

Psychological Pain

Sage Patanjali wrote his great work, the Yoga Sutras, about 2000 ago. It is the first important treatise on yoga, and in it he describes the five *kleshas*. Klesha is a Sanskrit word meaning psychological affliction, pain or agony.

According to Patanjali, the kleshas are part of the human condition - so deep-rooted that we may not even be aware of them. The kleshas affect the whole of mankind; they are not individual to me or you. They may be prominent and active, or deep: subconscious or unconscious.

"Klesha is a kind of agony inside our very being. Everyone feels subconscious pain, but our daily activities do not allow us to be aware of it – otherwise we would see pain in all its vividness."

Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 4 Chapters on Freedom

Abhinivesha

Abhinivesha, the fifth klesha, is fear of death.

"In most people you will find this klesha in a most active condition, so much so that if anyone is suffering from a disease, everyone will be in a panic."

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

All the world over, people fear death. Is it fear of the unknown - or not wanting *not* to exist - or an overwhelming attachment to life? We find it hard to bow to the constraints of life and death, and it's only when old age bends us low that we are ready to accept death as a release from disease and physical pain.

But it may be possible to face death with equanimity, if we resolve our burdens and conflicts while living. If we live in the moment, without wanting to prolong the moment, we may be able to let go of our deepest attachments. Living our daily life with a letting-go of the past - dying to each day - we will approach death naked, without guilt or regret. Death is not separate from life, but life's natural conclusion, and we will die the way we have lived.

Raga and Dwesha

Raga is craving pleasurable experience, and dwesha is recoiling from unpleasant experience.

It is natural to appreciate the pleasant things of life, but human beings have an unending thirst for pleasure, and we are capable of cruelty and violence to get it. Raga and dwesha are the deep-rooted cause of confrontation and conflict, sorrow and unhappiness. We are capable of putting pleasure before our relationships, and before right action.

But there can be no peace of mind without right action – action which is appropriate to the situation. The wise man acts in harmony with the requirements of the moment and the natural flow of things. Chuang Tse says: *“The sage acts without choosing.”* Is it possible to live without projecting our likes and dislikes onto everything?

Asmita

Asmita is I-consciousness, awareness of myself. Due to asmita we are acutely conscious of ourselves as a separate entity: I feel separate and different from you.

You may have noticed that in moments of great joy or elation one may totally lose consciousness of this “I”. Then there is only awareness of the moment and what is being perceived. At times we may have glimpses of oneness, where all boundaries disappear and we perceive the whole – as if we are standing on top of a mountain, viewing a vast landscape in which there is no separate “me” but only a vista of which I am an integral part.

The aspiration of yoga is to break out of the prison of asmita.

Avidya

Avidya is the first klesha, the cause of all others. It is the deepest klesha. Avidya means lack of understanding, an error of perception; mistaking the false for the true.

According to yoga philosophy, we have made a fundamental error of perception – not just my error or your error; this error of perception is a part of the human condition. We see ourselves as an ego, a “me”, cut off, divided, separate, different from the rest of mankind. We have identified with the ego, and this identification is so deep and blinding that it is called in Vedanta philosophy maya, the veil of illusion.

When we identify ourselves as an ego we become merely a poor thing, clinging to life, fearing death; seeking pleasure; afraid of (psychological) pain; fenced in by barriers of our own making. We protect and defend ourselves and what we have at all costs.

This sense of separation is responsible for all the wars, all the injustice, corruption, the rich and poor divide – all the sorrows and sadness in the world today and since time immemorial.

"A human being...experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a ... prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

*Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of Nature in its beauty."
Albert Einstein*

Through meditation, through awareness of the ways of the self, by right action and right thinking, it may be possible to break out of the confines of this little "me" and live in harmony and peace.