‘Love, Healing and Happiness:
In search of the flipside of suffering’

Dr. Larry Culliford

‘What (people) have to hold on to is the idea of vulnerability as inherent in the very idea of a physical universe of the kind we inhabit… and what faith has to build on to this is the idea that this very vulnerability may be the instrument of redemption and hope’.

John Cottingham (from The Spiritual Dimension[1])

‘Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.
The deeper your sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain’.

Kahlil Gibran (from *The Prophet*)

Introduction

I am going to speak about the meaning of suffering, and about the benefits of finding the flipside through surrender, by not resisting it. To illustrate, I will use some of the stories from my new book, *Love, Healing & Happiness: Spiritual wisdom for secular times.*[2] Together we will take a look at the life and hard times of a celebrated Auschwitz survivor to discover the spiritual origins of relief from extreme suffering, the origins of faith, courage and hope. Finally, we will briefly explore the relationship between love, healing and personal (spiritual) growth.

Suffering and the Wisdom of the Emotions

‘Suffering’. The word conjures up pain and deprivation, both physical and emotional. There are however three sets of meaning, of which this is only one.

‘To suffer’ can also simply mean to experience. For example, ‘The people of Southern France suffered drought last year.’ There may be a hint of endurance in this, but it sounds more neutral.

Lastly, *‘to suffer’* can mean to permit or allow. A good example comes from St Mark’s Gospel. Jesus is reported as saying, ‘suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not’[3]. As well as to allow, the word can even be extended to mean to foster or encourage. This is useful when thinking about emotions, including painful emotions, because to resist painful emotions often results in strengthening them and making them last. In simple terms, we resist our emotions whenever we feel bad about them. If we are unhappy about feeling unhappy, then we are stuck with that feeling.

The first story in my new book is about a young woman, Kelly, who suddenly found herself profoundly sad and in tears. She consulted a doctor, who happens to have been me. She could think of no reason for her sorrow,

and felt anxious about its possible significance. Was she going mad? In other words, she felt bad about feeling bad. Later we discovered together that her mind knew better than she did. The wisdom of her emotions had broken through to remind her that this was the time when she would have had the child resulting from a pregnancy terminated earlier. With this insight, she was able to start feeling good about feeling bad, and this enabled her to surrender to her emotions, to avoid resisting and let the healing process flow with the tears.

In my books and previous talks, I have developed the idea of a bi-modal spectrum of emotions, linked to the process of healing.

Spectrum of Emotions	
Painful	**Pain-free**
Wanting (desire and/or dislike)	Satisfaction (contentment)
Anxiety (fear)	Calm (serenity)
Bewilderment	Clarity (discernment)
Doubt	Certainty
Anger	Acceptance (non-anger)
Shame	Worthiness
Guilt	Innocence (purity)
Sadness	Joy

One column is the flipside of the other, indicating a complementary relationship. For example, in the absence of anxiety, there is calm… In the absence of sadness, not bland, neutral emptiness but joy! The trick is to allow, even to encourage, these emotions to flow. When fear, anger and the resistance to loss have been overcome, the resulting acceptance permits emotional release. Crying through sadness, for example, then both heralds and hastens emotional healing. Transformation towards the flipside of the whole spectrum follows.

Very briefly, emotional pain begins with attachment and aversion, with likes and dislikes. We want some things, and want to avoid others. To have what we desire threatens us with loss. Painful emotions are those associated with threat and loss. Satisfaction, however, is often short-lived. Getting what we want in the short-term can lead rapidly to boredom and satiety. To have lasting feelings of contentment, calm and happiness, then, involves relinquishing not the objects of our desire but desire itself. This wisdom is embedded in Buddhism's Four Noble Truths.

