



DUKKHA

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RIVERS & LAKES PRESS

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There are two kinds of immature people:
those who do not see their own mistakes as mistakes,
and those who do not forgive mistakes committed by someone else.
– Anguttara Nikaya (I, 59)

What is Dukkha?

Dukkha, or *dukkha* (Pali, Sanskrit) is the second of the Three Marks of Existence in Buddhism and is subject to the Four Noble Truths. *Dukkha* is translated as *kǔ* (苦 “bitterness; hardship; suffering; pain”) in Chinese Buddhism. Although there is no satisfactory equivalent English word for *dukkha* it has been variously translated as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, frustration, unhappiness, anguish, dis-ease, (opposite: *sukha*, ease, well being). It is essentially transience and all that arises from the experience of transience. For the Buddhist, the primary characteristic of sentient existence is the fact of *dukkha*. This is signified in the first of the Four Noble Truths: “there is *dukkha*”; this means the truth about suffering is the fact of its universality. The Buddha is said to have made no other claim than that he was the teacher of the fact of suffering, its origin, cause, and remedy (the Four Noble Truths).

Traditional Buddhists define *dukkha* in a number of different ways:

1. In the Four Noble Truths *dukkha* is represented as birth, old age, sickness, and death; grief, sorrow, physical and mental pain; involvement in what one dislikes and separation from what one likes; not getting what one wants; in summary, the five groups of grasping (or craving) are the source of suffering.
2. Threefold *dukkha* is ordinary physical and mental pain, that is, pure or intrinsic suffering, suffering as the result of change, suffering owing to the impermanent and ephemeral nature of things; and sufferings due to the formations of individuals and their temporal or finite states.
3. It is maintained that all transient beings, whether gods, humans, *pretas* (deceased), animals, or inhabitant of hell, are subject to *dukkha*. Gods suffer the least since they are in a hierarchy of different beings, and the inhabitants of hell the most. Humans lying midway experience a mixture of suffering and happiness; this makes them best fitted to escape from their temporary surroundings, because the mixture gives them both the opportunity and the impetus to discriminate the nature of reality...

- John Bowker, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*,

New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 296-297

FALSE INTENTIONS

Where is my true intention
to find real happiness?
Is it in the bottles, powders,
pills, fights and parlours?
Or is it in my untrained mind
wandering from here to there?

Sleeping in ignorance,
I am entwined by my lies,
that not only drag me down
but all those around me.
My desires and schemes
spin endless sticky threads
into a deluded web of hatred

Hatred for myself,
for not doing what should be done.
Hatred for the burden
of my lust for passion.
Hatred for the suffering caused
by my suppurating false intentions.

It is hard to leave the world,
even harder to live in it.
A blind drunk beggar I am,
a long way away from home.

DUKKHA

My mind is a haunted palace;
a serpentine labyrinth,
which turns pearls into swine,
and diamonds into stone.

It fears what it ought not to fear,
and is not ashamed of what it should be.
It sees wrong where there is none,
and does not see wrong where there is.

Its careless acts and unkept vows
will bring their own reward,
as it spirals ever downwards,
into the laughing depths below.

THE ELEPHANT AND THE WOLF

I am no elephant
who can bear the arrows
of harsh and bitter words.
No, I am a wolf,
who upon being struck,
hides and schemes revenge.

Whereas an elephant
carries both rich and poor
on its strong curved back,
I carry nobody,
except my famished self
as I stalk life in the shadows.

In heat the elephant
will not eat a thing,
pining alone for its mate,
while I just devour,
mount and then dismount,
moving on to find new prey.

The wise elephant
wanders in the forest
content in solitude,
while I, hungry and alone,
seek out the drooling pack
to help me make my kill.

THE THIRST OF TRISHNA

It's a scorching day up on the roof.
Bricks smoulder underneath the tar.
Rays wring salt water from my shirt.
Iced cravings squeeze me in their grip.

