

Understanding the Truth of Suffering

Q: Denial is tricky since I'm the one convincing myself that serving my own addiction is a really good idea. Do you have any tips for recognizing this rascal and beating him at his own game?

A: Thank you for the question. And you're absolutely right, denial is really tricky. Sometimes we even try to acknowledge our problem, entertaining the denial. Sometimes there comes an ego boost too, in which we love to have it. But the denial really is extremely tricky. We love to deny, we like to hide our problems. We do not want to acknowledge that "I have a problem." We do not acknowledge, "I made a mistake", because we think "I am faultless." Tibetans have a saying: "faultless, pure white, Buddha of love." So we would like to be the Buddha of love-- faultless, pure white. Meaning there are no dark spots. We would like to do that. That is why we deny everything.

However, we have to know that denial will give a shelter for the problems. Shelter for the problems. If you deny that there is something wrong with you, you will never go to the doctor, you will never get treated, you will never take medicine, and you certainly will not take operations, until it becomes so late and you cannot do anything. So then denial succeeds. Denial's job is to give shelter for problems and to make sure problems succeed and to make sure the individual is lost. Denial does that.

We have a choice: whether we would like to entertain our laziness and hide behind the denial or whether we challenge our laziness with enthusiasm and let the denial out, let it go out of our system. I think beating the denial at its own game will be really beating the laziness of the individual and applying enthusiasm to take care of the problem. That should do. And thank you for the question.

Q: You illustrated the biggest problem I have: being willing to feel the pain and suffering I experience and then to be aware of how much I distract myself while trying to remain comfortable away from the sufferings of life. How do we break through the denial without having to wait until the pain becomes so great that we have no choice but to notice?

A: Good question. Very good question. I think that what we call that experience when you begin to... when the pain has caught us really quite late. Unless we have a mental or physical pain, it's particularly the emotional pains we deny fairly successfully. But mental and physical pains, even though we keep on denying, we can't really deny. And then once you keep on acknowledging, recognizing so that though the first acknowledgment comes a little too late. However, it's never really late. It's never late. Although we are already suffering with the pain, even though it's not too late. When you keep on recognizing and you begin to learn the early symptoms, when you begin to recognize early symptoms you begin to see it a little bit earlier then, and then the pain it has caught you. And that is when you

improve even before you know it.

I can easily give you myself as an example. Being a diabetic sometimes I get these low-blood sugar problems, very often. The first couple of times I was caught with the symptom of low-blood sugar, even quite late, I didn't even know what it was. Now I am at the point where before I get low-blood sugar I begin to feel in my stomach some kind of feeling that low-blood sugar is going to come. It's not that symptoms have developed yet; it's some kind of early signal that I get. Then I take a little sugar or fruit or whatever, I can avoid those symptoms coming in. Then I have this knowledge and understanding that low-blood sugar will come or higher blood sugar will come. That knowledge or understanding then gives me the opportunity not only to prepare to not have lower sugar or higher sugar but also a learnedness and awareness. That provides me a lot of help.

Just like that, all of our problems have their own symptoms, have their early warnings. With our experience we can recognize warnings and pre-warnings and pre-developments. We have the knowledge, and utilizing that knowledge is taking precaution. Using my own problem as an example and when I talk to you on that basis I hope you understand it better. I hope that will serve you a little bit that I talked of my symptoms of low sugar or high sugar, whatever you call it. Anyway, so the same thing goes for our negative emotions, same thing goes with out physical problems. Negative emotional problems. That's how we handle them. I think, that is what Buddha is talking all about. Thank you.

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Thank you so much for joining me today, and thank you for those questions. They are very important and I hope that they helped a little bit.

So to continue from what we talked about last Monday, let's again talk of the first noble truth: suffering. The understanding of suffering will be again continued in today's talk. Last week I said that traditionally we talk about three different sufferings: suffering suffering, changing suffering, pervasive suffering, and briefly I introduced all of these last week. So to continue today, suffering suffering is the one that really manages and engages our life completely. Most of the time we do have a tremendous amount of mental, emotional, physical pains that we endure tremendously. And we do suffer. We spend all our life doing that, engaging with those pains. Do we want those pains? Umm no. Nobody wants those pains. But we don't know we are engaging in pain sometimes. Sometimes it is very torturous. Very very torturous. So much that people cannot bear anymore. Not only can they not bear it, they go to the extent they will even commit suicide. So many people do that, unfortunately. Within our friends, within our circle, within our family, within our relations. We do see that everyday.

They are not doing that because they like it, because they enjoy it. They don't see that but they see themselves tortured. Tortured with their problems and they

can no longer bear it, they're driven to that. And that happens not only with uneducated people. That does not happen only with the poor people. That does not only happen with the blacks, with the Hispanics. That happens with any member of any society. The wealthy ones, the upper class people, the intelligent, the intellectual ones. Remember very unfortunately one of our old friends, friend of many of us and friend of Tricycle—Spalding Gray and myself together we did a fundraiser dinner speech for Tricycle years ago. But even to the level of Spalding Gray, he himself has had a great degree of difficulty and finally that's what he drew as a conclusion. So this is not really restricted to rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Everywhere it's happening. That is the curious symptom of this suffering getting to us. Sometimes when you have this situation we think we can do nothing but commit suicide then. My dear friends, look, committing suicide does not end our suffering. According to the Buddha, according to the great spiritual masters, our earlier lineage masters and all of these centuries' old masters-- one after another tells us because suffering is continuing when we end our life. Suffering doesn't end. Suffering continues. So with the light of that understanding, thinking that ending a life will end suffering is creating a double loss for us. A) We do not get rid of suffering. B) The precious, wonderful, intelligent human life [that is] very difficult to find gets lost in the process. All of this shows sometimes how heavy those sufferings are.

