

# THE DISSOLUTION OF PAIN

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## What is Pain?

It is said that pain makes an angel a devil. From this aphorism of the saintly Greek doctor Hippocrates, we can deduce three notions: 1) originally an angel and a devil are beings of the same nature; 2) an angel is a being who has no pain or anguish and is therefore happy and peaceful, but a devil is always being gnawed at by pain and tribulation and unfortunately has been transformed into so ugly and fearful an appearance; and 3) the dissolution of pain becomes the crucial matter to realize happiness. Below we will speculate on these three notions.

From the first notion, we can recognize that originally an angel and a devil are the same beings—human beings-- but an angel became an angel because of peacefulness and a devil became a devil because of tribulation. Originally nothing is good or bad in itself; 'goodness' or 'badness' of any condition or appearance is determined by its relation with many other factors. At any time a devil can become an angel, and vice versa.

From the second notion we can infer that some beings are happy because they have no pain or tribulation. Either they may be haphazardly endowed with good fortune, or they may willfully overcome pain by their own virtue and wisdom, and maintain themselves in serenity and beauty, happiness and ease. On the other hand, some beings are unhappy and unlucky, because pain and anguish

torment them until they become ugly and horrible. They themselves are suffering terribly from severe pain and overwhelming affliction, and they may inflict any relentless disaster on other beings. Pain has defeated them and they in turn have become the agents of pain and tribulation.

And from the third notion we can assume that pain and anguish are virtually the determining factors controlling all the beings in the world. That means that if there were no pain and anguish in the world, the world would be a paradise. The present miserable and difficult conditions in which we find ourselves are certainly caused by pain and anguish.

To some extent modern science has been succeeding in resolution of various problems of life. Still, paradise remains far away from the majority of people because the perfect solution to the fundamental problem has not yet been realized.

Generally speaking, science is a dualistic way of thinking that has inherited Hellenism, the original concept of Logos or reasoning. Thus it maintains a schism between an active, subjective "I" and a passive, objective "me". Without a doubt, modern science separated the Evolutionism from the Christian theology, the Copernican or heliocentric theory from the Ptolemaic theory, the quantum theory from the Newtonian mechanics, psychology from philosophy.

Scientists developed the way of objective observation, adopting accurate analysis and synthesis to build up an enormous amount of knowledge regarding animate as well as inanimate matter. They have been dealing with perceptible objects which provide them with evidence and examples of their hypotheses which induce new theories. Consequently, whenever they speculate on an observable matter, they handle it objectively, even mechanically, and materialistically. But to the degree that they can't handle human life as solid matter, their method can't gain perfect results.

Human life is never dead matter which stays under the same condition at all times. Actually, in many cases there is pain and anguish without any organic, nervous problems or mental causes. Even if there is one, it is so subtle and delicate that no doctors or psychiatrists can do anything about it. And some other cases are very particular, refusing any categorization or generalization.

When scientific practitioners try to observe, analyze, and speculate on symptoms, matter, or phenomena objectively --even with the help of modern, highly systematized knowledge and technological skill, accompanied by co-workers, machines, and instruments --they fail to perceive the really living state of pain or tribulation. These scientists can't realize exactly how real pain and tribulation affect people as they do so disastrously at this moment, because scientists are "third persons" who stand outside, observing objectively. Finally, no one can share one's pain or tribulation with other

person. The delicate and subtle, sometimes transitory reality of feelings and emotions which is now appearing and now disappearing, is only known by the first person who is the subject and who looks into the matters subjectively by him/herself.

Even when these mechanical and materialistic methods are effective, which they definitely are in our daily life, still because of their mechanical and materialistic limitations and inadequacy, they become inefficient. Concretely speaking, if there is no money, we can't consult a doctor, nor can we have surgery, or even buy medicine, particularly in those countries where medical care is extremely expensive and the insurance system is cumbersome.

The more fundamental cause of the inadequacy of all these methods and organisms is that all these systems and thought patterns are motivated by their own self-interest, not by a more insightful motivation. Therefore, they practice their "holy" and "philanthropic" work or research without real compassion or sympathy. That's why many unlucky and downtrodden people in this world live painful and difficult lives without any hope or happiness.

