

## Poisoned Grooves

The second noble truth as described in the Recovery Dharma book is that craving is what leads to our suffering - but craving for what exactly? Is it *just* the craving for our substance or behavior of choice; or is it a deeper desire, beneath the appearance of what we think we want?

The Buddha taught that the origin of our suffering comes from what are sometimes referred to as the three poisons which in Pali are: *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred) and *moha* (delusion). Words like greed/hatred carry more weight in English than the Pāli intends.

Take greed for instance - while it can be the gross form of greed (avarice / wanting more than what is justified) it really suggests the entire register of reaching: mild preference, subtle attraction, the quiet pull toward pleasant experience, wanting, clinging. Suffering rooted in *lobha* can cover the entire spectrum of our minds desire to move towards something.

Hatred similarly takes on a broad understanding. It can be any form of aversion, resistance, moving away from or wanting to end. This can range from mild irritation, to discomfort, to rage, impatience, and boredom. It is the low-grade dissatisfaction for the ways things are right now. Whereas *lobha* is a turning towards - *dosa* captures the sense of moving away from.

And finally there is delusion - *moha*. This can also be characterized as ignorance of the way things actually are, of not seeing clearly. In this way - *moha* is often considered the deepest root - the other two cannot exist without *moha* operating behind the scenes. It describes the fact that we grasp at or push away things because we do not see the impermanent nature of what we are seeking to control.

In our addictions - actions rooted in these three poisons often dictated how we conducted our lives. We crave because we craved. Like a wagon on a muddy road, the grooves deepened with each passing. Buddhism has an evocative word for this: *saṅkhāra* (in Pali). These are the old patterns of thought and conduct that we carry with us.

Each of us has *saṅkhāra*; they show up in our behaviors, our ways of thinking, our opinions. They can even condition us to behave in certain ways. They are not who

we are - but we do bear them - even after we have renounced our addictive behaviors.

*Saṅkhāra* can show up in surprising ways, and in the context of our addiction overlap somewhat with what psychology calls our triggers. Perhaps it's a certain time of day, a familiar smell, a conversation that tries our patience

They can even manifest in our dreams - where we find ourselves using/hiding again. These arise for many in recovery, and are often a source of shame and fear that a lapse is coming. Looked at through the lens of *saṅkhāra* - we can see that these are just the mind being a mind, doing what it has been conditioned to. They are the mind's habituated response to conditions: not memories, but grooves.

The grooves are real, and they don't vanish when we stop using. But the same mind that was conditioned into these patterns can be conditioned out of them, and the tradition offers something precise for that.

Each poison has a corresponding antidote - not as a suppression, but as a cultivation. For *lobha*, the practice of *dāna* (generosity) trains the mind in the movement of releasing rather than grasping. Every genuine act of giving is a small demonstration that we can let go and that nothing catastrophic follows. For *dosa*, *mettā* (lovingkindness) and the broader *brahmaviharas* cultivate the orientation of goodwill toward experience rather than resistance to it. This is particularly important directed inward: much of the aversion we carry is toward ourselves, and *mettā* practice aimed at self is often the most difficult and most necessary form. For *moha*, the antidote is the dharma itself as a map, and the practice of wise attention, actually looking at experience clearly rather than reacting from assumption. These antidotes work slowly. But the same process that carved the old grooves is available to us now: repeated action, rooted in something other than the three poisons, gradually conditions new ones.

What we were craving was never really the substance or the behavior, it was relief from the unease that the three poisons generated. The ruts were carved deep, and the mind found its way back to them again and again. Seeing that clearly, understanding the grooves for what they are and how they got there, and knowing that we can carve new ones, is already the beginning of the path out.