

Dukkha: Unable to Bring Lasting Satisfaction

We may feel that a way of looking that highlights how all phenomena are unsatisfactory is rather joyless or severe. It will be surprising, then, to find these lenses supporting a letting go that invites lightness and a kind of deeply sustaining satisfaction.

We may notice that other practices, such as seeing all phenomena as inconstant, or staying at *vedanā* gave some release from the contraction of *dukkha*. Because, whenever there are desire demands or aversive attitudes there is contraction, any letting go of the *taṇhā* demands that establish *dukkha* supports more ease and a certain happiness. A *dukkha* way of looking recognises that no thing or state can bring lasting satisfaction. This insightful way of looking stops the activity feeding contraction for an immediate relief.

A first application of noting “*Dukkha*” or “*Unsatisfactory*” can have a silent “because they are impermanent”. Building on noting phenomena as “*Anicca*” this way of looking aids letting go and releasing patterns of *taṇhā* (craving).

This practice is an invitation into the freedom of holding phenomena in, what the Christian mystics called “holy disinterest”. A mode that is not a lack of intimacy with appearances, yet, does not reify nor fabricate an essence to things. This guides the heart towards a happiness in keeping with both experience, and the teachings: When we get what we want there is a relief—felt as happiness. Generally we associate that ease with ‘getting’ rather than the opening of grasping and struggle. *Taṇhā* is *dukkha*, thus by directly easing *taṇhā*’s contraction we can find happiness and relief.

When craving fades, even a little, the sense of body and awareness become more spacious. Body-heart-mind reflect each other in a dependent way; as body relaxes we can notice a correlative opening in the heart-mind as *taṇhā* fades, and vice versa. A second expression of “*Dukkha*” or “*Unsatisfactory*” can have a silent “because of the contraction”. Gross contraction in the body, or a subtle contraction in the bodily energetics is an expression of *dukkha*. Often contraction in the sense of body or awareness is more reliable than trying to notice *taṇhā* in the thinking—an indicator of grosser forms of craving.

Many times we will find a relief from a *dukkha* way of looking, yet sometimes it doesn’t seem to be having much effect. This can be due to a more subtle not yet acknowledged aversion to the phenomena. It can be helpful to engender a little more *metta* into the practice: Welcoming the phenomena to arise, be present, and go, all with holy disinterest. A third mode of noting “*Dukkha*” or “*Unsatisfactory*” can have a silent “because it is pushed and pulled”. When we really welcome things to appear, quietening *taṇhā* demands of getting or rejecting, a profound kindness for all things opens us into something more liberated and lovely.

As you can see there are many ways to experiment with when regarding phenomena as ‘*Dukkha*’. Maybe you’ll find another way yourself. Until then we recommend slowly exploring these approaches one at a time over many meditation sessions alongside *samādhi* practice. Not forgetting to linger in any relief this insightful way of looking may bring.