With no choice, they must endure unsolved pain and anguish which gnaw at them day by day and hour by hour. Naturally, they become used to their circumstances and forget their true nature or original condition. In some cases they resort to temporary, harmful solutions, further undermining their conditions. And in more complicated

and troublesome cases, due to over or under-protection, they fail to nourish the spirit of responsibility and independence and they become dependent on other people or agents to relieve them. Then, whenever this dependence or reliance is betrayed, they become sad, upset, angry, envious, and vengeful. Eventually they behave as devils, even amusing themselves with others' pain. These three conditions: forgetting their true nature, harmful solution, and irresponsibility, are the real causes of the creation and preservation of devils and the hell into which human beings fall and which is ranked, in traditional Buddhist cosmology, even below the world of animals or hungry ghosts.

In contrast, all those innocent and natural non-human beings such as animals, birds, fish, or plants, don't have the bigotry, unwholesome emotion, or vengeful thoughts which cause us human beings to fight, kill, hate, cheat, blame, undermine, and sue each other, sometimes involving our family, company, community, country, and even philosophy and religion. Moreover, we are apt to indulge only our own interest or profit without noticing other beings' trouble, and thus devastate lives and nature by pollution, contamination, new diseases, wars, and so on. We go further and further astray, manipulating and confusing the conditions of our life, sometimes being encouraged by mass communication and mass production, which has resulted from materialism and philosophical mechanism. On the other hand, animals and plants accept any unwholesome or extraordinary conditions that cause them pain, just as they are. In most cases they have

wonderful coping mechanisms which have evolved to safeguard them.

Still, there are many persons who can maintain a humane lifestyle, not falling into confusion and delusion, not involved in craving and frustration, not being burned by hatred and jealousy, not humiliated by regrets and repentance, not subjugated by anxiety and fear, and not intoxicated by sex, speed and thrills, because they can maintain their integrity as human beings. They remember and retain intrinsic virtue and knowledge which qualify them as human beings. Thus, they endure pain, not losing their good nature and deepening their knowledge of the real meaning of life.

### **Facing Pain**

Then, why are some defeated by pain while others are not? That depends upon the degree of understanding one has regarding the reality of one's own life. What is actually our life? Life is birth and death. Life is eating, working, sleeping, and mating. Life is getting older and older by the year, month, day, hour, minute, and second. Life is good health and bad health. Life is love and hate. Life is gain and loss. Life is desire, anger, sloth, and torpor. Life is repentance, anxiety, delusion. Life is change. Life is pain and anxiety. Life is uncontrollable.

But all these conditions are exactly the same in their reality to all matters and beings in the world whether they are animate or inanimate. In this sense, pain --whether anxiety, hurt, anguish,

tribulation, or finally, death --is the fundamental feature of the lives of all beings, no matter how highly evolved they are physically or mentally.

To be aware, to understand this reality, is the basic knowledge of life. That means that if we do not contradict this fact and concept, but accept this as it is, we do not suffer destructively. If we do suffer, the suffering is quite natural, reasonable, even indispensable; or more accurately speaking, pain and anguish are beyond our choice. Therefore, they are quite endurable. Physical pain is a signal from our body appealing to us for an appropriate response, and anguish is a delicate reflection or vibration of our personal environment to which we must properly adjust ourselves. By careful and precise observation, we can convert pain and anguish into positive experience. Therefore, we should abide in it as a source of self-transformation. We need never exaggerate pain and anguish to draw others' attention or compassion, nor aggrandize it by our foolish, unexamined motivation. Therefore, we need not fall into the place which is called hell, where pain is predominant and permanent. Thus, we can stay in the world of human beings, the crossing point of heaven and hell.

Certainly, beings who are capable of safeguarding their lives can enjoy bliss and comfort in life as the reward and consequence of their endurance and understanding. They are far away from the miserable conditions of poverty, illness, envy, craving, humiliation, or frustration. They are called angels, celestial beings, or deities, and they are the "bliss-eaters" or "glittering ones".

