

WISSENSRAUM NO. 21

THE RIGHT TO SUFFER

*On the dignity of the unresolved, the possibility of transformation, and a world that turns
every pain into a task*

*“A human being remains fully human, even where their suffering stays unresolved. Their dignity
does not depend on being healed.”*

AKADEMIE DER WEISHEIT — WISSENSRÄUME

◆ 1. The Restlessness in the Face of Suffering

No sooner is suffering here than we begin to act, and we easily overlook what it needs first.

There is a peculiar restlessness in the face of suffering. As soon as a person suffers, or as soon as we see someone else suffer, something sets itself in motion almost by reflex. We look for causes, for explanations and for ways out. We recommend therapy, change, acceptance, letting go, forgiveness or a fresh start, and we ask what message might be hidden in a crisis, what a person is meant to learn from it and what development it might make possible. Much of this is well meant, and some of it is truly helpful.

Yet even where suffering is acknowledged, this often happens under a quiet condition: it is supposed to disappear again at some point. Pain may come, but it should go. Grief may be there, but it should be processed. A crisis may shake us, but in the end it should produce a stronger, wiser, more conscious person. Perhaps this is where a barely noticed harshness of our time shows itself. We have learned to treat suffering, to analyse it and to answer it with offers, but we have more rarely learned to look at it without immediately having to make something of it.

What happens to a person whose pain brings forth no insight? What about a grief that returns after years, an illness from which no growth arises, a loss that does not turn into gratitude? What about a bond that both carries a person and wounds them, or the pain that arises because one longs to be close to someone and cannot create that closeness? And what happens to the person who at some point stops searching for an answer?

This space of knowledge does not approach these questions with yet another method. It neither glorifies suffering nor calls on anyone to remain in it, and it does not oppose relief, treatment or help wherever they are possible and wanted. What is meant is something more fundamental: the right of a human being to remain fully human even when their suffering stays unresolved.

“Not every suffering asks for an answer. Some asks, at first, only that no one runs away from it.”

◆ 2. A Map of Suffering

Suffering is more than pain. It is the response of the whole person to what strikes them.

Pain and suffering belong together, and yet they are not the same. Pain is an experience of the body that always carries feeling, memory and meaning within it. Suffering reaches beyond that.

A person can experience the most severe pain and not break under it, because they can make sense of it, because someone is with them or because it hints at an end. Another can be outwardly healthy and still live in an almost unnameable distress: over a loss, over loneliness, shame, powerlessness, guilt, a relationship, the world, or a future that will not come.

That is why suffering can hardly be confined to a single place within a person. It can be physical, emotional, social, existential, and usually it is all of these at once. The body suffers and changes thinking, the soul suffers and changes the body. A loss changes relationships, an illness changes the future, and a shaken basic trust changes how meaningful or meaningless everything else appears. Anyone who has lived through a hard time knows that pain rarely stays within the borders we try to set for it. It sits in the body and in memory, in the fear of what is coming, in relationships, in unfinished things and in the question of what will become of one.

One can describe symptoms, rate pain, note limitations and document impairments. But no measure has direct access to the meaning an experience takes on in the life of one individual. Suffering has an inner side, and that inner side belongs to the one who suffers. Perhaps the right to suffer therefore begins with a simple acknowledgment: no one can prescribe to another how heavy something is allowed to be.

From this insight it follows that even the most comprehensive view needs a limit. A holistic understanding can protect a person from being narrowed down to a symptom. But it can also lead to the idea that every level of suffering must be found, named and worked on. Perhaps a person sometimes needs more than another model. Perhaps they need a space in which nothing about them is taken apart.

◆ 3. The Duty to Heal

Healing is one of the most hopeful words there is, and that is exactly why it is worth looking closely at when it turns into an expectation.

Our present has enormous possibilities for relieving suffering. The medical arts treat illness, therapy accompanies crises, nursing preserves quality of life, counselling and social support create stability, and care at the end of life eases symptoms. These possibilities are precious, and no thought in this space of knowledge calls them into question.

