

# Dukkha as Friction: Learning to Ride the Wheel of Life

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## What Is Dukkha?

Dukkha is often translated as “suffering,” but it is more accurately understood as **friction, unease**, or the feeling that something is just not quite right. Like an off-center cart wheel, life often wobbles, grinds, or resists as it moves forward. That wobble is part of being alive, but **how we relate to it makes all the difference**.

## . Cart Wheel Analogy

- **Cart wheel turning unevenly** = life not running smoothly.
- Causes of friction:
  - Bent axle = our conditioning and unskillful views
  - Lack of grease = absence of mindfulness, kindness, and wisdom
  - Heavy load = clinging, craving, aversion, and self-centered reactivity

“The wheel turns regardless—but how it turns depends on our internal alignment.”

## Sources of Friction

- **Dukkha often arises not from events themselves, but from how we react to them.**
- **Craving** = wanting something different (more pleasant, less painful).
- **Aversion** = pushing away or resisting what is.
- **Reactivity** = the tightening, flinching, story-making, or identification that arises automatically.
- **Identification** – Mistaking experience as “*me*” or “*mine*”

These add drag to the wheel of life, increasing suffering.

## Practical Examples

- **Traffic jam** → Craving to be elsewhere → tension in chest, jaw → reactivity = yelling or stewing  
→ mindfulness = noticing tightness, softening breath
- **Aging body pain** → Aversion → story of decline → emotional collapse  
→ instead: curiosity toward sensation → less identification
- **Social rejection** → Craving for approval → tightening, overthinking → self-judgment  
→ instead: name the feeling, breathe with it, allow it to pass

## Awareness as the Grease

Mindfulness isn’t about stopping the wheel—it’s about **aligning and softening our ride**. Through awareness, we learn to notice the wobble without reacting to it.

**Awareness enhances sensitivity**, and sensitivity—when grounded in awareness—**softens reactivity** and opens the space for wise response.

## Attention vs. Awareness

Understanding these two modes helps us meet friction more skillfully:

- **Strong Attention** is like jumping **into the river** of experience—narrow, intense, often fused with selfing.

“I am feeling this... I need to fix this... This is happening *to me*.”

- **Awareness** is like **seeing the river**—broad, spacious, less self-involved.

“This sensation is here... This thought arose... Let me stay with it.”

**If you see the river, you're not in it.**

The more we dwell in awareness, the less we're dragged by the current.

## Friction, Attention, and the Construction of Self and World

Dukkha—the friction of life—is not just caused by outer circumstances. Much of it comes from how we **construct** experience through **attention**.

- **Attention**, by its nature, seeks **cognitive closure**. It zooms in to define what's happening and what “I” need to do about it.

This process builds a **fixed object** (this is pain, threat, opportunity) and a **fixed self** (I am hurting, resisting, grasping).

The wheel starts to wobble when we **grip** too tightly with this constructed sense of “me” and “my experience.”

- **Awareness**, on the other hand, allows experience to stay open and fluid. It doesn't rush to define, fix, or act. In awareness, both the **object and the sense of self can soften**, and the wheel may keep turning—but with far less resistance.

Have you ever noticed how your mind jumps to conclusions before you even know what you are reacting to? That is an example of cognitive closure – a fast, evolved mental function that's efficient but often misleading.

The more we **see the process of construction**, the less we are controlled by it. We don't need to stop the wheel—we just need to stop bracing against it.

## Reflection Questions

1. Where do you notice “friction” in daily life?
2. How do you usually react? What habits show up?
3. Can you pause and shift from strong attention to gentle awareness?
4. What changes in your body and mind when you “see the river” instead of being in it?