When All Else is Gone

Sometimes, the giving up of desire is forced upon us. Viktor Frankl was a Viennese doctor and psychologist, born in March 1905. He was director of a hospital neurology department when Austria was invaded by Hitler's National Socialists in 1938. Arrested in 1942 for being Jewish and separated from his wife and family, Frankl was taken to a concentration camp. Eventually, after astonishing hardship, he survived. He was to live

more than fifty fruitful years beyond the end of the war, dying in September 1997 at the age of 92. His book, 'Man's Search for Meaning'[4], first published in German in 1946 and in English in 1959, has deservedly sold over nine million copies worldwide in several languages.

Frankl continued to make psychological observations throughout his internment until liberation, developing ideas about survival under the heading of 'Logotherapy', a system of understanding and treatment that he had begun developing in 1926. Put simply, logotherapy has to do with finding meaning in life, despite its vicissitudes, and so maintain the will to live.

At the time of his arrest, Frankl was a compassionate man and a healer. He had status and a career, a house, possessions, an income and probably savings, certainly ambitions, hopes and expectations regarding the future. He had also recently married a beautiful, young wife. All these, he was forced to give up.

The reality of his predicament and his losses did not impinge upon Frankl fully at first. He was subject to protective denial. 'Perhaps things are not as bad as they seem', we might have thought similarly. False hope, which Frankl calls, 'The illusion of reprieve', persisted briefly, but the dark truth was quickly revealed.

The journey to Auschwitz involved sharing a cattle truck with eighty others, fifteen hundred people on one train, the journey lasting several strength-sapping days and nights. Eventually, a huge internment camp became visible, with watch towers prominent, surrounded by barbed wire. Long columns of dejected, rag-attired prisoners were being marched about the compound.

Frankl and his fellow travellers were told to leave their small amount of luggage on the train. This was everything that remained to them after leaving their homes at short notice, and would have contained the most precious of their objects of attachment, whether jewels or mementos. Frankl, unwilling to give it up, took a chance and hung on to his haversack containing the manuscript of his new book about logotherapy. Looking healthy and strong, he was sent to join a group of prisoners on one side of the station forecourt, while ninety per cent of the people from the train were ordered in the other direction. Soon this larger group went directly to the crematoria where everyone in it was killed and their bodies destroyed.

Frankl and the other survivors found out about this that evening. Before the grim fact was made known, however, his group was made to run a good distance through the camp to the cleansing station, where they were ordered to remove their watches and jewellery. Frankl had to say goodbye to his manuscript then, in order to preserve his life. There was to be no mercy, and he was now forced for the first time to face painful reality. The situation hopeless, he records the irrevocable moment when, in his mind: 'I struck out my whole former life'.

The men were made to undress completely. They were crowded together and shaved. All their body hair, including their eyebrows, was removed; then they had a brief shower, as if to remove all trace of whom they had once been.

Numbers were tattooed into the skin of their arms, so they effectively lost even their names. Frankl was able to keep his spectacles and a pair of shoes,

but everything else was obliterated. And yet, this was by no means the end for him. It was the start of three years of terror, hardship and the will to survive.

Who, hearing this now, could imagine him or herself in such circumstances? All familiar activities and goals in life had been taken brutally away. Very little was left of personhood, of control, of dignity. We naturally hope that nothing similar will happen again, yet there are people today who encounter comparable circumstances, and not necessarily under repressive regimes.

Imagine, for example, living peacefully in a place suddenly visited by natural disaster: a famine, an earthquake, a hurricane, a tsunami or a volcanic eruption. What would it be like?

Imagine also being told that you have cancer or some other potentially fatal disease. Your body is wasting. Your clothes no longer fit. You are debilitated and cannot go about your work or normal daily business. Imagine attending hospital for surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy. You are dressed in nightclothes and a hospital gown. A band is applied to your wrist with your name and hospital number on it. You might lose all your hair as a result of treatment, even your eyebrows. You experience pain, nausea and other unpleasant physical sensations. Like Frankl and others in Auschwitz, you too will have been stripped back to essentials. Important differences include that you are still in contact with your loved ones, and that the people around you want to help rather than destroy you. Nevertheless, it would be natural in the circumstances to feel frightened, helpless and very alone. How are we to help people in such predicaments, young people with leukaemia, diabetes or schizophrenia, for example? How are we to maintain and offer courage and hope? I would like to suggest a few clues.