My head swims in the midday waves.
My mind steams with wayward thoughts.
My heart pumps and burns in heat.
The flames grow higher in my throat

I plunge my head into the bucket.
I come up gasping for fresh air.
The creepers reach out for moisture
that drips and drops from my pores.

Weeds in pools beneath my feet
grow and bind stronger at the roots,
pricking me with their poisoned ends
as I seek to assuage my raging thirst.

LOST

I have had no success
at holding up against
abuse or any other attack.

No love or truth
has filled my heart,
only empty lust and anger.

I have stayed attached
to this world's chains;
brass, bronze and gold,
even though I have
no home or possessions,
no family or friends.

I don't accept
what I am given,
I want what I don't have.
Cursing those who cross me,
I walk in uninvited,
to take what I think is mine,

I fill my boat
with greed and hate,
throwing away all hope.
I am cast adrift
in this floating world,
lost, sailing into sorrow.

OIL AND MUD

The oil and mud
of my indolence
seep into the house
crumbling on my watch.
The eaves wither
with my promises,
that warp and buckle
in the bright light of day.

The filthy floor cracks
with the weight
of my apologies
for all that I have done.
My touch of rust
corrodes the iron
of the tolling bell,
as *Mara* sits in wait
for the four walls to fall.

FOOLS

My tired eyes strain their sight
on the long road of night,
filled with fools' laughter
and the moans of sons of wealth.
I am neither one nor the other,
but an immature passer-by,
who, like a spoon placed in a bowl,
cannot taste the soup inside.

In the ashes of the moon,
twisted shapes and faces shift,
moving with the wax and wane
of the pain of gain and loss.
They break their heads
in fevered madness on the cobble stones,
screaming out at me,
as I stagger by;
drunk on the curdled milk of life.

"It's mine!" a young man groans,
splaying himself on the floor.

"No! You're wrong!
I know I'm right! It's mine!"
another cries,
older but not wiser,
scrambling over his supine form,
searching for something
that is now lost
in the melodies of twilight.

A ragged man watches them,
laughing with wide-eyed scorn
at the pain and despair,
in the struggle of this callow pair.
He believes himself wise,
fasting on just a blade of grass.
Better than this, he stands apart,
with no compassion for those here.

I look at these poor, mad,
stumbling fools
who have all lost their way,
knowing now that I am just the same,
shuffling aimlessly into the night.
My immaturity
tricked me down this path,
of profit and of pleasure,
but now standing here
I truly know,
that I don't know anything at all.

PAPA SIN

As I sow
so I reap
the fruit of my actions
in violence and disease.

The water pot
is filled drop by drop
until it overflows,
washing all away.

No joy will come to me.
No true happiness will I find,
while I stay attached
to the sins of my mind.

ANGER

I wasn't born with you,
so where was it that you came from?
I always blame someone else,
but the true fault lies with me.
I never try to put out your fire,
that burns inside my mind.

I use you as you use me,
to conquer gentleness and kindness.
I give in freely to your flood
to lie, hurt, injure and possess.
I never try to hold you back,
I merely ride the waves that rise.

AM I FREE?

My restless thoughts
go where they will
bringing only suffering.

I walk these streets
unprepared for the worst,
so can never claim victory
over the many demons,
tomorrow and today,
that lie in wait for me.

My inertial drift
is reflected in the plumes
of passing cars and fumes
that obscure the dawn
and paint the hunted sky
the colour of a precipice.

More than my friends,
more than my enemies,
more than anything,
nothing does greater harm
than the thoughts emanating
from this undisciplined mind.

Am I free?

No, I am a hooked fish
thrashing around in agony.

BRANCHES

The strong wind shakes me
as my rake turns leaves
fallen from the tree.

“He spat at me.
He cheated me.
He laughed at me.
He challenged me.”

Why is the trivial
so very vital to me?
I seethe.

I stop and lean lazily
against the unbending trunk.
I close my shattered eyes;
weary from chasing branches
that shoot from every knot.

A THOUSAND FLOWERS

A thousand words I've spoken,
every single one in vain.

