
Suffering

Mondo with Roland Yuno Rech

Question: *Is there any suffering that we cannot overcome, disease for example, or may the Path change our relationship with disease?*

Roland Yuno Rech: Sure and partly this is the most important thing. According to Buddha, any suffering comes from being born in this world. Being born implies decay, oldness, disease and death. Not to get ill or disabled, not to die someday, we shall find a way not to be born. It's the most radical point of view in Buddha's teaching. We must put an end to what is causing birth, with the desire of existing as an individual. It's an aspect of his teaching and above all it's the way the disciples of the Small Vehicle or Hinayana understood it. But later, the most important aspect was the one you hinted: change our perspective on life. It doesn't mean reaching nirvana in non-birth, but instead achieving non-attachment to the fact of being born, in all that makes up our individuality. Within this nirvana reside extinguishment of greed, hatred, ignorance, and subsequently all the moral sufferings linked to these bonnos. But it remains an objective suffering such as illness, physical pain, oldness, disability. And this suffering exists even for a Buddha. For example, Buddha suffered diarrhea when he died. His last moments were painful but he thought this was normal. He said: "As I told you, anyway everybody has to die someday, then this is normal." He was in pain, his body was ruined but he had accepted this ruin. Being not attached to our own body, to our own mean wealth, then we can accept illness. There is no fun and we cannot be delighted about that, but we may live with equanimity, not adding the subjective suffering of ego to the objective suffering of physical pain. We may either make a drama out of it or to take it up lightly: here resides detachment. In a kusen, Master Deshimaru told: Zen doesn't aim at abolishing suffering, but at making this less awesome.

Question: *In the Four noble truths it is said that suffering mainly comes from ego, but what about either mourning or sharp physical suffering, are they real all the same?*

R.Y.R.: Of course, they are, but the ego is still suffering, otherwise there is only pain. I use a knee pain as an example. The way we react to this pain, may become a suffering. This is not about suppressing pain, but about giving up any attachment that leads the pain to overflow us and to become a great suffering.

If our knee is aching, then we may think: "this is just a knee pain" and keep focused on posture, on breathing. Pain is still there but it's just a local phenomenon. It doesn't exist any myself suffering a pain, it just exists a pain. Starting fighting against pain is completely different.

Question: *Zazen has been practiced for 2500 years, but from the suffering perspective, there is little evolution. When we face the suffering of other people, what does it mean, the suffering we feel during zazen?*

R.Y.R.: This helps to be more receptive to others' suffering, to develop a wider spirit of compassion, and this cannot have effects other than beneficial.

Question: *And do you think that, thanks to practicing zazen, we can solve any problem?*

R.Y.R.: No, but I can't think of anything better to do. Enabling people to help themselves is important. Zen's purpose is not to provide solutions. Zen is not an ideology. But it should allow people not to stay stuck in dead ends. Sensei (Master Deshimaru) used to say that Zen is the one path free of dead ends.