Humour and Hope

The first beneficial thing Frankl noticed in the concentration camp was humour. The naked and hairless men in the shower found themselves laughing at themselves and each other. Stripped completely bare, the human spirit shone through with remarkable strength and resilience. The laughter provided not only important relief, but also the beginnings of a bond between these unfortunate men. Helping each other continued to give meaning to an otherwise senseless existence during the next weeks and months.

As a folk saying has it, ‘A day without laughter and without tears is a day wasted’. Laughter and crying, these are the two main ways we release emotional tension. These are forms of catharsis providing powerful, necessary and liberating connections between our true and false selves. This catharsis is a key part of the process of emotional healing.

We laugh or cry when some previously unconsidered aspect of truth penetrates our awareness, bursting the bubble of denial. When we are ready to let go of the falsehood, we laugh. When we are still trying to hold onto it, but recognise that we cannot, we may grow angry, feel ashamed, frightened or confused; but in the end we may well cry, as we are ultimately forced to let go. This, to explain it very briefly, is the process of healing. Releasing the energy bound up with our attachments and aversions, our likes and dislikes, our hopes

and fears; followed by reintegration and a sense of renewal. This is how nature allows us to become whole again and reacquaint ourselves with the flipside of suffering that has, in truth, only been hidden temporarily, like the sun behind a dark cloud.

Growth

How may healing lead to growth? Briefly, to experience, endure and survive a significant loss tends to render us more cautious and knowing about our attachments. This is a form of wisdom. Secondly, having survived, we are likely to have greater confidence in facing the threat of similar losses, and so be spontaneously freer to experience emotions – both painful and pain-free – in greater intensities. We will then naturally feel more alive. Encountering a more stable feeling of emotional equanimity within, we discover too a much greater resilience; a source of courage and hope. This is how we grow towards personal maturity, and the process is irreversible, usually continuing in stages throughout life.

What might maturity mean? How might wisdom show itself? In my book I illustrate this with the story of Bridget, another patient, whose severe schizophrenic symptoms largely abated when she was given clozapine. Bridget does not have much in the way of power, wealth or celebrity, but she is, by and large, a joyful person. Her recipe for happiness is both wise and simple: cultivate loving and trusting friendships; take each day as it comes; be grateful for what you have and share it, however little; think, speak and act when you can with kindness and compassion; be honest, especially with yourself; and accept limitations – your own and those of others.

Let us return to Viktor Frankl and the others in Auschwitz, to discover how their recipe for meaning, and for survival, compares.

Healing Mind and Spirit

Frankl does not say so, but I think the men in the showers were not only laughing at each other's bizarre new appearances, but also through an unexpected sense of relief. When everything is taken from us, we are left with conscious awareness: with physical sensation – vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell – with emotional feeling; with powers of thinking, imagination and creativity; and with bodily movement – the ability to act and be still. To have a shower then, to feel warm, cleansing water stream over your naked flesh after days of exhausting travel in dirty, squalid conditions, would be restorative, healing mind and spirit through comforting and familiar bodily sensations. Such non-threatening, even pleasant experiences allow us to re-focus consciousness on the simple reality of the here and now. This is the secret of mindfulness.

The truth of such moments is like an incontrovertible fact, one that cannot be taken away. The shower triggers a kind of remembrance of the deep-seated knowledge of that fact. It is like a soul-memory, and the ability to get in touch with that level of consciousness can form the basis of a powerful type of resilience. Furthermore, soul-memories are universal. They are shared. That seems to be why these men on their first grim day in Auschwitz found themselves laughing.

