

Purification and Fulfilment: Four Formulas

~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What is the role of electromagnetic theory in the development of human happiness and human suffering?

00:00:06 James Clark Maxwell described the whole of electromagnetic theory in terms of four fundamental field equations.

00:00:15 I somewhat jokingly also have a set of four equations that describe the issue of human happiness and human suffering

00:00:27 in terms of the body.

00:00:31 Start with the first one here. Suffering equals discomfort multiplied by resistance.

00:00:38 So what I mean by discomfort in this case is physical or emotional uncomfortable sensations.

00:00:46 So one form of discomfort would be pain, but tiredness is a form of discomfort, too hot, too cold, hunger, things like that.

00:00:55 Those are all forms of physical discomfort.

00:00:59 Then body sensations such as those associated with anger, fear, sadness, shame, impatience.

00:01:07 Those would be emotional uncomfortable flavors in the body.

00:01:11 So physical or emotional uncomfortable flavors in the body I generically refer to as discomfort.

00:01:19 Resistance means any interference with the natural flow of those sensations.

00:01:28 That means any fighting with their arising or any holding on, preventing them from passing in their natural pattern.

00:01:38 So any interference with the natural expansion and contraction of body sensation is resistance.

00:01:49 So when you have physical and or emotional discomfort in your body, the degree to which you fight with that by pushing and pulling is the resistance.

00:02:02 Now we tend to think of resistance as a mental thing based on our attitudes.

00:02:06 Well, actually that's a rather small part of the resistance.

00:02:11 That's part of it, but most of the resistance is in the body circuits themselves at a very deep primordial level.

00:02:18 When the body begins to make a sensation, it also will begin to interfere with its own product.

00:02:25 Fortunately, through meditation practice, we can train the body out of the habit of resisting interfering with its own sensations.

00:02:36 The intensity of the discomfort multiplied by the degree of interference with its natural flow measures the perceived suffering that you get from that.

00:02:51 That's the first formula. Suffering equals discomfort multiplied by resistance.

00:02:58 Now, this is a linear approximation of something that's probably a much more complex mathematical model,

00:03:07 but this will give a sort of rough approximation of what goes on.

00:03:15 There's both good news and bad news in this formula.

00:03:19 The good news is that if you have a lot of intensity of discomfort, but you reduce the resistance to a small amount,

00:03:34 then your perceived suffering will go down, even if you have huge discomfort.

00:03:38 In fact, the best news of all is it is theoretically possible, with sufficient training or just by the evolution that comes through living,

00:03:51 to reduce resistance to zero, in which case, even with huge discomforts, the perceived suffering would be zero,

00:04:00 because no matter how large this is, if this is zero, anything multiplied by zero is zero.

00:04:08 So that's the good news. What's the bad news in this formula?

00:04:12 The bad news is that you can have very small discomforts, physical or emotional, uncomfortable sensations in the body,

00:04:21 that are wispy, hardly even noticeable, perhaps.

00:04:24 It could even be so mild that they're below the threshold of awareness.

00:04:30 But if they're subject to huge subliminal resistance, interference, impedance, you will have the impression of huge suffering.

00:04:40 That's the bad news.

00:04:42 A lot of the distortions that take place in human behavior are due to rather tiny emotional-type sensations,

00:04:51 some of them below the threshold of awareness, that are filling the body and subject to huge resistance,

00:04:59 therefore cause a huge perception of suffering and distort our behaviors in the objective world.

00:05:10 So that's formula number one.

00:05:12 The sort of flip side of that is purification equals discomfort multiplied by equanimity.

00:05:21 Equanimity is the opposite of resistance.

00:05:24 Equanimity could be said, at least to a linear approximation, to be the reciprocal of resistance.

00:05:32 So as the resistance goes down, the equanimity goes up.

00:05:37 As equanimity goes up, the discomfort turns into not only a freedom from suffering or a reduction of suffering,

00:05:48 but a positive flavor of purification, which leads to fulfillment.

00:05:54 So it is actually possible to have a fulfilling, empowering experience of physical and even emotional discomfort in the body.

00:06:04 If you bring enough equanimity to it, you'll actually get a taste of purification,
00:06:10 which turns into a kind of taste of fulfillment.
00:06:15 Something meaningful and useful is happening to the depths of one's being
00:06:22 because of how you're experiencing a physical pain or even an emotional discomfort in the moment with high equanimity.
00:06:30 So discomfort here, the opposite of discomfort, pleasure.
00:06:38 Frustration equals pleasure multiplied by resistance.
00:06:42 If you push and pull on the natural flow of pleasure, resist its arising, resist its passing,
00:06:49 then it doesn't give you fulfillment. It gives you a sense of frustration.
00:06:54 This is the Imelda Marcos phenomenon. How many shoes will fulfill you if you can't get fulfillment from one?
00:07:03 The answer is no amount will do it.
00:07:07 Because you don't know how to turn pleasure into fulfillment. That's this last equation.
00:07:14 Fulfillment equals pleasure multiplied by equanimity.
00:07:17 The good news here is that with very small pleasures, tiny little pleasures actually,
00:07:26 and enormous equanimity, enormous non-interference, you can derive enormous fulfillment.
00:07:34 So the bad news is this formula, which leads to Imelda Marcos,
00:07:39 people with huge pleasures in their life that can't get any satisfaction.
00:07:43 They're frustrated. That's because they have not trained their pleasure circuits out of the impedance.
00:07:54 So that's the bad news. The really good news here, even with relatively small amounts of pleasure,
00:08:01 physical or emotional, a human being can derive enormous fulfillment
00:08:06 if they train their pleasure circuits into equanimity.
00:08:13 That fulfillment actually brings the same flavor of purification that you get here.
00:08:21 So you can purify consciousness in two ways, by experiencing discomfort with equanimity
00:08:29 or by experiencing pleasure with equanimity.
00:08:32 That's the good news for everybody.