

## “Buddhist Concept of *Dukkha* (Suffering) on the World”

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### Abstract

It is so essential to make a thorough examination of the meaning of ‘*dukkha*’ and its types for a person who wants to realize the connotation of ‘*saṅkhāra dukkha*’. The word *dukkha* is traditionally formed of ‘*du*’ and ‘*kha*’. ‘*Du*’ means ‘bad’ like ‘*du*’ in the word ‘*duputta*’ (bad son), and ‘*kha*’ implies ‘empty’ just as space is called ‘*kha*’ because it is vacant. *Dukkha* is bad owing to it is the haunt of many dangers, and it is empty because it is devoid of the lastingness, beauty, pleasure, and self, conceived by the rash people. The *Pāli* word ‘*dukkha*’ is equivalent to the Sanskrit word ‘*duhkha*’ (*duh+kha*). The Sanskrit word ‘*dukkha*’ means ‘uneasy, uncomfortable, unpleasant, pain, sorrow, and trouble’. ‘*kha*’ in Sanskrit also means ‘Hole or empty space’. The *Pāli* term ‘*dukkha*’ has a much wider meaning than the Sanskrit word because the implication of ‘*dukkha*’ in *Pāli* can embrace every phase of things in the world as well as uneasiness and pain.

**Keywords:** *Dukkha, Four Noble Truth, Eightfold Noble Path, Saccā, Vedanā.*

### Introduction

It is, here, necessary to clearly understand the meaning of the philosophical term ‘*dukkha*’ before we mention three types of *dukkha*. In view of its prominence in the first *ariyasacca* or ‘noble truth’, the concept of *dukkha* is so fundamentally important that it is worthwhile spending some time to get clear on what has been translated. What is *dukkha*? It is significant to note that five aggregates which constitute personality are impermanent, and that whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*. Here, it is the definition of the initial principled truth, ‘*dukkha-ariyasacca*’ given by the *Vibhaṅga*. There is as under: “Therein, what’s the Noble Truth of *Dukkha* (suffering)? Actually, birth is *dukkha* (suffering); ageing is *dukkha* (suffering); death is *dukkha* (suffering); lamentation, sorrow, pain (bodily), mental painfulness, and despair are

*dukkhas* (sufferings); connotation with the detested is *dukkha* (suffering); separateness from the loved is *dukkha* (suffering); not to gain what one need also is *dukkha* (suffering); in brief, the fivefold aggregate (as the objects of) the attachments are suffering”. In her translation ‘Middle Length Sayings’, I.B Horner translates as ‘anguish’ the word ‘*dukkha*’ in the combination ‘*dukkham ariyasaccam*’. In the compound word ‘*soka, parideva, dukkha, domanass, upāyāsa*’, she renders it as ‘suffering’. But Ven. *Seṭṭhila* distinguishes clearly the meaning of these two important terms rendering the former as suffering and the latter as physical pain. Although it is disputable whether the former should be rendered as ‘anguish’ and the latter ‘suffering’, Horner has seen the importance of assigning different meanings to them. Frank J. Hoffman divides the term ‘*dukkha*’ in the two contexts as ‘*dukkha one*’ and ‘*dukkha two*’. He comments as follows; “Apparently ‘*dukkha-one*’ is not semantically equivalent to ‘*dukkha-two*’, for otherwise the characterization would be at that point tautologies.”

According to the above quotation, Hoffman thinks that the meaning of *dukkha* in these two places should be different to avoid the fault of repetition. It is important to notice also that this term, like the other *Pāḷi* technical terms, gives various meanings depending on the context. The ‘Pāḷi-English Dictionary of *Pāḷi* Text Society’ gives the following recommendation on the term ‘*dukkha*’: “There is no word in English covering the same ground as *Dukkha* does in *Pāḷi*. Our modern words are too specialized, too limited, and usually too strong. *Sukha* and *dukkha* are ease and dis-ease (but we use disease in another sense); or wellbeing and illness (however illness indicates something different in English). We are squeezed, consequently, in rendering to make use half-synonyms, nothing of which is accurate. *Dukkha* (suffering) is similarly physical and mental. Pain is so mainly bodily, sorrow so wholly mental, but in several associations, they need to use in default of any further accurate translation. Suffering, discomfort, ill, and worry can be, every so often, used in certain associations. Misery, agony, distress, woe and affliction are never true. They are all so much strong and are just only mental.”

