

Greed (1 of 5) Non-Greed as a Reference

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Good morning, and welcome to the beginning of a new three-week series. This series addresses a huge personal and social issue for human beings – an illness that spreads within and without. It has a big bearing on Buddhist spiritual life. The topic is greed, hatred, and delusion.

There was a time in my life when I would have hesitated to spend so much time talking about greed, hatred, and delusion. Maybe knowing that will support some of you who might not feel inspired to spend a few weeks listening to the topic.

I plan to give a similar set of five talks each week for three weeks. This week, the topic is greed. Today, I will

talk about its opposite – the absence of greed and the wonderful medicine of non-greed. It is a valuable reference point for studying this topic. On Tuesday, I will discuss greed itself. On Wednesday, I will talk about the basic vipassana practice in relation to greed. On Thursday, I will talk about composting greed and what that means in terms of transformation. On Friday, I will talk about liberation from greed and living a life that supports others in the ending of greed. Maybe we can be agents of change in this regard.

I will start with the idea of non-greed. When I was younger and first encountered Theravadan Buddhism, there were many references to greed, hate, and delusion. When I heard these, I saw the topic as reductionistic. It felt puritanical and moralistic. I felt like I was being reduced to a very limited, unsavory identity: someone with a lot of greed, hate, and delusion that needed uprooting. This emphasis did not resonate with me; it was a little off-putting.

But I went along and did the practice of mindfulness. Now, in retrospect, I can say I discovered non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. I discovered a capacity for inner health and well-being that became a very important reference point for understanding myself and my life.

To have a strong connection to a non-agitated mind – a peaceful, calm mind that operates in a healthy way. To tap into a capacity for a confident, clear, loving mind and heart. To discover a wealth of beauty within that is not reductionistic, but rather, enhancing and fulfilling.

There was a nun, in the early Buddhist tradition, Puṇṇa, which meant “full,” like the full moon. Her name suggests this idea of becoming full of beauty and radiance.

So, to do the practice and start discovering these wellsprings within of well-being. With that, I started recognizing that when I had greed, *that* was what was reductionistic. *That* was diminishing me. When I had hate, it would eclipse the beauty, and I would lose it and become diminished. I would be reduced to something unpleasant. If I got caught in delusion, that also limited me. In some ways, it was very alienating to be in delusion. It separated me from myself and the world around me.

Understanding non-greed helped me to understand the shortcomings and the danger of having greed. Then the teachings on greed, hatred, and delusion became much more interesting. I became interested in understanding greed in a deeper way. It became interesting to practice with greed – to learn how to overcome it, compost it, and live a life liberated from it. I could recognize the

limitations, the suffering (*dukkha*), and the way I was shortchanging myself when I got pulled into greed, hatred, or delusion.

That is not easy to see because the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion are very compelling. Any resistance or restraint to allowing them to flow freely through us can feel uncomfortable, as if our freedom is limited. And if we are supposed to be free, let these things roll – let greed, hatred, and delusion flow through us.

Greed is somewhat valued in our society. Certain kinds of greed are not recognized as greed. Economic collapses seem to occur in this country every ten years or so. We discovered that bankers and others were operating with tremendous avarice. They were illegally or unethically acquiring wealth at the expense of other people. But did we see it as greed? Did they see themselves as greedy? Or was it just the American way to acquire more and more wealth and material things?

So, to begin to understand that unabated, unrestrained giving ourselves over to greed, hatred, and delusion is not an expression of real freedom. It is an expression of being in bondage – being caught and enslaved by forces inside us that have taken control and are pushing us around. We are looking for a way to not be on automatic pilot nor compelled by these strong human

instincts and drives. But also, not to restrain them in ways that can feel uncomfortable and are a lot of work. To learn how to allow them to dissipate or come to the other end of them, where there is peace. The inner beauty begins to shine, and we feel full and enhanced.

People might be resistant to the idea of non-greed because the compulsion for desires is there for a reason: to try to get what we want. Not having desires can feel as if we have no motivation to care for ourselves, get what we need, or protect ourselves from the encroaching masses who might destroy us. But, when we discover this beautiful capacity for peace, calm, and inner well-being, we find that we *can* take care of ourselves and act beneficially in the world without greed.

There can be wholesome desires: to do good, to be generous. Buddhist faith is said to be a kind of desire: the desire to develop the fullness and freedom we can have.

There can be tremendously beautiful motivations arising from a peaceful heart – a heart of well-being that is not agitated, pushing, resisting, or fighting for what it can get. There is a kind of aikido movement of not resisting or fighting, but instead, discovering our wellsprings of wisdom, generosity, love, compassion – and peace,

where there is a tremendous capacity for creativity and engagement.

This wellspring is not centered on self: me, myself, and mine. It is not centered on personal identity: who I am, what I need, what I have to do to care for myself and protect myself. The excessive focus on maintaining one's identity complicates greed, hate, and delusion, and makes them really sticky, even dangerous.

To discover there are beautiful motivations within that are not self-centric. They are certainly within us, so they are part of us. But they are not centered on egotism, conceit, or selfishness that often goes along with greed, hatred, and delusion. We may not want to give up greed, hate, and delusion because it seems as if we are giving up our self – our identity. People may often be rooted in a contracted sense of self and self-identity.

But, to discover within that which is not-self – a non-contracted self – a place of non-preoccupation with identity. To discover an inner beauty and fullness from which motivations without the preoccupation with self can well up.

This inner beauty is one reference point for becoming interested in studying and understanding greed, hatred, and delusion. Seeing this beauty, we can truly understand how greed, hatred, and delusion diminish,

reduce, and limit us. We see how wonderful we are – and oddly enough, the world is – when we live without greed, hatred, and delusion.

We will continue tomorrow on the topic of greed. Hopefully, you will appreciate why this is such a valuable topic in Buddhism, and how liberation from greed, hate, and delusion is one of the most potent expressions of liberation. Thank you very much.