

Delusion (1 of 5) Non-Delusion

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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This week's theme, following up on the last two weeks, is the third of the three unwholesome roots. Given the dramatic name of the three poisons, they are sometimes described as three ways that when firewood burns, it burns itself. So these three roots are sometimes called the "three fires." They arise out of us, they burn from us, while they also burn us. They are greed, hatred, and delusion, or greed, ill will, and confusion.

For now, we'll stay with the translation of *moha* as "delusion." But, as the pattern has been for these last two weeks, this first talk will not be about the unwholesome root of delusion, but rather, about its

opposite. This tradition calls the opposite of delusion “non-delusion” (*amoha*). This takes many forms. It is not simply the absence of something, but think of it as an absence that allows its opposite to appear. Many things are kind of the opposite – for example, wisdom, discernment, vision, clarity, and understanding. The tradition also lists “penetration” as an opposite.

Today, I want to emphasize clarity. Understanding is certainly part of wisdom, but rather than wisdom necessarily being a sophisticated understanding of things, so much of wisdom arises out of clarity – clear, seeing, clear knowing, clear perception. This is something to appreciate and celebrate. Such a sense of refreshment, openness, peacefulness, simplicity, or brightness can arise with non-delusion.

Maybe the most dramatic or powerful idea for non-delusion is the idea of being awake. The word “Buddhism” could be translated more literally into English as “awake-ism” – the religion of being awake, of being non-deluded. Often the strongest association with awakening is the ending of ignorance (a variation of delusion.) The tradition gives us wonderful analogies for non-delusion. One of them is turning on the light – we were in the dark, then the light goes on, and we can see clearly what’s around us.

Non-delusion is not a passive thing. It is like a skilled guide that leads us through the forest or the jungle, like someone who knows the jungle well can guide us through. So non-delusion has a function of helping us to see the path of practice. It shows us where to practice, where the practice is, where the path is found.

Another analogy is that of a skilled archer who can shoot an arrow that penetrates whatever is shot. A skilled archer has very good eyesight and a precise ability to calmly stay present and see what's there. They can see through what's there – not just the projections, biases, and preferences. They can see through and penetrate all that, so they see things clearly for what they are.

I love this analogy of the archer because of a story that I may have told before. Here, in California, there was a wonderful Zen teacher named Kobun Chino who came from Japan in the late 1960s. In Japan, he had studied the Japanese art of archery. One day he was going to demonstrate his ritual or practice of archery at Esalen, a retreat center on the coast. Esalen has a big grass lawn on the edge of a cliff that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. People were gathered on the lawn to watch Kobun Chino do his thing. He took a long time to get ready.

A lot of the ritual of Zen archery is the preparation of getting centered and balanced, with the feet grounded,

the spine straight, the head in the right position, and putting the arrow in the bow in just the right way. All the preparations took a very long time. He had such focus, such stillness, such quiet, and such poise that I think everyone felt concentrated. Everyone got pulled in. They all got very quiet – this was a demonstration of skillful elegance, skillful concentration, presence, and stillness. Then, when he had the target clearly in his sight, he let the arrow go. It flew through the air and hit and penetrated his target perfectly. Bullseye. He had aimed for the Pacific Ocean, and the arrow landed perfectly in it. The analogy of an archer who penetrates and sees clearly illustrates the idea of being poised and still.

Different words are associated with non-delusion. One is to have discernment – to make a distinction between what is wholesome and unwholesome, skillful and unskillful, helpful and not helpful – to keep it simple, between what is harmful and what's beneficial. Of course, it is not always so easy to discern this, but the greater the wisdom, the more clearly the difference is discernible.

In Buddhist practice, as we get wiser and wiser, or with less and less delusion, it becomes more obvious right in the moment where the benefit is and where the non-benefit is. We gain the ability to see that. Discernment also gives birth to the ability to have vision about where

the path of practice is. That path is to follow what is wholesome and beneficial – to follow where non-attachment and freedom are. To have vision about that is part of clarity and non-delusion. It gives life a purpose and direction that can be quite powerful and meaningful because it is so freeing and valuable.

The factor of wisdom – or discernment, vision, understanding – is said to be a beautiful state of mind. When it's there, it is not obscured or fogged over by confusion, guessing, analyzing, and trying to figure it out. In and of itself, the clear awareness of wisdom is a beautiful state of mind. There can be brightness, clarity, illumination, or simplicity associated with it.

As we practice Buddhism, sooner or later (sometimes maybe it's later; sometimes it's sooner and later and in between) we begin to slowly wake up and discern – see and recognize – the mind's capacity for simplicity, clarity, wisdom, understanding, and discernment. Not in a complicated way; it is obvious and right there.

One of the ways to see that capacity for clarity (and why I'm starting the week with this topic) is at some point, to see the distinction between simple clarity and simple presence, aware of the present moment, and a way of being that is more complicated. Maybe we lose the present moment through entanglement in the past or the future. Maybe we lose the simplicity because we've

gotten very caught up in our preferences about what should be in the present moment. We might be caught up in our fears, analyses, and insecurities around it. Maybe we're caught up in our ill will, our projections, our bias in relationship to whatever we're present with.

But having a reference point of clarity, wakefulness, and wisdom, in any of its many forms, shows us how we lose that wisdom. We see that when we get pulled into delusion, projections, biases, and overlays of opinions on top of whatever we're seeing – including seeing ourselves and other people – there's a loss there. There's a diminishment there. The light gets turned off. We lose our calm and become agitated. We lose our guide. We lose our ability to see where the path is. Then it becomes much more obvious and easier to see what delusion is and its disadvantages. We see and recognize what we have lost: we've lost that clarity.

To start by trying to understand delusion without any practice at all is only an analytical exercise. We get a clear definition of it, apply that to look at our mind, and we understand: "This is delusion – that's what they're talking about. And I am not supposed to have it." It seems more complicated to free ourselves from the complication of delusion.

But if we are settled, calm, peaceful, and non-agitated, with a basic clarity of mind, then we can have a very

different reference point for recognizing delusion. This includes the reference point of understanding that we don't have to feel ashamed, angry, or upset by the movement into delusion. All we have to do is to recognize it as delusion. The simple, clear recognition, "This is delusion," brings us back to some of that clarity. This is not a moralistic critique of delusion. It is a clear recognition, a clear knowing of the disadvantage of being pulled into it. And we know that the alternative – not being deluded – is so much better and more satisfying.

Clear recognition gives us the opportunity to have non-delusion about delusion – to have wisdom about delusion. In some ways, this is central to the Buddhist enterprise. It is not so much wisdom about wisdom, but freedom is found in wisdom about delusion.

Thank you all very much, and I look forward to our time tomorrow.