### **Analysis of the Term ‘*Dukkha*’**

When we analyze the term “*Dukkha*”, we realize that some scholars, particularly, prefer not to translate this word and instead use the *Pāḷi* word because there is no exact word in English which

can adequately cover the import of the *Pāḷi* word *dukkha*. By proclaiming the Initial Noble Truth, the Buddha shows the world reality, the fact of life, which is suffering. Many people do not like Buddhism because they think that it dwells on *dukkha* or suffering and teaches pessimism. A physician cannot be accused of being pessimistic when, after a thorough examination, telling a patient that he has a disease. It is realistic and necessary so that a program for curing the disease may be designed. If the Buddha had pointed out *dukkha* only, he might be accused of teaching pessimism, but he found the cause of this suffering and gave hope by declaring that there is cessation of suffering, like the physician telling the patient that the disease can be cured. Not only did the Buddha find out that there is cessation of suffering, but he also pointed out that there is a way to achieve that cessation of suffering, that there is a way, a method, a practice by which to eradicate suffering. So, the Buddha's message with regard to the Noble Truth of *Dukkha* (Suffering) isn't pessimistic. The '*Visuddhimagga*' states the meaning of '*dukkha*' and its characteristics. The following four meanings of '*dukkha*' run as follows; "Suffering has meaning of oppressing, of being formed, of burning, of changing. These are suffering's four meanings, which are real, not changeable and not otherwise." The '*Visuddhimagga*' mentions the characteristic of '*dukkha*'. The fact of *dukkha* (suffering) has the characteristic of troubling. Its purpose is to burn and it is demonstrated as incidence or as the sequence of existence. The complete list of *dukkha* can be discovered in the '*Mahāniddesa*', and the '*Cūḷaniddesa*'. Here, it should be divided into two types; (1) the first type belongs to all kinds of suffering; (2) the second belongs to each particular name described in the definition of '*dukkha*'. Seven kinds of suffering are included in the first type. They are as follows;

- (1) Intrinsic suffering (*Dukkha-dukkha*).
- (2) Suffering owing to change (*Viparināma-dukkha*).
- (3) Suffering due to formations (*Saṅkhāra-dukkha*).
- (4) Concealed suffering (*Paṭicchanna-dukkha*).
- (5) Exposed suffering (*Appaṭicchanna-dukkha*).
- (6) Indirect suffering (*Pariyāya-dukkha*).
- (7) Direct suffering (*Nippariyāya-dukkha*).

### Definition of Six Kinds of Dukkha

(1) *Dukkha-dukkha* is the name of mental pain (*dukkha-vedanā*), which itself is suffering with its nature and trait. So, it is said ‘intrinsic suffering’. It can indicate any kind of painfulness people have in their mind. According to the *Abhidhamma*, there is the distinction between these two words ‘*dukkha*’ (suffering) and ‘*dukkha-saccā*’ (the Truth of Suffering). It states that the *dukkha-dukkha* can be counted as a *dukkha* as well as *dukkha-saccā*, but the remaining two types, ‘*viparināma-dukkha* and *saṅkhāra-dukkha*’, are comprised only of ‘*dukkha-saccā*’, not of ‘*dukkha*’. Here, there is need to say that the type of ‘*dukkha-dukkha*’ is applied in the name of ‘*kāyika-dukkha* and *cetasika-dukkha*’.

(2) *Viparināma-dukkha* is the name of enjoyable bodily sensations appearing from agreeable concrete impressions known as a *kaya-sukha* and ecstatic state of spirit appearing from reviewing enjoyable sense-objects known as *cetasika-sukha*. The twofold form of happy state pleases everybody or every creature. All creatures go after the twofold happy state day or night, even risk their lives and when these are attained, their happiness knows no bound. Nevertheless, when they are joying with delightful contentment, suppose the sense-objects which have offered them such strong enjoyment and delight get destroyed or disappear, great would be their anxiety shadowed by intense pain. Once the prosperity they have accrued in the method of money, gold or property abruptly gets lost by way of one reason or additional; in the event that separation or death approaches to one’s adored the family member, children or spouse, distress ensue and intense grief, which may even root psychological madness. Accordingly, these twofold form of happiness, *kaya-sukha* and *cetasika-sukha*, are as well a kind of suffering that is known as the *viparināma-dukkha*, suffering because of change. When they endure, they may rise very pleasant, only to be substituted by extreme despair and grief once they disappear. It seems superficially agreeable the moment one enjoys it. But when it ceases, it leaves psychologically emptiness which torments and gives more painful feeling. Therefore, the pleasant feeling is called ‘*viparināma-dukkha*’ (suffering in change).

