

## When nobody seems to care

The body is limited to only four postures (standing, walking, sitting, and lying down), and cannot remain too long in any one posture. So long as we change our postures constantly or whenever necessary, we would find it tolerable or are unlikely to notice any discomfort. However, if we have *mental* suffering, if we are *unhappy*, then our bodies, too, would in some way be affected.

Then we need to “isolate” the suffering, as it were, to define it for what it really is, and not make it bigger than it really is. Identify the causes and effects, the conditionality behind the suffering, and the feelings that arise for it. *What* are these feelings? *How* do they behave? Notice how they rise and fall, come and go.

A healthy mind is able to withstand physical discomfort or pain to a considerable extent. If there is no wound in our hand, we might safely carry even poison in it (Dh 124). A weak or negative mind, on the other hand, would find it difficult to do so, and might even worsen it with negative thoughts.

*While pain and other difficulties may be unavoidable, suffering is optional.* In other words, it might be difficult to prevent or end physical pain, or conflicts with others, but we can prevent or end mental suffering with proper mind-training (especially meditation and mindfulness). In short, we create our own sufferings, and as such we can remove them ourselves.

A negative thought is destructive because it looks at what it *cannot* do, rather than what it *can* do. A negative thought tends to attract more negative ones, and creates new negative thoughts. In time, we are crushed by the weight of all these mind-made negativity. In other words, we must be careful when we allow our minds to wander. The point is that we have the power to pull the mind back before it self-destruct, as it were.

As we move through the world with lovingkindness, we are likely to see more suffering than others. Our compassion moves us to identify with the sufferings we see. This is what the Bodhisattva prince Siddhattha sees in the first three sights which leads him to renounce the world. This is what should move us to help others, and to better ourselves in the process.

The more compassionate we are, the more we feel for the world. To be kind-hearted is like being a lightning rod always up there, and whenever there is a storm, lightning would hit the rod. The rod does not complain, but safely drains all that powerful electricity into the ground. We must learn to do this, too.

We must always remember that the world out there will always be the way it is, since time immemorial. In the past, people have hurt one another, wars have devastated us; famines have diminished us. Today, too, this is happening; and it will happen again and again in the future.

Let us for a moment imagine we are doctors who see sick people everyday: we heal them, but they keep on coming. There is no end to the number of the sick. Yet, we do not give up, because every life counts.

A boy was walking along a river one day, and a truck carrying fresh-water fish skidded off the road and the fishes spilled onto the ground, jumping about hopelessly. The driver was unhurt but dazed. The thoughtful boy at once ran about and carefully took the fishes one by one and let them into the river. He kept on doing this.

A man comes along, stands with folded arms, and scolds him. "You stupid boy! How many fishes can you save?" The boy at once replies, "If you were this fish, it would matter a lot. At least, this one is saved!"

We may not be able to save the world. Indeed, we never can. For, the world was yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow. As we go through life, we meet other travellers. When they are tired, we help them along. We rest with them and try to comfort them. If they are hungry, we try to share what little we have when they have nothing. If they are lost, we patiently show them the way.

Sometimes we hear traveller's tales, some happy, some sad. Sometimes we hear the same story but told in conflicting ways. The tellers do not seem to be lying. They are simply telling it the way they feel and see things. But we are not them. We too feel and see things differently. So we tell the same story our way, but we tell it in a way that would put a smile on their faces, and fire in their hearts. And then, we too must move on.

It's all right to journey on at our own pace, even slowly. We might even falter and fall back sometimes. Stop, if we must, but not too long; for, then we might forget about the journey. Every step we take, we are nearer our destination.

There is only one way to help others, that is, to do it, despite everything. We are never perfect at the start, but as we age, we become better at it. That is, if we are willing to learn from mistakes. We best learn from mistakes by not being afraid to have made them, but more courageous to correct them.

To be kind to others is to empower them. The greatest empowerment is to give others the confidence that they are truly good deep inside, and that they are able to work things out for themselves if they really try. One of the best things that we can really say to ourselves in the evening of our lives is that we have really learned a lot about life, and that we need to let others have this same opportunity, too.

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