Alongside them, however, something else has developed: the idea that suffering must in principle be worked on. The human being is to reflect, process, accept, regulate, let go, grow stronger, reinvent themselves and integrate their wound. They are to recognise their limits, see through

their patterns and ideally be able to say at some point: “Today I know what it was good for.” In this way even suffering is taken up into the logic of self-improvement. A human experience becomes a project, and projects have goals, timelines and results.

The suffering person is thereby placed in a second situation. They do not only suffer, they are also supposed to explain why they are still suffering. Why is it not getting better? Why can’t they let go? Why do they still think about it? Care may stand behind such questions, but they carry an expectation: that it must finally be over. Pain is given a deadline, grief a timeframe, exhaustion a forecast of return, and a crisis a development goal.

And what if that goal is not reached? If something was simply terrible and nothing lies hidden in it? If someone is less resilient after a crisis than before, and something stays broken? A culture that wants to translate every suffering into development creates a paradoxical situation: the person must first suffer, and afterwards they are to prove that it was worth it. Perhaps what is needed is another sentence, one that protects both hope and dignity.

“Healing may be a possibility. It must not become an obligation.”

◆ 4. The Violence of Meaning

Meaning may be found. It should not be prescribed.

People seek meaning. Precisely in the face of illness, death, loss, separation and upheaval the question of why arises: Why me? Why now? Why this person, why like this? Since time immemorial, paths of wisdom, worlds of belief and ways of thinking have given answers. Some speak of a trial, others of fate, of cause and effect, of chance, of an order we simply cannot survey, or of the absence of any higher purpose. Each of these interpretations can give a person a supporting frame, and whoever discovers a meaning in a hard experience may keep it.

Meaning becomes problematic where it is imposed from outside. “It had to happen.” “Everything has its reason.” “You are meant to grow from this.” “It was a test.” Such sentences often arise from the need to comfort, and often also from the difficulty of bearing silence. Yet they answer a question that perhaps no one has asked, and they lay an order over an experience whose very nature may be that it escapes every order. Imposed from outside, the same interpretation that would have carried from within can expropriate a person’s pain. It is no longer enough to be hurt. They must also understand their suffering correctly.

Here the subject touches the question of power. Who actually decides which suffering is legitimate and which interpretation is the right one? Societies know hierarchies of suffering.

Some is visible and recognised and has rituals, other suffering must be explained again and again because it has no visible finding: exhaustion, loneliness, shame, broken trust, the loss of a life plan. The right to suffer is therefore also the right not to have to prove one's own experience before a foreign court.

From this perhaps follows a further right that sounds unfamiliar: the right to meaninglessness. Not in the sense of a life without significance, but as the freedom not to have to attribute a higher purpose to a single event. A death may be tragic. A loss may seem unjust. An illness may simply be an illness, a betrayal a betrayal. Life does not have to justify every wound after the fact, and not everything is redeemed by giving it meaning.

◆ 5. The Door That Cannot Be Closed Again

Awareness is not always relief. At first it can mean being able to flee less.

Anyone who grew up in times of destruction, in a country where people, values and certainties broke at the same time, often carries more of it within than could ever be told. Some of these wounds never close completely. They change their place, their tone, their nearness, and they make themselves known in nights when a person lies awake and with their breath tries to embrace a whole people, a country, a planet.

In such experiences lies a thought of great consequence: there are things that cannot be unseen once they have been seen. Some experiences open a door that cannot be closed again. Behind it lies not automatically peace. There lies first of all often a greater sensitivity, a knowledge of the vulnerability of life, of its transience and of what people can do to one another, and often also the knowledge of how closely one's own suffering is bound to the suffering of others.

Awareness is therefore not always the ending of suffering. Sometimes it first makes suffering fully visible. Whoever has seen, sees. Whoever has experienced, remembers. Whoever has been touched, carries traces. And yet in this inescapability there is also a peculiar dignity, for a person who can no longer look away does not necessarily have to harden. They can learn to look in a new way.

Out of this has come a sentence that speaks from the soul of many people and is nonetheless easily misunderstood: "Without suffering, no growth." It may hold as a personal truth, but it can only be said by someone who has gone through it themselves, and it is only felt as truth by someone who has found that truth themselves. Imposed on another from outside, it loses its power and becomes an imposition. We will return to this later.

