

Hatred (5 of 5) Liberation from Hatred

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It is said that the greatest health is *nibbāna*, which is liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion. This experience of deep peace and non-attachment is not nothing, but rather it feels like a kind of healthiness that has nourishment, deep satisfaction, and rightness to it. Importantly, it demonstrates or reveals to us the ways in which movements away from peace are unsatisfactory, stressful, or involve tensions. This is what Buddhists call *dukkha* (suffering). And it is very interesting to feel that in meditation.

In daily life, there might be good reasons to be engaged actively in the world, and have the mind and body active, engaged, and not so peaceful. It is sometimes quite beautiful to be active in daily life. There are ways of acting vigorously in the world that can feel very peaceful, harmonious, and engaging if no resistance and no greed are present.

But in meditation, when things get very quiet and still in a very vital and vibrant way, the mind might begin to move into distracted thought or clinging or holding on to something. We can see: “Oh, this isn’t so good. I’m better off without it. The better alternative is peace.” So it is not a condemnation of reactivity or rejection of being agitated or distracted – it is just knowing that peace is a better alternative.

So we learn to work with ill will, hatred, aversion, and hostility. We learn to recognize it and learn how we get hooked or attached to it. We begin to see that hostility itself is a kind of attachment. To have hostility we are already attached to something. We begin to see and feel that in a clear way and then put it down – to let go, to go to the other side of it to find that which is deeper, and to have confidence in that peace. That is a big part of Dharma practice.

There is a possibility of living without any ill will, hostility, aversion, or strongly biased opposition to things. This is part of the radical message of Buddhism; that it is possible to bring an end to greed, hatred, and delusion. This is what the Buddha emphasized over and over again.

It is not necessarily easy. For some people, greed, hatred, and delusion in subtle forms – desire and aversion – are so part and parcel of living a life that it is inconceivable to not have it. But it *is* possible to come to the end of it. We are not diminished or lessened because of it. We are no less able to take care of ourselves. It is a state of health. And in that health, there is wisdom and a deeper understanding.

It is not just to become mindful of aversion or ill will and to learn to hold it spaciouly, non-reactively, and to not get caught by it. It is very powerful to do that. But there is another step, and that step is to let go of any tendency towards ill will and aversion. The idea is that aversion is a form of attachment. So if all we are doing is letting go of our reactivity but still allowing the aversion to be there, then we have not gone to the depths of freedom – of what’s possible to let go.

Some people are suspicious of this idea of letting go of ill will in a deep way. It seems like it is such an important way of protecting ourselves or taking care of what we need. But there are powerful motivations and ways of living that arise out of peace (the absence of ill will). One of the most common reference points for this is the opposite of ill will, which is goodwill. Goodwill is a radical feeling or attitude of friendliness. Some people like to call it love or kindness, not because we are acting, pretending, or overriding everything else in order to be kind. It is because that is what wells up from the wellsprings within when there is no aversion. And then to learn to meet the challenges and injustices of life in a way in which we are clearly expressing our goodwill, well-wishing, kindness, or friendliness.

Do not get confused by this and think that it is all for the sake of other people. It is for the sake of not losing your health, your capacity to be free, or your ability to let the best and the fullest part of you be there and present. These parts cannot be present if we have hostility, ill will, or aversion. Then we become partial or incomplete. The deep letting go of practice and the absence of greed, hate, and delusion is a kind of coming into a wonderful state of completion.

To not succumb to ill will is tremendously beneficial for oneself. To come with goodwill and love as a reference point for the world and how we act may be more beneficial for yourself sometimes than it is for others. But it can be both.

For the Buddha, one of the consequences of this deep liberation from ill will, greed, and delusion is a life of service. A life that is naturally dedicated to the care and the welfare of the world. I like to believe that it is not because it is a duty, but because it is the best thing going. It is what allows the healthy expression of the heart to manifest itself in the world. If it comes out of our own hearts, then the goodwill of service or care is going to be expressed in our own particular way.

There are an infinite number of ways in which this gets expressed. Some of them are in the form of caring for our immediate family or our community. Sometimes it is caring for the communities around us in a bigger way. Sometimes it is situational and it is all of the above. Care can be different on different days, in different months, and in different years. Care can be different depending on where our attention goes or where our service and care goes. But to have that care and service come from our peace and freedom is one of the best things going. It is one of the best reasons to have a deep study of hatred and to get to the bottom of it.

Thank you.