They were forced, by the circumstances of having nothing else left, to make contact with their true selves; to get in touch, we might say, with their souls. I think this may be happening in hospital wards, psychiatric facilities and private homes throughout the land, when distraction from the harsh realities of finite, human existence and suffering are no longer a possible option.

Commitment to Life

Frankl experienced many moments of despair whilst imprisoned in death camps, but showed formidable resilience. He describes several uplifting experiences that helped keep him going. He also describes how important it was to have luck, fate, God or Providence, what you will, on your side.

In the concentration camps, the over-riding need every day was simply that of survival. Frankl, describing what was called 'barbed wire sickness', makes it clear that many survivors of the extensive initial Nazi culls gave their lives away afterwards. They ran into the electrically charged fencing and so perished. They chose 'not to be', after reaching 'the Hamlet point', rather than endure further 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'.

Frankl himself, on his first evening in the camp, made a firm and deliberate choice not to commit suicide. He decided 'to be'. This decision, for whoever takes it, requires courage and, when denial has been overruled by reality, such courage depends on a measure of faith, on the intuition that – although we are not able to see or experience it yet – we do have a meaningful future. Courage and faith go together.

Having made the decision to live, come what may, and given the continuing fact of his survival, the main problem in the camps for Frankl then concerned the perpetual and painful insistence of hunger and the need for food. Rations were meagre, so that even a small extra piece of bread could provide a momentary sense of comfort, almost of luxury.

Taking Care of Basic Needs

After food came the necessity to conserve energy and rest when possible. Nature largely took care of this. A poor diet and hard physical labour in the work details left the men weak. They had, for example, very little sexual energy or desire. Physical hygiene was also important. Even though opportunities to wash thoroughly were infrequent, the men took turns grooming each other before sleeping at night, removing lice and other infestations from skin and re-growing hair. This reduced the irritation and helped them sleep better. Infections, such as typhus, also occurred in the camps and were often fatal. Survival chances improved with cleanliness and basic hygiene.

There was little respite from hard labour, building roads and railways from morning until night, day after day. What to do by way of occupation was taken care of, but what about relationships and recreation? Friendships, normally vital for human wellbeing, were problematic between prisoners. A kind of grim camaraderie and mutual support became important as one of the pinions of survival, but if you did make a particular friend, he might be moved to a different hut or work gang. He might die of sickness or be killed; so people protected

themselves from loss and the threat of loss by avoiding getting too close emotionally. Although extremely overcrowded, the barracks were essentially lonely places. Frankl tells us that he liked it best when he could be alone in a quiet secluded place, sheltered near one of the huts, even for just a few minutes' respite and reverie. He yearned to be alone with his thoughts and dreams. It was necessary, he said, part of the process of keeping hope somehow alive. He is describing the importance of spiritual connection, of contemplation.

But this was not the whole story. Frankl frequently intimates that helping another to survive is as important and natural as saving oneself. 'All efforts and all emotions', he writes, 'are centred on one task: preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow'.

This is not the same as friendship. Such a degree of loyalty also invokes the spiritual dimension. It speaks of a seamless level of attachment that we can call 'identification'. When we identify with someone, some group or some thing, such as an idea or ideology, the connection is intimately close and very powerful. Because it is often automatic and unconscious, we tend to take such identifications for granted. It may seldom occur to us to take note of and reflect upon the people, objects and ideas with which we identify; but these are the attachments (and their corresponding aversions) which define us, which both enthral and control us, so we do well to take the time and trouble to contemplate and ponder them occasionally. '*The selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears'.* Gibran's words work equally in reverse. What gives joy now, may well lead to grieving one day.

To repeat then, occupation, in the form of hard labour, was arduous and entirely controlled by camp officials. Despite strong identifications and loyalties, personal friendships were difficult to establish and maintain. Also, whereas recreation was challenging, it was not ruled out entirely.