◆ 6. The First and the Second Arrow

Between what happens and the way we relate to it, a space opens.

An ancient image distinguishes two arrows. The first strikes a person from outside: the illness, the loss, the news, the betrayal. The second arises within them, where resistance joins the pain, despair, an endless circling of thoughts, self-reproach and the refusal to accept that things are as they are. The image carries a deep truth, for a person can indeed suffer additionally from how they experience their suffering.

Yet the image calls for gentleness. All too quickly it becomes a new burden: whoever suffers additionally under their pain could supposedly have done better. The second arrow turns into a reproach, and the person who was already struck is now also given the task of behaving correctly. But resistance is not weakness. The No belongs to being human. “This should not have happened.” “I don’t want this.” “I want to go back.” Such sentences are often nothing other than the expression of a wounded reality, and sometimes they are the first honest step.

Resistance can also protect. It sometimes holds at a distance a truth that a person could not bear at that moment, and it buys them time. Whoever cannot yet accept has not failed. They are still on the way. It would be a second harshness to tell them they must open to their pain before they are able to.

Perhaps the task therefore lies less in forcibly laying down the second arrow. Perhaps something quite different begins with simply recognising it. There is the event, and there is my relationship to this event. Both belong to my experience, but they are not the same. Between these two levels a small room for manoeuvre arises, and freedom perhaps begins not where there is no more pain, but where the pain and one’s own reaction to it become distinguishable.

With this comes a boundary that must not be crossed: accepting does not mean putting up with. Where violence happens, where injustice persists or where complaints can be treated, quietly enduring is no virtue. The room between the two arrows belongs to inner attitude. It never replaces protection, help or change where they are possible.

◆ 7. Suffering as a Sacred Truth

Whoever looks instead of fleeing often discovers that there is more in pain than pain.

There is an ancient wisdom that does not count suffering among the faults of life but calls it a sacred truth. At first this sounds disturbing, for nothing about pain seems sacred. What is meant,

however, is something other than glorification. Suffering is not sought here, it is looked at. The first question is not: How do I get rid of it as quickly as possible? But: What is here? What hurts, and what feeds this pain? What happens when I stop running away from it?

In this attitude lies an invitation to go with one's own pain to someone who looks at it without flinching, with kindness, with compassion and with attention, and to show it the pain instead of hiding it. The pain may come along. It does not have to stay outside so that the person may enter. Whoever experiences in this way that their suffering may be seen, made neither smaller nor greater, can begin to look deeper into it: at its roots, at what feeds it and at what connects it with the suffering of others.

From such looking something can arise that cannot be produced. A compassion that grows from one's own experience. A slower judging, because behind a visible action an invisible story may lie. A knowledge of the limits of control. Sometimes even another kind of peace, not because the pain has vanished, but because the person has stopped fighting the fact that it is there. The wounds in one's own heart and the wounds of the world then no longer appear as separate spaces, and whoever recognises their own vulnerability recognises it more easily in the other.

That is why suffering can indeed be a path. It can lead to understanding, to connectedness and to a quieter kind of joy that does not depend on circumstances. But it is a path that can only be walked by walking it oneself. One may show it to another, but one may not instruct them to take it.

"Suffering can transform. But no one may impose transformation on the one who suffers."

◆ 8. Transformation Without Entitlement

Two truths may stand side by side: suffering can transform, and it does not have to bring forth anything.

Many people report that precisely hard phases of life changed something in them. They reordered relationships, shifted priorities, recognised limits and discovered a strength they knew nothing of. Some experience a deeper gratitude or a compassion they did not know before, and find a new language for their lives. These experiences are real, and it would be dishonest to deny them.

And yet no general rule may be made of them. Not every suffering leads to growth. Not every person finds a deeper meaning after a catastrophe. Some suffering exhausts, some leaves fear behind, some destroys trust and at first makes the world smaller. And what feels like growth in

hindsight is not always what has actually changed in a life. Sometimes a person grows in spite of their suffering and not because of it, and sometimes they do not grow at all and remain nonetheless entirely human. Perhaps a finer formulation is therefore needed: suffering can become a place of transformation. It has no claim to it.

