

Delusion (4 of 5) Composting Delusion

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This will be the fourth talk on the topic of delusion. It certainly builds on the first three. The title of it is “Composting Delusion.” I think of this as kind of an advanced practice, because it involves allowing delusion to be present. Since delusion is one of the primary sources of causing harm in the world and for ourselves, allowing it to be present is an advanced practice. But we do this without getting entangled or caught in it, and certainly without being motivated by the delusion.

When there’s something undesirable or unwholesome going on in the mind, composting delusion is an alternative to the attitudes or approaches of trying to fix it, make it better, make it go away, or let go of it. Sometimes these approaches are the operation of delusion.

For example, there could be the idea that I will only be a good meditator or a good person if I get rid of this delusion, so I have to do something to get rid of it. There can be a lot of baggage, some of it perhaps delusive, around “me, myself and mine” – who I have to be – that operates within the movement to get rid of something, stop it, or fix it. Of course, sometimes it’s healthy to fix something or let go of it, so I won’t say it’s always the case. But the problem is that there is more delusion in that movement than most people realize.

The alternative is to not try to fix or make anything go away, but without being caught in it. This is where it is helpful to have a stable, strong capacity for being still and present, especially in meditation, where you’re committed to not moving or saying anything during that time. Then it is safer to just allow things to be there.

We can be present enough to recognize something as delusion. For example, there can be fantasies that involve delusions of grandeur: how great it would be if I could do X, Y, and Z. We’ve done this so much that we see it clearly, “Oh, this is kind of a fantasy world that I’m living in.” We see it clearly, but we don’t try to judge it or judge ourselves for it, and we don’t try to get rid of it. But we allow it in a certain way: we allow it while knowing it is delusion.

This accomplishes a number of things. One very important result is that it allows us to become more familiar with this tendency. We get to recognize, feel, and sense what delusion is. One principle is that we only let go of things in a healthy way when we have really understood them. If we let go of something before we really understand it, this might not really be letting go. We might let go of just the surface symptoms, not of what's really happening.

There is a lot of wisdom that comes from familiarity – seeing something over and over and over again. This idea might be bad news, because it might be uncomfortable to see some things over and over again. But in fact, seeing a delusion with a nonreactive mind – without being entangled or caught, and without trying to get rid of it – allows something deep to begin happening within us.

One thing that can arise with that is a very healthy sense of “enough already” – a healthy feeling that: “I don't really value this anymore. I'm not behind it. I'm not motivated by it. I don't care for it. I see that this particular delusion I'm having is actually not very healthy for me or the world.” That insight – that real clear seeing – is not aversion. It's not any kind of hostility. It is just clear seeing, “Oh, look at that.”

If you put your hand on a hot stove, if you do it long enough and become familiar enough with it, you want to pull your hand away – “Enough of this. I don’t want to do this anymore.” Most of us don’t need a lot of time on the hot stove – just milliseconds – before we know that we don’t want to do that; that’s not wise. But with some of the illusions of the mind, it takes longer for us to see the healthy movement – “Oh, this is not for me.”

Building on that, especially if the delusion continues (and it doesn’t necessarily stop), that feeling of “enough” can be a wonderful source of motivation for practice. We might feel: “I don’t want to live this way anymore. I think the only way to get to the bottom of it or work through it is to practice – to meditate.” So a person might dedicate themselves to meditation or a contemplative life for a while, so that they can tap into something deeper than the surface mind of delusion and preoccupations that they may have been living in.

Allowing delusion to be there in order to become familiar with it can produce a healthy attitude of “enough already,” and a healthy motivation: “Okay, I’m going to get more serious about my daily practice. I’m going to practice more.”

Another aspect of allowing delusion to be there (composting and digesting it) is that it is often useful to think of delusion as a symptom of something deeper.

When we allow delusion to be there without reactions, without being for or against, this allows something deeper to manifest, or allows to sprout what is maybe, metaphorically, a healthy, beautiful seed within the delusion.

This seed might be the opposite of some of the conditions that allow the delusion to be there. Maybe some of the conditions for delusion are anxiety, loneliness, insecurity, or very strong desire. But as we sit quietly and allow the delusion to be there, knowing it is delusion, then over time we begin to recognize that something inside begins to morph, change, and settle. We see that the opposites of the unhealthy movements are there. We can recognize peace growing within delusion. We recognize feelings of security, and feelings of well-being and ease, that are growing there and beginning to show themselves.

This growth has a lot to do with the ability to sit still and not be engaged in or reactive to delusion. The attitude of composting, digesting, or allowing things to be, so something can be transformed and changed in a deep, healthy way, is very respectful. I like to think of it as being very respectful toward life. Everything can be respected. Nothing has to be seen as a problem. Nothing needs to be seen as unnecessary. It is all to be respected as a deep unfolding and working of our humanity.

We have an amazingly fantastic, wondrous potential to move toward healing, health, wisdom, and freedom. This does not have to be intentionally worked on. We do not have to be the doer of it. Rather, we get out of the way for this deeper potential to show itself. Mindfulness or awareness – this unmoving consciousness that's really present for things – is the field or the soil out of which this transformation can happen.

The composting of greed, hatred, and delusion, which I talked about the last two weeks on Thursday, also helps us discover this deep respect for everything. That respect doesn't celebrate everything. It doesn't condone everything. It also doesn't condemn anything. It doesn't disrespect or treat anything as wrong. Whatever is happening for us, we hold it in that field, in that container of clear awareness of what's happening, without being entangled with it, and without being motivated by what's unhealthy. This is why I think meditation is such a powerful laboratory for this practice.

Please be very careful with the composting practices I've been teaching. Think of them as advanced practices, a little bit dangerous. It is so easy to fall into believing we're nonreactive, and then believe that whatever is arising from within is somehow wonderful or important or wise, and we should just make room to

allow things, and some kind of inner intuition or deep knowing can flow as we get out of the way. That attitude can be a kind of delusion as well.

So be very careful with this. In no way are we giving into something that's going to cause harm to ourselves or others, or anything that perpetuates other delusions, like delusions of self and self-grandeur. If you find this composting practice to be really valuable or meaningful, it's probably good to check in with a meditation teacher a little to make sure that you're on the right track. Because it is possible to go a little bit off track doing this kind of practice. Thank you very much. I look forward to our last talk on delusion tomorrow.