

Types of Suffering

In reflecting on my preference regarding the two lists of suffering – the three types and the eight types – I am indebted to the insights shared by Chögyam Trungpa in his book *The Truth of Suffering and the Path of Liberation* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2009).

He lists the eight types of suffering as follows:

1. Birth
2. Old age
3. Sickness
4. Death
5. Coming across what is not desirable
6. Not being able to hold on to what is desirable
7. Not getting what we want
8. General misery

He then organizes these eight types of suffering within *three patterns* as follows:

1. *Suffering of suffering*: birth, old age, sickness, death, coming across what is not desirable.
2. *Suffering of change*: not being able to hold on to what is desirable; not getting what we want.
3. *All-pervasive suffering*: general misery

I relate to the above three types (patterns) of suffering more than to the eight types because I can more readily recall them. However, in so doing I am still recalling the eight types.

Following are four examples from my own life illustrating experiences from within the three patterns.

Suffering of suffering

An experience in 2013 reminded me of *coming across what is not desirable*. Devastating floods were occurring in the Czech Republic where my wife and I lived between 1993 and 2001. How completely unexpected the flooding had been in their month of June which normally boasts sunshine-filled early summer days.

Another instance of suffering of suffering, in this case *sickness* (combined with *coming across what is not desirable*), is that of a dear friend, Frank, who is over seventy. About three years earlier, he began experiencing unusual tremors – to be then diagnosed with the onset of Parkinson's Disease.

Suffering of Change

Another experience is that of a friend who unexpectedly suffered a stroke at the age of sixty (again *coming across what is not desirable*). As time went on, I began to realize that the stroke may well have changed them. For the longest time, I couldn't accept their changed nature and this caused me, and still triggers, some anguish. I have been trying to see them as the person I knew before the stroke – but the reality is that I have *not been able to hold on to what was desirable* (their former good-naturedness).

All-pervasive Suffering

Finally, as I reflect on life, I recognize the element of *dukkha* – both the everyday sufferings associated with life itself of pain, difficulties, illness, and discomforts, together with that sense of imperfection, impermanence, and dissatisfaction which is very deep-rooted in the psyche. Chögyam Trungpa writes about "general misery" that goes on completely all the time – it is a sense of heaviness, hollowness, and even wretchedness, which is eternal.

In closing, I find myself indeed relating more to the list of the three types (patterns) of suffering and believe that within them all pain in life fits.

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