The two sentences, suffering can transform and suffering does not have to bring forth anything, contradict each other only in appearance, for what matters is who is speaking. When a person looks at their own life and says, “My suffering has transformed me,” this meaning belongs to them, and it is true because they found it. When another stands before them and says, “Your suffering will make you grow,” something else happens. Insight becomes attribution, possibility becomes expectation, inner experience becomes outer interpretation. Here lies perhaps one of the most important limits of any accompaniment.

The suffering person owes their experience no wisdom. They do not have to thank the person who hurt them for having learned something through them. They do not have to wring a message out of an illness, and they do not have to declare a loss a gift. If insight arises, it may arise. If peace grows, it may grow. But both are gift and not an examination result, and no one has to justify their suffering by turning it into something successful.

“Peace is not a certificate of well-accomplished suffering.”

◆ 9. The Dignity of the Unresolved

Some things heal, some scar over, some remain, and what remains also belongs to life.

Our language has many words for dealing with what is heavy: to close, to process, to cope with, to overcome, to let go, to leave behind. All of them create the image of a movement in which one passes through something and eventually reaches the other shore. Human experience rarely follows this geometry. Some things become smaller, others change their shape, some disappear, some return, and some accompany a person for the rest of their life without being felt every day.

A scar is neither an open wound nor a return to the state before the injury. It carries both within it, healing and remembrance. Perhaps a different understanding of development is therefore needed, not as a movement from suffering to non-suffering, but as an expansion of life by what has happened. A person would then not have to erase an experience in order to go on, and they would not have to overcome it in order to be alive. They could laugh and mourn at the same time, love and miss, go on and look back, hope and be exhausted.

This includes the right to one's own time. Suffering follows no calendar, and yet our society has unspoken deadlines: at some point one should function again, grief should become lighter, the separation should be finished. "That was years ago now." But inner time is not linear. A smell, a song, a name, a season, a date, and something that seemed long past is present again. This does not mean that a person has stood still. It means that biographical experience knows a different time from the calendar. And perhaps even in the expectation that a person should become "their old self" again lies a mistake, for after some experiences that old self no longer exists. Healing would then not lie in restoring it, but in someone coming into being who is the same person and yet has become another.

The question of identity also calls for delicacy here. A person is never only what has happened to them, and yet an experience can for a time fill the entire horizon. "You are so much more than your illness" can be liberating, and it can miss reality when the pain is determining every breath. Dignity might therefore mean neither shutting a person into their suffering nor pulling them out of it. Not: you are your suffering. And not: you should long since have risen above it. But: here too you are fully human.

◆ 10. The Suffering of the Other

Hardly anything challenges a human being as much as another's pain, and hardly anything asks so much for presence instead of solutions.

We want to help, we want to ease, we want to do something. But beneath this helping there is sometimes another movement: we want the other's suffering to stop because we can hardly bear their presence. Their powerlessness reminds us of our own, their illness of our vulnerability, their grief of our losses, their dying of our finitude. So activism begins, another piece of advice, another explanation, another attempt. Do we then always help the one who suffers, or sometimes also ourselves, so that we no longer have to look at their suffering?

Comfort too has its limit. It belongs to the oldest gestures of human beings: a hand, a glance, a shared silence, a word at the right time. It loses its power where it shrinks the other's reality. "It will get better." "You'll find someone new." "Others have it much worse." Such sentences are often spoken because silence is harder to bear than speaking. But the suffering person does not necessarily need a perspective. Perhaps they first need someone who understands that there is none right now. True comfort does not have to refute the suffering, nor shrink it, nor turn it into hope. It begins where a person can experience: I do not have to change my reality so that you can stay with me.

Perhaps suffering needs less a healer than a witness. A person who does not immediately intervene, explain, relativise or optimise, but stays. Who does not make the other's pain their own project. This does not mean passivity. It means learning to distinguish: does this person need action right now, or do they need someone who does not have to leave their experience just because it is hard to bear? Accompaniment then becomes less an activity done to suffering than an attitude toward the one who suffers.