Time, strength and the opportunity for games, sports or artistic activities were generally lacking, but entertainment of a sort was available. Inmates often shared and enjoyed songs, poems and jokes in a way that helped Frankl and the others forget their circumstances, their hunger and fatigue, their pains and sicknesses, their isolation and loneliness, their many losses and uncertainty about the future.

Renewal of the Spirit: the power of love

Re-creation is about renewal of the spirit, as well as resting the body and revitalising the mind. Frankl was impressed by the strong degree of interest in religion among camp prisoners, many of whom demonstrated deep, vigorous and moving levels of belief and expression. Prayers and short services were often improvised.

Frankl describes taking strength especially from memories of his wife and their love for each other. He had no news of her while he was in the camp, and did not know if she was living or not. Nevertheless, holding her in his imagination frequently, often for long periods, he found solace and, eventually, something more: a kind of enlightenment. The thought transfixed him one day that, for each of us, love is the ultimate and highest goal to which we can aspire. The reciprocal

love between himself and his wife seems to have expanded into a universal love for humanity and creation. This is what he says:

> 'I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart. *The salvation of man is through love and in love.* I understood how a man who has nothing left in the world still may know bliss'.

For many of us, it is gospel that, 'God is love'. Just as physical healing of wounds requires optimal circumstances – infection-free, well sutured and protected, in the case of a laceration, for example – so do emotional injuries. A single word to describe the ideal healing and protective environment for psychological pain is 'love'; the word referring here to a mature and selfless, non-possessive kind, rather than love involving desire or passion. This kind of love is divine.

The loving memory of his wife seems to have brought Frankl to a still-point, to a timeless moment, an 'epiphany', during which he encountered his true self, his soul. Part of the wisdom awakened within him then was the sure knowledge that love is transcendent, going beyond the physical person. Spiritual love does not depend on the presence of the loved one, on whether they are still living or not. Love for a person depends on spiritual reality, on what extends into this extra dimension from our physical selves. The hidden life force, the ember of love was rekindled for Frankl by these precious moments of contemplation. This is not a point that can properly be understood by thought processes alone. It is necessarily a matter of the most profound, transformational personal experience.

Frankl also describes the power of beauty. He writes of the palpable wonder and joy on the faces of his fellow inmates on beholding through their prison bars, for example, the glory of mountain peaks glowing in a sunset. His own experiences were even more mystical.

One day, when working under guard in a grey dawn landscape, feeling somewhat numb, his mind again questioning and resisting the apparent senselessness of his existence, he suddenly, as it were, 'heard', a triumphant affirmative: the word 'Yes', filling his mind and his entire soul. At the exact moment, a light was lit in a farmhouse in the distance, as if to confirm the fact of a sacred light 'shining in the darkness'. This is the light, St. John tells us[5], that cannot be overcome; a powerful message of hope.

You do not have to be a psychologist, or even an educated person, for such an experience. The knowledge it brings is beyond thought. The whole psychological being of the person is involved – senses, thoughts and emotions – and such experiences can happen to anyone. They are not accompanied by any impulse to act, because the entire experience is one of being acted upon by some great and loving power. The feeling is of being in a state of awe and acceptance, of surrender, of grace and gratitude, of insight and understanding, of peace. In an instant, life becomes full, complete, and bursting with meaning, with the significance of knowing oneself to be part of and at one with a perfect, timeless, infinite and eternal whole, an indescribably sacred unity, an infallible

source of hope. The Hamlet question becomes redundant. Life is no longer about being or non-being. The two are subsumed into one: being *and* non-being. This works because having once been, we cannot be obliterated. We leave an indelible imprint, an ineradicably secure trace in the realm of the human spirit.

After Survival

After survival, it is said to have taken Viktor Frankl only nine days to dictate the account that became his enormously best selling book. Sadly, though, his wife, parents and brother were all holocaust victims.

