

Looking at Greed, Aversion, and Delusion.



Our teacher for the June 10th talk was Andrea Fella. Andrea has been practicing Insight Meditation since 1996, and, under Gil Fronsdal's guidance, began teaching meditation classes in 2003. She is particularly drawn to intensive retreat practice, and has done a number of long retreats, both in the U.S. and Burma. During one long practice period in Burma, she ordained as a nun with Sayadaw U Janeka. Andrea teaches residential retreats for IMC, and is in the Spirit Rock teacher training program with Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein.

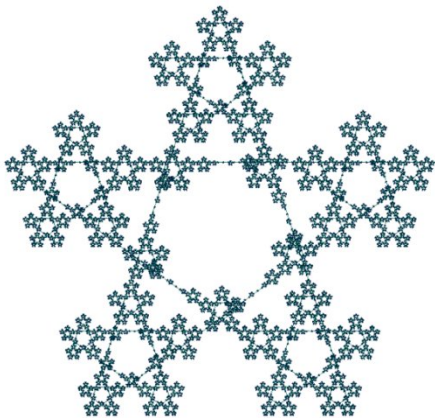
Andrea will be teaching a Jikoji retreat August 19 through August 23.
http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/fliers-forms/Jikoji0809_Info.pdf

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Suffering may be catastrophic and life-changing, or it may consist of minor irritations, some of which are barely noticeable. For all suffering, there is a pattern – the small ways in which we suffer resemble the large ways.

The patterns of suffering are like *fractals*, a mathematical term for geographic shapes that are made of smaller versions of themselves. The smaller versions are made of still smaller versions, *ad infinitum*. For example, this star is composed of stars, which are made of stars, which are made of stars, etc.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PentagramFractal.PNG>)



Because the patterns repeat, if we study the small ways in which we suffer, we can gain understanding of the greater sufferings. The small ways are more frequent than the larger sufferings, and do not wreck as much havoc in our lives, making them good candidates for learning how and why we suffer.

We do not suffer because of events - we suffer because of our emotional reactions to those events. If we free ourselves from our reactions to events, we free ourselves from suffering.

Underlying all forms of reaction are greed, aversion, or delusion. These states cause stress, and are known as The Three Poisons (*kilesas*), the roots of suffering. With mindful exploration of greed, aversion, and delusion we start to learn about them: how they arise in our minds, the ways that they cause suffering for ourselves and for others, and what allows them to fade away.

If we are to cultivate a skillful relationship with our experience, whether in external or internal relationship, we need to get very familiar with these very common reactions to experience.

Greed and aversion operate in very similar ways, so we can discuss them together. Delusion, on the other hand, underlies both greed and aversion. A delusion, or misunderstanding, is what creates the conditions for greed and aversion to occur, and we will discuss that separately.

Both greed and aversion are based on wanting to manipulate our environment to make it the way we want to be.

If something is pleasant, we want more of it: that is the root of greed.

If something is unpleasant, we want it to stop or go away: that is the root of aversion.

Desire to escape the unpleasant and to want the pleasant is built into sentient beings; it is part of our biology. However, we have a self-reflective capability, and this capability can free us from this natural tendency. These tendencies cause us problems when we tie our happiness to getting the pleasant and getting rid of the unpleasant. This makes happiness conditional. Ultimately, everything we have, we will lose: this is the recipe for suffering.

Although we tend to think of suffering as not having what we want, or not escaping from what we don't like, we need to remember that suffering is not about the *thing*, but about the *wanting*. Wanting *is* suffering: if wanting goes away, suffering goes away.

Instead of wanting, try to note what it feels like to want. Turn the attention inward, noting and observing what wanting feels like. As an exercise, try letting go of small *wantings*.

Some wanting is wholesome. Wanting flowers, for example, is wholesome. But if we are unhappy because we don't have flowers, we have a problem. It is not the flowers that are the problem, it is the wanting something we do not have that is the problem.

Many emotions arise out of greed and aversion; it can be helpful to recognize them, so we can turn our attention towards those emotions, such as was suggested in turning attention towards wanting. From greed comes pride, stinginess, covetousness, excitement, insistence, exaggeration, and vanity. From aversion comes fear, anger, bitterness, resentment, hostility, dislike, rage, irritation, annoyance, worry, hatred, distrust, cruelty, discontent, frustration, and dissatisfaction. With these afflictive emotions, which often have to do with our relationships with others, we focus on the outer world; how the other person is behaving, and how we think they should behave.

Instead of blaming the other person, turn your awareness inward. What is the physical effect of that emotion on the body? What does it feel like? When you become angry, there may be an initial flush of pleasure at the righteousness of your anger, and the aliveness of action. As anger progresses, you may feel pressure and heat. Note these feelings.

Emotions are like a wave; they swell, they crest, they dissipate. Noting what the body is doing during an emotion cuts short the otherwise natural course of the affliction. The results are not instantaneous - they are more like taking your foot off the accelerator of your car, and coasting gradually to a stop. Being aware of what your body is doing tends to stop the spinning thoughts or scripts that are playing.

Everything is impermanent, including the afflictive emotions. Mindfulness tends to tamp these emotions down, and reduce their affect and duration. This is the way to freedom.

Delusion

- Unawareness as a form of delusion: When we are not aware, not mindful, our habits and patterns are running the show.
- As a not connecting: related to neutral experience
 - Uncertainty, confusion, disconnection, restlessness, torpor
- As a view that clouds our accurate perception of experience
- We see our world through a delusional filter. We make mistakes on many levels as we attempt to make sense of the world around us.
 - Not inherently flawed – these distortions can be seen through.
- Four distortions of reality (Anguttara Nikaya IV.49):
 - Seeing permanence in the impermanent (anicca)
 - Seeing happiness in what is suffering (dukkha)
 - Getting what we want, further conditions the wanting.
 - Seeing self in what does not have self (anatta)

- Causes and conditions, process unfolding
 - Seeing beauty in the unbeautiful (asubha): Classic in the body:
 - JG: wrap it all up with skin, and it's beautiful
- One of my teachers (SUT) once said: delusion does not mask the object (does not mask experience), but it masks the true nature of the experience.
- So, we are aware, but are aware through a distorted filter.
- Three levels of distortion of reality:
 - As distortions of perception: the way we experience through our sense doors. E.g. seeing a coiled rope as a snake. Normally such perceptions can be corrected by a second look.
 - As distortions of thought: Next level of mental processing. We think about them and ponder them in our minds. We have the thought that a coiled rope is a snake
 - As distortions of view: Patterns of thought that become hardened or habitual. We form the view that we saw a snake, and no amount of evidence to the contrary can shake this view.
- These then work in a cycle – our further perceptions are then formed by our views, which are re-cemented by our thoughts about them.
- Becoming aware of these distortions can help us to correct them.
 - Look deeply at what you assume is permanent, you will find it otherwise.
 - Likewise for what you assume is happiness.
 - When we see something as beautiful, often there is an ignoring of the aspects of it that are not beautiful. Open your mind to all aspects of your experience.
 - Observe what you consider to be self.