

Sickness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Sickness was one of the ‘messengers of the gods’, an awakening call that set Siddhatha Gotama on the path to an astounding spiritual discovery. When sickness befalls someone we know - a dangerous illness, a crippling accident - it comes as a jolt. It’s happening around us all the time, but now it’s in our face. But still we rarely ‘get it’. When such misfortune happens to us, it’s a shock. Depending on the circumstances, it may drive us to despair. A young policeman, all-body paralysed by a shot, chose to commit suicide. Even though it is happening all around us, we continue to live as if it won’t happen to us. If we reminded ourselves, every day, of how vulnerable the body is, it would take away the tinsel armour of ignoring, of self-deception. Should we have to suffer, it won’t be such a shock. But a shock it will be, because so much of who we are, the Self, is tied up in the body. Sickness is a mini-death. It tears us away from what we love – ‘the things I do; the friends I see; the job I have’ - and offers us what we don’t want – the discomfort, the pain, the disability. The mind works on this and offers a future of horror, of terror. Yet, here lies a gateway. An opportunity of escape. Escape from the delusive world we have conjured up within ourselves and take for real. The escape cannot be yesterday, drowning in nostalgia. It’s gone. Nor tomorrow, a world only in dreams. It hasn’t arrived. The answer must be present. Right here. Right now. That was the Buddha’s astounding spiritual discovery. Through developing right mindfulness, we can stand back within ourselves to discover an unassailable place. Even as the objective observer, the feeler, the experiencer, whenever it is stabilised, we’ve already found a haven. Indeed, when we have been patient enough to let all fear and aversion subside, this haven tells us there is physical discomfort or pain and disability to smaller or greater degree. And that’s all! There is no denying that is not an easy task. Indeed depending on the severity of the illness, it can be a great struggle. So let’s start with the easy ones. Next time you are ill, even a cold, try saying to yourself. ‘There is this discomfort or pain and this illness prevents or hinders me from doing this. That’s all.’ This sort of acceptance helps to establish patient forbearance which is uncomplaining and a realistic optimism which sees possibilities. Here are some daily reflections to prevent us living in a make-believe world of continuous health: This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. Such reflections act on the heart as toothpaste on teeth. If we want to free the heart from the accumulation of plaque from fear and anxiety, each day we need to face such possibilities. We get in touch with these unpleasant mental states and in accepting them, they manifest and evaporate. Far from glooming our lives, such reflections, undermining the constraining effects of fear and anxiety and have the opposite effect of allowing our lives the more to bloom. Recognising the body’s paramount importance in human existence and that this life form the Buddha tells us is the best for liberation, we need then to turn our loving-kindness, metta, towards the body. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong. I determine to look after my

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body. Such blessings transform the energy of fear into care. (There is a longer Bodycare mp3
<https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm>)

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