



Types of suffering

Buddhists distinguish three broad types of *dukkha*.

Ordinary suffering

The first type of suffering includes experiences that human beings universally identify as obvious forms of suffering, regardless of whether they follow a religion or not: experiences such as giving birth and being born, illness and disease, old age and dying. The quality these experiences have in common is that they are all painful. This type of suffering also includes the grief of being separated from those we love or from places where we feel at home; the distress of not getting what we want; and the pain of witnessing the suffering of people we love.

The suffering of change

The second type of suffering includes the many types of distress, anxiety and stress that result from changes in our life situation. As the first Mark of Existence showed, everything in the world is impermanent and because either we don't realize this fact or don't want to accept it, we suffer when things change beyond our control. Happy feelings or happy situations do not last for ever, even though we wish they would, so when they change they bring about suffering and disappointment. Examples of this are marriage break-ups and divorce; bereavement; losing one's job; having to move house or leave one's country.

Sometimes it is we who change rather than our circumstances: for instance, the music you love at one time you might later find rather boring, and then you look for something new to bring you pleasure in an endless cycle of frustration and lack of contentment. Consumerism and advertising are successful because of the impermanence of our likes and dislikes, and indeed they feed the cycle. One reason why people who seem to have everything can still feel bored and unhappy is that their feelings about things fluctuate.

The suffering of conditioned existence

The suffering of conditioned existence, or conditioned states, refers to the background dissatisfaction we have with life, a latent anguish or *angst* which arises from a sense of insecurity. It is the frustration we feel at our own limitations and at our powerlessness to control our life and our world. We often find we don't fully understand why things are the way they are, we don't know where our actions will lead or what the future holds in store. And when we consider that whatever we achieve it all ends with our death anyway, life itself can feel pointless. This is not a dramatic form of suffering or one that is sparked by any event in particular, rather it is a more fundamental and more subtle background feeling of unease.

Discovering Buddhism, Dominique Side (Chapter 10: The Three Marks of Existence)



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