

Frustration and its prevention: A Buddhist Psychological Point of view

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Introduction

Frustration, a common, destructive dangerous Subjective factor in the world today, which leads people to some maladaptive behaviors or Psychological dysfunctions such as assaulting, Killing, Suicide, mental stress and even severe mental disorders. In addition, "frustration is experienced when the pursuit of some goal is thwarted. In essence, you experience frustration when you want something and you can't have it. Everyone has to deal with frustration virtually every day".¹ A lot of Social, mental and psychological misbehaviors are based on frustration primarily, therefore, various psychological interventions have been conducted by various Psychologists to identify causes, forms and treatments of frustration. So that this article focuses on what are the causes, forms and preventive strategies of frustration, according to Buddhist Psychology, with special reference to the *Saccavibhanga sutta* in *Majjhima Nikaya*.

The term "Frustration" in Buddhism

Buddhism is entirely psychological religion and has demonstrated a lot of psychological teachings since 2500 years ago. Buddhism has revealed the truth and the reality of world. The major prospect of Buddhism is purification of mind and attains the *Nibbana* also known as the ultimate happiness.

Buddhism has explained the path of the *Nibbana* which consist four truths of world also called as the Four Noble Truth or "*ariyasaccāni*" in Pali texts. The word "*sacca*" refers the "truth". *Rohita Sutta* in *Sanyutta Nikaya* explains,

"In this very one-fathom long body along with its perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world"²

The meaning of the "world" in this manner is suffering. The Four Noble Truth can be categorized accordingly.

1. Truth about one's own suffering (*Dukkha Sacca*)
2. Truth about several factors arising together to cause suffering (*Samudaya Sacca*)
3. Truth about the non-arising together of several factors (*Nirōdha Sacca*)
4. Truth about the way to the cessation of one's own suffering (*Magga Sacca*)³

The first Noble Truth refers the disease or suffering, the second identifies its causes, the third gives a prognosis and the final noble Truth suggests a remedy or treatment of Suffering.

The Buddhist Psychological explanation of frustration involves in first noble truth basically. The *Dukkha Sacca* represents the reality of the world and worldly matters, suffering or worrying. 12 types of Sufferings are there in the *Dukkha Sacca*, or Suffering.

1. Birth
2. Aging or decaying

3. Illnesses or diseases
4. Death
5. Separate from loved ones or things
6. Association with detested ones or things
7. Unfulfilled wishes (stress of not getting what is wanted)
8. Cling of five aggregates (*Pancupādānakkhandhā*)⁴

The *Saccavibhanga Sutta* elaborates the *Dukkha Sacca* and illustrates each type of it. When we concern with the Buddhist psychological point of view of frustration, the seventh type of the *Dukkha Sacca* is very important. This seventh type of the *Dukkha sacca* comes up with new explanation of frustration. Unfulfilled wishes or frustration is going through all other types of the *Dukkha Sacca*. The *Dukkha sacca* or the truth of suffering is almost always related with frustration. When suffering occurs, frustration also occurs concurrently, when frustration occurs, suffering also occurs. There is an inter-connected relationship between these two.

Basically the *Saccavibhanga Sutta* names frustration as "*Yampiccam na labhati tampi dukkham*"⁵ Or "wish unfulfilled is also suffering"⁶. *Saccavibhanga Sutta* describes five types of sufferings of frustration accordingly. First type is,

"*Katamam cāvuso yampiccam na labhati tampi dukkham: jātidhammānam āvuso, sattānam evam icchā uppajjati: aho vata mayam na jātidhammā assāma, na ca vata no jāti āgaccheyyāti. Na kho panetam icchāya pattabbam idampi yampiccam na labhati tampi dukkham.*"⁷

This *Pali* text means, "And what is the stress of not getting what is wanted? In beings subject to birth, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to birth, and may birth not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted."⁸

According to this explanation, one cause of frustration is birth. The reason for all kinds of suffering is the birth. People specially annihilationists wish to not birth again in the world but it does not happen as they wish. It affect on frustration finally. Furthermore, the other part of *Saccavibhanga Sutta* shows the other factors that affect on one's frustration.

"*Jarādhammānam āvuso sattānam evam icchā uppajjati: aho vata mayam na jarādhammā assāma, na ca vata no jarā āgaccheyyāti. Na kho panetam icchāya pattabbam idampi yampiccam na labhati tampi dukkham.*"⁹

"In beings subject to aging, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to age, and may age not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted".¹⁰

This text says that aging is another factor that generates frustration. Modern psychologists also agree with this statement and Gerontology has revealed that aging can produce frustration within people through numbers of researches. The definition of aging in gerontology is controversial but Buddhism emphasizes that aging starts from one's birth.

"Byādhidhammānam āvuso, sattānam evam icchā uppajjati: aho vata mayam na byādhidhammā assāma, na ca vata no byādhi āgaccheyyāti. Na kho panetam icchāya pattabbam idampi yampiccham na labhati tampi dukkham."¹¹

"In beings subject to illness, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to illness, and may illness not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted".¹²

According to this explanation, illnesses also affect on one's frustration and modern psychologists also confirm this. Illnesses may occur at any time of our life and specially severe illnesses can produce frustration. People with cancers, heart diseases, sexual disorders and other life threatening diseases may experience frustration easily.

