

Attaining No Physical Suffering from No Psychological Suffering: A Speech Given at the Losheng Sanatorium

Extract from *The Buddha-dharma Is the Light to Save the World*

Author: Venerable Yinshun

Source text: 《福慧隨身書》 No.002 《從心不苦做到身不苦》

Translated by Yinshun Cultural & Educational Foundation Translation Team

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE BUDDHA TAUGHT THAT LIFE IS FULL OF SUFFERING	2
Physical and Psychological Suffering.....	2
The Way to Be Free from Suffering.....	4

Introduction

For me, coming here to the Losheng Sanatorium to share the dharma with you all fills me with many thoughts and emotions. First, your pain and suffering fill me with much sorrow. Yet, under such a situation, it is indeed very precious and rare that you can all still come together and practice the Buddha-dharma. The buddhas and bodhisattvas always have compassion for you. They have never abandoned any beings, and we are always held in their thoughts and embraced by their light of kindness. It is just unfortunate that our volitions do not entirely align with those of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. In this world that is filled with immeasurable suffering, our only comfort is the Buddha-dharma. It is our light, our only refuge. Apart from the Buddha-dharma, what else can we depend on?

The Buddha Taught that Life is Full of Suffering

The Buddha taught that life is full of suffering. This is what everyone here can completely understand. The Buddha likened the human body to illness, a boil, an ulcer. This is certainly something all of you have deeply experienced in your situation. What the Buddha said is really true! Not only are you all at present caught in such suffering as a result of illness, but also all people and all sentient beings have never been truly free from sickness and suffering. The only difference is in the degree of suffering and the severity of illness [that each person and being experiences].

At present your pain and illness are severe, and to be able to reduce them even by a little would, of course, be a good thing. However, please do not compare yourself with others and yearn for the happiness that comes from no suffering and the fitness that comes from being free of sickness. This would only unnecessarily increase your suffering. You should know that every sentient being in the cycle of life and death has never really ever gained freedom from sickness and suffering. All of us have always been living with illness and suffering, but you are currently experiencing sickness and suffering to a greater degree. The only [true way out] is to completely let go and move in the direction toward the great path of liberation from cyclic life and death as well as move toward the state where there is no more sickness and death.

Physical and Psychological Suffering

On this topic of suffering, there is both physical and psychological suffering. For example, situations such as having no clothes and food, being battered by the winds, scorched by the sun, chilled by the cold, burned by fire, lashed with a whip, slashed with a knife, stung by a bee, and wounded by a snake cause physical suffering, which is generally undesirable for everyone. These types of suffering can be reduced if we can [find ways to] increase production, integrate labor and capital harmoniously, improve medical services, et cetera. Although such measures cannot completely eradicate these types of suffering, relatively speaking, they can provide relief.

Psychological suffering is another matter. Feelings of hopelessness, hatred, anxiousness, fear, resentment, sorrow, vexation and so on are experienced differently

by each person. For example, gazing at the moon can arouse different sentiments in different people. Some feel delighted, some feel sorrow, and others experience fear. Also, some feel lonely and miserable, while others feel a sense of calmness and beauty. Similarly, with sickness, some have a mild illness, and yet in their minds they experience great sorrow and fear. And yet, although some have grave illnesses, their psychological suffering is minimal.

Therefore, regarding physical suffering, whether it is due to causes in our past lives or our current conditions, we should seek the corresponding remedy. As for psychological suffering arising from past causes or present circumstances, because we have started the practice of the Buddha-dharma, it is better that we [use our practice to] adequately control and resolve our psychological suffering such that we no longer have any fear and all of our worries, sorrow, and vexations cease. This is just as if, in your case, all of you have contracted a severe illness, which may be due to past causes or unfortunate present conditions. Given that the current medical know-how is unable to cure your disease completely, the best thing is to establish stability in your lives. It is best to not do anything silly to add to your current woes.

Conversely, the removal of psychological suffering is something we can attain. I would like to let you know that some arhats who have been freed from cyclic existence still unavoidably have physical suffering. However, there is no psychological suffering for them. The Buddha once said that we must aim to be able to have no psychological suffering even though we have physical suffering. I genuinely believe this is the Buddha's most compassionate and skilful teaching gifted to us. This teaching is something [I urge] all of you here to hold dear and practice.

Both the physical and psychological—that is, the material and the mental—innately influence each other. Therefore, physical suffering can lead to psychological suffering and vice versa. Nevertheless, reduction in physical suffering does not necessarily equate to a reduction in psychological suffering. For example, our present materialistic culture is quite advanced, and theoretically it should follow that mental happiness should also increase. Yet, this is not the case; rather, the number of people who suffer from anxiety and psychological issues has increased. Moreover, governing policies that incite conflict result in fear and cause people to fall into the ocean of suffering, where they feel panic and distress and suffer from severe misery. These people are in a much

worse situation compared with the suffering from illness that you are experiencing. Even though the elimination of psychological suffering does not automatically eliminate physical suffering, if one practices well enough, it is possible to remove physical suffering. As such, attaining the state of no physical suffering by means of eliminating psychological suffering is the most thorough way of providing relief taught by the Buddha. We should take this as our goal and work hard to realize it.

