

Three Roots of Unwholesome Consciousness and Ways to Remove Them

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Abstract

All of the beings in *samsarā* want to have good things not the bad ones. However, they cannot avoid the unwholesome deed and as the result, they fall into the *samsarā* of sufferings and worrying for both current life and the next existences. In spite of difficulty to become a person who is totally free from doing all of unwholesome deeds, people should try to reduce or fade out the formation of unwholesome consciousness as possible as they can. The objectives of this paper are to understand the nature of the roots of unwholesome consciousness and to remove these three roots for abstinence of doing all types of evil deeds based on unwholesome consciousness. The approach applied in this study is descriptive one and the references are extracted from Pāli canons, commentaries and other books. By learning from this study, people can understand the background context and process of formation of unwholesome consciousness and then can try to remove them in order to have a peaceful living and social relation in the community.

Keywords: unwholesome consciousness, greedy, hatred, delusion, *kamma*

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this paper are to know the disadvantages of greed, hatred and delusion and to have self-mindfulness, and to reduce unwholesome mind as much as we can.

Research Questions

- 1) What can be consequences of unwholesome consciousness?
- 2) How can unwholesome consciousness be removed?

Materials and Methods

For this research, three roots of unwholesome consciousness are collected in Pāli canon, Commentaries together with differentiate and descriptive methods. The material used for the purpose of research Pāli canon, Commentaries, Tipiṭaka Pāli-Myanmar Abhidhan, other books and internet website are found to be much useful.

Introduction

Buddhists believe in *kamma* and its effects. The word “*kaṃ*” derived from Pāli word “*kamma*” and it means deed, action. According to Buddhism, there are three types of action: bodily action, verbal action and mental action. If one does any meritorious deeds with one these three actions, he will enjoy the positive effect of good *kamma*. If the evil deeds are done, he will suffer from the negative impacts of unwholesome deeds.²

Kamma means not merely action, but it is the action based on volition. The behavior which is intentionally done based on volition, according to Buddha’s words, is *kamma*.³ In all of the types of actions, volition is the foundation and base of them. This behavior based on volition can be divided into meritorious (*kusala kamma*), demeritorious (*akusala kamma*) and neither meritorious nor demeritorious (*abyakata kamma*). The *kamma* which is based on non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion and motivated by volition can be called meritorious deeds,

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³. A II. 363.

the *kamma* which is based on greed, hatred and delusion is demeritorious one and the *abyakata kamma* which lacks both meritorious and demeritorious roots.

In Buddhism, the *kamma* can be divided into two types: past and present *kamma*. Both types of *kamma* can have an effect on present situation and among these two *kamma*, according to Buddhism, the present *kamma* should be emphasized. The past *kamma* cannot be amended or changed and therefore, the present *kamma* is preached to be emphasized.

All of the beings in this round of rebirth want good things not the bad ones. However, they felt worried for both present and future existence of life as they cannot avoid the unwholesome *dhammas* and their negative impacts. To be free from this worrisome condition, one should emphasize the present life and try to remove the greed, hatred and delusion which are the basic concepts for evil things. Moreover, one should practice the meritorious *dhammas*.

One who practices the good *dhammas* can enjoy and be happy in both current and future lives. With the expectation for removing the evil things, this study is conducted to understand the basic concepts of unwholesome consciousness.

