

## Suffering

Does suffering belong in the same category with the other negative emotions—sadness, anxiety, regret, fear, shame—that we have been reviewing? Or is suffering, properly speaking, an emotion? Do we, with suffering, enter into a largely physical dimension, as we do with agony, misery, or simple pain, with which we name the primal conditions through which we enter the darker realms of consciousness? Is suffering even a ‘feeling?’

With suffering we do, yes, enter a non-negotiable condition of the darker consciousness, in which we have above been pasturing. To be in great pain means, nowadays, to have your pain level quantified, to agree that it's a nine, or possibly an eight. With this level of suffering, in any case, we feel no longer tempted to the finer points of descriptive prose. We gladly accept the pinpoint of nomenclature, as though an assigned numeral sufficed to reintroduce a vestige of healing actuality into the murky present.

The ancient Greeks were able, as in so many other matters, to shed light on the nature of suffering. The dramatist Aeschylus observed, through a renowned chorus of his play *Agamemnon*, that ‘in suffering there is wisdom,’ *pathei mathos*. This is the Aeschylus whose deepest character, Prometheus, was punished for his revolt against the supreme god, Zeus, by having his liver eaten away by the avenging assaults of the supreme god's pecking eagle. Prometheus survived, in part because he knew the secret Zeus longed to know—the identity of his successor-- and in part because he knew that persistence would bring him victory in the end.