

Hi everyone. My name is Zac and I use he and him pronouns. I'm a white 38-year-old male with long and thinning medium brown hair. Today I'm wearing a black T-shirt and gray rectangular glasses, although it's not visible on my camera. I'm seated on a gray and black manual wheelchair.

One thing I find really interesting is that words in Pali, which is the language the Buddha's teachings were originally translated from, are much more complex than the English words that they're translated to. Gil Fronsdaal calls these translated words. "Buddhist English."

One example is that the Pali word dukkha is most frequently translated to the English word, "suffering". I've heard some teachers suggest that a more appropriate translation might be unsatisfactoriness. This is because dukkha represents a wide range of experiences from something unpleasant to something deeply traumatic.

Personally, I find unsatisfactory as to be a bit mild to express this range. Although I haven't heard these words used, I like the translations of "unpleasantness" and "hardship."

The Four Noble Truths are the foundational teaching of the Buddha. The First Noble Truth is that dukkha is a factor of life for all living beings.

In the Second Noble Truth, the Buddha outlined three causes of dukkha. Sometimes these are translated as "poisons" or "defilements", and once again, those are some pretty strong terms. Buddhism often tells us that unwholesome states are things that we need to be aware of and work with, but not something that we should feel shame about, let alone something that will poison us. Unwholesome, some states are normal parts of the human experience, by working with them, we can reduce their impact, but they're not something to be outright rejected.

A great modern day parallel. Is when doctors say that stress is a catalyst for many medical conditions. While this may be true, the problem is it's a pretty stressful thought! Suddenly, every time we're stressed, we'll start to get even more stressed. Rejecting our internal experience is a recipe for making it worse. Instead, we can be compassionate towards our stress and try and reduce it, but not shove it away.

So as I discuss the Three Poisons, keep in mind that we all inhabit these mind states and to be gentle with yourself when you notice them. Simply bring non-judgment to your awareness of them. Viewing them as poison that we need to avoid at all costs can also lead us to striving, which is another source of suffering.

If it's okay to experience the poisons, why is it important that we know about them? When we're aware of the poisons, we can learn to live alongside them. Much like my example of stress, the point is to reduce their impact, not to eliminate them. Understanding what makes us experience suffering can give us insight on how to reframe our thoughts into more constructive ways of thinking.

Another cause of suffering is feeling alone and isolated. When we place our suffering in the context of something everyone experiences, it normalizes our dukkha, which is less isolating. Tonight I will focus on the first of the Three Poisons, which is desire. Desire is a huge topic in Buddhism, so I'm really just scratching the surface in this talk but here are some things I've been considering.

Desire has multiple translations. Three common ones are attachment, craving, and greed. I see each of these as speaking to something slightly different. I think of attachment as clinging to

the way that things are. For example, rejecting impermanence. It's a universal reality that everything changes.

If we stamp our feet and say "No, things will not change!" It makes it that much harder when they do change. Thich Nhat Hanh said, "It's not impermanence that makes us suffer, it's wanting things to be permanent when they're not." While we want to loosen our grip on our attachments, desire speaks to something slightly different.

Gil describes desire as a road with a fork in it. Down one fork is craving, and on the other side is aspiration. We pretty much constantly have desires playing in the background of our mind. It's hard to turn them off completely, and our goal is to try and direct our desires towards aspiration and away from craving.

By itself having desires can be a neutral experience. For example, hunger could begin as a neutral desire. Depending on how we relate to our hunger, it can turn either into a wholesome or unwholesome desire. We could take our hunger, remember our aspiration, to eat healthy food, and feed ourselves a balanced meal. Or. We could remember that we bought a package of Oreos, skip our meal and eat the whole box of Oreos. No judgment here as I think we've all done this at one time or another.

One of the big differences between an aspiration and craving is not necessarily the object of what we desire, but how we relate to it. Gil says that "Craving has a quality of compulsion." For example, the desire to become enlightened may sound very wholesome, but if we live every day from a "Are we there yet," mindset and torture ourselves over how long it's taking, it becomes craving.

