

Shop & You Will Drop: Buddhism 3

The incredible Banksy often nails uncomfortable aspects of our lives. Buddhism too, points out that there are consequences of our actions. To explore those we must turn to the Four Noble Truths as we explore attachment and influence - or marketing - as we like to call it.

When Buddha told his followers that suffering was an invariable part of life, the next question must have come quickly: 'but how can we end suffering?'

His deliberations on this led to the second Noble Truth: *the source of suffering is attachment*. It is because we become attached to the way things are, or more importantly to the way we wish them to be, or we remember that they used to be, that we suffer. Since the dawn of civilisation, marketers were quick to recognise this and to place their product, service or offer in the path of that suffering - **to end it**. And so, we bought Bloggo, we signed up for an account, a mortgage, healthcare or a vacuum cleaner, following the suggestions of the seller.

Did our suffering cease?

There may have been a temporary respite, but within a day or two, or more honestly an hour or two, our pain was back. If we were extremely lucky, something like a new house or car might have the power to return us to a sense of pleasure on an ongoing basis. But, the suffering was still there. This, according to the Buddha is due to another fundamental law: **all things are impermanent**.

*[At the same time, he pointed out **the law of conditionality**, which describes how anything that happens is dependent on several rather than any one thing. So a purchase might alleviate one aspect of your sense of lack; it is unlikely to heal all of it.]*

Thus, in our search for release from suffering, we become repeatedly attached, divorced and re-attached to people, places and things. To reduce our suffering there is always the trip to the supermarket, convenience store, fashion house or movies. And so the Laws of Buddhism predicted the consumer society!

Nowadays we can practice attachment using our hand-held 'connectors' - mobile phones and tablets. We are never more than a fingertip away from a connection which temporarily reduces our suffering. We are also encouraged by advertising not to endure anything that produces discontent for longer than an instant.

However, more and more research is beginning to prove what we suspected; that those fingertip touches can easily lead to more suffering because, once connected, we compare our situation with others' and often feel we lose in the comparison.

And in a speeded-up, electronic networked world, all things pass ever more quickly. So even if we are satisfied, it does not last long!

Our preoccupation with attachment and its ideal form, *loyalty*, comes from the fact that attachment is one of the primary needs for thriving in early life. We are born vulnerable, unable to feed ourselves, walk or talk and the development of reciprocal attachments is critical to survival. Perhaps we never get over the idea that an attachment will help us thrive?

However while attachments have survival value at different times throughout life, inappropriate attachments are the source of - you guessed it - more suffering. We are starting to hear of FOMO, defriending, trolling, likebait, unfollowing, clicktivism, all forms of suffering arising from technology's appeal.

So, if suffering is inevitable and nothing lasts, what can we do?

One consequence is that we are understandably cynical and resistant to marketing and use 'low attention processing' (Heath R) either to screen it out or scan it for those moments when a spending splurge feels like the answer once again.

This means that marketers who do not understand how to penetrate this screen, will largely waste their money in aiming to attract new customers. They will simply get filtered out by our defence mechanisms - the very defence mechanisms created by overdoses of marketing.

Now that we can communicate anything pretty much to anyone in a millisecond, the overuse of attempts to create attachment is overwhelming. Politely called Spam, like its namesake tastes of nothing while its poor quality offends. It is, in truth, a bloody nuisance and makes us want to switch off even more.

Are we sowing the seeds of our own destruction?