

2020-06-24: The Roots (3 of 5) Hostility

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So we're in the middle of this series on the three roots of the unwholesome and the three roots of the wholesome. And the word kusala and akusala, wholesome and unwholesome could also be understood as skillful and unskillful. I think of wholesome as being that which is healthy, unwholesome is what is unhealthy. And I think of skillful is that which is helpful. And unskillful is that which is unhelpful. And that distinction represents a fundamental distinction that the Buddha makes. That helps us to find our way in any situation. Like we're always coming to a fork in the road. And that fork can go either in the wholesome direction or the unwholesome direction. And to some degree, that's our choice. And to learn to sit in the place of mindfulness is to be able to have some choice, in which of those forks that we take. We're not just a, you know, have to go along with things. But we can decide which we avoid and which we go along with. And now there's a statement by the Buddha around wholesome and unwholesome, skillful and unskillful that for some people I know had been it's been a very powerful little teaching that really galvanizes them around practice and what the Buddha had to teach. And so I'd like to read it to you. So the Buddha said, "abandon what is unwholesome, it is possible to abandon what is unwholesome. If it were not possible to abandon what is unwholesome, I would not say to you abandon what is unwholesome. But because it is possible to abandon what is unwholesome, I say to you abandon what is unwholesome. If this abandoning of what is unwholesome were conducive to harm and pain, I would not say to you abandon what is unwholesome. But because this abandoning of what is unwholesome is conducive to benefit and happiness, I say abandon what is unwholesome. Develop what is wholesome, it is possible to develop what is wholesome. If it were not possible to develop what is wholesome, I would not say to you develop what is wholesome. But because it is possible to develop what is wholesome, I say to you develop what is wholesome. If this development of what is wholesome were conducive to harm and pain, I would not say to you develop what is wholesome. But because this development of what is wholesome is conducive to benefit and happiness. I say to you develop what is wholesome." So, this is a very definitive. There's no you know, he's very clear, very definitive, very, you know, confident in what he's saying. There's nothing wishy washy about this. It is possible to do something. And it is. It is possible to change and to grow and

develop and to be able to let go of the things that we're doing inside that are causing us and others harm. And it is possible to cultivate that which is for our benefit and well being and happiness, but also those qualities within that are beneficial for the world around us. And I'd like to suggest that these two aren't the same, aren't separate, distinct, as we develop what brings benefit and well being and happiness, real happiness to ourselves. That it's inseparable from developing a concern and a desire for the welfare and happiness of the world around us. So abandon the unwholesome. So we have to be a little bit wise about this. Abandoning is not aversion, is not hostility to what's unwholesome. You can't use the unwholesome to get rid of the unwholesome will use the wholesome, to abandon, to let go to dry up, to evaporate, to thaw, what is unwholesome. So, I want to mention a little bit today about the second of the three unwholesome roots, which is hate. So the three of them are greed, hatred and delusion. So there's hate and or hostility. And sometimes people will relate this to anger. But I'd like to suggest and this is a semantic issue, that the word anger in English, the way that I've talked to many people about this word over my career as a Buddhist teacher. People have a lot of opinions about anger, a lot of different, it's amazing how quickly people are defensive of anger. I don't think there's any other emotion that I know of where I haven't had people in Dharma talks and afterwards want to defend anger. So I don't know what it is about anger that people feel so strongly they won't defend it. But I would suggest that the word anger is an umbrella term, like the word desire is that I talked about yesterday. That the word anger is a general term, within which is held a range of other motivations or feelings, attitudes, that can include hostility and hatred on one end of it spectrum, on the unwholesome part of the spectrum. And on the wholesome part of the spectrum. There can be fierce disapproval, strong disapproval of something and it might look like in English that that person is angry, who's has a strong disapproval. However, the inner life is very different for someone who's hostile. And someone who has, you know, deep stability and stillness inside and warmth and love and freedom. The inner life is very different for that person who has a strong disapproval. It's clear in the Buddha, the Buddha had strong disapproval. When I read the suttas, in it, at least the English translations, sometimes I feel the Buddha's pretty stern. Stern is my language. I don't know if you would read the same thing in that. But maybe the strong disapproval sometimes has a sternness to it. And sometimes the Buddha doesn't appear to be this. My more earlier in life my romantic idea of what a compassionate person is always about. Sometimes compassion does involve sternness or clear disapproval or a clear no. But the inner life is different. And so in this quote I gave, if it's unwholesome, unskillful spectrum, a side of this anger word that I'm using, then we are harming ourselves. There is self harm involved. If it's the wholesome side of the range, then it really leads to benefit. Maybe I'm a little shy to say it leads to happiness. But maybe in the long term it does, but it leads to benefit. And to feel the difference of that. To feel how hostility, hatred really is a violence to oneself. The hateful person is destroying themselves. It's a kind of poverty to be living in hate. The commentaries have this description of hatred. And maybe we take it to be all the unwholesome side of anger. So, even the mildest irritation can have hostility and anger or annoyance. Even complaining sometimes can have a little hostility in it. So this is the translation that Nyanaponika gives, so maybe you don't, maybe some of you will choose to choose different words for the translations in English. "Hatred has the characteristic of savageness, like a provoked snake. Its function is to spread like drop of poison, or its function is to burn up its own support, like a forest fire. It is manifested as persecuting,

