

Delusion (5 of 5) Liberation from Delusion

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grasping, clinging, hatred, greed, absence, letting go, freedom

Gil Fronsdal

Today is the last talk in this five-part series on delusion. It's also the last talk in the three-week series on the three roots of unwholesome behavior. The three roots, sometimes called the poisons, are greed, hatred, and delusion. In conclusion, I'd like to paraphrase the Buddha when he said emphatically, enthusiastically: "If it was not possible to bring greed, hatred, and delusion to an end, I would not instruct you to do so. But it is possible to put an end to greed, hatred, and delusion. And so, this is my instruction."

For many people, it might be inconceivable that they could give up these very strong forces in the mind. But this is what Buddhist practice sets out to do. It's a phenomenally beneficial, dignified, and valuable path to be on – to first alleviate, decrease, and then experience an absence of greed, hatred, and delusion. That absence is followed by a time when the tendency to greed, hatred, and delusion comes to an end.

A wonderful thing about ending greed, hatred, and delusion is that they are the roots of all unethical behavior. They are the roots of all behavior that causes intentional or conscious harm to others and even to ourselves. We read about the consequences of such behavior in the newspaper and see its impact on people and the environment. It's a phenomenal thing to become a person who has cleansed themselves or freed themselves of these powerful forces.

The hope is that there are some people who appreciate the human capacity to become free. They become a model or a beacon for others. They show it's possible to be on this path. Maybe in this lifetime, we're not going to go all the way to the complete ending of all greed, hatred, and delusion, but we can diminish it. It's truly marvelous to have greater and greater periods of time when we're free of it before it comes back.

The Buddha teaches what is called the Dharma. Sometimes it's said that the Dharma is visible here and now – directly perceivable in the present moment. It's not something esoteric and distant. Rather, it's something that's available here. One of the inspiring ways that the Dharma is available and visible here and now, which might be hard to do, is experiencing a mind with greed, hatred, and delusion, and then experiencing a mind free of greed, hatred, and delusion. This distinction between what it's like to have a mind *with* greed, hatred, and delusion, and a mind *without* it, is where we can see the Dharma in a very profound way. It really takes seeing both.

Part of this study of greed, hatred, and delusion is a willingness to see it in ourselves. Admitting it to ourselves and becoming familiar with all the tricks and ways that greed, hatred, and delusion operate in us. The intention is not to feel bad about ourselves or to be depressed by it. Instead, as we become more familiar with greed, hatred, and delusion in us, we're able to recognize in a clearer way when it's not there.

It's like going from a crowded room full of things into an open room that's free of things. Because we know what that's like – that difference – we can really appreciate it. In fact, if the room is spacious, clean, and peaceful enough, it can feel nourishing and delightful to be in it. To be familiar with the presence of greed, hate, and delusion is to better appreciate and be nourished by the absence of it.

That is how to see the Dharma here and now. It's not understanding great, profound teachings on emptiness or great states of consciousness or transcendental states, as much as it is this clear, ordinary recognition. It's recognizing the presence and absence of greed, hatred, and delusion.

As we become familiar with greed, hatred, and delusion (this week's topic), we begin to appreciate that they have a common characteristic. We can call it a common denominator, which is they all involve clinging or grasping. Some people like to think of clinging as plastic wrap that sticks to us and we stick to it. Sometimes you can't get rid of it, or you can't unfold it. It just accompanies us.

Some people think of clinging as synonymous with grasping, but grasping is more powerful. When we cling to people with our hands or with our hearts or minds, we grasp on. We don't want to let go. Sometimes it seems like we are clawing onto what we want or onto other people.

So all greed, hate, and delusion share clinging and grasping as part of them. There is something we are grasping, something we're clinging to.

The experience of becoming free is the opening up of that grasping hand. It's the relaxing of the clawing hand. It's the softening of the fist or the resisting hand. There's a deep letting go of a knot inside of us, a deep letting go of a contraction, a coagulation that exists within the field of awareness. Moving in that direction is to sense what is possible. Experiencing this release of clinging and grasping, first with the small, little experiences in life, is a foretaste of liberation. Even the smallest letting go, relaxing around something, partakes in the liberation of a Buddha. It's just a matter of degree.

We're not so different from the Buddha when we begin to appreciate the small degrees in which we live without greed, hatred, and delusion. The small degrees in which we can let go of it and relax around it. The small degrees we can let go of clinging and grasping. Seeing that, valuing that, and valuing ourselves for being on this path supports our growing capacity to let go more deeply, to relax more deeply.

It isn't so much that we're letting go of things in the world. Some people protest living a life of radical renunciation, letting go of everything. There's some value to that for sure. But it's not letting go of *things* that's the object of Buddhist practice. It's letting go of the *clinging* to things. It's letting go of the grasping in the mind. Whether or not we let go of things, or even people, is secondary. With people and things, we use our wisdom to know what's best to do there. But it doesn't take much wisdom to appreciate that we're better off not having clinging or grasping in the mind. The people we do cling to really appreciate it when we can be with them and love them without clinging to them.

If we learn to let go of clinging, life becomes a whole different game. As we learn not to cling, this absence of the activity of clinging and grasping, this non-doing of clinging and grasping, lowers the tendency to be caught in delusion, in hatred, and in greed. We begin seeing how the movement towards delusion, towards greed, towards hatred comes along with an activity of the mind and heart of contraction, of tightness, of clinging, of tension that is not good for us.

Really feeling and recognizing this tension because we're in touch with ourselves gives us the opportunity to recognize something different – the absence of clinging. We feel how good that absence is. We recognize how our view of the world changes if we're seeing the world through the lens of non-clinging, rather than seeing it through the lens of clinging. It is possible to see the world through the lens of non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. It is possible to do this. It's more valuable to do this than a lot of other human pursuits. More valuable than becoming rich. More valuable than having popularity and all kinds of things.

I wish you much, much happiness, peace, and well-being. I know that the greatest happiness and peace that's available to you will come when you let go and release the clinging and grasping in the mind and free yourself of greed, hatred, and delusion. May it be so.

Thank you for listening and being a part of this series.