Not one syllable, line or stanza
has brought me peace of mind.

All of them are dead flowers
pressed tightly in my hands.

TIME

My face is creased with lines.

My hair has started to thin.

My skin has begun to sag.

My addictions alone stay strong.

I am an ox tilling a dry field,

a crane in a lake with no fish,

I am a burning wheel

going round and round.

I search in vain for answers

when I don't know the questions.

I sit here creaking, worn out,

my gaze fixed upon passed time.

MY WORLD

I make my own world
out of coloured thoughts,
filling it with feelings;
painted bright for show.

I polish my mirage
every day and night,
with the wax of delusion,
to keep it shining bright.

I live in it day to day,
following my own law,
walking inside a bubble,
dreaming of the moon.

Nobody enters,
nobody leaves,
it is mine and mine alone,
to do with as I please.

This is *my* world.

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THE AWAKENED ONE

I just miss the bus and curse,
losing my patience in the rain.
Pulling my collar up I walk
to try and soothe my temper.
An old man passes safe and dry
underneath a wide umbrella.
Not a single drop marks his suit
while I am soaked right through.

He carries slowly on down the road,
while I make a mad dash for cover.
He looks across at me and smiles.
I glare at him, and still he smiles.
I swear at him, but still he smiles.
I give up and smile, he starts to laugh.
“Good,” he says,
“Now, don’t forget,”
pointing up at the umbrella,

“Be prepared and stay aware,
you never know when it’s going to rain.”

ESTABLISHED TRUTHS

My fists are bloodied and bruised.

My lip is cut and swollen.

My body is badly battered.

My head is shaved but stupid.

I didn't mean for it to happen,

it wasn't even my fault,

but the problem is that it did

and the truth is that it was.

My pretty face had had its fill

of a woman who should have known better.

Especially as her husband was there

and not half as drunk as I.

I drag my knuckles into an ice bucket
gritting my teeth as they begin to blue.

My motor mouth chews up the pain

of its sweet words rammed back in it.

When will I learn to accept the truth

established so many times

in these establishments?

When will I learn

to choose the good and not the bad,

when I hold the scales in my hands?

HATE

There is no sorrow,
fire or sickness like this.
It consumes all I see.

On this long journey,
my worst enemy
has been my only friend.

THE WHIP

The farmer takes his whip,
driving them into fresh fields.
His loud shouts and curses
ring in sharp and harsh tones
that I have used with others.

The whip's crack on backs
sends shivers down my own,
as I recall when I struck out
so many times in anger,
at the happiness of others.

Some move and try to hide
from the whip's stinging lash,
but do not, and will not find
shelter here, or in fresh fields,
from its punishment and pain.

MY SELF

I can't trust you
to show me what is right,
when your body envelops me
in my constant situation,
and your diamond spine
crushes my grey blue eyes.

Loving only you,
I am always alone,
with no sense of shame.
Too immersed in your night,
I cannot see the stars
beyond your alluring frame.

You don't guide me,
or protect me,
or offer anything of hope.
You just play me
and mock me,
with your handcuffs and rope.

The only place I want to be,
is anywhere else but here,
but you're far too strong for me,
my precious baby,
and I'm a sucker for your touch.

THE PATH

Dark illumination radiates
from this empty shell of light
upon my transitory road.

Divided words and deeds
pour forth with every step
over the frozen winter ground.

A calf huddles by its mother
at the edge of the white wood
from the iced flakes falling down.

I stop,
knowing not
what holds me back or leads me on.

I look,
in vain,
for the way home submerged in the snow.

A silhouette from the trees appears
making the calf and mother scatter,
leaving me to stare at this void,
leaving me alone with my fears.

Do not take this path. Do not follow me.
Do not wait and waver, with weak will and fractured mind.
Never forget your destination.
There is no escape from here.

DUKKHA

(SANSKRIT)

SUFFERING IN THE MOST GENERAL SENSE;
THE HUMAN CONDITION

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