like an enemy that has got its chance to destroy. Its proximate cause is the grounds for annoyance," I guess just being bothered some for others. "And it should be regarded as being like stale urine mixed with poison." I think in the ancient world, they use urine as a kind of medicine. And so to have that be stale urine is pretty bad but then you don't taste the poison. So that's kind of strong language. But maybe there's a time and place for this kind of language, definitive, clear language about something that's so can cause so much harm in our world, hatred. And I think that many of us probably don't want to think of ourselves as being hateful people. But if we see the spectrum of, you know, from all the way from the wholesome to the unwholesome side of what we might call anger, sometimes these were just a little bit into the unwholesome. Little bit, you know, it's annoyance, criticalness. And sometimes we're so identified with it, we don't really see that that's what we're doing. It's just obvious that this is true or something and we're supposed to do this. As we practice mindfulness, the idea is to become more and more familiar of the cost of having unwholesome anger and unwholesome hostility. What is it cost in us? And even though anger sometimes motivates us to act in the world and get things done, there might be always a better way. There might be a skillfulness to learn skill of how to have a strong disapproval, a strong no, that has no hostility in it. Also the strong disapproval, the anger which is strong, fierce kind of no, sometimes gets mixed up with hostility. And sometimes the energy of hostility can feel pleasant for some people. And that kind of or feel there's a rightness to it, or there's a very strong identification and sense of power, personal power that comes with it and the attachment to the hostility is not the hostility, but the power or the identity or the way we feel good about ourselves that might come from it. So that's my brief words for today. And what I hope to leave you with for today is the idea that hate, hostility is a phenomenally important issue for our world to address. There's so much of it in all directions. And we really as a people need to study and understand and get to the bottom of what is this about hostility? And how do we wisely separate out the healthy sides of anger or the healthy sides of fierceness from the unhealthy side? And how do we learn to act from better places than the places of hate. And how do we go into ourselves in such a deep, deep way, that not only do we heal the suffering and the poverty that from which our hatred comes. But how do we really tap into that which is deeper, deeper still, deep inside, underneath the hard shell of of hatred and hostility. There is love and that is wholesome. So maybe study this today. I'll do that as well, because I don't feel like I understand all that I wish I understood about how this works and what's going on. And so maybe for this next couple of days, it can be a subject of conversation with your friends and reflections. Maybe read about it. We want to become wise to this whole idea of hostility and hatred. It will be a good thing for the world for us to have that wisdom. So thank you very, very much and I look forward to tomorrow.