(3) The neutral condition which by its nature is neither pleasurable nor painful is called equanimous feeling, *upekkhā-vedanā*. This neutral equanimity does not exist permanently. It needs constant maintenance of necessary conditions for continuity of this medial state. This

implies laborious effort which, in reality, is *dukkha*. Hence this equanimous feeling, neither painful nor pleasurable, is termed *saṅkhāra dukkha*. In addition to this self-contained feeling, all the additional formations of *nāma* (mind) and *rūpa* (matter) of the earthly sphere are as well termed *saṅkhāra-dukkha* as they require continuous training. Feeling of happiness also requires constant conditioning for its maintenance and as such should be classified as *saṅkhāra-dukkha*, but the commentators left it out of this classification as it had been given a separate name as *viparināma-dukkha*. Nevertheless, it should be regarded as *saṅkhāra-dukkha* too since it is very plain that considerable application is needed for its maintenance. The equanimous feeling and the remaining formations of three planes are called ‘*saṅkhāra-dukkha*’ since they are oppressed by the arising and disappearing (*udaya-vaya*). Here is a formula ‘whatever is impermanent is suffering’ in the ‘*Aṅguttaranikāya*’. “In accordance with this formula, the former two kinds of suffering are also included in the *saṅkhāra-dukkha*,” states Ven. Mahāsi Sayadaw in his work named ‘*Visuddhimagga-Myanmar Translation*’. Excluding the *Nibbāna*, everything in three planes enters into the range of ‘*saṅkhāradukkha*’.

There is a different definition of the word ‘*saṅkhāra-dukkha*’ which is found in the *Paramatthadīpanī*, the exposition of the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*. Ledi Sayadaw, the author of *Paramatthadīpanī*, gives new connotation of the term ‘*saṅkhāradukkha*,’ which is more coherent and less complicated than the commentarial notes. Owing to Ledi Sayadaw, the term ‘*saṅkhāra-dukkha*’ implies “the act of performing good and bad deeds, searching for food, keeping one’s body, various kinds of preparation for living and so on.” The *Vijjāmaggadīpanī* divides ‘*saṅkhāra-dukkha*’ into two kinds, namely, *santati sa ṅkhāra-dukkha* and *khaṇika saṅkhāradukkha*. ‘*Santati saṅkhāradukkha*’ is ‘the effort to bring about something, e.g., to cook rice one has to harvest corn, to reap it and to store it. Those kinds of works are called ‘*santati saṅkhāradukkha*’. From *Abhidhamma* aspect, mind and matter arise and perish every moment and every second. These changes of phenomena are so rapid that any worldly knowledge cannot perceive them. The rapid arising and disappearing of things are called ‘*khaṇika saṅkhāra-dukkha*’.

(4) Such physical and psychological illness as toothache, ear-ache, fever born of lust and fever born of hate and so forth is termed ‘*paṭicchanna-dukkha* (concealed suffering)’ owing to it can

only be recognized by enquiring and the illness isn't obvious; it is also called '*apākaṭadukkha* (unevident suffering)'. The suffering of that sort can be said 'individual suffering' which is difficult to be recognized by the other person.

(5) The misery yielded by the thirty-two agonies, etc., is called '*appaṭicchanna-dukkha* (exposed suffering) due to it can be realized deprived of questioning, or '*pākaṭa-dukkha* (evident suffering) because it is very obvious and easily noticeable.

(6) Except intrinsic suffering, all kinds of suffering stated in the explanation of the Fact of Suffering starting with birth are also termed '*pariyāya-dukkha* (indirect suffering) because they act as the reasons for suffering. It cannot be said directly that they are themselves suffering because they are not associated with *consciousness accompanied by pain (Dukkha-sahagata-kayaviññāṇa-citta)*.

Concerning the term '*dukkha*', there is the commentarial exposition of '*saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā*'; it says — It is impossible to tell it without remainder, showing each kind of suffering, even for many eons, so the Blessed One said 'In short the fivefold aggregate of clinging are suffering' so as to perform in short how all that *dukkha* (suffering) is current in anyone of the fivefold aggregate of clinging in the similar way that the sense of taste of water in the entire sea is to be discovered in a solitary drop or droplet of its water. Due to this commentarial statement, the kinds of sufferings described in the *Vibhanga* and the *Dhammacakkapavattana sutta* are very little number. If the Buddha gave complete explanation of suffering for many eons, those eons would not be sufficient to express all kinds of suffering. So, the Buddha said, 'In short the fivefold aggregate of clinging are suffering'. It means that as long as there is a fivefold aggregate of clinging, there will arise countless sufferings depending on them.

