

## April 2017

Greetings!

Spring is finally here!! Seattle has kept up with its reputation; we have had record rainfall. It is always a joy to see the sun here. The groups are going well and we might add one more group. If that goes as planned, it will be the last group. I do keep quite busy, and fully enjoy it.

At a recent group meeting, we were talking about greed, which is one of the three distractions that pull us out of meditation and into suffering. The three are greed, hate and anger, and delusion. At the meeting, Jim, a long time trainee, talked about what greed meant to him. He started talking about greed in a totally different way than I see it in myself. I asked him if he would like to write about it for this email, and he wrote a very nice contribution. Before I go on, I think it best to show what Jim wrote first. So here is Jim's piece:

“I experience greed as the feeling that occurs when I feel something is missing, and then I convince myself that I will be incomplete so long as I don't have it. What begins as innocent delight or admiration of the desired thing can quickly turn into greed. I'm aware of a sense urgency in the feeling, and it sort of takes over my mind. My thinking is often like this: “I can't be happy until I have it. I simply must have it. I will be complete and satisfied only if I can have it, and I'm certain I will be happy and satisfied if I do have it.”

The gratification, the feeling of completeness and satisfaction that comes from acquiring the desired thing lasts for a while, but before long I notice that there's still an “itchy” feeling of incompleteness: “Hmmm, this other thing is really nice. I like it. Wouldn't it be nice to have it...” etc etc. When I lose myself in greed, I find that I'm on a treadmill, repeatedly desiring and distracted, only to feel dissatisfaction, and then a new desire arises. Wanting what we can't have is a form of suffering. (Not the worst suffering we'll encounter, but still...) And what's disappointing is how easily the distractions associated with greed can become habit forming.

I know that meditation is profound, yet I don't know how it works on the deepest level. I do know that it really works. During the forty years I've been meditating it has helped me a great deal, helping me to see, for example, how greed is a natural function of the egocentric self, and how it works through delusion. Now, when these thoughts and emotions arise, I am able to rest in stillness, to entrust myself to the flow of the Eternal, and to let go of the delusive thoughts and the suffering they involve. Another of the blessings that has come to me through meditation is that I am more able to admire and appreciate things (and people) without the claustrophobic feeling of having to own or possess them. The obstacle of attachment, of having to have, still comes up but I can see it through my training, let it go, and watch it dissolve.

Over the years there have been times when I let my practice lapse. This is where a teacher can really help. At times my teacher has confronted me with teaching that one

might find harsh or unsparing of my feelings. Like many people my first reaction was to be taken aback and assume a defensive attitude. But by being as still as possible I was able to see that my teacher has only my best interest at heart. I am very grateful for the three treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I vow to keep "going, going on beyond."

Thank you Jim for your contribution.

Let me first talk about how the experiences of greed for Jim and for me are different in some aspects, but ultimately end up in the same place. Jim describes his experience with greed as a cycle of desire, distraction, and ultimately dissatisfaction, that repeats itself with other objects of desire when he is in this "state" of greed. I have to admit that I have never thought of greed in this way, but it is quite interesting. For me, greed takes a different route. It begins with a general not so great feeling, a kind of dis-ease due to external situations (or perhaps some karmic energy). At this point I seek something to cover up this feeling. I have spoken about how I use food, and in the past used various unhealthy substances to accomplish this. This led to a craving for more and more, which just makes things worse. It is just a temporary covering up of these feelings (karma). Jim's sense of greed is different from mine, but the deep causes are the same. In both cases, we enter a state of greed and delusion, but ultimately realize that our "cures" don't work. As Jim points out, by turning to the training and meditation, by entrusting ourselves to the flow of the Eternal, we allow these delusions to dissolve in its immaculacy. These feelings, attitudes, and desires are converted into the stillness of the Eternal, with its pure non-judgmental love and compassion. We then can move from a state of suffering to a state of peace and stillness.

In the last part of Jim's piece, he talks of how his teacher really helped him when his training lapsed. Let me speak to this relationship between the teacher and the student, between the master and the disciple. Taking a teacher/master is a step that can be extremely helpful. It certainly was the case in my training with my master. Many times in training, obstacles arise that we just don't or can't see. Often, when the teacher/master shows us something to look at, it can be quite painful, since it is often something we are very attached to. It is an act of great trust and faith to go with the teaching and not get defensive. I know from my own training that this can be quite difficult, but by sticking with these teachings, I have been able to go much deeper in my practice. This is just one example that shows how beneficial this relationship can be, but it is very complex and there are a myriad of aspects to it. Again, it is something that I know from my own experience really works.

Jim ends off with an abundance of gratitude, citing the end of the Scripture of Great Wisdom to keep "going, going on beyond." With all the ups and downs of daily life, with all the light days and dark days, it is important that we stay with our training and meditation that keeps the love of the Eternal flowing through us. Especially when it is difficult, when we see ourselves or others with blocks, we try to keep our heart open, to offer compassion, to see that the flow of the Eternal is in everybody and everything.

With all my heart,

Rev Basil