But if you understand that, if you acknowledge that, then you begin to see how to get rid of it. Remember when, talking to you last week about how the Buddha went out of his palace and tried to see the suffering there and began to look for a solution. Solution means finding how do I protect myself, how do I avoid it. If there is nothing to avoid Buddha would not have wasted his princely life. So Buddha doesn't think he wasted, he thought he had achieved something. So the opportunity opened to all of us. Opportunity is open to all of us. The Buddha's experience has been left behind in life with the continuation of the lineage teachers in different traditions. One thing I would like to say to you very proudly is that Buddhism, Buddha's teachings are a living tradition, not just dead dry information. It's a living tradition. People in life are experiencing it, people in life are practicing, people in life are overcoming suffering. It's happening everyday around here, right under our own nose this is happening. We have the opportunity right here so we have to take it. That is your human privilege, that is your right that you have earned. So that's what you have to do. That was Buddha's gift for us. Don't think "there is no solution so I can do nothing but commit suicide." Suicide does not end suffering.

Similarly, there are other ways and means we do to try to take care of the problems, which are wrong. The last eight years in the United States the administration took on the solution of "preemptive." Remember? Preemptive solutions. And each one of them really didn't work. Didn't work. And we ended up with two wars: war in Iraq and war in Afghanistan, and all this. How many lives we have lost. Forget about the money. Those expenses trump economic ones in all this. So again it seems that how we have tried to handle our problems didn't

work. Didn't work. Not only didn't it work, it might have created more suffering. We know it has created a lot of suffering to the people who have lost their lives. Not only for Americans but even Iraqis, Afghanis, and each one of those who lost their life-- they have a family, they have a son, they have a daughter, they have a wife, they have a husband, they have a mother, they have a father, they have grandparents. So the suffering is becoming pervasive throughout. We created more suffering than solutions.

Sometimes even knowing and acknowledging alone doesn't work. You need to have a right way of handling it, not a wrong way of handling it. That is where all the religious traditions come in to give us the right way of handling the suffering. Buddha gives his own version and every tradition has its own version too. But in doing that we need our own intelligent, educated ideas of, preemptive ideas came, sometimes it doesn't work.

Now I'm not going to go into detail talking to you about traditions and about Buddha's teaching of suffering outside the human realms-- they call that suffering at the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, the animal realm and all the different realms-- because we have enough suffering in our human realm. Not only in our human realm, but in our galaxy, this solar system where we live together. We have enough suffering. We have environmental suffering. Environmentally, you know what's happening with the weather? Some people tell me "global warming is not true." Maybe global warming is not true but the globe getting cold is true! Today there was really unprecedented coldness, how much we are experiencing. Whether it is warming or cooling, there is definitely a changing of the planet. Why does the climate keep on changing? Whether it is hot or cold, doesn't matter! Too extreme hot, too extreme cold, we are losing the snow glaciers and ice, all these are true where I come from in Tibet, close to Mount Kailash. All of this place used to be full of ice, full of snow, and now that the ice is gone it becomes a dry mud land, or just muddy. So that way it is sort of direct, the naked eye can see it. This is the environmental suffering we experience, and all these toxins we dump here and there, and create here and there, they create suffering. The environmental suffering is tremendous that we have.

People suffering, unnecessarily wars we fight, unnecessarily killing-the war means killing, what else? Yesterday I had an interview with "The Voice of America" and the questioner asked me about the first Buddhist chaplain in Iraq. So then the questioner says the war is meant for killing and what is a Buddhist chaplain doing in the killing field? The questioner was asking a tricky question. However, yes they have work to do there for sure. I won't go into that. But war is killing, and killing is not a solution for a problem. Violence brings violence. Violence brings hatred. Hatred brings violence. Violence is not a solution at all. When you recognize the problem what do you do if you have to deal with that nonviolently? Because nonviolence tries to bring some gentleness, some kindness, some softness rather than trying to be harsh against harsh. Anyone will know "if you're not good to me, I don't like you, I can kill you." If you look back on

our history we have done so much of that. So much war. How many wars we've fought in our history and nothing really achieved anything. Look back in the history. Achievement is very little, expenses of human life and suffering was tremendous. WWI. WWII. Yes, we've been able to stop Hitler's brutal activities for a while, but then another enemy popped up, another problem started. Because we have not taken care of the source of the problem. All of our sufferings-- mental, physical, emotional-- all of our suffering is coming from within ourselves. Within ourselves. It is my ego that created my suffering. My ego created "my side," "your side," and the attachment to "my side." Hatred to the other side. Push, pull, love, hate-- these are internally created. These are the real source of our suffering. The second noble truth is the cause of suffering. I will be talking with you about that.