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Greetings,

I hope everyone is doing well. I have had one of those rough periods. First, I had a bad dose of covid. I was quite sick for a few weeks. Then, two of my closest loved ones, who I have known for many years, had very serious health issues. One died in two weeks and the other is going through an ongoing treatment. This came as a big shock and there was, and still is, a whole lot of grief. The meditation and the practice is really helping me. I am able to let the flow of the Eternal with its stillness and purity permeate through me and help with my pain. These events have really brought home the teaching of impermanence and that things can change in a moment.

Reprinted below is an article that was recently in the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter. This teaching has also been a great help to me.

With all my heart,
Rev Basil

The Three Poisons

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When I first heard the Buddhist term, “the three poisons,” I was a bit shaken up. The word poison has always had a big negative effect on me. I would think of something very bad, terrible, something to be really avoided. This reaction was based on a bad case of poison ivy I had I was young that was quite painful, and I had a very difficult time with it. So, I had always had great hate and disdain for poison ivy.

So, when I found out that the three poisons referred to greed, hate/anger, and delusion, I brought my attitude towards poison to these. As I started my meditation and training I thought of these things as really evil, bad, wicked things to be avoided at all costs. Basically, I took the literal dictionary meaning of poison—“something destructive or fatal”—and applied it unreservedly to the three poisons. I didn’t realize at the time that there can be helpful aspects to them.

I began to see things in a different way when I got sick and took a homeopathic medicine called Rhus tox. This medicine worked so well that I wanted to see what it was. To my amazement, I discovered that it is the essence of poison ivy itself! I couldn’t believe that one of the things I most hated actually helped me. Coincidentally, at about the same time my sister was taking chemotherapy for a cancer she had. Here again, I learned that chemotherapy also contains some form of, basically, poison. Exactly the right dose is needed: just enough, and it kills the cancer cells; too much, and it kills the patient.

On reflecting on this, my whole attitude towards poison changed. I realized that just as poisons can be used to cure disease when used in the right way, we can use the three

poisons in our daily training to help cure our spiritual dis-ease...when taken in the right dose. They are simply a part of our human condition. Various aspects of the three poisons are going to arise naturally in us as we go about our daily life. The problem is when we indulge them and let them control our actions of body, speech, and thought. With mindfulness grounded in meditation and the Precepts, we can let them be washed by the love, compassion, and stillness of the Eternal. So instead of hating and despising the three poisons, or indulging them, we can actually use them to bring us closer to the Eternal when we relate to them properly.

I have seen different aspects of the three poisons that come up for me that I would like to share.

The first is greed. As with all three poisons, when greed comes up for me I am usually in some kind of pain, usually spiritual pain. I look for things to help me get rid of this pain. With greed, I grasp after external things, like food and forms of entertainment, with extreme indulgence. More times than not I get in trouble. Now, when I see myself going in this direction, I can catch myself and remember that greed is poisonous to my spiritual life and causes me suffering. I remember that instead of indulging in greed, taking refuge in meditation and training opens me up to the Eternal.

With hate/anger and delusion, I see myself going with a discriminative mind, strong opinions, and being judgmental. Again, these states have always led me to suffering. Now, just like greed, I can catch them and go with the flow of the Eternal instead and feel stillness and peace.

Now I look at the three poisons as a great tool in my practice. Instead of hating them, I can use them like medicine and I do not have to play in the fields that have poison ivy any more.