Historical Background

The Buddha preached for the mundane and super-mundane benefits of all creatures for the entire 45 years after his Buddhahood. In this paper, I collected the background history from the Khuddakanikāya, the Dhammapada, the Jātaka Story and present the disadvantages on the present life and *samsarā* (the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth) due to greed, hatred and delusion which are the basis of vice. Among the sermons of Buddha, relating to greed, the Serivavānija story reveals the greedy beryl trader and the temperate beryl trader. The greedy trader was asked by an old woman and her grandchild to exchange their cup with some beryl. The greedy trader noticed that the cup was gold although the owners didn't know. But the greedy trader didn't want to return his beryl. He left away saying that the cup is valueless. Then the temperate trader reached that place. As soon as he saw the cup, he said it is gold and brought the cup giving its value worthily. Sooner, the greedy one came back and learned that the gold cup was gone. He is angry at the loss of gold cup. He followed the temperate trader leaving his things behind. By the time he saw the temperate trader amid of the river; he vomited blood due to his burning greed and died of heartbreak. In this story, the greedy beryl trader wanted to occupy the gold cup without returning his beryl. When the gold cup is achieved by another one, his hatred aroused and his greed became intense. In addition, he lost his self-control and was influenced by unconscious delusion. Finally he lost his life.¹

Again, Buddha preached that if we behave with unwholesome attitude, these misdeeds will follow along with us as in the Khuddhaka Nikāya, the Dhammapada Pāli, the Cakkhupāla vatthu, the Cakkhupāla monk went blind for many lives because of hatred. The monk was an optic medico in one of previous lives. He gave treatment to an optic suffering woman with a bond that she promised to be the servant of him. So he gave a very effective eye wash solution and she recovered clearly. But the woman lied that she felt more painful when the medico asked. The medico knew that she didn't want to give him anything for his treatment. So he was furious and brought a searing eye wash solution from home and gave it to her. Then the woman went blind. On the other hand, the medico was chased by the consequences of his misdeed or anger and he was blind for many lives.²

Again, Buddha preached the disastrous consequences of greed, hatred and delusion in which all creatures gets hatred because of greed and the blood feuds happen in their passage

¹. JA. 126-129.

². Dhamma A. 2-16

through lives. Therefore, the basis vice (greed, hatred and delusion) is the misdeed that can curse both the present life and *saṃsarā*.¹

During the time of the Buddha, in Vesālī, people suffered from both feminine catastrophe and the epidemic disease catastrophe. Because of the corruption of morals, being greedy, jealousy and making each other get into troubles, people encountered with drought, water scarcity and the plants were naturally destroyed. Thus, people were starved to death and a lot of people died. As they could not bury many dead bodies, they had to throw them away outside of the village. The beasts came to eat those dead bodies and people were also afraid of the danger of the beasts. Because of the smell of the dead bodies, the infectious diseases were spreading and people had to face the outbreak of the epidemic disease catastrophe.² So, the reason why people experienced the epidemic disease catastrophe during the time of Buddha was because of people's greed, anger and delusion which are the roots of unwholesome consciousness.

Findings

The meaning of unwholesomeness

In the *Mūlapaṇṇāsa Aṭṭhakathā* of the *Majjimanikāya* in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the meaning of unwholesomeness is defined as the calamity with sin.³ Moreover, unwholesomeness is bad action, foolish, sinful and associated with diseases and illness.⁴

Greed, hatred and delusion are three roots of unwholesome consciousnesses.⁵

Greed (*Lobha*)

The nature of making greedy to the mental objects which accompanied with them and being greedy on the objects of senses itself and the mere concept of greed on the objects is greed mental factor.⁶ Due to this nature, this mental factor consists of all of the forms of greed on sense objects according to the amount formed. Greed mental factor also consists of not only the strong desire but also attachment on the objects and therefore, the group of concepts related with greed mental factor is associated with all forms of sensual objects. The desire on wholesome or good things or objects such as desire to attain *Nibbāna*, the desire to hear the *Dhamma* and the desire to get properties to make donations are not the greed but the mere desire. Therefore, the desire without clinging is desire and the one with clinging is greed.⁷ The latter solely related with unwholesome things and destroy the power of good consciousness through the impurities which cause mind to be impure.⁸ This greed mental factor is called *pema* (love, affection), or *taṇhā* (craving) or *rāga* (attachment) or *samudaya* (rise, origin) in various Pāli literatures.

The word “*pema*” means the affection or falling in love and is used in the theme of kind of relation between siblings, couples, relatives and friends.

