

An Exhortation

By Ayya Khema

Every evening we chant, "*Pamadamulako lobho... doso ... moho.*" *Lobha, dosa, moha*, the three roots of evil: greed, hate and delusion. We are born with these roots, We wouldn't be born at all if we didn't have them. But there are also the three opposite roots: non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion. It is these roots of good which we must cultivate.

Non-greed is generosity, generosity shown in giving one's things away, giving one's money away, giving one's understanding away, giving one's love away. That is generosity. And the more one gives away, the richer one is. But unless one can give freely, one is caught by greed, *by lobha*.

The opposite of dosa is the root of non-hate, loving kindness, metta. The more we can generate *metta* in our hearts, the less we will suffer. But we have to work consciously at abiding in loving kindness. There is no hoping, wishing or praying that brings *metta*. There is no creator to grant *metta* to us. There is no grace which will bestow *metta* on us. It is we who must create *metta*.

There must be deliberate action, a deliberate action of the heart which opens towards love. Loving kindness must not be directed only towards what is lovable. To love that which is lovable is possible for anyone. It's easy. To love that which is lovable is not even interesting. That is what all the romances, the movies, the novels are about. To love that which is lovable is not the spiritual path, but a worldly endeavour. The reason for loving kindness is because the heart has the ability to give; its purpose is for purification.

But trying to understand loving kindness with the mind can never succeed. It's got to be felt with one's heart. The heart has to be involved "wholeheartedly," for unless loving kindness is felt in the heart, the root of hate, *dosa*, will remain.

There is no intellectual understanding that will make *metta* possible because the mind is caught up in delusion, *moha*. The mind can take a stand on either side of any debate. It can say "pro" or "con" on anything. The heart cannot. The heart opens up and feels love, or it shrinks and feels hate. The mind can judge very easily, "This is lovable." Or the negative mind can say, "Oh no, it's not. It's detestable!" The mind can do that. But the heart cannot. Rely on the heart and not on the judgments of the mind. Work on the purification of one's heart. See within. Become fully aware when there is greed. Become aware when there is hate. Then substitute the roots of good, generosity, and loving kindness, for the evil roots. The more often we look within, the more often we substitute the good for the evil, the sooner the ego-delusion will diminish.

Moha is the delusion of a self. Its opposite, non-delusion, is the knowledge that the idea of self is the

cause of suffering, that our mind and body are coreless. It is because of the delusion of self that the other two roots, greed and hate, beset us. Without delusion, there would be no greed or hate, it is the self-delusion, saying “This is me, this is the way I see things, this is the way I want it, this is the way I’m separating myself,” that is the cause of hatred, separation, isolation, resistance, and rejection.

The more deluded one is, the more greed and hate one generates. And how deluded one is depends on how much one identifies with what and who one thinks one is, and what one wants to get out of life for oneself. The more self-identification there is, the more delusion; the more greed, the more hate; the more hate, the more unhappiness.

Even the views we hold are stained with ego-discolouration. They cannot be absolutely true. But they are true from the standpoint of the ego. The ego says and the ego thinks and therefore the ego wants. This is the root of *moha*.

It is not possible to work on eliminating ego-delusion alone. It is done through awareness of the three roots: greed, hate and delusion. For this is the path of purification. This is the path of self-inquiry. This is the path of self-discipline. And there is nothing else on this path as important as mindfulness—watching the mind. This is a simple formula, but just sitting and waiting for enlightenment is not going to bring enlightenment. Nothing happens by itself. What matters is action. Take the action of following the Noble Eightfold Path. With awareness, with no fixed views, but only the knowledge of something to be done: the elimination of *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*. Without that deliberation to remove the three roots of evil, meditation is a total waste of time.

So, we watch the mind. A mental state arises. Don’t believe it! Check it out. Which part of the ego-delusion is talking—greed or hate? Or both? And then—watch. The thought arises and it ceases. If the thought doesn’t cease, there is clinging, hanging on for “dear life,” keeping the thought. There are even people who are enormously attached to their own dissatisfaction, to their own *dukkha*. This is one of the greatest absurdities: being attached to one’s own suffering.

Remembering to be aware is another problem because our minds get caught up in our own thinking processes. Drop the thinking processes. They aren’t worth having. Look instead at the greed and the hate and the delusion, the things worth seeing.

Our ego-delusion has at its roots the identification of ourselves with the five aggregates, the *khandhas*: the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Yet we know that our problems, our suffering, our unhappiness, stem from that identification. And we know we must abandon this wrong view. For we are not the aggregates.

But there is no way of getting at the root of delusion as long as one strongly identifies with one’s thoughts, and with who one thinks one is. The identification takes away the possibility of stepping back and watching, of stepping back and watching mindfully. Mindfulness is what we learn through meditation, and mindfully we learn to watch every moment of our daily life. Mindfulness means being fully aware, “the miracle of being awake,” which is not the opposite of being sleepy, but the opposite

of being foggy. Not thinking foggily and woozily, but being fully aware— fully awake to what is going on within oneself.

Self-identification with one's state of being is the great trap. So we must first become aware of the props we use to maintain who we think we are. It begins with: "I'm a woman" or "I'm a man." There's strong identification. There's strong support for the ego, for that "I am" is the ego itself talking. Next we identify with our abilities and our knowledge. "This is what I can do" and "This is what I know." Two further strong supports for the ego.

Ask yourself: "Who do I think I am? Why do I think I am like that? What makes me think like this? Is it because I'm identifying with the body? ... the feelings? ... the perceptions? ... the thoughts? ... the consciousness?" If you identify with any or all of these, what misery! What a miserable situation owning all those aggregates. Drop the identification and you get nearer the truth. This is just a body, prone to *dukkha*. These are just feelings. These are just perceptions. These are just mental formations. This is just consciousness.

So greed, hatred and delusion, *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*, are everybody's lot. The work on the spiritual path is eliminating these roots. For unless something is done about them, they'll be with us— life after life after life.

The three roots of evil, with delusion as the base, make the world go round, "Love makes the world go round," it is said. But if love really did make the world go round, this would be a very different world! No, it is greed that makes the world go round; it is hate that makes the world go round; it is delusion that makes the world go round. Because of these, relationships don't work, friendships deteriorate, people have personal difficulties with one another. That is why love is lacking. That is why people steal, kill, wage wars.

But the only world we need be concerned with is the world we have inside of ourselves. And doesn't that world look different for each one of us? And different each time we look? And one does have to look to see for oneself what one is really like. Do you know that the whole of the universe lies within this mind and body? Each one of us has an entire universe within him. Let's get to know the universe by getting to know ourselves. And we get to know ourselves through meditation.

Meditation is about purification. Meditation is about finding the Dhamma within oneself. The Buddha said: "Whoever sees me, sees the Dhamma. Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me." And the Dhamma can be seen with an inner vision—but only if one does the work. One can't get an inner vision by merely thinking about wanting one. There's work to be done. Nothing can replace the work each of us must do. But with the joy of the path there is energy. And when the joy of the path arises, there is confidence. Have that confidence in your experiences.

The Buddha said that we are like children playing in a house on fire and are too foolish to jump out. We don't realise that the fire of our passions, of our wanting, of our rejections, of our views and opinions, of our self-centred assertions is the fire that is burning us, and we are too foolish to let go.

Like little children we want to keep on playing. That's childish, not childlike. And if we keep on playing we're going to get burned by our passions over and over again.

Each day has a limited number of hours, each week a limited number of days. Knowing that time grows shorter each day, a state of mind called urgency, *samvega*, arises. See that urgency. Jump out of the house which is on fire. This work is the seeking of enlightenment. Get on with it.