



Question: 'I want to ask about suffering in the world. I find it very difficult to understand and to find reasons why powerless people - Third World children, for instance - have to suffer. Do you have an explanation for all this seemingly unnecessary suffering?'

It may not seem necessary, but it's a reality. Remember that the first thing the Buddha said, when he started teaching, was that all is suffering. So suffering is a fundamental truth. We talked about suffering during a zazen day we held recently in Bristol; we talked about suffering all day long, it's such an enormous subject. Remember that the Buddha started with suffering. He then said that the second truth was impermanence; the third was ignorance and the fourth, the ending of suffering. In other words, he didn't take a pessimistic view. He did say though that you have to accept suffering; you have to see it, to look at it. Suffering is the result, the consequence of impermanence. Suffering comes about because everything changes each moment and we are not suited to endlessly adapting to change. We are not adapted physically, mentally or spiritually because we are ignorant both of the cause and final result of all this change. But it is the role of human beings. It is very important not to be pessimistic about it or believe that suffering is its own justification. What has a decisive influence is our attitude to suffering. How are we going to overcome it? For ourselves and for others. The suffering of children in the Third World is no different from your suffering. If I have understood your question properly, you say that the suffering of those children makes you suffer. Your Third World hurts because you share in the karma that has contributed to that suffering. Our two countries, the United Kingdom and France, have contributed greatly towards creating the conditions of that suffering. We carry a heavy karma. But that does not mean that we should feel guilty about it because guilt paralyzes us. We must confront it though, and understand that the first thing to be done is to change ourselves. That is the genius of the human race: transforming, progressing. We haven't got time to go into the details here but historically speaking, our Western countries have made enormous technological progress. We have created a vast number of objects. This again is a masculine attitude, endlessly creating more and more things and amassing and accumulating things; accumulating enough bombs to destroy the world ten times over - as though once wasn't enough! That is our karma and we are all responsible for it. But we mustn't shut ourselves up in our guilt. We have to see what we can do with our own suffering that includes the suffering of others; with our own compassion in order to change ourselves. And it automatically spreads like a pool of oil. As always, everything is linked. If you move something here, something moves there. If you pull the sheet while you are making your bed, it moves on the other side of the bed. You are here and it has an effect over there.

Automatically, naturally, our zazen helps the children of the Third World because we are not separate from them and they are not separate from us.

An extract from a mondo at a sesshin led by Jean Baby at Gaunt's House, June 1993

