

Waltham Meditation Group

Thursday 16 Oct 2014, presentation by Michael Fagan, an outline

“Suffering” The first noble truth. The truths are noble because acknowledging them and addressing them will allow us to engage on the path of enlightenment, the truly noble path.

In Buddhism, there are three marks of existence: Impermanence, egolessness, and suffering. All three are a unity, interconnected and interactive. We will treat all three over this course of study. We presented impermanence last week as one characteristic of the ground and will come back to it again. This is the basic reality of the human situation. We do everything we can to adjust it, fix it or ignore it. Not acknowledging this is shallowness and unwillingness to face the truth. Facing the truth is always the first and best way to address it.

All conditioned existence is characterized by basic dissatisfaction, which underlies everything.

We aren't really in control, despite all our assurances and attempts:

We can't foresee or forestall, even in the best of circumstances:

- illness
- death
- loss
- injury
- disappointment
- catastrophe
- emotion harm or trauma

Three types of suffering:

1. **Pain, “the suffering of suffering,”** (Sanskrit dukkha).

- physical, psychological, spiritual
 - intrinsic contrast, necessary and unavoidable. Our dualistic cognition (all forms of conventional knowledge) built on it.
 - problems characterizing any challenge, obstacle
 - contrast to a basic sense of wellness or harmony; denial of wishes and desires
 - inconvenience
 - struggle
- all these run through the course of birth, development, maturation, old age, sickness, death

Human life as fundamental predicament: how we grow.

We can't get what we want, can't hold on to what is desirable.

Even getting our desires fulfilled reveals more dissatisfaction.
Then the common descriptions of physical pain, emotional pain, mental anguish

2. **Suffering of change**

Impermanence and groundlessness. The ground itself generally ignored, things present taken for granted that they will continue and expected. Impermanence and discontinuity.

This produces circle of discomfort and distress, endlessly.

Desire characterized by neediness, fulfill sense of lack.

We see it in boredom, restlessness, disquiet.

All fulfillment only temporary.

Three poisons: passion, aggression, ignorance

Two of the three poisons that give rise to neurosis:

Like: Accepting/attachment--- passion, grasping. This produces hope

Dislike Rejecting/aversion ---- aggression. This produces fear

Hope and fear are the foundations for the Eight Worldly Dharmas:

Hope for happiness -----fear of suffering

Hope for fame -----fear of insignificance, rejection, ostracism, ignored
(overlooked)

Hope for praise ----- fear of blame, shame

Hope for gain ----- fear of loss

Happiness itself becomes the source of suffering. Clinging to it produces suffocation, cloying, stickiness, blinds us to present reality.

We think reward is pleasure and punishment is pain. This is confusion.

3. **All-pervasive suffering:** more subtle, subterranean, subconscious, hidden and most profound. In a word, it is **anxiety**.

Sense of hollowness, inner wretchedness. An edge to everything. Even in best of situation, something always sours. Everything sweet and sour. Samsara "licking honey on razor blade."

We are constantly engaged in forms of escaping this truth.

From boredom, we seek entertainment, distraction, crowded schedules leaving no time to oneself. From sadness, seeking mirth, forgetfulness.

We confuse the shift from a painful awareness as pleasure, because it provides relief.

The higher, more profound meaning expressed in the Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharmas, Volume I, page 393 paragraph 1:

This last form of suffering, general misery, is supposed so subtle that it can only be perceived by realized ones. Only they have experienced a contrast to that anxiety, the absence of anxiety. However, although it has been said that this form

of suffering is very difficult for people to understand, it is not really all that sophisticated. It is actually very simple. The point is that ordinarily you are immune to your own suffering. You have been suffering such a long time that you don't notice it unless you are attacked by very vivid or very big problems. In that way, you are like somebody who is very heavy. a 300-pound person may be quite jolly and happy because he feels that all that weight is part of his body. He doesn't feel that carrying all that weight is particularly painful, until he begins to have shortened breath or thoughts of heart problems. Likewise, you are immune to your own suffering. Since you carry your burden of suffering with you all the time, you have grown accustomed to it. You have learned to live with it. On the whole, even though you carry this burden of fixations, which constantly perpetuates your mental events of disaster, you do not recognize it. You are immune to the disaster of the kleshas --- the negative, unwholesome mental confusions of aggression, passion and ignorance that make you stupid and keep you wandering around. You are immune to the general sense of suffering that takes place all the time.

The issue at core: ignorance giving rise to neurosis.

Turning this into an object of enquiry and study deepens our understanding of suffering. Encountering the teachings point to genuine, lasting relief and liberation. This is done through exploring and learning about the causes of suffering, the second noble truth, which is the topic for next week's class.