

## NO SUFFERING ALLOWED, PLEASE

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The first of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism is "The Truth of Suffering," and I am often asked: "Where is the suffering? I am not really suffering? Life is good!" It is as though they are suggesting that Buddhism is a downer and that Buddhists believe we are supposed to be suffering.

Daniel Brown, Clinical Professor of Psychology at the Harvard Medical School, who is also a skilled translator of Tibetan (and a Buddhist practitioner with a knowledge of Sanskrit) states that "suffering" is not a good translation of what the original Sanskrit word "dukkha" means as used in the First Noble Truth.

He points out that the Sanskrit word "dukkha" means more like "the dissatisfaction, anxiety, and unrest that is the result of constant change," and he says that a better word than "suffering" might be "reactive," like an abscessed tooth reacts when ice or heat is placed next to it. That is what "react" means here – approach / avoidance. The self tries to get close to what it likes and far away from what it does not like. Both are reactions.

If we will look closely, we will see that we react (one way or another) to almost everything, constantly. Substitute "react" for the word "suffering," and what the Buddha was pointing out may be easier to understand, the First Noble Truth then reads "The Truth of Reaction or Reacting."

Many of the same folks who tell me they are not suffering, certainly are reacting, because they can't seem to stay on their life course and/or are being beat apart by their closest relationships, which ancient wisdom tells us are the perfect mirror of the mind, like: our own mind. They are reacting, at least to one another, and to the speed bumps of life. And of course, aside from lip service, they have no time in their busy life, and cannot move a muscle, when it comes to any real kind of mind training. I do understand their situation, because I was the same way and feel genuine compassion for them. They are in reaction and certainly their compulsive reacting is a profound form of suffering in my book.

The meditation teacher Jack Kornfield tells a story of an interview with the Dalai Lama in which someone asked the Dalai Lama questions about self-hatred, not liking our self. Instead of answering in English, which the Dalai Lama speaks very well, he began to talk with his translator and for a long while. After an extended discussion in Tibetan, the Dalai Lama said that neither he nor his translator could find a word in Tibetan for self-hatred or getting down on oneself. Apparently, this is purely a western concept, a real difference between eastern and western psychology. It seems that Tibetans, as a rule, don't have such a thing as a negative self-image.

For me, the saddest part of all this is that we can be the cause of our own suffering. It is not something that life demands of us. We continually sow the seeds of our own unhappiness with our self, life, and others, a real syndrome or loop into which we seem to be locked. And we apparently don't know how or have time to remedy this.

Beginning meditation and many of the more advanced meditation techniques are geared to

desensitize our reactions and allow them to begin to naturally subside, gradually exposing the actual nature of the mind which is there all the time, but obscured by all of our constant reactions, labeling, and other busyness. That is the basic idea and reason for training the mind.

Like a stuck record, I repeat in blog after blog, that it is all about awareness, becoming aware of what we are already experiencing to the point of catching ourselves on the verge of reaction and then not reacting. Meditation practice desensitizes our tendency to go off in endless reaction and allows the mind to settle down, come to rest, and for clarity to arise.

