

Suffering on hope: comparing prometheus and io



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“ Let him hurl his twin-forked lightning bolts down on my head.. let him make the wildly surging sea waves mingle with the pathways of the heavenly stars... he cannot make me die,” says Prometheus after his suffering gives him the hope to withstand Zeus (Aeschylus 83). In *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus portrays the effects of suffering on a person’s hope through the two characters of Prometheus and Io. The diverging reactions of these characters challenge us to decide whether a positive or a negative reaction to extreme suffering is the wiser choice.

Prometheus suffers dramatically, both physically and mentally, as he is punished by Zeus, a tyrant, for his love and kindness to humans. Since Prometheus disobeyed Zeus’ law, he is forced to suffer from physical pain as he is “ chained here, nailed on this cliff above a deep ravine, where [he] remain” (Aeschylus 54). Prometheus writhes in pain, but he can not move, which represents his physical suffering. He also suffers mentally, as he is unable to put his gift of foresight to use, being bound to a cliff. His sufferings cause a great amount of pain, however Prometheus continues to struggle under Zeus’ wrath, showing his resolve to not submit to Zeus. Furthermore, Prometheus’ suffering affects his hope by giving him more feeling and optimism than before because he realizes that the longer he withstands Zeus and weathers the storm, not telling Zeus the secret of who is going to take over his throne, the sooner Zeus will fall from power. With a more faithful attitude, he says he “ can see the day approaching when [Zeus’] mind will soften, once that secret [he] described has led to his collapse” (55).

Prometheus’ belief that Zeus’ mind will eventually soften demonstrates that he gains more hope because now he believes that sooner or later Zeus will

let him go, whereas in the past he did not. Although Prometheus is suffering, it causes him to be more optimistic and not submit to Zeus. This depicts that suffering has a significant effect on Prometheus' hope because his misery helps him realize that if he remains hopeful, Zeus will collapse and he can ultimately be free. Prometheus' story provides a lesson to the common man that sometimes suffering can be useful, as it helps people learn and can result in a positive consequence such as in Prometheus' case, more hope. Meanwhile, another character is being tormented.

Io is also forced to suffer, only this time under Hera's wrath; however, Io begins to lose hope because she can not bear the pain she is going through. Zeus' lust for Io causes her to be in misery, as Hera turns Io into a cow. When explaining her story to Prometheus, Io says, "[Hera] is oppressing [her]... setting a fearful stinging fly to chase a helpless girl..." (67). Io did not do anything wrong, but has to suffer involuntarily, as she is continuously stung by a gadfly and is forced to roam around paths that never end. This illustrates the significant amount of pain she has to bear. Moreover, Io begins to doubt her hope of deliverance. She does not want to continue being tormented in the future, as Prometheus told her she would, and she can no longer stand the pain she is in now as she says, "I would prefer to die once and for all than suffer such afflictions every day" (72-73). Io makes this statement as if she has given up on life. Instead of fighting the pain, Io would rather die because she no longer believes that her physical body or mind will be free. Furthermore, Io's statement that she would rather die than to continue to be in agony is used to indicate that suffering has driven her too far. It is significant in representing the effects of suffering on her hope

because it reveals that she has no faith left, as she can not tolerate a lifetime of pain.

Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound illustrates how the sufferings of Prometheus and Io affect their hope. Both Prometheus and Io suffer physically and emotionally, however Prometheus is able to use his suffering to help himself become more hopeful, which gives him belief that he can withstand Zeus and eventually be free. Io, is also in great agony; however, in a contrast to Prometheus, her suffering has a negative effect on her hope, causing her to lose all of her faith because she believes that she will never be free from the pain or suffering she is going through, even in the future. Both stories provide the wisdom of positive and negative effects of suffering on a person's hope in a manner that is understandable, and perhaps useful, to those approaching Aeschylus' work.