

## The Gap in Awareness

Written by Nirmala

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(Here is an excerpt from my book, [That Is That](#) which you can receive for free [here](#) .)

We usually think that suffering is caused by bad experiences, but it's actually caused by our attention flowing towards something that's not really there-towards something that's not very true in that moment, such as an idea or a fantasy, which are very small truths. Suffering ends when our attention is flowing towards what's actually happening, what's true in the moment. Suffering is the distance-the gap-between what you're oriented towards and what is. However large the gap is between what's actually happening and what you're putting your attention on is how much you will suffer. If there's no gap, then there's no suffering.

That gap can be present regardless of whether something good or bad is happening. For example, if someone close to you is dying, your awareness may be so fully focused on what's happening in that moment that the experience lacks the suffering you would expect, although suffering may appear later if thoughts creep in about how things should have or could have been. In contrast, there are times when things are going really well and you're suffering, often because you're afraid of things changing. If this truth is understood-that it doesn't matter what happens-it can change your life. It may or may not change what's happening, but it will change your experience of what's happening...

Our hopes, dreams, desires, fears, doubts, and worries aren't really happening so they are very small truths. When we give our attention to something that isn't actually happening, we suffer. When our attention is focused on these things, we never feel satisfied because they don't nourish us. But when we give our passion and curiosity to more of what's true in the moment, we don't suffer. What are you giving your awareness, your passion, your curiosity to?

It's very simple: Our suffering is a matter of how much of our attention is flowing towards what's not actually present, such as hopes, dreams, desires, fears, doubts, worries, ideals, and fantasies. What we're desiring isn't present or we wouldn't be desiring it. Nor is what we fear. Our fears are just as much of a figment of our imaginations as our desires. None of these things are real, and turning our attention towards the unreal brings us out of contact with the real, where the aliveness of Being can be experienced.

Rejection and desire are the mechanisms with which we resist what is, which results in our suffering. They operate in a cycle: We go back and forth from rejection to desire. We think,

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"This isn't good. Maybe if I got this or maybe if I meditated more or if only I had a better lover or more money or more freedom, it could be better." Then we go about trying to fulfill that desire and, regardless of whether we succeed or not, we come back to the point where we still reject whatever is present now. Even when we get what we think we want, we may find that it's not that great, so we dream up something else we believe will make things better.

This activity of desiring what isn't present and rejecting what is creates and sustains the sense of a small self. If things are lousy, they're lousy for whom? For me. And if things could be better, better for whom? Better for me. We're often not even conscious of rejecting and desiring because we're caught up in the content of our desires and fantasies. We get so hypnotized by our fantasies that we're not even aware they're contracting our sense of self and making us feel very small, incomplete, deficient, and unsatisfied.

Nevertheless, that sense of incompleteness can be trusted. It's telling you how true it is that your fantasy will make you feel better. The sense of incompleteness and smallness in the experience of fantasizing shows you just how little truth there is in your fantasy. Fantasies aren't very true. They only exist in our minds. There isn't much substance or reality to them.

You can also trust when your heart feels very full and complete. The simple alternative to rejection and desire is to give all of your attention to what is here right now. The only trick is to include all of what is present right now. Every sensation can be included. There is no suffering in any sensation that you give all of your attention to. The suffering comes in when we have an idea about the sensation that pulls us away from it.

And the biggest surprise is that ultimately there is no suffering even in our suffering! When you give all of your attention to the actual experience of rejection and desire, the suffering inherent in it dissolves. When we become curious and attentive to the process of rejection, it no longer has any sting. If you simply become fully present to the movement of thought, it can be recognized for what it really is: just a thought! Suffering is like a mirage that you never actually reach. It dissolves whenever you get close to it.