

# Hatred (1 of 5) Non-Hatred as a Reference

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

hate, hostility, love, Japan, Buddhist, suffering, calmness, full moon, perfume, absence, *adosa*, *dosa*, *mettā*, three poisons, roots, greed, delusion, patience, peace, *Dhammapada*, friendship

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This week's theme for the Dharma talks will be the second of the three unwholesome roots or three poisons – hatred or hostility. The three are greed, hatred, and delusion. Last week, we explored greed.

In Buddhist practice, it is phenomenally important to understand these three poisons because they are the primary conditions, sources, or catalysts for human suffering. To end or alleviate the amount of suffering in ourselves and the world around us, understanding and decreasing or completely eliminating greed, hate and delusion makes a huge difference. One of the purposes of Buddhist practice is to bring suffering to an end – a remarkable achievement. It is possible.

As I did last week for greed, I'm going to start not by talking about hatred directly, but by talking about non-hate, because this contextualizes the discussion about hate. The Pali word for hate is *dosa*. *Adosa* is “not hate” or “non-hate.” *Adosa* is more than just the absence of hate. In the tradition, it is understood to be the presence of something wonderful. Somehow the absence of hate does not leave us neutral, empty, or impoverished, in some kind of void. Instead, it is the opposite of that. The presence of hate is what is impoverishing us.

As we release hate, wonderful states arise. The primary one that's associated with hate is love – loving-kindness (*metta*). The release of hate is also associated with patience, calmness, and peace. There is a wonderful, famous verse from the *Dhammapada*, the third verse in this anthology of Buddhist poetry from ancient times. It goes something like this: “Hate is never overcome by hate. By non-hate only is hate overcome. This is the ancient truth.”

The word “non-hate” implies its positive corollaries, so some translators actually translate the verse as: “Hate is never overcome by hate. By love alone is hate overcome. This is the ancient truth.”

That particular verse was very impactful after World War II. In the early 1950s – '51 or '52 I think – there was a big international conference in San Francisco to decide on the fate of Japan. Japan had lost the war, and the United States had occupied Japan and was governing the country. Many of the countries – 40 countries, I think – which had been impacted by Japanese aggression during World War II came to San Francisco to decide on the fate of Japan. Should Japan be divided up into multiple countries? Should different countries take over parts of it? What should happen to it?

There was kind of a stalemate at this conference until the foreign minister from Sri Lanka came up and evoked the principle of caring for everyone, including the Japanese people, and he recited that verse. As the report goes, when he recited that verse, everything settled down. The conference went ahead and decided to grant Japan its independence. This was an expression of love and goodwill, maybe even trust that there was another way possible after the aggression of World War II. There is a plaque in Tokyo commemorating this event with that verse in stone.

As we meditate, or by using other means in our lives, we might, from time to time, begin to tap into a degree of calmness, or peace, and a capacity for love and all the different manifestations of love, such as a capacity for deep patience. This begins to show us something very important – that when there is hatred, it diminishes us, it impoverishes us, and it brings suffering. Hatred is a fire that burns the person who is hostile. One analogy is that picking up hatred is like picking up a hot piece of coal. Of course, not everyone who hates or has hostility recognizes that, partly because the intense focus on the object of hostility sometimes blinds us to the impact that hate has on us. Hate also does not lead to very clear thinking. On the other hand, calmness, peacefulness, and love tend to produce wiser trains of thought. Not necessarily always, but they tend to help us think more wisely, by including the impact that our behavior, our feelings, and our emotions have on us and those around us. Then we can feel the diminishment of our own well-being.

So rather than talking about hate in a critical way, or in a way that condemns hate or is puritanical – as in we should just get rid of hate because it's wrong, it's bad – I want to emphasize the perspective we can have on hate when we are really rooted in a place of peacefulness, calm, or love. In that place, we can look upon hate not as an enemy or as something that we need to judge in a negative way, but rather, almost as if it is an illness, and it's something that needs to be addressed. We don't have to condemn ourselves or condemn other people for it. But we do want to address it and find an alternative – a way of settling, relaxing, and supporting ourselves and others, so the best qualities of heart can come forth and meet the world.

If we want to try to help the world to suffer less, we need to figure out some way to reveal the suffering in hostility and hate. One way to do that is to know its opposite well – to really know non-hate. Even in small halting ways at first, we can keep coming back and recognizing where we can find our capacity for calmness, peacefulness, love, and generosity. We do not become passive because of that. Rather, it can be empowering to step forward in that peace, in that love, and to learn the wise, engaged ways to do that.

As we go through this week focusing on hostility – not necessarily a pleasant thing to talk about or reflect on – if we remember to look upon and explore it from our capacity for peace, love, and calmness, then we can see the topic as something that can move us toward greater capacities for love, kindness, goodwill, and compassion. We have a wide range of wonderful, positive feelings inside of us connected to non-hatred.

In the Buddhist tradition, the quality or state of non-hate is refreshing or enlightening, like the full moon that rises. The analogy from the ancient texts is that it is pleasing, like the full moon is pleasing. So imagine a full moon on a clear night – that is an analogy for your non-hate in the clarity of an unobstructed heart and mind. Non-hostility is characterized by the absence of violence. It is said to be gentle, like a good friend. And it is the cause of friendship. Rather than simply the absence of hate, there is something in the state of non-hate that supports friendship. It is said to smell like sandalwood. Sandalwood has a wonderful smell; it is used for perfumes and other things. But sandalwood normally doesn't harm anyone.

In the same way, with someone who lives in non-hate, there is a kind of non-harming – a perfume, atmosphere, or mood that can waft from them – that is palpable sometimes. They say that when there is non-hate, we never intentionally or knowingly harm ourselves or others. In fact, the opposite is true – we are interested in promoting welfare for self and others. That is one of the functions and manifestations of non-hate.

Here are a couple of other attributes of non-hate. The tradition says that it's a condition for youthfulness – that the fire of hatred speeds up the aging process. The ancient texts say that when there's a lot of hatred, there is a quicker gathering of wrinkles and gray hair. Be a little bit careful with these kinds of ideas – don't assume that just because someone has wrinkles or gray hair, there is hate there. The texts also say that discovering non-hate is like unraveling and setting free a tight knot.

May you come to appreciate your capacity for non-hate as an untangling of the constrictions and knots in your heart and your mind. And may you discover your capacity for peace and love, so that the way you gaze upon hatred is not hateful, but rather, brings the medicine of goodwill and care. Thank you.