Soon after the end of the war, Frankl became director of the Vienna Neurological Policlinic, a post he held for twenty-five years. Love helped him survive the camps, and happily revisited him after the liberation too. He met a young hospital worker and fell in love with her. She became his second wife in 1947. This is an important point about suffering, even the most extreme form: it comes and it goes. Perhaps this is what we can take from the Beatles' 1968 song (from the White Album): 'Ob la di, ob la da. Life goes on!'

Frankl's story points towards spirituality, towards a spiritual solution for suffering. The implication is that everyone is on a journey towards personal and spiritual maturity. Essential to this is the experience of weathering losses and threats; most particularly and especially the threat of extinction. In the context of today's meeting, this means the threat of madness, of loss of control and identity, as much as it does of death. Therefore, the remedy for many of what we refer to as mental illnesses may well necessarily have (I would say does have) a spiritual dimension. In this, love is a key factor: love of the more mature, selfless kind, that is. The other kind, the more immature, selfish, controlling, possessive kind, is more often part of the problem, as the case of one of my patients illustrates. I have called her June.

June's Story

June was from a poor background. Her parents were frequently bad-tempered because of this hardship. June was never allowed to ask for anything. Her requests were always rejected. As a child, she was made to help her mother and look after her younger siblings. She was permitted little time to play and develop friendships. Later, her father insisted that she leave school to start earning money for the family. At seventeen, she met Ronnie, and eventually agreed to live with him. Ronnie often said he loved her, and may have believed it, but he was jealous and possessive. He had a cruel streak and a liking for drink, and he was often unfaithful.

June put up with his violence and inconsiderate behaviour as well as she could, for she was too ashamed to return to her parents and ask their help. She never cried openly, partly because it was her nature to conceal her feelings, and partly because to do so would have inflamed Ronnie and risk another beating.

June wanted a child, and found she became pregnant easily. She looked forward to having someone to love unconditionally, and someone to love her in return, but she had a disappointing series of early miscarriages. When, after four

years with Ronnie, she carried her latest pregnancy into its sixth month, she was delighted, but hardly dared show her feelings for Ronnie was not pleased. He was thinking selfishly about the expense of an extra mouth to feed and one day, after a heavy bout of drinking, he assaulted June so badly that she went into premature labour. At the hospital later, they told her that the baby had died. Even then, she suppressed her feelings and did not let herself weep. She left Ronnie, but a second marriage was equally unsuccessful and she spent many years on her own.

Things did eventually change for June. In her mid-forties, she went to work in a care home. The disabled children there gradually drew her out of herself. She laughed for the first time in many years at their smiles and their antics. Hers was an infectious, tinkly kind of laugh and it caught the attention of Sam, a widower with two teenage children, James and Becky, who lived next door to The Lodge. Leaning over the fence one summer afternoon, he started a conversation with June, and they soon became friends. When Sam proposed marriage several months after they first met, a little reluctantly she agreed.

June assumed that she would now find it easier to be contented and happy. She expected to feel at peace, so it was a shock that she did not understand when, several months into her new marriage, she began experiencing prolonged fits of crying. She lost her much of her energy and drive, had difficulty sleeping and lost her appetite. Saying it was depression, her GP gave her some tablets and referred her to me.

It was easy to gain June's trust and get her to tell her story. She was bright enough to see where my questions were leading, and to co-operate fully when I probed her feelings as well as the facts. As we reached the end of the first interview session, June repeated her problem. 'I cry. I cry a lot, and I don't know why. I should be happy. I've got everything I always wanted. I've got a loving husband, and his children love me too. We've got a beautiful house, and there are no money worries. It just doesn't make sense. Why do I cry all the time?' It was my turn to do some talking and offer an explanation.

'You are crying now, June', I said, 'because you are loved. Sam loves you. Becky and James love you; and because they love you, you are now safe, safe enough to allow yourself to cry; safe enough to be healed of your many past sorrows'.