"Maranadhammānam āvuso, sattānam evam icchā uppajjati: aho vata mayam na maranadhammā assāma, na ca vata no maranam āgaccheyyāti. Na kho panetam icchāya pattabbam idampi yampiccham na labhati tampi dukkham."¹³

"In beings subject to death, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to death, and may death not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted".¹⁴

The death is very dangerous factor that can produce frustration. People who lose a loved one or death of spouse, children, relatives and friends can easily get frustrated. In

addition, people who are close to death may develop severe frustration.

"Sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsadhammānam āvuso, sattānam evam icchā uppajjati: aho vata mayam na kaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsadhammā assāma, na ca vata No sokaparidevadukkhadomana ssupāyāsā āgaccheyyunti. Na kho panetam icchāya pattabbam, idampi yampiccham na labhati tampi dukkham."¹⁵

"In beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, and may sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted."¹⁶

This description is wide one and all types of sufferings people live with are emphasized by this text. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are originated by all types of sufferings which described in the *Dhammacakka pavattana Sutta* in *Sanyutta Nikaya* as mentioned at the first of this article regarding the *Dukkha Sacca*. Hence, finally, *Saccavibhanga Sutta* illustrated that all types of sufferings in life produce frustration all together and all those sufferings are interconnected with birth, aging, illnesses, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. It is one of the truths of the world.

Narada (1964) Stated this Buddhist Psychological view of frustration as, "all are Subject to birth (*jāti*), and constantly to

decay (*jarā*), disease (*vyādhi*), and finally to death (*marana*). No one is exempt from these four inevitable causes of suffering."¹⁷ Those are the major factors that affect on one's frustration and he further mentioned;

"Impeded wish is also suffering we do not wish to be associated with things, or persons we detest, nor do we wish to be separated from things or persons we love our cherished desires are not, however, always gratified. What we least expect or what we least desire is often thrust on us. At times such unexpected unpleasant circumstance become so intolerable and painful that weak ignorant folk are compelled to commit suicide as if such as act would solve the problem."¹⁸

As *Narada* (1964) demonstrated, modern psychologists also have identified that the frustration as a risky mental factor of committing suicide. Western psychologists have introduced the causes of frustration as below.

- 01 Death of a loved one.
- 02 Illnesses
- 03 Break up of love affairs.
- 04 Neglecting.
- 05 Aging.
- 06 Lose of income.
- 07 Retirement.
- 08 Divorce.
- 09 Conflicts with others.
- 10 Sexual disturbances.
- 11 Jailing

These all situations can be included in the frustration categories identified by the *Saccavibhanga Sutta*.

How to prevent from frustration

As the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* explained, frustration is only one type of the *Dukkha Sacca* or suffering, so that frustration is also a reality of the world, which cannot avoid by mundane people. Therefore it is a question how can we prevent from frustration. The Lord Buddha taught a particular way to prevent not from the frustration but from the suffering from frustration in the *Pariññeyya Sutta* in *Sanyutta Nikaya*,

"*Dukkham bhikkavē ariyasaccam pariññeyyam...*"¹⁹

It means the way to prevent from all types of sufferings is to understand them as they really are. "This first truth of suffering which depends on this so-called being and various aspects of life is to be carefully analyzed and examined. This examination leads to a proper understanding of oneself as one really is".²⁰

This understanding increases one's awareness of world and worldly matters. This strategy of preventing frustration suffering is virtually an insight therapy. The only one way to promote one's frustration tolerance is gaining insight of the world. Furthermore, the Lord Buddha explained the reality of the world as,

"*Acinti tampi bhavati
Cinti tampi vinassati...*"²¹

It means things that we hoped do not happen while things we not hoped happen more often. Unexpected things are happened suddenly and then we sorrow and suffer. So, one who can understand the reality of the world is not going to suffer furthermore. It is the real frustration tolerance. Finally, we cannot control the world and worldly matters where we live, according to Buddhist Psychology. The only thing we can do is understand them what they really are. It increases one's awareness and finally develops the way to the enlightenment also known as the *Nibbana* or the ultimate happiness.

End notes

- ¹ Weiten Wayne (2005), **Psychology**, p. 361
- ² **Sanyutta Nikaya 1**, P.62
- ³ Nissanka H.S.S (2002), **Buddhist Psychotherapy**, p.40
- ⁴ **Sanyutta Nikaya 5**, Dhammacakkappawattana Sutta, p. 270
- ⁵ **Majjhima Nikaya 3**, Saccavibhanga Sutta, p. 514
- ⁶ Narada (1964), **The Buddha and His Teachings**, p. 83
- ⁷ **Majjhima Nikaya 3**, PTS, Saccavibhanga Sutta, p. 251
- ⁸ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.141.than.html>
- ⁹ **Majjhima Nikaya 3**, PTS, Saccavibhanga Sutta, p. 251
- ¹⁰ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.141.than.html>
- ¹¹ **Majjhima Nikaya 3**, PTS, Saccavibhanga Sutta, p. 251
- ¹² <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.141.than.html>
- ¹³ **Majjhima Nikaya 3**, PTS, Saccavibhanga Sutta, p. 251
- ¹⁴ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.141.than.html>

- ¹⁵ **Majjhima Nikaya 3**, PTS, Saccavibhanga Sutta, p. 251
- ¹⁶ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.141.than.html>
- ¹⁷ Narada (1964), **Ibid**, p. 321
- ¹⁸ **Ibid**, p. 321
- ¹⁹ **Sanyutta Nikaya 5**, Pariññeyya Sutta, p. 292
- ²⁰ Narada (1964), **Ibid**, p. 322
- ²¹ **Jātaka Pāli**, Sarabhamiga jātaka, p.472.