Needless to say, they are not simply fortunate ones who are haphazardly endowed with this happiness. Actually, nothing in the world occurs at random. Rather, the happy conditions of the endowed beings are the effect or the result of their wholesome conduct or habit which has been built up and practiced moment by moment, even through previous stages in their lives. Certainly, they are born in a good world without environmental hardships, countries without any wars or pollution, good places without any violence or insecurity, a good community without any prejudice or racism. They live in a beautiful home with good parents, brothers and sisters, family, friends, and relatives; and they get good discipline, good education, and good manners and etiquette. They have a good job, or they don't need to work at all except as a service to others. They don't even eat gross food. These beings are ranked higher than ordinary human beings in cosmologies the world over.

When beings of any status become aware of the importance of the cause and effect of their deeds and thoughts and the real meaning of their lives and environmental situation, they become serious, and are motivated or inspired into higher disciplines and training to improve and to develop a true quality of life and understanding. Finally, they resort to appropriate practice to remove the real cause of pain and anxiety.

### **Removing the Cause of Pain**

What is that practice? It is called meditation. How do we meditate in relation to pain and anxiety? First of

all we must meet a good teacher who through his/her behavior will give us the best example, which is not conceptual but concrete and practical. The teacher should be just like the Buddha himself in terms of faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. When you find a good teacher who can show you the real effect of meditation, your practice is already almost achieved, because you can just follow the distinctive way of life to attain the ultimate goal. Second, you should understand what life is. Life is impermanence, pain and anguish, and no-self. Life is empty.

When we have obstinate and pernicious pain and anxiety and cannot sleep at all, we will long for the dawn to appeal to parents or doctors who will help us by releasing us from our miserable condition. The more severe the pain and worry are, the more eagerly we pine for release. Therefore, for those who suffer, life should be or become something great or sweet, beautiful or wonderful, which can compensate for their present tribulation. And this kind of view of life predominates among the majority of people. They assume, wish, dream, that life should be very very happy. This very attitude of ordinary people is the proof that they are greedy, angry, depressed, impatient, and deluded.

Of course, when the day breaks and mother calls a doctor, we are relieved from our pain and anguish. But we are not really released from our suffering insofar as we are aided by others but not by ourselves, because we know that sometimes the mother and doctors are not available or the night will never

end. The dark of the night symbolizes ignorance. The mother and doctor symbolize delusion. If we are deluded and do not develop wisdom, we will be continually enclosed in the darkness of pain and anguish, and unless and until we do achieve independence, we yearn for seek, desire, and dream of delusive relief.

But persons who are not deluded do not seek change in their circumstantial conditions. They rather try to solve their problems by themselves. They wait neither for dawn nor for mother. They endure. They just observe where pain is. And the darkness of the night is not hopelessly dark for them because they clearly observe everything with their concentration and insight rather than with a phenomenal, physical, or materialistic light such as a flashlight, the dawn, or sunlight. They also know the exact location, nature, extent, and degree of the pain, or the real cause of anguish and the effect of it. Consequently, they become cooler and more detached and objective. Naturally or automatically, they invoke their own immanent and innate healing power and gain penetrating insight with which they gain deeper and clearer understanding and confidence that life is impermanent, that it includes pain and anguish, and that the self has neither a physical nor a mental entity consisting of solid building blocks to make up a "self" or "ego".

Actually, when there is the realization of no self, nobody suffers. One who is suffering is not no-self. That which is suffering is not one's true self, but the deluded "self- composition", who is full of

expectation, fear, ignorance, desire, pride, egocentric ideas, prejudice, and obsession.

Meditation is the practice of mindfulness, concentration, and awareness which dissolve pain and anxiety into peacefulness and emptiness. Practically speaking, we try to be aware of our intrinsic reality. What is our intrinsic reality? Our breathing body is the intrinsic reality.