Compassion needs closeness and, at the same time, a boundary. Whoever is completely submerged in the other's suffering may lose precisely the presence they wanted to give. Mature compassion perhaps does not consist in feeling less, but in being able to feel without having to possess the other's pain. I can be with you, love you, accompany you, take your situation seriously, and yet I cannot live, die, decide or suffer in your place. This boundary can seem cruel. Perhaps it is at the same time the precondition for encounter to remain possible. Whoever accompanies people over a long time also knows the exhaustion that arises when sympathy no longer finds a place to rest. It too deserves respect, for it tells of a love that has reached the limit of its strength.

◆ 11. The Foreign Power

There is a suffering that arises where the essential does not lie in one's own hands.

A person wants to act and cannot. They want to be present and may not or cannot be there. They want to help, but the decision lies with someone else. They want closeness, but encounter is tied again and again to conditions, to new prerequisites, to one more obstacle that must first be cleared away. They want certainty and receive new uncertainty. They want to say goodbye, and the possibility is taken from them. Then something enters the experience that one might call a foreign power: one's own well-being hangs on a door whose key someone else holds.

When may I come? When may I see you? When will what was promised become real, when does the waiting end, and what must happen first? This form of suffering weighs especially heavily because it separates the impulse to act from the possibility of acting. The person is emotionally fully involved and practically powerless. They can love, hope, wait, write, believe, but the decisive event they cannot bring about themselves. The suffering then lies not only in the loss. It lies in the continuing inaccessibility of what matters most.

A special weight is carried by the pain of not being able to be where one already is inwardly: with someone ill, with someone dying, with a person in need, with someone one loves. It arises from compassion and powerlessness at once. One knows, one feels, one would act, and cannot lift the

distance, the circumstances or another person's decision. Then even love can become the source of suffering, not because it would be wrong, but because it contains a movement toward the other whose path stays closed. I suffer not only from what is happening to you. I suffer from not being able to be with you in what is happening to you.

This pain too does not necessarily call for a solution. It calls for being recognised as a form of suffering in its own right. And it poses a question that is not easy to answer: how does a person tell whether they still live in an encounter or only in an expectation? Where closeness is repeatedly postponed, tied to new conditions or made dependent on ever new proofs, it is worth looking honestly at whether the relationship still bears what it promises. That is no accusation of love. It is an attempt to protect love from the power that uses it.

Under such a burden many people become quiet. They answer more briefly, withdraw, stop explaining. Not every silence means peace. Sometimes it begins where language is exhausted: when the same questions return, every explanation demands a new one, and hope and doubt stand side by side and both tire equally. Then silence can be a protection, a boundary, a room in which no new reaction is required. Quiet suffering therefore carries a particular risk: it is easily mistaken for the end of suffering. But just because a person no longer speaks does not mean that nothing is happening within them.

♦ 12. Chosen Staying

Perhaps “self-chosen suffering” is the wrong word. More fitting is the chosen staying in a place where suffering arises anew again and again.

The notion of self-chosen suffering is dangerous, for it sounds as if people had brought their injury upon themselves and needed only to leave, let go or decide differently. Human attachment is not that simple. We often do not choose what hurts us. We do not choose whom we miss, when hope ends or whether a bond is coming to an end inwardly. And yet there are situations in which another question arises: what happens when I stay in the place where my suffering is produced again and again?

This staying can have many reasons. Love, loyalty, responsibility, hope, guilt, fear, a promise, the memory of something beautiful, the hope for an encounter that is postponed again and again, the feeling that one must not leave the other precisely now, or the notion that everything carried so far would become meaningless if one left today. Then leaving can look like betrayal and staying like loyalty. Perhaps one of the most difficult realisations begins where a person notices: my love and my suffering have been given the same place.

Then the question is no longer: do I love? But: what form does my love take? Must closeness always be proven by presence? Must loyalty mean remaining in something unsolvable? Can a person leave and still acknowledge that what came before was real?

