

# Grasping Fuels More Grasping

December 28, 2021

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

*upādāna*, hand, clench, clinging, ease, attachment, comfort, cycle, perpetual-motion, labyrinth, tension, relax, calm, clarity

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It is an interesting fact that in the language of the Buddha, the word *upādāna*, which is often translated as “grasping” or “clinging”, is the same word used to mean “fuel for a fire.” There is a way in which grasping, clinging, or being attached is the fuel for more grasping.

For example, if I keep my hand open, that is fine. But if I make a loose fist with my hand, now something (the fist) exists that did not exist when the hand was open. Now it is possible to become attached to the fist. I might hold on and clench a bit more tightly with my hand. If I go around with my clenched hand for a long time, it will start to hurt and become uncomfortable. One response I might have to the discomfort is to clench or tighten up even more as a reaction to this discomfort.

So there is a progression in which I start with something that does not exist. Then I create something new, in this case, a grasping of the hand, that is uncomfortable or is something that I'm attached to. Progressively, with each step along the way, I'm grasping what is grasped. The very thing that I'm grasping is the source for grasping even more.

There is a cycle of attachment. We see that the attachment is the fuel for more attachment. And that cycle cannot be broken if we keep grasping even more. You can see this in the thinking mind where there is a drive or push to think – a preoccupation. We could say that an attachment or grasping to thoughts or ideas is like a pressure to think – to try to figure things out, for example, or make plans to make ourselves safe, or review the past and repeat the same conversation with someone over and over again. There is a kind of drive or pressure to think. That pressure is the very source for more pressure. Grasping certain ideas or trying to accomplish something with our thoughts can become uncomfortable.

Our system reacts to that discomfort and wants to find more comfort. And if the system thinks that comfort is found through thinking, then the very thing that is causing the discomfort is what we will do more of in order to try to figure out how to end the discomfort. So it becomes cyclic. We are attached, clinging or grasping something, and that sets the ground or foundation for doing more of the same. When we are doing something that is unhealthy and stressful, sooner or later we have to realize this cycle of doing and reinforcing more of the same is not working.

Some people do not discover that for decades. It is not easy to discover that the approach we have to help make ourselves safe or get what we want is the very source of what is making us feel unsafe or stressed. So grasping is the fuel for more grasping. Attachment is the fuel for more attachment. At some point, we have to step out of this cyclical movement. We have to be willing to realize this is not the way anymore. Hopefully, at some point in meditation, there arises a clear sense that to continue thinking this way just does not work. It is like being caught in a self-fulfilling, perpetual-motion labyrinth that just keeps fueling itself.

When we decide that it is time to step away and stop investing in or giving ourselves over to that kind of thinking, we step away into awareness. The mindfulness is not the attachment. The mindfulness *of* the attachment is a way of stepping away. We can step away into our body and begin to relax our body. The tension or stress of grasping is often expressed or found in tension in our body. If we can relax and reduce the tension of the body, this goes a long way toward helping us relax the tension in the mind.

Sometimes we cannot find or see a way to relax the tension in our mind – where do I let go? How do I stop this? It is really hard when we see tension as just a mental thing. But if we use mindfulness of breathing or some kind of meditation to relax and quiet the body, we can begin calming the thinking mind. With progressive calming of the body and mind, we can get to the point where we say, “Maybe I can just not think this way anymore. I do not have to be caught in discursive thinking. Okay, enough.” Then maybe for a few moments, we can get quiet and have mental peace. Then we can focus more on the breathing.

Just as grasping is the fuel for more grasping, at some point the equation switches over, and peace is the fuel for more peace. Calm is the fuel for more calm. Clarity is the food for more clarity. And you can feel that. If I open my hand and feel how nice it is to have an easy, relaxed, open hand, then feeling that ease is support for having more ease. When I can feel the ease of my hand, I feel my shoulders release a little bit. I value that, so I stay close to that feeling of ease. I notice the slightest little movement toward tightening up. Then I say, “Wait a minute, peace is the way forward.” So I relax my hand. It can be very helpful to be willing to see and understand this principle – that grasping is the fuel for more grasping, and letting go of that grasping is the way toward peace.

This way to peace is not linear. Sometimes we are grasping to protect ourselves, get away from, or cope with difficulties in our life. There might be strong or difficult emotions present. Sometimes we have to go through those and really feel what's going on. In the example I gave of the grasping hand, if I grasp lightly and that feels uncomfortable, when I try to get away from that discomfort, I clench even more. As I relax the hand, I might feel that initial layer where it felt very

uncomfortable. I do not like being there, so I clench even more. So we have to learn to be willing to go through this feeling of discomfort as we release the layers of grasping, until we come to the place where peace is the fuel for more peace and clarity is the fuel for more clarity.

Thank you all very much.