With regard to '*saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha*,' the explanation given by Mahāsi Sayadaw can indicate the complete implication of this short Pāli sentence. According to Mahāsi Sayadaw, dreadful suffering of novel becoming, ageing, death, sorrow and grief, and so on arise because of a fivefold group of grasping. So long as the fivefold group of grasping exists, awful suffering of novel becoming, ageing and demise, and whatnot will persist. Therefore, the fivefold group of grasping is themselves awful suffering. In short, since there is physical body, *rūpa*, mental and physical sufferings arise depending on *rūpa*. Due to there is the perceiving

mind, *nāma*, physical and mental sufferings arise based on it. Therefore, *rūpa* and *nāma* constituting the fivefold group of grasping are awful suffering. In additional words, the intolerable mental and physical distresses are awful inherent sufferings known as *dukkha-dukkha*. Everybody worries them. Consequently, *dukkha-vedanā*, feeling of pain, otherwise *upādānakkhandhā* is the actual fact of suffering. Enjoyable feelings in the mind and body are delightful, agreeable, and enjoyable once they endure, but once they disappear, they are substituted by dissatisfaction, discomfort which of sequence is suffering. This sort of suffering, recognized as *viparināma dukkha*, approaches about through conversion or change from a enjoyable condition or state to something dissimilar and is dreadful.

To the *Ariyas* (the Principled ones), enjoyable feelings are like a monster, who bewitches individuals along with her beauty or loveliness and twisted them mad. For them, enjoyable feelings are terrible *upādānakkhandhas* all the similar and establish the real Fact of Suffering. At the similar occasion, enjoyable feelings are fleeting and require endless conditioning energy to uphold the rank quo. This of course is bothersome or irksome and is, accordingly, actual *dukkha*. The residual *upekkha vedanā*, the neutral sensation and *upādānakkhandhas* of *saññā*, *viññāṇa* and *rūpa* are always in a state of flux transitory and therefore to the Noble Ones they are also dreadful. As demise awaits continually, having to depend on the impermanent *upādānakkhandhas* for physical substance is terrible, like existing in a building which performs signs of failing at any instant. As all five gatherings of grasping are observed by the Principled Ones as truly dreadful suffering, the Holy One had said in conclusion of the description of the Fact of Suffering, “in short, the fivefold group of grasping otherwise called *nāma* (mind) and *rūpa* (matter) which could root attachments as ‘I’, ‘mine’, ‘permanent’, ‘blissful’, ‘self’, ‘ego’ are just dreadful suffering”.

## Conclusion

In fact, it is worthwhile to mention the commentarial statement “*ayañhi jāti sayam pana na dukkhā, dukkhuppattiyā pana vatthubhāvena dukkhā vuttā.*” “For this birth is not itself suffering. But by being the foundation for the arising of suffering it is called suffering.” To

comprehend fully this commentarial statement, it is necessary to give more definite meaning of the word 'jāti'. Technically, the first consciousness, mental factors and *kammaja* materials, which are all resultant, are called 'jāti'. They do not have the kind of feelings which are associated with the two types of unwholesome consciousnesses '*dukkha-sahagata-kāyaviññāṇa* and '*dosamūlacitta*'. It is very important to notice that the word '*dukkha*' in the above passage refers to the *dukkhadukkha* of the three kinds. But it is possible to say that *dukkha-dukkha* is also included in the type of '*saṅkhāradukkha*' because it is also subject to the impermanence (*anicca*). The different types of *dukkha* are stated in the name of '*aṭṭhasaṃvega-vatthūni* (the eight grounds for a sense of urgency).' The *Visuddhimagga* enumerates them as follows;

- (1) *Jāti* (birth)
- (2) *Jarā* (ageing)
- (3) *Byādhi* (sickness)
- (4) *Marāṇa* (death)
- (5) *Apāya-dukkha* (suffering in the woeful plane)
- (6) *Aṭṭevaṭṭamūlaka-dukkha* (the suffering in the past rooted in round of rebirths)
- (7) *Anāgatevaṭṭamūlaka-dukkha* (the suffering in the future rooted in the round of rebirths)
- (8) *Paccuppanneāhāra pariyetṭhi-mūlaka-dukkha* (the suffering in the present rooted in the search for nutriment)

It can be said that the above types of suffering are also included in *saṅkhāra-dukkha* since they are subject to alter. However, suffering in the woeful plane and suffering in the present rooted in search for nutriment may be said '*dukkha-dukkha*' since in them the characteristic of *dukkha-dukkha* is more visibly seen.

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