A channel of communication, a relationship, a place can be ended without the suffering ending. Sometimes a connection ends outwardly earlier than inwardly, and the inner connection goes on speaking for a long time. The pain then changes its place. The pain triggered anew each day becomes another: grief, withdrawal, emptiness, memory, not-knowing. It may even grow stronger at first. But something essential has changed, for the source of its continual renewal has been interrupted. Perhaps liberation therefore does not always lie in the end of suffering. Sometimes it begins where no new suffering is added to the pain already there.

This does not contradict the thought of not running away from suffering. It refines it. Not running away does not mean staying in every situation that keeps producing new suffering. A person can leave an outer place and, precisely through that, turn for the first time truly to their inner pain. Leaving then becomes no running away, but the condition for looking to begin at all. And such a step needs no justification before others, for no one except them knows the weight they have carried.

“Liberation does not always mean that suffering ends. Sometimes it begins where no new suffering is added to the pain that is already there.”

◆ 13. The Suffering of Many

Suffering has not only a single story. It can shape families, communities and whole eras.

Wars, displacement, violence, social collapse and oppression leave traces not only in individuals but in what connects people with one another. Houses can be rebuilt, roads renewed, borders moved. But a destroyed social reality cannot be restored in the same way. What happens to trust after a war, to families who have lost people, to children whose first memories are marked by fear, to a language in which certain words suddenly sound like death, to a people whose history has itself become a wound?

Collective suffering is more than the sum of many individual sufferings. It touches memory, belonging and self-understanding. Families tell or are silent, and both are passed on. Fears are carried forward, and so are rules that once protected: Don't talk about it. Trust no one. Always be prepared. Show no weakness. Rely only on yourself. Some of this remains long after the

original danger has gone. In this way suffering can connect generations who never experienced the same event together.

This transmission, however, is no unavoidable fate. People are not mere containers of their ancestors' injuries, and just as pain is passed on, so is protection: care, language, community, new experiences. Perhaps awareness here consists in learning to distinguish. What belongs to me? What have I taken on? What do I want to carry forward, and what shall end with me?

At the same time there is the suffering people experience from the world itself, when it is not the individual but their surroundings that make them ill: working worlds without breath, poverty, loneliness, exclusion, social insecurity, constant availability and an acceleration that scarcely leaves a person time even to feel what weighs on them. Here it would be a mistake to attribute everything to the individual and advise them to learn to cope better. Some suffering asks first that circumstances change, and only afterwards that a person relate differently to them.

Whoever lies awake at night and with mindful breath tries to embrace their people, their country and the whole planet perhaps senses that the suffering of the world and one's own are not two different ones. One's own wound and the wound of the world belong to the same fabric. And perhaps something one might call healing begins where a person, within this connectedness, neither despairs nor turns away, but stays.

◆ 14. ALL-THAT May Be

The sentence sounds gentle. Its test begins where what is meant is hard to bear.

ALL-THAT may be. As long as "all" means beauty, stillness, love and connectedness, this sentence comes easily. Its real test begins where this All also includes fear, despair, anger, grief, loneliness, shame, illness, dying, not-knowing and resistance. It even includes the wish that all this might not be. For the No is also there, the defence too, also this: I don't want this. That does not mean not easing suffering or accepting violence and injustice. It means something more fundamental: suffering too does not fall out of reality.

Many ideas of life carry an unspoken ideal image: healthy, balanced, fulfilled, connected, aware. Suffering then appears as a deviation, a malfunction, something that should not be. But if transience, loss, illness and death belong to human existence, then suffering is at least in part no disturbance of life but one of its forms of appearance. That does not mean: suffering is good. It means only: we have learned either to fight suffering or to glorify it. Perhaps we lack the third possibility, neither to glorify nor to eliminate it, but to leave it a place in reality.

That is why even the call to acceptance would fall short. A person does not have to accept their suffering, for even this demand would again be a task. They may say: I can't yet. I don't want to. I hate what has happened. I find no peace in it. These sentences too do not fall out of being. Perhaps there lies in this an even more radical form of acceptance: that even the inability to accept may be there at first.