The word “*taṇhā*” means the thirsty or lust and it implies that five sense pleasures such as sight, sound and smell are extremely lusted or wanted and cannot be assumed as in the form

¹. Dhamma A. 29-34

². Khudaka A. 133-138.

³. M I. 57.

⁴. ဝိပိဓာန်၊ အတွဲ ၁။ ၄၈။

⁵. D II. 195.

⁶. Abhi A II. 129.

⁷. Khu I. 195.

⁸. Abhi A II. 129.

of just normal desire. The extreme lust or very strong desire on sensual pleasures particularly in contact can be assumed as *rāga* and it means the clinging or addiction to some sensual pleasures.

In division of four noble truths, the greed is alternatively used as *samudaya* and it means the cause of suffering and the embryo of suffering.¹

If the greed is allowed to extend according to the demand and not be controlled with the Dhamma, it will never set back. As the emerging horn of an ox becomes longer and longer according to the age, the greed also becomes bigger and bigger when the time passes. The kind of small greed which lacks support of wholesome things can lead to Hell. If there is support of wholesome, it cannot lead to hell although there is affection or falling in love between two persons.²

In some places, the *tanhā* can be called as *māyā* (deceit) and it resembles magic. As the magician can cheat the audience to see the stone like gold one, *māyā* can also cover and hide the sin of people to see as honest by the others.³

Hatred or Anger (*Dosa*)

Anger is the roughness of consciousness by nature. Due to the roughness of consciousness, the body also becomes rough and tough. The anger of Cobra with the roughness and toughness of body and mind when it is struck by the stick is the characteristic of anger. Therefore, the anger is defined as the mental factor that can destroy both the body and mind. In the *Majjhimanikāya*, the *Majjhimapaṇṇāsa Pāli*, the Buddha preached that-

*Attana sampayuttacittam vinaseti dosa.*⁴

“The nature of anger can cause mind to be rough and moreover, in mood of disappointed, worried and fear condition after the entering of it into the mind.” Depression, disappointment, fear, unhappiness, sulking and other forms of grievance are called anger or *dosa*.

Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair which is formed when there is loss of properties, fame and death of relatives and family members are related to anger. Grudge is also rooted in anger and is one of the spoilers of consciousness. The angered mind that appeared suddenly might disappear when someone reviles in verbal action or assault someone with bodily actions. However, the long lasting anger without any action to relieve it can become grudge. Anger is like live coal and it burns the things from the surroundings when it is blown to get more red heat and becomes big flame. The emergence of a saying in Myanmar that small pieces of flame in dry leaves can lead to destroy the big royal building is rooted in the nature of live coal. The long lasting acceptance of anger can transform into grudge and then hatred, a heap of anger and is carried along with the whole round of rebirth not one of two lives.⁵

Delusion or Ignorance (*Moha*)

The nature of delusion does not know and can be called ignorance. The ignorance means not knowing the difference between right and wrong, wholesome and unwholesome. The accompanied consciousness with delusion is deluded ones and the person who has strong delusion can be called a foolish or stupid or ignorant or dull or damp man.⁶

¹ ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ၊ (၂၀၀၇)၊ ၂၄-၂၆။

² Abhi II. 142.

³ Abhi III. 215.

⁴ M II. 106

⁵ Visuddhi I. 312.

⁶ Visuddhi I. 312.

Although the condition of not knowing can be assumed as delusion, not all lack of knowing such as the technique that is not acquired, the place where anyone has never been to and the new name that heard the first time can be recognized as ignorance. This type of lack of knowing can also be found even in the Arahantas. However, the lack of knowledge on difference between wholesomeness and unwholesomeness, right and wrong is very important in terms of concept. This type of delusion is very strong and dangerous for anyone who does not know the nature of suffering, impermanence and non-self, the four noble truths and the circle of dependent origination.¹

The delusion has three degrees depending on the maturity and amount and are the *anusaya* (the latent) level in the inner part of mind, the *pariyuṭṭhāna* (active) level in the mind and the *vīṭikkama* (action or conduct with verbal and bodily actions) level. The first level can be defined as the presence of property that can cover the Dhammas which should be known by the people like the nature of producing poisonous fruit from poison tree. This type of level cannot be seen by the worldly beings.

