

Dhammapada No. 4: Hatred Is Not Pacified by Hatred

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 16:08

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

This is my inaugural talk around the *Dhammapada*, taking the verse and just seeing what we can make of it. The first one is a very famous one. I shall chant the Pali first.

Nāhi verena verāṇi sammantīdha kudācana, averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano.

The usual translation is something like this: "Hatreds never cease through hatred at any time. They only cease through love. This is an eternal law." It doesn't really matter the exact translation.

That's the verse. Of course, it's one of the most famous of the *Dhammapada* verses, of which there are well over 400. Most of these are taken from the Scriptures, and there comes a story with it. The stories can be charming and sometimes are related, but sometimes I find it difficult to relate to the actual verse.

Very fortunately, I have this book, *The Dhammapada*, which I think is limited in edition by Sri Dhammananda, who was a monk, a Sri Lankan monk living in Malaysia. He's kindly reduced the stories to something quite manageable. So I shall read the story and see what you make of it.

Once there lived a householder whose wife was barren. Being unable to bear a child and afraid that she would be mistreated by her husband and her mother-in-law, she herself selected and arranged for her husband to marry another woman. But on two occasions, as soon as she knew the second wife was pregnant, the barren wife gave her food mixed with drugs, causing her to have miscarriages. On her third pregnancy, the fruitful wife kept it to herself without informing the barren wife. But when the latter came to know of it, she again caused a miscarriage. Eventually, the second wife died in childbirth. The unfortunate woman was filled with hatred and vowed vengeance before she died on this barren wife and her future offspring. Thus, the feud was started.

Among their later existences, the two were reborn as a hen and a cat, a doe and a leopardess, and finally as the daughter of a nobleman in Savatthi and an ogress. One day, the demon was in hot pursuit of the nobleman's daughter and her baby. When the lady heard that the Buddha was giving a religious discourse at the Jetavana Monastery, she fled to him and placed her son at his feet for protection. The demon was thus prevented from entering the monastery, but she was later called in and both the lady and the ogress

were admonished by the Buddha.

The Buddha told them about their past feud as rival wives and how they had been harbouring hatred towards each other and killing each other's offspring through their various lives. They were made to see that hatred could only cause more hatred and that it could only cease through friendship, understanding and goodwill. Both realised their mistakes and on the admonition of the Buddha, made their peace with each other.

Then the Buddha requested the woman to hand over her son to the ogress. Fearing for the safety of her son, she hesitated, but because of her devotion and confidence in the enlightened one, she handed over her son as directed. The child was warmly received by the ogress. After kissing and caressing the child tenderly like her own son, the ogress handed over the child back to his mother. As a result of this episode, there was much goodwill on both sides.

Here we have a very ancient story with ogresses—I think a nasty Shrek. I presume that there's a kernel of truth in the story somewhere. It could be that a distraught husband came to the Buddha and said his two wives were at daggers with each other, and could he help? And when they came to see him, he counselled them and they stopped their fighting. But these three words are worth noting: hatred is overcome by friendship, understanding and goodwill.

If we go back to the verse itself and just look at the Pali: *nāhi verena verāṇi*. *Nāhi* just means no or not. *Ver* is the root word. It means hatred, revenge, hostile action. And this is not pacified, this is not brought to an end by this wrong reaction of more hatred. *Kudācana*—at any time, on any occasion, could be another translation.

But it is pacified by *averena*. The Buddha doesn't use the word for love, *metta*, or some other word, *karuṇā*, whatever. He simply puts a negative, *averena*, which means that the response we have to another person's anger or hatred can be varied. It doesn't have to be just love, as we'll see in a minute. And this is an eternal truth. This is an absolute law, and we'll see that it's an absolute law when we understand the psychology of it.