The Way to Be Free from Suffering

For those people who do not know the Buddha-dharma and [therefore] do not practice according to it, when they have physical suffering, it leads to psychological suffering, and when they suffer mentally it then affects them physically. Accordingly, minor suffering ends up becoming major suffering. For instance, some may have a minor illness but worry too much and become overanxious. Then there are those who may miss loved ones too much and become lovesick so that they develop insomnia and loss of appetite. In both situations, their physical suffering increases over time [due to psychological suffering]. This is a very common situation in our country at present, so there is no need to elaborate further. For those who understand the Buddha-dharma and practice it accordingly, their physical suffering will not bring on psychological suffering, and certainly their mental suffering will not lead to physical suffering. Also, their minor suffering will not develop into major suffering, and in contrast, any major suffering can be remedied to become minor, and minor suffering is eliminated.

The key to this [result] lies in (1) thorough understanding of the principle of cause and effect and having confidence in the law of karmic retribution so that one does not become disturbed by suffering and does not confusedly create more pain for themselves; (2) repentance for past unwholesome deeds, seeking the blessings from the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and undertaking more wholesome deeds to ameliorate their suffering and vexation; and (3) practicing insight meditation, which is a powerful tool to transform the body through one's mind. In the past, the great master of the Tiantai school, Nanyue Huisi, was afflicted by paralysis such that movement in his limbs was slow, and generally, he could not control his body by will. Later, on account of the strength he developed through insight meditation, he was able to fully heal himself.

There is another true story found in the records of a literatus from the Qing Dynasty. The circumstance also aligns with the Buddha-dharma, and this story is something you can all ponder.

There was a lady who came from a wealthy family. She was beautiful and smart, and the man she married was from a similar background. They were a well-matched couple. Their relationship was very loving, and she had a good relationship with her parents-in-law. Unfortunately, this lady contracted leprosy. After she became ill, despite how much her husband and parents-in-law cared about her, they had to establish strict quarantines. Not long after, the infection worsened, and so they built a separate little hut for her. Accordingly, she had to stay there day and night, like a hermit in retreat. While living there alone all day, she kept pondering the symptoms of her illness. The more she looked at her infected and impure body, the uglier it became, and so she detested it even more. These images of her impure and gross body never left her thoughts, no matter whether she was eating or drinking and so on. Eventually, she was able to visualize that the impure and disgusting body afflicted with leprosy had fallen away. What was left was a white pure skeleton that was unblemished. Suddenly, the white skeleton began to shine, which filled the hut with light. From that moment on, her leprosy also healed completely. So, because she loathed her worldly and impure physical body, she recovered. After that, she remained in the hut, living a life that was truly free. This story aligns well with the Buddha's teaching on the process of meditating on impurities until one attains the insight into purity.

Because the mind attains the powers of concentration and wisdom, it can effect a transformation in the body. This is possible. I urge you all to treat this Losheng Sanatorium as your retreat hut and practice well. I assume that for most of you, your regular practice is to recollect the Buddha. Recollecting the Buddha is a practice that seeks purity of body and mind and to attain rebirth in a pureland. This requires one to sincerely want to leave this world behind, which is only possible if you see this world as utterly impure and disgusting. The ancient masters say that if one's mind to leave this *sahā* [world] is not sincere, then it will be difficult for one to leave the world and

attain rebirth in a pureland. This *sahā* [world] contains the five kinds of turbidity,¹ and this physical body is a collection of five poisonous elements. If one can thoroughly view this body and world as impure, then naturally, one is able to transform the impure into pure or transfer from the impure to the pure.²

The story of that lady from the Qing Dynasty can be a role model for you all. The Buddha is the great teacher in this world and also the great doctor. When one starts to believe in the Buddha and practice Buddhism, one has already set off on the right path and is heading toward a bright future. Please do not place too much emphasis on the present because you still have your boundless future ahead. Please do not place too much emphasis on your physical bodies, for you still have mental freedom.

Under the blessings of the triple gem, I wish that all of you do not develop mental suffering even though you experience physical suffering. Also, I hope you make great strides toward a future where both your mind and body are pure.

¹ The five kinds of turbidity refers to (1) the turbidity of age, where sentient beings' life expectancy reduces dramatically and this is met with corresponding calamities of famine, pestilence, and conflicts, all of which no one can avoid. (2) Turbidity of view, which is where the true dharma disappears, and false dharmas begin to arise, while evil views grow stronger. People no longer carry out good deeds. (3) Turbidity of affliction is where beings are overcome by the many defilements of greed, lust, stinginess, confrontations, lying, and so forth. They adopt evil ways to create mental distress. (4) Turbidity of living beings is the time when beings delight in evil, do not respect their parents or elders, and have no fear of retribution, and so they do not create merit or undertake deeds to help others. (5) Turbidity of life span is where humans no longer enjoy the long life spans of the ancients. Due to the evil they create, their life span dwindles, and it would be extremely rare for people to live to one hundred.

² This transformation of impure into pure refers to departing this impure world and gaining rebirth in a pureland.