The second level is emergence of emotions to do evil things when there are some objects which can stimulate the potential to do them like the emergence of desire to catch in a kittle when it sees a mouse.

The third level is actual violation of evil deeds without any control with appropriate consideration and reasoning.² In this way, delusion and ignorance is the primary root cause of all *kamma*. It can cause violations of various evil deeds if there is influence of ignorance. It is the forerunner of all forms of unwholesomeness and there will be no greed and anger without the formation of ignorance.³

The adverse effects of unwholesome things

The three unwholesome consciousnesses of greed, hatred and delusion can never give positive effects. Among them, greed can cause negative effects like the enemy or bad friend or opposite of mind.⁴ The people with strong greed will exist in woeful planes especially in plane of goblins.⁵ Due to greed, the people overwhelmed by this evil thing can develop another evil thing, anger.

The people with anger have unpleasant facial expression and cannot have deep and good sleep. Finally, they might commit criminal cases and this lead to loss of wealth and properties, loss of fame in the community and loss of supporters, followers, relatives and even family members. The death of such people will be full of mental, verbal and bodily evil things. The anger can cause ruin of welfare of both oneself and of others.⁶

With the formation of anger, there is parallel existence of ignorance or delusion and due to the cover of delusion; this can cause not knowing of the possible results of next life which are formed by committing the unwholesome deeds. The current evil condition cannot be noticed and commit various sins with every mode of action if there is lack of appropriate attention and reasoning on them.

All of the foolish things in the world depend on and are rooted in delusion or ignorance. Due to ignorance, even the good people might commit evil deeds not just the ordinary worldly

¹. ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ၊ (၂၀၀၇)၊ ၁၈။

². D III. 210.

³. A I. 33.

⁴. Khu I. 252.

⁵. Abhi A I. 172.

⁶. Visuddhi I. 312.

fools. When there is strong influence of ignorance over people, they cannot see or consider the possible negative impacts in both current and next lives and do the evil things without fear or shame.¹ Therefore, the ignorance can cause lack of wisdom which is not formed yet and loss of wisdom which is already formed while these are negative impacts of ignorance. Therefore, the people with greed, hatred or delusion will exist in woeful planes again and again. The attainment of insight or super-mundane things will also be prohibited and even just the formation of ordinary wholesome things will not occur. This might result in very unpleasant effects. Regarding this, Buddha preached in the Yamaka Vagga of the Dhammapada as-

“All of the mental aggregates are led by consciousness and it is the head of them. As if the wheel continuously follows the footprint of oxen in the carts, the suffering will permanently follow the person who did evil verbal or bodily actions.”²

Nowadays, the world is dealing with the epidemic disease catastrophe (*rogantara*) because of the outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19. Thus, a lot of people are dying, many are very anxious and also many people are suffering from hunger. According to Buddha's teaching, the epidemic disease catastrophe outbreaks because humans are overwhelmed by their delusion. Then, famine catastrophe (*satthantara*) happens because of greed and war catastrophe (*dubbhikkhantara*) happens because anger leads to killing and fighting one another. The reasons why these three catastrophes happen are also shown in the Aṭṭhasālinī and the Visuddhimagga Aṭṭhakathā.

