**The 4 and 8 Sufferings (part 1)**

Life is a tree that blooms flowers of suffering. We must overcome all kinds of troubles and obstacles during our lifetime. We are never at ease, as anxieties and worries come to us one after another. The German, Goethe said: “I can say that I have had only 4 weeks in which I felt truly happy in my 75 years of life” Shakyamuni Buddha’s first statement after attaining enlightenment was: “Life is suffering.” He didn’t say “life is fun” or “life is happiness.” He said “life is suffering.” Why did he say this? To become happy one needs to first look at the reality of one’s life. It is necessary to look at life head on. Without a proper diagnosis of an illness, the patient won’t know what medicine to take. In the same way, to lead of life of supreme joy, we need to understand the truth that life is suffering. This is the first step to being truly happy.

Annually in the United States about 40,000 people commit suicide. Around the world one suicide takes place every forty seconds. People everywhere are suffering. Even grade school children kill themselves. About 65000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 take their own lives each year around the world. People who are happy will not kill themselves. No one says “I am so happy now I think I will kill myself.”

*Sickness, the death of a relative or loved one, a sudden accident, conflicts at home and at work, disputes with neighbors, examinations, competitions, sudden layoffs, heavy debt, apprehension about old age: just as one difficulty is overcome, before one can relax, the next appears. Everything that we painstakingly build up with sweat and tears is apt to collapse before our eyes in a second. I can’t believe this is happening to me. How many times have we said those words, full of amazement or chagrin or regret at some unforeseen disaster…?*

*In hopes of attaining happiness, we scramble for dear life up the mountain in front of us, only to find a still steeper slope waiting on the other side. Tottering, we pull ourselves together and puff our way up again, thinking surely this will be the last one. Is not life a succession of such experiences?* (You Were Born For A Reason p.54-55)

In Japan some 800 years ago the Buddhist monk, Shinran compared life to an ocean of suffering. *”The painful sea of birth and death knows no bounds. Long have we been suffering,”* he wrote. We are born into this ocean of suffering and we must keeping swimming if we are to survive. In this ocean waves of suffering continually wash over us. We drink salty water and suffer. Some people have given up and drowned. All around are cries of people suffering: “Why is this happening to me?” “I can’t believe this has happened now.” Like the waves of an ocean, suffering is ceaseless. This is why Shakyamuni Buddha said that life is suffering.

Buddha listed the 8 kinds of sufferings that we all experience:

The Suffering of:

1. Living

②Aging

③Sickness

④Death

⑤Parting From Those or Things We Love

⑥Encountering Those We Dislike

⑦Not Getting What We Want

⑧Our Own Existence

1. The Suffering of living

"For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin - real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, or a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life." (Dr. Alfred Souza)

Working, studying, getting up in the morning, loneliness, not having enough money, traffic, problems with co-workers, or family members. All kinds of incidents and problems occur in our lives on a daily basis. How many irritations did you have to endure just today alone? We convince ourselves that life will be better after we get married, have a baby, and then another. Then we are frustrated that the kids aren't old enough, and we'll be more content when they are. After that, we're frustrated that we have teenagers to deal with. We will be happy when they are grown out of that stage we think. We tell ourselves that our life will be complete when our partner gets their act together, when we get a nicer car, are able to go on a nice holiday, or when we retire. Life will always be filled with challenges. Happiness always seems to be over the next hurdle. When we graduate from one school level we progress on to the next. When in school we think that when we graduate and enter the workforce and earn money that we will be happy. But then working brings its own problems, and we feel like a hamster in a cage running in a wheel. Work seems never ending and we think longingly of retirement when we can be free at last to do what we want. But in retirement we don’t know what to do with our time. We almost wish we had a job or someplace to go. And we have the added stress then of dealing with health problems and loneliness. Our happiness is something somewhere in the distance, but always just out of reach. Yet dealing with our problems keeps us busy from day to night. They keep coming around and we keep dealing with them one by one.

(To be continued)