This seems to be how our minds work. From childhood, June had suffered many things, and had had many reasons to cry, but she learned to suppress and hold back the tears. She did this automatically, because it usually made things worse if she was seen crying by her parents, by Ronnie or by anyone else. This was part of her conditioning.

The healing process had begun with her tears. I explained that she was crying for her former self, for the June who had uncaring parents and a bully for a partner, Ronnie, and later a weakling for a husband dominated by his widowed mother. After what she saw as a second failure, after leaving her husband, June closed off her emotions for so many years as a way of protecting herself. This was not deliberate. Her mind did this for her; but the children at The Lodge started to bring her back to life. It was like waking up.'

‘Sooner or later’, I found myself telling June, ‘we must all wake up and face the suffering, as well as the happier side of life’. I was thinking that life wasn’t necessarily meant to be easy.

It seems frequently true that painful experiences come first. Winter comes before spring: foul weather before fine. We have to face and actually experience stored-up emotional pain before it will dissipate. When we do, it is the pain that heals us. The pain itself becomes the medicine. It is unpleasant, but it does us good. The tears and pain not only heal the emotional wounds of the past, but also transform us, helping us grow.

Recognising that June was experiencing a profound and prolonged catharsis, I was able to tell her confidently that, when it was over, when all her suffering had been used up like water eventually released from a long pent-up dam, she would be well again and feel renewed. I was trying to help her feel good, rather than ashamed and unhappy, about feeling bad.

She seemed reassured by the idea that every tear shed was one less in her reservoir of misery, and that she would empty it eventually. I thought it would be days or weeks in her case, rather than months or years. ‘Coming and talking about it will have helped’, I told her, ‘and I will see you again regularly until you are better and confident once more’.

I asked June to remember that it is good to cry, even if it feels unpleasant at the time; and reminded her that her life was back on track, that she was no longer adding to her reservoir of distress.

She came to see me again two or three times over the next few weeks. She told me parts of her story in more detail, each time revealing – and relinquishing – something important. Sometimes she did so tearfully, but increasingly as time passed with humour. A couple of months later, June was off medication entirely, and she was happy again.

‘I hated my parents for a long time’, she explained. ‘I did not even admit to myself how much… But now I just feel sorry for them. They were young and poor, just like Ronnie and me. Ronnie wasn’t all bad. He had had a rotten time with his father, who was an even bigger drunk than Ronnie. Anyway…’ she smiled. ‘It’s water under the bridge now. I just don’t feel bad about it any more. It’s done, and I feel free to move on in my life with Sam and the children’.

She said she was grateful, and recognised that she had been going through a kind of grief process for her younger self. ‘It had to be done’, she said finally. ‘I wouldn’t want to go through it again, but in a way I am glad that I did. I feel so much better for it in myself’. June is here demonstrating her newfound wisdom. As Kahlil Gibran says:

> *‘The deeper your sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain’.*

Conclusion

I hope these three stories – Kelly’s, Viktor Frankl’s and June’s – have illustrated successfully a few key points about pain and suffering, about regaining

the flipside of peace, joy and contentment, and about the key dimension of spirituality that is involved. As well as faith, courage and hope, we require patience and the capacity for endurance with equanimity. We require wisdom.

Here is Kahlil Gibran again: '*Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding'.*

This would be the last word, if ever there was a last word, but there isn't. Where joy and suffering are concerned, as The Beatles reminded us so poetically and succinctly: '*Ob la di, ob la da. Life goes on!'*

---

[1] Cottingham, J. (2005) *The Spiritual Dimension.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[2] Culliford, L. (2007) *Love, Healing & Happiness: Spiritual wisdom for secular times.* Winchester: O Books
[3] St Mark 10 v 14
[4] Frankl, V. *Man's Search for Meaning.* Available (2004) from London: Rider Books.
[5] St John Ch 1: Vs 5.

See also www.happinesssite.com for self-help books written by the author under the pen name Patrick Whiteside