Another noticeable difference is that aspirations can benefit us, even if we don't achieve them. You can have an aspiration to become a doctor and, for whatever reason, you weren't able to complete that aspiration. But all is not lost, you still applied yourself, you still gain the knowledge of all the individual classes. Whereas craving is usually only fulfilling if the object of desire is obtained.

Unfortunately, this is not a lasting fulfillment because before we know it, we'll be chasing after the next thing we crave. One reason craving is a problem. Is that it takes us away from what we have in the current moment and makes us yearn for an imagined future. Aspiration, on the other hand, is a direction that we'd like to head in.

It's important to think of where we'd like to go, but once we've set our aspiration, we can return to what needs to be done in the present to achieve that desire. When we are craving, we are fixating on what we don't have, and that leaves us with a sense that things are not good enough right now. When our focus is on what we don't have, it's pretty hard to appreciate what we do have.

For me, one of the most important parts of experiencing joy. Is to appreciate what's here right now. We can still want more or better things, but not let that detract from our present experience. It's exhausting to be constantly pulling away from the present moment. Although our bodies stay in the present, our minds are in the imagined future. This creates a disconnect where our minds are separating from our bodies, and that takes a toll on us.

It can also cause a lot of frustration and grief when we can't fill our desires. Impatience can lead us to unwise action in order to fulfill our desire as quickly as possible. This is another source of suffering and likely won't even bring us the result that we want.

Another problem is that craving can incite jealousy. Often when we see someone have what we want, we envy what they have. When our jealousy is about someone we care about. This can complicate our relationship with them.

So how do you work with desire? As with so many things we experience, when we realize that we're being caught in craving, it's helpful to note it and say something to yourself like, "This is craving."

Our emotions are processed in a different part of our brain than our logic. When we think logically about the emotion we're experiencing, it helps turn down the volume of our emotion. This allows us to work with it rather than be consumed by it. Once we have noticed it, we have two options. The first is to try and loosen our grip on it or let it go. Ignoring our craving can cause it to lose its potency. One way to accomplish this is simply by focusing our attention on something else. You've all had to do this during meditation, so as you know, you'll have to keep refocusing over and over. Trying to think of this repetition, like a game instead of a battle.

Alternatively, you can feel your craving deeply and investigate it. This is not so much about feeding the specific desire, but understanding what desire itself feels like. Studying it helps us process it and understand it better.

A third option is to try and shift our craving towards aspiration. One way to do this is to nourish and appreciate our aspiration. Wow. It's really admirable that I want [blank]. That's a really great thing to pursue. If we can hold our aspiration realistically. And in a more relaxed way, we open ourselves up to different possibilities, including achieving our aspiration in a new manner from what we envisioned.

Gil points out that the word aspire has roots in the Latin word to breathe. Breath gives us spaciness around what we're feeling. Whether we're breathing into pain or desire, giving our desires that spaciousness will help transform them into aspirations.

As is typical in Buddhism, there are antidotes or opposites for each of the poisons. The antidote to greed is generosity or dana. Another antidote could be gratitude. By giving to others and being grateful for what we do have, we're coming up with another way to take our focus off our desire. Of course, both these practices are intended not to hurt the practitioner and to be done with wholesome intent. So just giving something away in hopes that your craving will stop, won't help.

I worry a little that this last concept is a controversial opinion, so I want to start by saying, this is what I believe. You don't have to agree. I also think this mindset is more applicable to some conditions than others. That said, it's common for disabled people to crave finding a cure for their affliction. I've grappled with this myself, and if a cure is discovered for my condition, I would likely take it. But I try not to let myself be consumed by desire for a cure and not dwell on it. Especially because I have absolutely no control over it happening. This is not only a form of craving, but encourages the thought that we're not good enough as we are. Our conditions may be painful, scary, and isolating, but they do not detract from our awesomeness. Wanting relief from what ails us is perfectly understandable, and I'm not saying it's wrong or bad, but if it's on your mind every day, that's something to pay attention to.

Okay. That's my brief talk on desire. I'm hoping to explore craving more at some point. And maybe some of the other poisons as well. The other two poisons are hatred and delusion. I find it to be really affirming to look at the suffering in my life and understand what it is and why it hurts. Ultimately, by doing so, we can find ways to release it and be happier people.

Thank you.