**The 4 & 8 Sufferings (part 4)**

⑦ Suffering of not getting what we want

We want things such as a certain position at work, fame, money, property, degree, boy/girlfriend, things we see in the shops, our dreams, physical appearance. Buddhism teaches that we are made of desire and nothing else. Just like a snowman is made of snow, we are made of desire. From when we wake in the morning to when we sleep at night we are driven by desire for this, that and the other. There is never a moment that we are not thinking either of sleep, eating, seeking good reputation, how to gain more money, or sensual pleasure.

To want is to suffer. Those who are constantly seeking are suffering. When our desire is interrupted or we are prevented from obtaining the object of our desire, suffering arises in the form of anger. When we cannot express our anger, our suffering turns into the silent form of hate, jealousy, grudge or envy. Especially if we are scolded in front of other people, we feel a sense of humiliation that remains with us till our dying day. And everyday newspapers run stories of distraught young me who throw their lives away as, spurned by the lover, they turn to stalking, then murder. We are unmoved when it comes to the interests of other people, but the minute our own profit is involved, we are all attention. If someone is standing in the way of our desires, even a relative or a benefactor, we will push him down and stab him in the heart with never a second’s thought or a second’s pity. The world of Hungry Ghosts is told by Buddha as being one of the 6 worlds of suffering that we have revolved through over and over. In this world, the people are starving even though they have lavish food on display in front of them. They don’t have the ability to eat, so they must suffer continually from seeing but not able to get what they want.

⑧ Suffering of our own existence

A summary of all the above sufferings. We have to suffer because of the existence of our own physical body.

The “Four Sufferings and Eight Sufferings” are the sufferings which all of us have to go through regardless of what time or place we live in, and regardless of our sex, wealth, or status e.g. if we are the president of a country or a homeless person. In other words these sufferings are universal.

Everyone tries hard to cut off the flowers of suffering; however, since nutrients get to the tree through the roots, another flower of suffering blossoms. Up to the moment that we die, suffering does not cease coming to us.

The suffering of life is endless, just like the waves of the ocean endlessly come back. Life is suffering said Buddha, but we are not born to suffer, nor do we live just to overcome suffering for the sake of overcoming suffering. Overcoming suffering is simply a method of living, but it is not the purpose of why we live. When we learn the purpose of life taught by Buddha we will see that the struggle to overcome suffering takes on meaning.

Master Shinran said, *“The painful sea of birth and death knows no bounds. Long have we been suffering. Only the ship of Amida’s universal vow will take us aboard and carry us across without fail.”*

The painful sea of birth and death is the sea of the 4 and 8 sufferings. We have long been submerged in this sea, seeking something solid to hang onto, something that will give us lasting peace of mind. We have never known true peace of mind or satisfaction. Happiness has been fraught with uncertainly and lasts temporarily. Such kinds of happiness cannot give us the true joy that we are seeking. But we are not born to attain temporary happiness. Buddhism teaches that we are born human to attain the supreme unchanging absolute happiness. It is the kind of happiness that never fades or abandons us. To attain this is the purpose of life.

What is this happiness? It is the Great Ship of Amida’s promise. Amida Buddha, the master of all the Buddha’s in the universe, made a promise to save all people into true and lasting happiness. A Buddha is a synonym for compassion. Unlike humans, when a Buddha makes a promise, they will keep it. They don’t go back on their word, nor do they lie. For this reason Amida’s promise for sure will be fulfilled. Seeing the plight of all people struggling in the sea of suffering, Amida Buddha vowed to eradicate the root cause of suffering and grant true and lasting happiness. To listen to Buddhism is to move on the path towards true happiness. It is to go from suffering to joy; from darkness to light.

What is the meaning of going from suffering to joy and from darkness to light? It is to have our minds transformed from a mind of suffering and pain to a mind of joy and freedom. This transformation happens through the power of Amida Buddha. Amida Buddha is known as the Buddha of the light of wisdom. What is light: It is Amida’s Buddha power or working.

There are two workings of Amida’s light: Illuminating and embracing.

The working of the illuminating light shines upon all people equally. No one is excluded from the reach of this light. Muslim, Christians and other non Buddhists, everyone is included in the scope of this kind of light. It is the working of this light that draws us towards the vertical line of salvation. In this way, everyone, all sentient beings, are being nurtured by the power of Amida Buddha.

The working of the embracing light embraces beings who have no desire to be saved into true happiness. This is all people. We are running away from Amida Buddha. But he runs after us until we have nowhere left to run to and he embraces us completely. The moment we are embraced by this light is the moment, the split second of time that we are taken aboard the great ship of Amida’s compassion. This light is not shining on everyone, just those who are brought aboard the great ship. We are saved when this embracing light shines on us. It does not mean that all people have been saved. If we are still under the first light, the illuminating light, it means we have not yet been saved. If you keep listening to Buddhism, a moment will come when you will be enveloped in the embracing light and attain true, indestructible happiness.