

Quarrels (2 of 5) Roots of Quarrels

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Hello. Welcome to the second talk on the Buddha's teachings related to quarrels and disputes. The Buddha recognized very well that human beings live in conflict with each other.

Not only does he have a lot to say about it, but it could be understood that the core teaching of the Buddha, including the whole purpose of becoming enlightened, has to do with creating a world where people are not driven by unethical behavior. The core teachings of the Buddha are ethical, with an ethical goal.

A person who is awakened is defined as someone who will not harm anybody at all. This includes the way in which we have disagreements with people. Certainly,

we will have disagreements. To disagree in an argumentative way with hostility, anger, assertions of power, and demeaning other people is not the direction of the Dharma practice the Buddha taught.

The Buddha wanted us to take responsibility for our contribution to suffering in the world. Certainly, taking a look at ourselves is not enough to diminish the suffering in the world. But without a deep look at ourselves and what is going on with us, we could inadvertently continue being models and perpetrators of hostility, hate, and the assertion of power. We could continue the endless cycles of harm that have existed since the time of the Buddha.

His teachings on quarrels are the topic for this week. Taking a deep dive into ourselves to understand ourselves is the primary strength of the Dharma the Buddha taught. This is not to ignore the world, but it is a deep dive inside of ourselves to really see and free ourselves from the inside out. We turn ourselves inside out and return to the world with a heightened sensitivity and capacity to care. We are able to love without any hostility or taking on any stress in that process. This is done without any kind of conceit that gets in the way of caring for others and the world.

In one set of teachings about quarrels and disputes, the Buddha talks about the six roots of quarreling. These

are six problematic qualities found underneath quarrels. They are the six ways in which we contribute to quarreling, arguing, or disagreeing in an unhealthy, unbeneficial way.

We want to find a way to go under the surface. We want to go down a layer so we are not constantly involved at the level of the quarrel. We want to step away from who said what, what is going on, and what should I do. This level is like living in an objectified world of problems. We also want to take time out to understand what we are contributing. What gasoline are we putting into the fire?

One of the purposes of meditation is to give us the introspection to drop down a layer into our being, into our psychology. We try to see what it is that we are contributing to the quarrel in terms of pressure, energetics, agitation, or stress.

The Buddha talked about six roots that he pairs up. They are considered synonyms, close synonyms, or part of a family. We understand the teachings to imply that as these roots settle, they get replaced by their opposite.

The Buddha uses the word “root” using a plant as a reference point. If you cut off the plant at the surface, it will sprout again from the roots. If you really want to get

rid of a weed, you must pull out the roots so it can't resprout.

The first of these roots is anger and resentment. Anger in the Buddhist lexicon is not the same as the English word. The Pali word for anger is "*dosa*"(?). Some people in the West want to justify certain kinds of anger as clean, white anger, or justified anger. The anger that Buddhism says is a problem or a poison is anger that has hostility or hatred within. Resentment is also a type of poison that certainly harms the person who is resenting.

These are the first roots. They are anger and resentment. If these settle down, then friendliness and care are possible. We each can come from a different place. We might still disagree, but we disagree in friendly ways. If we can't be friendly because that is too high a bar, we can disagree with care for the welfare of everyone involved. What does it take to engage in a disagreement in a productive way? It is not easy.

The second root is contempt and spite. We might have an attitude of contempt or spite toward others who disagree with us. We know that there are political movements and politicians who are demonizing their opponents with contempt and spite. This just puts gasoline on the fire of the many social, political, and national conflicts that exist in our time. There is no hope of resolving a conflict if there is contempt, spite, hatred,

or demonization of the other. The alternative is respect. We enter disagreements with respect for the other, even if they don't respect us.

The third root is envy and greed. The word for greed can also mean selfishness. This third root could be envy and selfishness. For some people, envy is a very deep poison. It is not an issue for me, but I have talked to other people and was surprised to learn from them how toxic it is to live with envy. Being envious of another, or what they have, or their situation seems to undermine one's own integrity or well-being.

We might experience greediness or selfishness. We want more. We want everything. Some of the disputes have to do with wanting what someone else has. They don't want to give it to us, or we can't have it. If that level of tension, of envy, greed, or selfishness settles or quiets down, the healthy alternative is generosity. We want other people to be well. We want them to have things, and even give them some of our things. We wish them well.

The next root for disputes and quarrels is deceit and deceptiveness. We might try to deceive people so we get what we want. We could be deceptive in what we say, and lie. This also is a poison for our society. It is a poison for our interpersonal relationships. It means that there is no trust. It means that there is no respect for

others. We are just trying to get our way at any cost. As we relax the inner tensions and forces of deceit and deception, the alternative is honesty. Honesty is medicine. Honesty is the food for psychological and spiritual health, which spreads and inspires.

Evil and wrong view are the next root of quarrels or disputes. It is not so clear what is meant by evil. Perhaps it is wickedness. Some people just have a pure and simple tendency to want to cause harm. They have no other reason than to simply cause harm in some way.

Wrong view doesn't understand the nature of what is harmful and what is not harmful. From the Buddhist point of view, both evil and wrong view involve some kind of tension. There is a kind of contraction or agitation within. As we drop down in our awareness of self below the level of the quarrel and into the subjective level, we start discovering these tensions. We discover what we can relax. If we can relax evil and wrong view, there can be greater wisdom. The core wisdom in Buddhism is the penetrating wisdom that applies to almost everything. It is understanding what causes harm and what causes welfare, real welfare.

The last root is attachment to the world. This is being attached to this life that we are living. It might seem that of course, we should be attached. The alternative is to

be generous to the world. We don't have to be attached to the world to live a full life. In fact, I would suggest that we do not want to be attached to anything – instead, we want to be able to give. Being generative from the inside out creates a fantastic sense of well-being and freedom. Being attached to the world means that we are consumers only, holding on rather than giving away.

The primary Buddhist lesson that I would like to pass on is that we want to be able to sit quietly enough to find a way to step below and look below the level upon which the quarrels, disputes, and fights are happening, so we can see what our contribution is. What is the tension or pressure? What are the roots within us?

This is a good checklist to see if any of these roots are present. As we find them, feel the physical and subjective way in which the tension or pressure is present. Feel the agitation, and then learn to relax. Initially, it may be easier to relax physically, mentally, or emotionally than it is to pull out the root itself. We might be able to relax the tension around the root.

If any of these roots are experienced today – anger, envy, greed, deceit, the tendency to lie, attachments of any kind, or contempt for other people (maybe someone in the news) – stop. Look below it subjectively. Is there any tension? If there is, try to relax. See what healthy alternative is possible with relaxation.

Thank you very much and I look forward to being with you again tomorrow.