That pandemic disease firstly occurred in Wuhan, China in the first week of December 2019. The reason why this pandemic disease occurs is not found yet but there are two different causes about that disease. The first one is that this virus emerges because people eat the animals that they should not eat, many early cases of Covid-19 were linked to the Human market, and it is possible that an animal source was present at this location.³ (Edward Holmes, 17 March, 2020). And the second one is that the virus is transmitted as a result of invention and testing biological weapons⁴ (burmese.asia, March 27, 2020 by Myo Min Htet) and it is also said that it comes from nature. However, this pandemic disease arises because of human's greed and delusion. As mentioned above in the first reason, people want to eat the animals that they shouldn't eat and with delusion, they kill many different animals to eat dead bodies or sometimes they eat them alive. They become out of their mind because their greed makes delusion. Their misdeed destructs themselves and leads to the epidemic disease catastrophe. According to the second reason about the cause of virus by making biological weapons, they invent those weapons to destroy other people. Thus, people are so greedy and covetous to win the others and they cannot see the truth, overwhelmed by the delusion.

Although the first outbreak of the pandemic disease was in the first week of December, 2019, Myanmar confirmed the first cases of covid-19 virus infection in the last week of March, 2020. Then, the next infected cases are also from the returnees who do not live in Myanmar. Some returnees follow the rules by the government to prevent the spread of the virus because of them. But some return home without following the rules and thus they can make troubles to their families and environments. In order to prevent the transmission of the virus, every returnee from abroad should be in 14 day quarantine with their own consciousness. But some returnees return home without being quarantined as they want to live with their families. They are following their own greed without thinking for the other people. Thus, because of their greed and delusion, every citizen in Myanmar feels anxious, dealing with the troubles. The

¹. M I. 20.

². Khu I. 13.

³. <https://www.Academia.edu.coronavirus-covid-19>

⁴. <https://www.burmese.asia>

industries, companies and other small businesses are closed and schools, universities also must be closed. Thus, many people experience losses in the various affairs. The citizens also get angry when some returnees do not stay in quarantine camps. But we cannot blame the returnees because they also want to come back to their native country when they are in trouble in the foreign countries as everyone misses their homes and parents when they are in trouble. But those returnees should not be greedy and go to quarantine camps with their own consciousness not to give troubles to the others by spreading the virus. If so, the transmission can also be controlled and people can do their jobs without anxiousness. Here, I do not mean every returnee from abroad because there are many returnees who have ethics and quarantined themselves. I just want to convey the message about greed and delusion.

Everyone should have ethics and mindfulness. In other words, without delusion, there will not be any greed and anger. But everyone has greed, anger and delusion. However, if people can control their greed, anger and delusion which are the basic causes of unwholesome consciousness, their families, their nationalities and the world will become peaceful.

The removal of unwholesomeness

To remove the unwholesome things, one firstly should observe and analyze the condition of mind and the root causes of the formation of these things. At that time, the nature of one's consciousness and others will be understood. After this understanding, the consideration and thinking of the nature of grievance formation due to the unavailability of what he wants can cause the disappearance of the greed consciousness as soon as it forms when the object occurs.¹

In the same way, one should remove hatred or anger by nurturing the passionate mind when someone commits any form of torture or ill-treatment to him. If one cannot do like this, anger should be removed by remembering of the teachings of Buddha. If one cannot remove anger in this way, it should be removed through the compassion to the good attributes of the enemy.² Finally, immediately after noticing the situation of mind, the anger formed is noticed by other people and it is shameful. This cause the reduction of the formation of anger and this type of continuous consideration and absorption should be done.³

Delusion is weighty sin in all of unwholesome things and it can be reduced only with the gradual pattern through practice of morality, concentration and wisdom so that there is occurrence of knowing (insight) with the disappearance of ignorance. This person can be described by Buddha as -

*Anavassuta cittassa ananvāhatacetaso
Puññapāpa pahīnassa natthi jagarato bhayam.*⁴

There will be no danger to someone who has the mind which wakes up from the sleep of delusion, not wet with the lust and had removed all forms of good and evil deeds. According to this teaching of Buddha, the person who can remove all of the unwholesome things can enjoy happiness and good effects of *kamma*.

Discussion

The man who is with basic unwholesome things; greed, hatred and delusion will badly be effected not only in current existence but also in the next lives. If the greed can be removed,

¹. တစ်သက်တာမှတ်တမ်းနှင့် အတွေးအခေါ်များ၊ (၁၉၈၂)၊ ၅၉၃။

². Visuddhi I. 290-300.