Here too shows the shadow side of some spiritual attitudes. Where transcendence becomes flight, letting go turns into repression, acceptance into obedience, unity into the claim that pain is ultimately unreal, and awareness into a ranking in which the sufferer is merely not yet far enough along. The person is then supposed to go beyond the personal even though it is precisely the personal that is hurt. They are supposed to recognise that all is one while their body aches. Such an attitude abandons the person exactly where it wanted to accompany them. True depth shows itself in the opposite way: it does not have to deny the pain in order to point beyond it, and it does not have to devalue the person in order to speak of the whole. It begins not beyond the pain, but in the midst of it.

◆ 15. Conclusion — The Right to Suffer

The right to suffer is no plea for suffering. It is a plea for the human being.

Perhaps the right to suffer can be condensed into three movements: the inviolability of one's own experience, the right to one's own time, and a dignity that needs no healing.

It defends a person's inviolability, the dignity of their experience, their own time, their right to closeness and to boundary, their right to meaning and equally their right to meaninglessness, their right to change and the dignity of what cannot be changed. It does not oppose healing, treatment and protection, it only wants to free them from being a condition of dignity. A human being is not worthy only when they are healthy, not only when they have forgiven, not only when they have let go, not only when they function again, have found meaning or are healed. They remain human in pain, in contradiction, in despair, in incomprehension and where nothing has been resolved.

Perhaps suffering can indeed be a sacred truth, not because pain would be sacred, not because wounding would be necessary and not because a person would have to suffer in order to become valuable or aware. But because the encounter with suffering can make something unavoidable visible: that life is vulnerable, that we need one another, that we cannot control everything, that love holds no power of command, that closeness is not always possible, that some wounds remain, and that a human being is human even where no answer is left to them.

That is why not every suffering needs a solution. Some needs protection, some treatment, some change, some farewell, some a boundary, some time. And some needs at first only a place where no one demands that it become something else. Suffering may become a teacher, but it does not have to be one. It may lead to compassion, but no one has to be grateful for it. It may open a path to peace, but it may also remain what it is.

Perhaps this is one of the quietest forms of human respect: to allow a person to be fully there in their unresolvedness. And perhaps another kind of peace begins precisely there, not because the suffering would have vanished, but because the person has stopped having to abandon themselves so that their suffering becomes more bearable for others.

| *“A human being remains human, even where their suffering stays unresolved.”*

∞ Deepening & Continuation

Those who wish to engage further with the questions touched on here will find related deepening in the WISSENSRÄUME series:

- Wissensraum No. 3 — Der Ruhe Stille: A Space for Awareness, Education and Change
- Wissensraum No. 4 — Palliative Care 2026: The Architectural Foundation
- Wissensraum No. 7 — Beyond Listening: The Essence of True Presence
- Wissensraum No. 8 — The Echo of Life: Between Creation, Transience and Presence
- Wissensraum No. 9 — Burnout in the Shadow of the Perpetual Motion Machine
- Wissensraum No. 10 — Depression as a Blocked Transition
- Wissensraum No. 12 — The Reality of Non-Duality

◇ Sources & Traces of Thought

This Wissensraum does not present itself as a scholarly treatise. The sources below mark the professional and scholarly traces of thought to which its central statements connect — above all those of chapters 2 to 9, 11 and 13. The chapter numbers in brackets show where a thought connects; the chapters themselves deliberately name no names.

- Byung-Chul Han: Palliativgesellschaft. Schmerz heute [The Palliative Society. Pain Today]. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2020. On society's aversion to pain and the wish to always remove suffering. (Ch. 1, 3)
- Hartmut Rosa: Unverfügbarkeit [Unavailability]. Residenz Verlag 2018. On the experience of what cannot be produced, steered or forced. (Ch. 3, 11, 15)
- Srinivasa N. Raja et al.: The revised International Association for the Study of Pain definition of pain: concepts, challenges, and compromises. PAIN 161 (2020), 1976–1982. On pain as a sensory and emotional experience. (Ch. 2)
- Elaine Scarry: The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World. New York: Oxford University Press 1985. On the incommunicability of pain and the limits of language. (Ch. 2, 10)
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