

A Pothole Analogy Applied to the Peace of Mind

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For many years, I was wondering about the way potholes were made on the surface of the road. Once I realized that this kind of question can be answered easily through the Internet search, this question became a non-issue. However, I also realized that potholes do convey something interesting, in connection to my spiritual pursuit, as in the following analogy.

1. When it rains on a street with full of potholes, water can stay in those potholes for a long time. If it is below the freezing point, the water may fill those potholes as ice or snow, possibly remaining there for a long time until the temperature rises or it melts and evaporates by the heat from tires of the passing vehicles. The situation of water staying in potholes for a long time can be seen as a metaphor of our thoughts stuck in our minds for a long time, e.g., ruminating. And most of us know that such a situation is not healthy because that is when we are suffering in various degrees, just like potholes are problematic in many ways.

2. So, water can stay on the street surface because of potholes. Analogously, we are stuck in various thoughts because of how our minds are conditioned and carved. In our minds, there must be something comparable to potholes on a street.

3. Now, if there were no potholes on the street surface, water flows and disappears into wherever designated by the drain system. Regardless of how hard it rains, water will pass. Analogously, if there are no “potholes” in our minds, we would be able to have a clearer mind without being stuck in various thoughts. Regardless of how hard the life situation becomes, the hard feelings will pass. We may not even need to experience suffering as such.

4. Naturally, we can fix real potholes by completely resurfacing the affected section or by patching each pothole. Analogously, we can purify our minds by fixing our mental potholes ... in various ways. We do not need to go into the details of such methods; we can easily find many approaches and choose whatever appropriate for ourselves.

The four steps above are actually reminiscent of the Four Noble Truth, the very core of Buddhist psychology. Here, the four steps can be summarized as: 1. The state of being conditioned, 2. The process of conditioning, 3. The state of being unconditioned, 4. The process of unconditioning. We don't need to refer to the Buddhist literature to appreciate such an idea. Many modern day approaches to the peace of mind adopt similar ideas.

Peace.