

Hetu — The Unwholesome Roots

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 10:00

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

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Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The word I'd like to tackle this evening is *hetu*. It means root—the roots of our suffering. It's really what you would call these days our depth psychology. And it splits into three roots, which won't come as a surprise to you: greed, hatred and delusion.

The word for greed is *lobha*. Most of you would know perhaps the word *taṇhā*, which means desire. But *lobha* is that attitude that's translated as greed, though I think it's much better to understand it as acquisitiveness. The second one is *dosa*, which means aversion, not wanting. And the third one, *moha*, is delusion.

Now we've come across the word *avijjā*, which means ignorance. It's translated as ignorance, but actually it's far better translated in a very neutral sense of just not knowing. And then we make this mistake, and that mistake we call our delusions.

So the mistake, of course, is to believe ourselves to be phenomenal psychophysical organisms, human beings—which is understandable. I mean, our consciousness moves into the cellular life of the fetus, and when it's born, what does it know, apart from what it's experiencing? You can't expect anything else except for that consciousness to say, well, this is what I am. Not actually saying it intellectually, but just a direct relationship with what it experiences as being me. And this is what we call the self.

So the self isn't a thing, it's not an object, it's a relationship. It's a relationship we have to what we experience: this is me or mine. So there's your basic position in the world which we call delusive, a delusion, *moha*. This is me and these things are mine. So identity and possessions.

Now you can see that once you've established that relationship with the world, there's a whole load of things which aren't me, aren't mine. And that's where the barrier comes. Underlying, remember, the sense of self—and this is really quite an important understanding—is that the self actually in itself, or we in ourselves, never truly believe in the self itself. And the way that expresses itself is through a constant anxiety of being in control of our lives, of our things and so on.

If the self were actually rock hard, if it were a real rock hard self, which was immutable and eternal, then

obviously that wouldn't happen. It's just that there's somewhere inside us that knows that this relationship doesn't quite fit, isn't quite right. And so we're constantly trying to acquire the future. And that's what *lobhā* means in its deepest sense. We're trying to control the future.

And to do that, you've got to, of course, get rid of anything that upsets your presumed future. So your attitude, our attitude to life, is always this trying to make sure that things are going to go the way I want them to. And if anything gets in the way then I want to get rid of it. Simple as that. And it comes down into the moment as holding on to what we have and defending it from the enemy. And the enemy is simply all those who want what we have. Very simple.

So once we recognize that mechanism, and we know it's coming from this deeper delusion, this deeper mistake we've made of presuming that this is what we are, then our challenge is to be aware of that. I mean, that's what the *vipassanā* is about. It's leading us to the awareness of every time the mind is holding on to something or pushing something away. And what we find is that just to be aware of it allows us just a small space of freedom. And the freedom is not to act according to those impulses. That's where the liberation is.

But these roots—they're roots, they're deep within our psychology—are so deeply rooted that we're not aware of how afraid we are of letting go, so afraid of just living in the moment and making the decisions in the moment with the faith that things evolve. And if things happen that we don't want to happen, then that's also part of our evolution. We can't stop things happening which are against us, because we live in a world that we can't control.

So the trick is to be aware of how the mind is constantly wanting to control. Therefore it doesn't listen, it doesn't really see the way things are, the way things really are, and it constantly finds itself in this little conflict, this conflict with the world as it is.

Even a simple thing like opening the gate. I was out there the other day, and for some reason it wouldn't open. So I found myself getting irritated with it. The gate should open when I want it to open, in the way that I want it to open. It just refused to do so. Even the slightest things, you'll catch the irritation, you'll catch the grabbing, you'll catch the desire.

And the more we don't act on those impulses, the more we're challenging that deep delusion that we have of who we are. And the more we do that, the more we come across this anxiety, this deep-seated fear. And it's not a place we like to be. It's not a place we like to be at all. We don't like to be in a state of don't know. And it's getting used to that. It's getting used to the fear that surrounds that, the anxiety that surrounds that.

And once we're used to those feelings and how it feels to be like that, then we've already distanced from it. And what we realize has been a great prevention for us to actually dig deep is the fear of that fear, the fear of that anxiety. We just bounce off it, pull off it quick. And by making fear itself an object and getting used

to the feelings of fear, used to the feelings of anxiety, this fear of it disappears, or begins to disappear, or at least diminishes.

And of course, once we lose the fear of fear, what is there to frighten us? So this is the Buddha's deep psychology, really. From then on, it moves into how it manifests through daily life through the dependent wheel of origination.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated in this very lifetime, sooner rather than later.

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