

# Greed (5 of 5) Non-Greed as Grace

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

non-compulsion, desire, generosity, clinging, freedom, self-assertion, grasping, compulsive, compulsion, holding, suffering, meditation

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Today we come to the last talk about greed and non-greed.

I can imagine that this can be a difficult topic partly because desire is so integral to being alive. It can feel incomprehensible to not have the assertiveness of desire, the compulsion of desire to have things be different. Or it can seem inconceivable to not try to hold on to what is happening. This idea of freedom from needing things to be different and freedom from needing things to stay the same, maybe, sometimes doesn't compute. But, as meditation deepens and gets quieter, we can start getting a feeling for, a sense for, this clear recognition (clear awareness) that is settled and open, that needs nothing to be different and doesn't need things to not change from how they are.

The word "greed" is an umbrella term. Some people don't relate to the word very strongly and don't identify that their impulses of desire have any connection to greed. But greed is an umbrella term for a lot of different motivations. The family of greed includes acquisitiveness – wanting things; miserliness – not sharing, not being generous. Holding on tight to what one has is also in this family of greed.

Strong biological lust or biological passion can feel so natural. It seems that we should give in to it and allow for it. It can feel like freedom and such a wonderful pleasure in which to lose ourselves. But it can also be a form of greed if we are being compelled by it. Then there is no freedom in it. We give ourselves over to this force that takes over rather than being free and having a kind of ease or non-compulsion in how we act and how we live in the world of pleasure.

In the Dharma, one of the goals of Buddhist practice is to realize the possibility of radical and complete non-greed – non-compulsive desire. It might be unimaginable that this is possible, but it is possible. It is deeply satisfying. The level of peace, well-being, and sense of freedom that comes from it is pretty phenomenal.

When anticipating or thinking about this goal, some people worry that if they have no compulsive or strong desires that push them to hold on tight to what they have, somehow they won't be safe and life will become very difficult. There could be some truth to this. It is hard to know how everybody lives their lives and the conditions, or challenges under which they live. Certainly, we don't want anyone to be harmed by non-greed.

But, non-greed has this wonderful quality: the absence of mind states that eclipse the deeper goodness within us. Greed obscures the deeper movements of generosity, contentment, love, and deep faith in the possibility of freedom.

This capacity for living a generous life – not because we feel compelled to be generous – but rather, the kind of generosity by which, if a person has two hands, the left hand washes the right hand and the right hand washes the left hand. There is a kind of unselfconsciousness in the hands. There is a coming together. Clearly, there need to be two distinct hands so they can do the work, but they become one, they are not separate.

In generosity, there is a coming together of the giver, the receiver, and the gift (what is being given). It doesn't become something self-centered, or that creates a hierarchical distinction between the giver, "me who is special," and the receiver, "you who needs something and better be thankful for what I've done." There is a softening and letting go of any of the barriers, clinging, or holding on that gets in the way of a sense of mutuality and simplicity. This is just the right and left hands coming together to do the work of cleaning.

This simplicity and naturalness of generosity come from a deeper place. It could not come from a place of greed. In Buddhist psychology and understanding, this compulsive desire or greed comes together with clinging and grasping at something. There is no freedom with compulsion. Clinging and grasping is a form of suffering. There is a tightening, constriction, or tension that comes along with clinging and grasping.

Greed always comes with suffering, even if the promise, the excitement, or acting on greed might be pleasant, or have a promise of pleasure in it. The fantasies can be pleasant, but if we pay careful attention, there is something in greed that brings suffering. It also brings alienation from this deeper goodness, this deeper wellspring of love, contentment, and generosity that lives inside each of us. This deeper goodness is not really “us.” It isn’t what we usually identify as me, myself, and mine. In Buddhist terms, it is more like the Dharma that lives within us. It is not exactly ours, but it is not apart from us either.

So greed always comes with clinging. Freedom from greed comes from the freedom from clinging and grasping. It feels so good to be free of that tension. This freedom gives rise to a different orientation for how to live a life that may be foreign to how most people live in the world. It could even feel disorienting, frightening, or undesirable to have this lack of clinging because so much of how we normally live is based on clinging and grasping.

Greed also comes with conceit. It comes with an assertion of self: “This is for me, I want this.” Or: “I am going to grab this for me. I am going to keep this for myself.” This self-assertion in the world is also a form of suffering. Asserting greed and desire in the world causes a lot of harm in the world. We may be able to directly see the harm, but much of its harm is indirect. The ripple effect of our consumerism or capitalism that is based on greed affects so much of the world. The suffering of greed spreads out like a disease.

Through meditation or some other means, we can learn and discover that it is possible to live happily and successfully without the self-assertion of greed. It is like having a bicycle where one of the brakes is always misadjusted and rubs against the wheel so that you have to pedal harder and more forcefully to get the bicycle to roll. The brake that is always against the wheel is a bit like this self that we always carry with us. The rubbing of the brake wears all kinds of things out. To undo the brake allows some deeper wellspring to arise that is defined by the absence of greed, the absence of hatred, and the absence of delusion. This is a beautiful way to live.

For some people, the absence of greed may feel like a kind of grace, living a life of grace. For other people, it is living a life of love, generosity, or a life of freedom.

It is well worth taking a deep look at this world of greed and how it works for us. Take a deep look at the world of compulsive desires that drive us and move us along. Compulsive desires influence our thoughts in terms of distracted thoughts and the momentum of our thoughts. They influence our actions – what we do, and how we speak. What is it like to let speaking, thinking, and acting come from a place where there is no assertion of self, no clinging, and no greed? This is one of the great pleasures of life.

So thank you very much. Next week we will do the same kind of journey through the topic of hate, hostility, or aversion, depending on how the word is translated. I look forward to that.