

Hatred (2 of 5) Understanding Hatred

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Today is the second talk on *dosa*, which is translated as “hatred” or “hostility.” Yesterday I introduced the concept of non-hatred as a significant state of well-being that involves love, patience, calmness, and peace. Non-hatred is not simply the absence of hatred, but is a healthy state of being and a reference point that highlights the unsatisfactoriness of hatred. Non-hatred highlights how hatred is a form of stress, tension, and pain for the individual who has it, so we can see the contrast with a state that is not full of hatred.

Today, I want to talk about the idea of *dosa*. Tomorrow, we will be practicing with it. Thursday, we will be composting hatred – transforming it. Friday will be about liberation from hatred, and what is possible with that liberation.

It is important to appreciate that the Pali word for hatred (*dosa*) means hostility. The ancient texts describe it as wanting to harm. *Dosa* can also involve intense dislike. It is a kind of intense opposition to others. That dislike and opposition is a form of harming where others feel somehow belittled, boxed in, oppressed, or disrespected in some big way, when the dislike or aversion is so strong.

There can be a simple dislike of things and people, perhaps a dislike of their activities and what they do. But this does not have to translate into any disrespect for others. It does not have to diminish our love for others. It is possible to have a heartfelt warmth towards others even when we dislike some of the things that they do. But even if we don't think we hate someone or feel hostility, and we don't feel like we want to harm them, the intensity of the dislike is a form of hatred.

Dosa overlaps with anger, and sometimes includes it and sometimes doesn't. This is important because if we treat anger and *dosa* (hostility) as the same thing, then all anger is seen as being a problem and a source of suffering. Instead, we see that sometimes anger is a very passionate sense of "No" – a sense of "This is injustice. This is not right." The intensity of that anger might resemble hostility, but there does not have to be any hostility in it.

I have been on the receiving end of what I call “white anger,” where I felt there was zero hostility. I don’t know if I felt friendship from the person, but I felt no hostility. I felt safe, though the anger was intense. In the occurrence I am thinking about, the intensity was in the message, “No, don’t do that again.” As soon as the message was delivered, I could feel the person let it go. It was an appropriate message, and it was received. I was inspired by how clean the intensity of “No” was. It was a kind of anger, but without hostility in it.

Another way the movement of hostility and hatred can harm is that we harm ourselves. That is why the reference point of non-hatred is so useful – we see how we are harming ourselves. We see that hatred is like a wood fire, where the fire is both arising out of the wood and burning the wood. In the same way, the heat of hatred burns the one who is on fire with it and harms them.

Generally, when there is hatred (*dosa*), the attention of the mind is externally directed toward the object of the hostility. In some people, this takes the form of blame. Sometimes it takes the form of being hypercritical – an unwillingness to see anything good about the other person, and only seeing the aspect that is bad or problematic. Sometimes there is a recoiling from our own pain by finding something outside of us to either blame, or attack, or to be hostile towards. Sometimes

hatred is a deflection from the willingness to experience our personal pain and suffering by redirecting that pain outward. Sometimes the intention of hatred is clearly to cause other people pain: “I’m feeling pain, so other people should feel pain.”

There can also be hostility towards oneself. Some people hate themselves or some aspect of themselves. Although this self-hatred is not exactly externally focused, there is a kind of objectification of something the mind is directed towards. Any time there is objectification, then there is alienation from the other person or thing that we feel hatred towards. We are no longer present to be able to see and experience fully what is there. We are now seeing it through a particular filter – that of hate, hostility, or aversion. Everything is seen in that light: “Everything is wrong.” We pick up all the problems.

That is alienation. We are not really there fully for the person. It is also alienation from oneself. When we are involved in an intense objectification of something, we are involved in a thought, an idea, a concept of something. Our attention goes towards that object and towards thinking about it, so we lose touch with ourselves.

When there is hostility, it comes with many different aspects. It comes with burning, tension, and tightening.

It is a stressful state to be in. It comes with an objectification that is alienating and disconnecting. As we will see tomorrow, the task of mindfulness is to reestablish the connection and overcome the alienation, both towards others and towards oneself, by opening up and really being present.

Because hostility is so compelling at times, sometimes it produces its own fire that hurts. That hurt and stress of alienation produces more of the same. It keeps looking outwards for more things to hate, or more things to feel bad about and to be critical of. So there can be a loop of hate that is sometimes difficult to get out of, because not having the object of the hate would allow us to feel what is happening here, and that is just too difficult.

Sometimes intense hatred comes from good reasons within. There can be intense protectiveness. Maybe there is fear for good reason. There are people who cause harm. Then it is easy to justify the hatred. It is a justifiable form of protection, with good reasons to be protective. But, is that really the best way to protect ourselves? I can't answer that question for any individual. The circumstances are so complex that I don't want to say "never have hatred," if that is what protects you from the harm that other people are doing.

But I believe that it's possible to train ourselves to be reflective and have the presence of mind that allows us to protect ourselves in ways other than returning hatred with hatred, and returning harm with harm. How to find this way is an important topic. It begins with having the willingness to study our own hatred and our hostility – to really stop and take a look at it. The words “hatred” and “hostility” are such intense words that you might feel this often doesn't relate to you. But hostility and hatred are also very subtle forms of aversion – subtle forms of dislike and opposition to something. Sometimes, we use biting humor to get back at people. Sometimes we say cutting things when we're upset with someone; we use verbal daggers to stab them a little bit. There are all kinds of subtle ways that we express hostility. We say things where we don't believe we want to harm anyone, but there is a kind of subtle attack happening.

So to become sensitive to and aware of this subtle level of hatred, and spend some time being willing to look at personal hostility and aversion. This sometimes takes the form of prejudice and bias. Sometimes it takes the form of turning away, walking away, shutting down, and ignoring. Here, we feel like we are not hostile but we have shut someone out of our hearts. This is a kind of hostile act. So study it and really get to know it.

A worthwhile exercise to do, even if it's just for the next 24 hours, is to review how *dosa*, both the mild and

intense forms of it, has been part of your life, how it is part of your life still, when it manifests, what conditions bring it about, and what your relationship to it is. Do you hate it? Are you distraught that you have this within you? Do you justify it quickly, almost automatically? How is it? See if you can practice clear recognition of it, and relax with it. Find a time and place where you can relax and just allow it to be there, so you can start seeing it clearly without the interference of hating your hate, being distraught over your hate, being critical of your hate, turning away from it, or trying to fix it right away. Spend time getting to know it.

Really getting to know and understanding how hatred is for us is what lays the foundation for practicing with it well, and moving on towards freedom. Because, in Buddhism, freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion is one of the primary definitions of full liberation, it is well worth spending some time with each of these. This week, look at hostility, hatred, and dislike to understand how they work for you. Hopefully, you won't get discouraged or depressed. Hopefully, you can feel encouraged that this is the way forward – this is a wise and mature thing to do.

May this all be for the purpose of non-hatred. Thank you.