acknowledge my own suffering about the suffering of others(1)
- I acknowledge my habits of aversion in order to transform fear and resistance into openness 1

2. Express My Compassion and Gratitude Through Contemplative Practices

- Meditate on or contemplate the suffering of others 23
- Offer Tonglen and Metta; meditate for them; send compassionate vibes (15)
 - Nurture my feelings of love (3)
- Hold the intention that all beings be free from suffering (2)
- I seek stillness and quiet 2
- Pray for them/ pray they have what they need 6
- I nourish my gratitude for my own situation; I'm grateful for not having more suffering in my life 5
- I contemplate to assess the problems (that cause suffering and are caused by suffering) 1

3. Care for Myself to Maintain Balance and Resilience

- Take solace in small difference I make 2
- Try not to let it overwhelm me; maintain equanimity; re-stabilize myself 13
- Don't get caught in dualistic thinking: good and evil; victim /perpetrator 2
- Ask "why?"
- Keep my own head on straight 1
- See their situation from a place of balance 1
- (Do what I can do, but . . .) I don't feel responsible to fix the whole world's ills 2
- I don't feel responsible for things I cannot impact 1
- I know when to rejuvenate myself 1
- Do a media fast 1

4. Hold Compassionate Intentions and Aspirations

- Hold the intention to help relieve suffering in the world and offer healing 5
- Hold the intention to end suffering without attachment to the outcome 2
- Hold the intention to maintain awareness of their suffering and be more sensitive to others 1
- Live in a way that doesn't perpetuate or create suffering, work on myself 21
- I try to make choices on a daily basis with how I spend my money, time, or get from here to these that will have an impact on global suffering
 - The essence of my spiritual life is to live life lightly and to teach myself and others how to love and empower ourselves with a focus on fun and intimacy.
- I seek to understand the truth of the situation and then act out of that understanding 4
- (Not know, bear witness and step forward)
 - I seek to get to the source of the suffering (1)
 - I sit and listen to the cries of the world in order to let allow a response to arise (1)
- I practice, study and try to embody/follow the Buddhist precepts 5
- I take my guidance from the precepts
- I dance for universal peace 1

5. Take Compassionate Action (or Take Action Out of Compassion)

Respond to the suffering of others; do what I can do 44

- I look for ways I can help; I ask what can I do and then do it (18)
 - I ask "why?" and "what do I do next?" (2)
 - I get involved directly; do something active (5)
 - Involve myself and see what unfolds (1)
 - I engage authentically, doing good works (1)
 - Try to mitigate suffering (7)
 - Think globally, and act locally (6)
- Am kind to people I encounter throughout my day 1
- Just be there 1
- Support friends and family through illness 1
- Offer aid and comfort; I connect with that person 2

Listen to those who are hurting 9

- I make myself available to listen to those who are suffering
- I compassionately acknowledge their pain

Give money to charities and causes 47*

- To those less fortunate; Red Cross; Food bank;
- Christian organizations that work in the world to help others
- Local and national; natural disasters; relief organizations
- Take care of the underfunded

Engage politically 17

- Elect compassionate people who support human rights, social justice
- Vote; protest; write letters

Volunteer; give my time 14

- Driving seniors to appointments
- . . . but not much
- Serve on Boards of health and human service organizations and spiritual communities 2

Have a livelihood in a service profession; my work involves relieving suffering 4

- Live my life in response to global suffering (1)
- I chose a profession that I feel can help reconnect people to their relationship with this lifetime on earth. (1) Josh Herr
- My profession also helps preserve ancient knowledge, tools and techniques for relieving suffering. (1)

Focus on my own family to do what I *can* I do where I can do it 2
 Educate myself / read about “hotspots” of suffering around the world 2
 Educate others about suffering in the world 4
 • Talk with others about other’s suffering and situation; inform others (2)
 • Enlist others in the cause (2)
 Spread ideas I believe will lead to social and political change; I enlist others in these ideas 1
 Put my nose in other people’s business (and sometimes that isn’t welcomed) 1

6. Grieve; and Nurture Connection, Empathy and Emotion

Feel compassion toward those who are suffering 5
 Feel sad; I feel bad; I feel a sense of heaviness in my body 5
 Feel frustrated and angry 2
 My heart aches; it tugs at my heart 4
 Empathize with those who are suffering 2
 Try to understand their situation 1
 My own suffering reminds me to pay attention to the suffering of others 2
 Cry; weep 4
 Giving money makes me feel I’m doing something, but I still feel so sad for the people 1
 Give to ease my own conscience 1
 • Identify it when I am responding out of guilt 1
 My compassion increases over time 1

7. Avoid and Resist The Suffering of Others

I don’t think globally 1
 I’m not as aware of others suffering as I should be 1
Am overwhelmed by suffering 7
 I feel useless, helpless, hopeless, frustrated and angry (3)
 Don’t know what to do about it (1)
Don’t do as much as I feel I should do; don’t do enough 3
 If I don’t know them personally I respond poorly (1)
 Just watch as a spectator thinking I should do something; stay detached 4
Turn away or distract myself 25
 • Shut it out; tune it out; turn away; close down; isolate (6)
 • Hold it away from myself (3)
 • I turn away to protect myself and to keep from drowning in it (6)
 • Tell myself there’s not much I can do other than give money (1)
 • With hunger, poverty, injustice and illness I feel overwhelmed and ignore it (1)
 • Ignore it (1)
 • Do things to distract myself from thinking about sad things (1)
 • Change the channel; I don’t watch TV news (3)
 Say I can’t help them 1
 Am indifferent 1
 Am stoic and cynical: Happiness is up to the individual 2
 Notice my reactivity to and rejection of others suffering; and wonder (about it) 2
 Allow my family priorities to outweigh my inclination to get involved 1
 Feel guilty for how good I have it 3
 Surround myself with positive people 1
 Put blinders on as I don’t feel I can do much 1

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The anti-historicist stance of the novel is grounded on the notion that bearing witness to suffering without betraying it means refusing to represent it, that is, refusing to translate history and speak of it; instead, the novel's characters remain inconsolable before history. The essay builds on these ideas and considers whether educators and their students need to (re)learn the limits of historicism in comprehending conflict, oppression, otherness and suffering; also, it examines the educational implications of such a pedagogical task. Keywords. Disgrace Ethics Politics Suffering Reconciliat The results from this study will be used to further develop the theory of bearing witness; this theory may be useful to develop and test interventions to relieve the suffering experienced by individuals affected by HIV/AIDS. Authors: Vincent P Hall. Publication Detail: Type: Journal Article. Journal Detail: Title: The Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care : JANAC Volume: 14 ISSN: 1055-3290 ISO Abbreviation: J Assoc Nurses AIDS Care Publication Date: 2003 Jul-Aug.