

## What is Suffering?

In this culture, we've heard the terms "pain" and "suffering" as if they were a package deal, that if there's pain there's automatically suffering. I'd like to question that.

I'm guessing that since you're listening to a talk entitled, "What is Suffering," you may have encountered pain and perhaps suffering sometime in your life, or perhaps you're going through it now. Life has many opportunities for painful experiences, whether they be physical injuries, illnesses, the grief of losing a loved one, perhaps even the loss of a job, a relationship, or loss of financial security. There's many events that we can term painful in this life. Even though we know exactly what physical pain can feel like in the body, these other more emotional or psychological events can feel like a body blow as well, almost as if someone struck us physically, energetically.

But the question is does that body blow automatically lead to suffering? Or is there a difference between pain and suffering? Pain is a physical sensation, again whether it's emotional or psychological, it's still felt in the body, without a concept about it. The concept about it is something that we tell ourselves after the fact. Our mind comes in to explain what happened, to try to justify or deny or avoid, what happened, and we do this to ourselves all the time. We talk to ourselves, and when something really painful happens we amp up this activity. We create stories about it, we say that this shouldn't have happened, life shouldn't have treated us this way, we didn't deserve it. "He shouldn't have done that to me; they shouldn't have left me." And by repeating those stories over and over again in our heads, each time with a little more fervour, a little more belief, it solidifies those stories within us. We believe they're true and suffering is created. The suffering is a result of the stories that we tell ourselves about the pain.

The pain may be inescapable but the suffering is optional. We can choose not to believe the story that we're telling ourselves or at least question whether the story is true. Just bringing the story into the light of day, allowing it to unfold and play itself out, as if a movie was playing on the screen of our mind and watching it. Allowing consciousness to see how this storytelling operates within us. We tell the story, we believe the story, and we suffer. And we do it again and again. After a while we can see that there's a relationship between telling ourselves a story about the painful event and the resulting suffering. So, it's really bringing the light of day, bringing consciousness, bringing awareness, to see what we're telling ourselves; to watch ourselves telling the story, to watch ourselves believing the story.

That consciousness has a transformative benefit. We can see that there's no payoff in telling ourselves a story about why something shouldn't have happened. That's the freedom. That releases the suffering. The pain may still be there, the grief may still be there, the sense of loss. But without the blame, guilt, and story behind it, we can be free from suffering.