

### **Buddhism and *duhkha***

What is suffering (*duhkha*)? What did the Buddha mean by life is suffering? Although, in English, we translate the word *duhkha* as ‘suffering’, this does not actually coincide with the ordinary meaning of the word. There are actually three distinct, although connected, levels of suffering: ordinary suffering, change, and attachment.

Ordinary suffering includes the sorrow of separation from those we love through absence, death, the presence of people we hate, things we hate, frustration of our desires, sickness, degeneration of our faculties, fear, anxiety, and the prospect of our own death. This level of suffering is relatively easy to understand, for it is a part of all of our experiences.

Suffering as change is a bit more difficult to understand. Here, even the moments of joy and pleasure are painful because they are momentary and not permanent. Every moment of love and happiness will pass away. Not only does their passing bring suffering, but even the presence of these happy moments is tinged by sorrow.

Suffering as attachment is far more difficult. Here there are at least five types of attachment that build from the previous forms of suffering. Being attached to 1. Physical activities; 2. Sensations; 3. Perceptual activities; 4. Impulses to action; and 5. Consciousness all are forms of attachment. These are the five basic groups of activities that make up a person on the right and supposed owner of these groups. They all rely on a notion of self as some form of enduring substance or thing. We should talk about each one in turn in order to understand this basic principle of Buddhist philosophy.

The first group includes the material factors responsible for all physical things. This includes all the fundamental elements of material existence and their derivatives, including the body and the sense organs and the objects of the external world.

The second group includes all our physical and mental sensations that give rise to rudimentary feelings that are pleasant, unpleasant and the like.

The third group is constituted by perceptual activities, those of the five senses as well as the mind. In Buddhist philosophy, the mind is thought of as being like the other senses except that its objects are ideas and thoughts rather than material factors. Here the sensations and feelings constituting the second group become the basis for recognition of objects and events, generating perceptual knowledge.

The fourth group includes the various mental formations, knowledge, the will, desires, which direct the mind in the direction of the good, neutral or bad. It need be pointed out that only these volitions are called *karma* by the Buddhists. Even the results of volitional activities are not called karma, only the “fruit of karma”. Thus, karma, as a condition of suffering, is not some

blind material or mechanical force, but human volitional activity.

The fifth group is constituted by the various activities of consciousness that make possible both knowledge and delusion. Buddhists do not regard consciousness as a separate faculty or power but, rather, as a response to the perceptions of the senses and the mind that relates these perceptions to their external objects and to each other in a conceptual way. Thus, there are only six kinds of consciousness, ear consciousness, taste consciousness, smell consciousness, eye consciousness, body consciousness, and mental consciousness.

It is important to note that, although the self is nothing over and above these five groups of factors in all their interactions, it is neither their owner nor is it to be identified with any one of these groups. In India, as in the West, it has proved tempting to identify the self with consciousness, but the Buddha left no doubt about the erroneousness of this view.