



LEARNING FROM PAIN

PAIN IS OUR GREAT TEACHER



One of the challenges we have to face during meditation is pain. Having sat for some time, pain may arise in the knees, back, feet or shoulders. We dislike the pain, so we move to get rid of it. But, often the pain comes back and we become agitated. Pain is our great teacher and it offers us valuable lessons that we can all benefit from learning:

1. No one likes pain because it hurts. If we ourselves dislike being hurt, then we should consider that others feel the same way. So pain reminds us to practice self-restraint to avoid inflicting pain on others psychologically, verbally, or physically.
2. If we ask other meditators, we soon find that they share the same experience of pain. It is natural for everyone to feel pain after sitting still for an extended period of time. So why feel bad or berate ourselves? Instead, we can open our heart — exhibit love and compassion for ourselves and others based on this common understanding.
3. We learn that our bodies are unsatisfactory. Without pain we delusively go about thinking that our cherished bodies provide happiness. But now pain seems endless, one after another! The mind becomes extremely agitated, and we want to quickly do away with the pain. Such a reaction makes the mind and body even hotter and the pain unbearable.
4. Turn to watch the mind, we realize that it is the mind that knows the pain. Without mind, physical pain cannot be apprehended. Having a mind is also distressing (dukkha). As it turns out, body and mind are not our refuge, not our protection, they are devoid of satisfaction. This is the lesson of pain in accordance with truth.

We learn about the impersonal nature of “our” body from pain. It does not yield to our wishes. Pain arises because of an imbalance of elements, mostly due to excessive hardness, heat, and vibration. It is merely an aggregate of materiality. It is our identification with and clinging to pain as “my pain” that makes it unbearable.

Contemplate pain as not mine, not myself, mere element, then the observing mind can grow dispassionate and detached from it. We use the same practice to face illness and death.

