

# Good Feeling Suffering, Bad Feeling Suffering

BY ZEN MASTER WU BONG

*This exchange is from a talk at the Introduction to Zen Workshop on September 9, 1990.*

**Question:** What do you mean by suffering? I read somewhere that suffering isn't really what one thinks it is.

**Wu Bong Zen Master:** There are many kinds of suffering: body pain, emotional pain, mental pain. Sometimes people are happy but this happiness is also a kind of suffering. For example, someone takes some cocaine and it makes them feel very good, this is also suffering. The root of this happiness is suffering. So, suffering does not mean just bad feeling.

Sometimes, we have good feeling suffering, sometimes we have bad feeling suffering. Someone may be very happy, because he or she is attached to something. This kind of happiness already has the seeds of suffering. The seeds of suffering come from our attachment, our expectations, our wanting something from a situation. If you have, "I, my, me" you are suffering whether you know it or not.

**Q:** Then does Zen mean not to think in terms of "I, my, me," and suffering will go away?

**WBZM:** If you attain Zen then you will get more suffering. If you do not want suffering, you shouldn't try Zen, because if you are practicing, then everyone's suffering becomes yours. Then there is no "my suffering," but still there is suffering in the world.

We talk often about compassion. Many of us want to become more compassionate, but we do not always understand what compassion is. Compassion is not some kind of a feeling. Compassion is not just feeling bad for someone or feeling pity for someone. Feeling bad for someone who is hungry will not fill that person's stomach. Compassion means moment to moment, what do you do? When somebody is hungry, what can you do?

For example, ten years ago I was very sick and had to stay in a hospital. My doctors thought that I would soon die, so all of my friends worried about me. Among the people who came to visit me from the Zen Center was one person who was very emotional. I was exhausted after each of her visits because I had to spend a lot of my energy on cheering her up.

To make it more clear, consider a teacher's job. Being a human being, it is not unusual for a teacher to have favorites among his or her students, and others

that are perhaps even disliked. The teacher's job, however, is to encourage, compliment, and give good grades to students when they deserve it, whether one likes them or not. Also, to give correct grades and good feedback to students who perform poorly, even if they are one's favorites. Another name for this is compassion.

So finally, compassion simply means keeping one's correct situation, correct relationship, and correct function, moment to moment.

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