

Hatred (4 of 5) Composting Hatred

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Today I am offering the fourth talk on the topic of ill will, hatred, and hostility.

The talk is not meant to be a stand-alone talk. It is meant to be a continuation of the first three talks from this week that set the ground for today. It is also meant to be a continuation for those with a long practice focusing on Buddhist mindfulness. It is meant for people who have a strong grounding in mindfulness.

I don't usually use this kind of language, but this talk is meant as an advanced practice. I am offering it directly to those of you who have already cultivated a strong mindfulness practice, or as a future possibility for others, because it builds on the capacity to be nonreactive with our experience. We want to be able to get out of the way and allow what is within us to be there without being involved, picking it up, getting caught in it, or fueling it. We want to allow our experience without trying to get rid of it, resist it, or fix it.

Meditation practice is a wonderful laboratory in which to wisely learn this capacity so that we don't cause harm to the world or ourselves. This topic of ill will, hostility, and hatred overlaps but is not always synonymous with anger or fury. When we sit in meditation, we are committed for the duration of the meditation practice to not act on any of these impulses. We choose to sit with a body that is quiet and still. We also commit to not intentionally or actively involve ourselves in our stories, ideas, or planning that connects us to these intense feelings of ill will.

The practice for these three Thursdays is composting the difficult states of greed, ill will, and delusion. These intensities in Buddhism are considered poisons. Rather than condemning them, we learn to be present for them so that they can be transformed. They are not transformed because we are tinkering with them. Rather, this is the composting of them – our whole psychophysical system has the capacity to move them to greater health.

Hostility, hatred, is a form of illness. It is an illness in the sense that it is self-harming. In the Buddhist tradition, it is considered a poison. Rather than condemning it, we allow it. We allow the inner system to heal, transform, and compost it.

Sometimes this is most useful when the anger or hostility is so strong and there is no other choice. Something different can happen if we can be present and allow it without getting entangled, caught, or trying to fix it. We can become stuck if the self identifies with it, pushes it away, or comes into a relationship with it.

Our sense of personal strength, even power – a real vitality that moves through us in a wonderful way – overlaps with or is connected to hostility and anger. These are powerful states. There is a lot of energy in them. If we squash, push away, or deny these powerful feelings, we might also inadvertently suppress the vitality, energy, confidence, and strength that can exist in us as well. The suppression of anger or hostility can create a bottleneck, a pressure cooker, or unhealthy ways in which this life vitality can then fester within or explode later on.

One of the advantages of connecting mindfully – practicing real careful, careful mindfulness – with these strong, kind of negative energies, possibly harmful energies, is that it also connects us to this inner strength. It is possible that as we compost and transform this negative energy in a sense – this negative expression of energy – the energy can be retained and made available for positive things, healthy things, wholesome phenomena.

The idea in Buddhist practice, over time, is to become strong human beings – to not have our inner strength, confidence, or even courage be stifled. We want to be able to show up in the world – not aggressively or assertively – with a clear sense of stability, upright energy, and presence.

We have to first learn the capacity to be present non-reactively in order to compost hostility in meditation. The sense of mindfulness becomes strong enough to be present without being for or against it. We open to being

present, just here for this. When anger and hostility are strong, it is best to not try to open up to them continuously. Rather, it is sequential. It is moment by moment.

You might recognize, “Oh, there is anger or hostility here.” Then, for a moment, open up and feel it in your body. What does it feel like in the body? Let the body feel it. As soon as you are in your body, the body is in the present moment, *and* the body is a processing center. It is a way in which things can move and transform. It is like we are giving things breathing room for it to relax, open up – sometimes it needs to get stronger.

And then, the thoughts that are there – we are not fighting the thinking. To let go of the story is not the be-all and end-all. When we are practicing this composting, it is moment by moment. We open to what is here, “Oh, this is what is happening.” In those few moments that we can open, that is where the non-reactivity is. That is where the freedom is. Then we do it again.

We just kind of trust opening again and again: “Okay, here, feel this. Be present for this.” By doing that, we are stepping away from being entangled or fueling, identifying with, or feeding the anger, the hostility, the hatred. We are giving it room as if it could take care of itself, and transform itself.

There is no need for shame. There is no need for hostility towards our hostility. I am not sure I want to say there is no need for fear because there is healthy fear around hostility and anger. There is fear of causing harm, but there is no need to be caught in the fear. There is just here, here.

Sometimes it takes a while for things to settle down, open up, and transform. As we allow the settling, we might realize that the hostility and anger are a symptom or a messenger for something deeper inside of us. By making room for it, something in the cracks of the ill will begin to show that there are things like fear or hurt underneath. When we open to that, something even deeper begins to show itself. Underneath there may be a sense of care, compassion, goodwill, and tenderness.

There is a whole other world deep inside waiting for us. Sometimes it is the very thing that has been challenged, overlooked, or closed down around. And this closing down on our tenderness, peacefulness, love, and compassion is part of what gives some of the negative power to hostility.

The energy and strength of our life can flow through when we discover a reservoir of peace, compassion, care, and tenderness within. Then the energy of our life is not squashed or diminished. It can now flow through goodwill instead of ill will. And this goodwill and compassion may be needed, in some circumstances, to address the situations in the world that are the conditions for anger and hostility.

There is injustice in the world. Injustice and harm are being caused in the world and to ourselves. How do we respond to that? How do we protect ourselves from that? How do we address that with a sense of confidence, courage, and uprightness of this deep vitality, which can somehow get skewed or become more dangerous if that energy is channeled through hostility and anger?

To do this practice of composting and transforming is not meant to be an avoidance of addressing the issues of our life and the world. Rather, we do this practice from a different place where we are rooted in the wholesome treasures, the wholesome roots, inside of us. We are rooted in generosity, love, compassion, and wisdom. We are rooted in a way that people feel that there is strength here. There is a chance to meet and be with someone who is confident and is not diminishing himself.

I feel a little bit cautious about what I have offered here. What I am saying today needs to be done with great care, compassion, and gentleness. There needs to be very careful monitoring of it. This allowing and being present for hatred, hostility, and ill will must be approached carefully so that it doesn't get stronger than we can somehow manage. The standard for knowing when it is stronger than we can manage and has taken over is that when we open our eyes and take a deep breath, we don't feel grounded or stable.

One of the ways of practicing this composting in meditation is to periodically pull ourselves out of it. Look around, and take a deep breath. Somehow, shake it off, and then dip down again if it seems appropriate. We don't want to let the pressure build and build because we think that we're supposed to stick with it until the end of the meditation. That is usually not so useful. A useful standard is to do this just well enough, just good enough, and trust that over time the composting will happen.

We should not insist it has to happen in one sitting, but rather do it just well enough. When it feels like it is getting the upper hand, take a deep breath, and open your eyes. Maybe even get up and go for a walk. Then come back. It is very important to feel that you have some strength to not be pulled into it too much.

We have one more talk tomorrow that is related to liberation. The liberation is from ill will, hatred, and hostility. So thank you all very much, and I look forward to our time tomorrow.