

Suffering is a fact of life, according to the first noble truth that the Buddha laid out in his first sermon. This suffering is better referred to as dukkha, which has several root forms. One of these is a wheel whose axle is off center, and the other is a bone that is out of its socket. One aspect of dukkha, that is, fear of decrepitude, is exemplified in the image that portrays an elderly man. He has clearly lost his mental faculties and therefore suffers because he cannot understand the world in the way that he did in the past. This is a common and almost inevitable condition in the elderly. We fear losing our independence, and our ability to take care of ourselves. That is why we suffer when we lose our minds. If we believe that the self exists eternally, we will suffer when our health and wellbeing passes and we grow old and decrepit as our body slowly decays. This image represents the mental suffering that occurs when we realize the impermanence of ourselves, and the fact that our suffering exists partly because we have not realized the truth of anatta, meaning the illusion of self. It relates to myself because it reminds me of my grandmother. People like my grandmother with dementia are generally unaware of their surroundings and have problems recognizing their beloved. In this way, they are separated from the people who they truly love. I am a witness to the destructive effects of mental disease on the wellbeing of a person. My family is greatly affected by my grandmother's affliction, because she is unable to take care of herself and must be taken care of. The image of an alarm shows the general stress of not being able to sleep as much as I would like to sleep. It shows my sense of obligation, and how I define myself by social obligations. The image of a child with his face on his book in frustration shows the dissatisfaction that I have experienced with having large amounts of homework assigned to me.

The next image of a starving child shows death and destitution. This is the state of existence for many people in the world who do not have access to adequate nutrition for sustenance. It portrays the everlasting state of despair for people who must associate with evil in the world. This evil is represented by the vulture that preys on the vulnerability of the weak. The homeless man represents the contrast between our high expectations of reality and the hopelessness of reality in the case of this man. People suffer when they are severely deprived. Deprivation and excess can be seen as two sides of the same idea. Most people suffer because they lack a balance of these two opposites. Money represents tanha in the form of our desire for material wealth. This desire ultimately causes our suffering because we do not focus on the present when we are attached to the prospect of attaining wealth. This attachment causes us to focus on something that does not yet exist. It is the illusion of the material world that prevents us from reaching true nirvana, and ending the cycle of samsara. Due to anicca, the impermanence of existence, we can never be truly satisfied with the material world.