

# The Roots (4 of 5) Non-hate

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This topic of the roots of the unwholesome and the wholesome is phenomenally important for our society – for the world. If all the ways in which human beings live that are harmful and unwholesome arise out of greed, hate, and delusion, then we really want to understand these forces in ourselves, and also understand their opposites – the roots of what's wholesome.

I think that what is unique or noteworthy about this teaching of the Buddha is that the way the Buddha defines the wholesome is by using the negative prefix (not- or non-). The wholesome opposite of greed is non-greed. The wholesome opposite of hate is non-hate, and the opposite of delusion is non-delusion.

It can seem a little bit weak to offer this “non.” It's like an absence. Nothing is there, or there's nothing. That's not very inspiring. But I believe that one of the reasons non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion are used is so that we don't succumb to the problem of thinking that the opposite of these unwholesome things is a particular thing or a particular beautiful state.

Then we might limit ourselves. We might reify or solidify around this idea, hold on to it, get stuck on it, and measure ourselves by it or think that's how we are supposed to be. If the opposite of hate is love, that is a beautiful opposite if we have more of it. But if we think that's the only opposite and that's how we're supposed to be, this idea can lead to a certain kind of freezing up, tightening, confusion, or maybe even an inappropriate application of love at times when something else is needed.

For example, maybe what's needed is generosity. Maybe what's needed is a deep sense of acceptance of the person we're with. Love might be nice, but it might be a very different experience to receive love than to receive some kind of acceptance.

There is a wide range of things that fit into the category of non-hate. We want to be fluid, to be able to move and flow between all the different responses that are wholesome. I think this is partly where the art of Buddhist practice

is leading us. It is leading us away from any way of being stuck or holding onto an idea of how it's supposed to be –

“There's one way, and I have to fit myself into that one way.”

I think it's very respectful for human beings, for all of us, to let each of us find our own opposite of hate. Because on different days we might tap into some different qualities inside of us. Or maybe there's a different quality because of our life experience. We each have different qualities and different ways of manifesting what non-hate is. We don't have to be the same. We don't have to measure ourselves or think, “Well, someone else is that way, and I'm supposed to be that way as well.”

Non-hate makes a lot of room for us to be ourselves, and to find the response that's appropriate for the situation we're in. This might look very different in different situations. Certainly, there are things like all the different flavors of love. There is loving-kindness; there's compassion; there's appreciative joy; there's equanimity; there's *anukampa* – care, caring for people; and there's generosity. There is wanting to unite people and create harmony, and there is reconciliation, a movement towards creating peace for people; there is peace itself. For some people, the opposite of non-hate is deep peace.

The idea is to find out what non-hate is for each of us. An interesting reflection on this is: do we have confidence in it? Do we have confidence in non-hate? One of the reasons people hate is because they feel helpless or hopeless because they have no confidence in the other person. If you look at the way they behave, it seems like some people have a lot of confidence in hate. They really believe in it. They put a lot of effort into it and they feel justified in having hate.

Sometimes it's interesting to see this justification of hate for things we have no influence over, that are far from us, that might affect us, but where the momentum of the hate is not going to change anything for the better. We don't have any role, any power, or any involvement in the choices and decisions there. The only one being harmed by the hate is oneself.

We might feel there's a benefit from feeling, "I'm right. I'm powerful; I can do something." This is a kind of unhealthy expression of helplessness, hopelessness, a lack of faith, or a lack of confidence in ourselves. We can discover how to have more confidence in non-hate, not by believing it or thinking our way into it, but by recognizing for ourselves what non-hate is.

Then confidence is discovered through acting on non-hate. You develop confidence in riding a bicycle, if you've never ridden one, by riding the bicycle, maybe beginning with training wheels. In the same way, we can develop confidence in non-hate and see its power, its value, the benefit that comes from it, and how the situation is better served through finding powerful ways of non-hate. We can find effective ways to not accept things passively and allow them to continue, but have a fierce disapproval that has no hate in it. In the way of non-hate, we don't hate individual people but there is fierce disapproval of what they do and how they are in the world.

I think an important part of growing in the Dharma is having confidence and developing that confidence over time.

We can switch where we put our confidence. Many people wouldn't think they have confidence in hate, but it doesn't take too much digging under the surface to see that there is something inside that has confidence in hate.

Of course, we can't expect to always have non-hate. How do we practice with what's unskillful? How do we practice with things like hate? There is a wonderful teaching that the Buddha gave. He begins this way:

"Do not think evil, unwholesome thoughts." (The use of the word "think" here is interesting) – "that is, sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, or thoughts of harming." (Ill will is a word for hostility.)

"For what reason? These thoughts are not beneficial. They're irrelevant to the path of practice. They do not lead to dispassion, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *nibbāna*."

This is a very interesting idea – that ill-will, hate, and hostility are not beneficial. They are irrelevant to the path of practice and do not lead to peace, to enlightenment, to *nibbāna*. But of course, we have these kinds of thoughts.

What the Buddha says next is what I wanted to share with you.

"What you should think about is: this is suffering; this is the arising of suffering; this is the cessation of suffering; and this is the practice of the cessation of suffering."

What is interesting here is that of course there are times we are going to think unskillful, unwholesome thoughts, even thoughts of ill will. In those circumstances, rather than thinking, "Now I'm wrong, I'm doing it wrong," and being upset or discouraged about oneself, the instructions are to change our orientation and to see it as suffering. "Wow, I'm hurting now. There's hurt, there's maybe even self-harm going on. This is a drag."

I've seen this in myself and others – only when I could feel the suffering of my anger or hostility and see how much I was harming myself, was I willing to let go of the way I was holding onto it. But it gets more interesting, because it's not just about seeing the suffering, but also being present enough for that suffering to be able to start seeing it as something that's coming and going. We begin to see the impermanence of it, the inconstancy of it, its fluidity. That is the direction towards freedom.

The unskillful states, like greed, hatred, and delusion, lend themselves to freezing, tightening, holding on, and not seeing change and impermanence – seeing a kind of permanence – “this is the way it is.” The Dharma is found by discovering the changing nature of phenomena, its fluidity. We thaw the ways in which we're frozen. We break up the hard knots we get caught in so that the inner life can be fluid again. The fluid inner life that flows with things and can move and not be stuck is the place where the wholesome and beautiful qualities of mind and heart have a chance to flow.

So when there's hate, our practice is to turn around and look at it until we can really feel the suffering – what it's like for us. But we don't just see the suffering, and we don't analyze it or figure it out. We relax and settle in to really feel it till we start seeing how it comes and goes, the inconstancy of it. That is where the chance for a whole different way of being arises, and where the non-hate can flow forth. Non-hate comes out of the flowing nature of our inner life when things are free. That is where we should have our confidence.

I believe I'll talk a little bit about delusion tomorrow, the third of the three roots. Until tomorrow, I hope that you're well. I hope that your exploration of hostility, hate, and non-hate helps you bring more non-hate and all the different aspects of it into your life. Thank you.