If we just consider ourselves for a moment and think back when we hated somebody—when we severely disliked somebody, could have been a personality thing, could be something they did—when we felt angry, behind that hatred and anger obviously there's hurt. Something has hurt us. Whether that's right or wrong doesn't matter in this case. It's the fact that we feel hurt and we want to get our own back. So we do that through hating, finding a way of getting our own back through revenge, through spite, or we let it all out in a fiery emotion of anger. That's how we release this hurt—we turn it towards hurting the other.

You can see that if the other person reacts with anger, then of course that fuels our anger. We find ourselves growing even hotter and more cold in our hatred. But if the other person asks us what's wrong, and then we have that occasion to tell them why we feel hurt, and they are prepared to adjust or to do

something which undermines my hurt, then of course that hatred and anger begin to die away.

When we understand our own psychology, obviously it's easier to understand somebody else. Here we have somebody who hates us. We can feel the hate. Or we have somebody who is bursting with anger. Our natural reaction would be to fight back. Or if we feel we're not going to win, would be to run. Somehow we have to stop that from firing up within us. The best thing is awareness—to be aware of that immediate arising of that negative emotion towards the person and to be able to put something in between.

Here we can look at a story from the Buddha. The dastardly Devadatta had set this elephant on him, and the elephant was running towards him with his trunk lifted, presumably to attack. The Buddha stood fearless, not reacting, not running away. If an elephant went for me, I would definitely be running away. He held out his hand and offered *metta* to the elephant. The elephant was so affected by this love that it slowed down, finally came to a halt, and in fact lowered itself before the Buddha in some sort of obeisance.

That might be difficult for us to grasp these days, the power of love, but of course people use it to train dogs, to pacify dogs sometimes. When a dog is barking at you and looks angry, as soon as you open up to it and say, "Oh, quiet down, come on, boy," it'll begin to quiet down and finally come and sniff you out and be a friend. Love is a powerful message to give to somebody that you're not going to come back at them, that you're not going to react, you're not going to take revenge.

Here we are in a situation where somebody is hating us, perhaps, or somebody is angry with us. First of all, is to get in touch with that. In an actual situation where somebody is being hateful or is being angry, imagine that hand in front of you, if you can, and then absorb their negative feelings, as it were. So it stays on the outside of your heart. You can feel it, but you're not letting it in. The heart itself may be in this dual state of wanting to be angry, wanting to react. But we have to go over the top of that. The best way that I found is to point our attention directly to what they're saying.

As soon as you do that, as soon as the person who is angry with you realises that you're not going to react, it's not going to be a big fiery situation, you're not going to pour petrol on it, and that you're actually open to understanding why they're angry, of course their anger has got nowhere to go. It needs something to fire it up. It needs that reaction. Therefore, the anger begins to settle down. The more they begin to see that you want to understand them, then of course it slowly fades away and they begin to explain why they're angry and why they're in a position of hatred towards you. At that point, of course, there's some negotiation, there's some ability to settle the problem most times.

Obviously this doesn't always work. If the person has set their heart against you, well, that's a situation you have to accept and maybe you have to leave, but maybe you have to accept that the friendship is over or whatever that relationship had been. That's an extreme case. Most times, we can come to some understanding and more often than not, the friendship is healed.

We have a wonderful example there of the Buddha overcoming this terrible elephant from Devadatta. That attitude of seeing when somebody is angry or hateful, of actually understanding that they're coming from a position of hurt—there's your compassion. It's not love, it's compassion, it's an empathy, because we've been hurt, we know what it's like. Then the response is one of love, one of opening up to the person and allowing them to express themselves.

That's the teaching of this particular verse. These verses, if you take them on and you learn them off by heart, they're just like a mantra within us. Every so often, it's actually changing our attitude or deepening our attitude of how we relate to situations which are difficult for us.

That's the verse: hatred or anger or anything violent can never be pacified by that reaction of hatred and anger at any time. It's through compassion, through love that we can bring that to an end. This is an eternal law, an absolute law, because we can see the truth of it within our own psychology.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and I have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your devotion to the practice, you may be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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