### **Practice**

If you wish to practice, you should renounce all obligations and duties even for a certain period of a weekend or a vacation, and go to a peaceful place such as a forest, mountain, desert, solitary house, monastery, or retreat where there are no intrusive noises and disturbances. Sit down firmly in full or half-lotus posture and keep your spine upright. Then settle your hands and adjust your fingers in the proper position in accordance with the traditional instructions. It is in this way that you establish fundamental mindfulness of yourself. With the help of this fundamental mindfulness, you will obtain a clear sense of perfect balance and harmony of the body and perceptions. Then you start actual concentration on your breath – in the case of meditation on in-and-out breathing – and you will soon experience the consistent, distinctive, solid sensation and vision of breaths which come down through the body, reach the bottom of the abdomen, and then go back up and out through the nostrils. If you maintain this posture and breathing your mind focuses on the breathing, you will feel an

Extraordinary happiness and peace. In addition, you will also experience physical ease and comfort which is so perfect that no noise, pain, anxiety, temptation, hunger, thirst, or sleepiness can disturb you.

Some practitioners weep the whole day with ecstasy; some others enjoy the elastic unity of their breathing and body as if they themselves had become a pair of bellows. This is called the “penetrating breath”, or “entire body pervasive breath”. You are totally free from any feeling of disunity or discordance among your feelings, emotions, and consciousness. Finally, you will know that this is real life. However, this experience fades when you stop meditation and engage in normal daily activities.

Because of their strong attachment and misunderstanding that happiness must be different from pain and anguish, or darkness different from dawn, not all practitioners can attain this stage easily. But, provided we don’t have the kind of delusion that something is definitely good and something is definitely bad, and “I like this” and “I do not like that”, we can gain this concentration at any time.

Yet sometimes, or even quite often, even an advanced practitioner who was once successful in achieving perfect ease and supramundane happiness fails in meditation and suffers from pain and distraction, when he/she fails to establish the aforementioned fundamental mindfulness of the sitting posture and breathing at the beginning of a meditation session. Sometimes he/she suffers a long time, one year,

ten years, thirty years, or even the rest on of his/her life without regaining the previous glimpse of perfect liberation. Still, this one-time glance remains the biggest merit and advantage for the practitioner because by this experience he/she has the awareness that life is empty and this emptiness itself is the ultimate wisdom and liberation.

In mundane understanding, impermanence, pain and anguish, and no self or emptiness looks only negative and passive. But when a practitioner as a result of perfect concentration, really sees that everything in the world, including oneself, is impermanent, pain and anguish, and no-self, all of a sudden he/she will be dissolved into peacefulness, supramundane happiness, and ease, which is often characterized as the transparent moon. Once you have tasted it, you are never upset; you never suffer from pain and anxiety. You are no longer attached to anything. You can do anything without craving, anger, reluctance, repentance, or delusion. Consequently, you are perfectly peaceful, comfortable, and happy under any conditions or circumstances.

Herewith, I strongly recommend meditation to you. Don't seek happiness outside of yourself. Be small in needs; be contented with whatever you have. Be happy, not expecting anything from others; instead give anything to others. Just be independent and alone, unbound to others as well as to your consciousness of self. Be amused with solitude and tranquility, be always energetic and consistent in all acts in daily life; be careful and mindful in your behavior, always hitting the nail on the head; be settled in your mind and not confused, disturbed, or distracted by

anything; penetrate and understand everything objectively, accurately and precisely. Don't insist on your preferences. Don't indulge in anything. Don't shout, don't cry, don't laugh. Don't think --just have the thought of relinquishment or non-attachment, the attitude of goodwill, of non-cruelty. Just maintain peaceful silence, a warm smile, and togetherness. Eat well but not fully, just 70%, sleep well 6 hours, work well helping others.

Although you might not yet have experienced real achievement, or even a glimpse of perfect peace, happiness, and ease, have faith in your teacher or friends who have achieved this. Understand that there exists this kind of unconditioned, unbroken, and perfect peace and happiness that does not require money, high technology, sophistication, education, friends, or lovers.

Know what delusion is, what ignorance is, and what the cause and reality of pain and anguish are. Just know and understand that attachment is pain and anguish itself. Distraction itself is pain. If you meditate thus, concentrate and discover your penetrating breaths, at once you will be released from your pain or anxiety. Then when you really relinquish and cut all the attachment to yourself, at once you will find perfect liberation and will taste the nectar of life that is not particular to yourself or human beings, but limitless and boundless, extending in all directions, inspiring, liberating, illuminating all beings and non-beings.