

Meeting Well — The Art of Not Firing (more) Arrows of Dukkha

The Buddha said I teach dukkha and the ending of dukkha. The way we conceive of dukkha will shape the way we practice. One way to interpret dukkha is contraction.

In life there is dukkha. When the first arrow of life (emotional and physical pain) impacts we habitually contract. Because of our evolved biology we are more drawn to the less than fine in life. We can redress this imbalance of attention called the 'negativity bias'.

Experience is dependent on what we contact - first arrow dukkha

Feel how it is to open attention to include something that is okay:

A neutral or nice sensation in the body. Or incline a reflection about something we can feel a little grateful for; support, health, wisdom, nature, life.

We are not escaping, and we are not rejecting the painful, but rather acknowledging that we don't give the okay or pleasant equal attention.

Experience is dependent on the way of relating - second arrow dukkha

This refers to the habitual contraction of the second arrow of life: Why me; a form of rejection that can be a lament, or a sense of unworthiness. Why is it like this; a form of rejection that doesn't allow for life to be changing, unreliable, and impersonal and indifferent to my preferences. Let's investigate: when dukkha arises, what else arises?

Immediately as we make contact we filter experiences into pleasant, unpleasant, and neither...nor... This appears to be inescapable, but we don't need to habitually lean into attraction, aversion, and indifference, nor to escalate from there to greed, hatred, and ignoring. A more skilful approach relates to the full range of appearances via the immeasurable brahmavihārās:

The unpleasant can be met with compassion, the neither...nor... can be met with mettā, and the pleasant can be met with appreciative joy. All can be held within a warm equanimity; an even heart and mind that allows for life to be this way right now. Equanimity also supports this arising and passing phenomena to be met well; head and heart together; reasoned and loving, body present; sensitive to contraction and release.

How does that affect experience?

The sense of self

These practices will affect our sense of self, the aim is to support ease contracting here too. It would be lovely if our way of attending supported a quietening and lightening of self-sense, and for joy and wellbeing to arise. Yet, we all will know times when the self-sense may feel more tight. Can the appearance of a sense of self in consciousness now be met well too: with compassion, mettā, appreciative joy, and equanimity?