³. မြတ်ဗုဒ္ဓဒေသနာ၊ (၁၉၈၈)၊ ၁၃၁။

⁴. Khu I. 18.

his attributes rest on non-greed and not deeply attached in sensual pleasures. Moreover, he showed compassion to the poor in his economic actions. He makes donations and practices the moral ethics and meditation. Therefore, the nature of greedy man and non-greedy man are opposites of each other like the runners in opposite directions. Greed can lead to the hell while non-greed can enhance the existence in good realms or Nibbāna.¹

In the same way, angered man and non-angered one are opposite in everything and every aspect. Angered man is very rough although non-angered one is very gentle. The former one has a habit of reviling while the latter one has a habit of sweet conversation with people. Due to the good nature of non-angered man, he can cool the heat of anger of others in everyday conversation. The facial expression of angered man has a stern mien in spite of the clear texture of non-angered man. The context of social relation on angered man is not good due to the aggressive behavior but the condition for the non-angered man is very satisfactory because he has admirable facial expression, verbal and bodily actions. Therefore, people should adhere to the good mental factor, non-anger or non-hatred and should stay away from the evil nature.

Similarly, non-delusion can reveal and light up the covered things due to delusion. Moreover, the wisdom or enlightenment can make lightening up the darkness of not knowing due to ignorance. In other words, all of the things which are covered by delusion can be uncovered and revealed by non-delusion or insight and therefore, everyone should avoid delusion and should absorb or try to nurture non-delusion.²

Conclusion

All the beings began to form since the very first beginning of round of rebirth and this will continue to exist from one life to another until the attainment of Nibbāna. In this course of existences, the unwholesome things related to greed, hatred and delusion and the wholesome ones related to non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion are conducted more or less. However, in every occasion of doing evil things, the evil properties are in latent form in the mind of the doers and the good properties for the doing of wholesome things.

This formation of different states of mind is not merely related with one life or two lives only but related to habitual actions. The persons who have good habitual actions in previous lives are good-natured and so in the next existence. Moreover, it is difficult to correct or remove the evil mind for who have had bad habits since the previous existences and so in the next existence. Therefore, all of the beings must be affected by *kamma* according to the doctrine of Buddha.

However, one should not worry about the evil things or unwholesome ones that have been done if there is desire to correct. Moreover, one should try to practice for doing good things that had not been done before while there is trying of not doing new evil things.

The noble living is one which is living with four *brahmavihāra* (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) and everyone should practice as possible as they can in order to form a peaceful and prosperous society. As there is rare practice on these four things, the contemporary world is like the hell and the relation between the people is on the mood of unable to love, pity, be happy and control their mind.

However, the living with wholesome things with the removal of unwholesome consciousnesses can enhance the full happiness in current life and lead to good existence in next life and finally to Nibbāna.

¹. Abhi A I. 171-3.

². Khu I. 18.

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ဇနကာဘိဝံသ၊ အရှင်။ ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ၊ ၂၀၀၇။ အမရပူရ။ ဝင်းဝင်းမြင့်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

တိပိဋကပါဠိ-မြန်မာ အဘိဓာန်၊ အတွဲ ၁၊ ၁၉၇၁။ ရန်ကုန်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာအဖွဲ့ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။ မှ

ရေအောင်၊ ဦး။ တစ်သက်တာ မှတ်တမ်းနှင့်အတွေးအခေါ်များ၊ ၁၉၈၂။ ရန်ကုန်။ စပါယ်ဦးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

ကိုလေး၊ ဦး။ (အငြိမ်းစား၊ ဒုတိယအမိပတိ မန္တလေးတက္ကသိုလ်) မြန်မာပြန်ဆိုသည်။ မြတ်ဗုဒ္ဓဒေသနာ၊ ၁၉၈၈။ ရန်ကုန်။

အင်တာနေရှင်နယ်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

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