

Feelings are suffering. How should one free oneself from suffering?

The very first step that one should make is to learn how not to *crave* the cessation of suffering. At first glance this might seem simple, but actually it is not so straightforward at all; for we cannot assume that an untrained, ordinary person even knows what truly suffering is.

In order to know *dukkha* it is not enough just to suffer. To know *dukkha*, one has to recognize, within the present experience, what *is* and what *is not* necessary. The point is that, in the experience of pain, certain aspects are inevitable, while others, are not. In different words - the 'painfulness' of pain is suffering and not the pain itself.

Let us get back to the opening statement that one should not crave the cessation of suffering; why is that essential? The *immediate reason* of our suffering, as the Buddha tells us, is our craving or *taṇha*. It is because of *taṇha* that our experience of pain is *painful*. This applies to the other two kinds of feeling too. Thus, we can say, that it is because of craving that *feelings* are *dukkha*. In the first type, unpleasant feeling, craving for the *cessation* of that feeling causes one to suffer: the painful feeling is present there, directly opposed to one's desire for it to not-be, to disappear. In this way a discrepancy is created, a discrepancy which is nothing but *dukkha*. In the second type, pleasant feeling, craving for *more* of that feeling is manifested, thus the *actual* pleasant feeling appears as unpleasant, when attended from the direction of that increased pleasure which is *craved for*. The present feeling of pleasure becomes inadequate, a lack which needs to be satisfied. Again, the discrepancy arises, which one tries to overcome by a further pursuit of various things in the world which, will *intensify* his pleasure further. One hopes that such attempt will 'fill the gap' within, but needless to say, that is impossible since the discrepancy is actually being constantly *generated* by the presence of *taṇha*, and *not* by the various objects in the world.

Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,
Not the various things in the world;
Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,
The various things just stand there in the world;
But the wise get rid of desire therein.

- A.VI 63/iii, 411

When it comes to third type, neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feelings (i.e. neutral), suffering is experienced as a result of one craving *for feelings* themselves, since neutral feeling is not recognized at all:

Neutral feeling is pleasant when known [[as such]],
and unpleasant when not-known [[as such]]

- M. 44/ I, 303

So, to summarize, one's experience of pain is *not* the reason for one's suffering. It is rather the presence of craving, in one's experience, that suffering *is there*. As long as this remains the case, one will be a "victim" of one's own feelings, be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

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