

Hooked and unhooked: Buddhist approaches to greed and aversion

*If this sticky, uncouth craving
overcomes you in the world,
your sorrows grow like wild grass
after rain.*

*If, in the world, you overcome
this uncouth craving, hard to escape,
sorrows roll off you,
like water beads off
a lotus.*

— Dhp 335-336

Recognizing your hooks

What is your hook?

Addiction (greed), aversion (hatred), spacing out (delusion)

- Take some time to deliberately pay attention to your hooks in both daily life and meditation
- Write them down

Scratching the itch

- What do you do to alleviate the discomfort caused by your hook?

Getting to know your hooks

Mindfulness of body/feelings

- What does the hook feel like? Hot, cold, foggy, sharp, sticky?
- Where do you feel the hook in your body?
- How long does the feeling last?
- How does it go away?

The hook is a process:

- Something happens to us in our life
- Subsequently certain situations, people, cause us pain or craving
- We seek to alleviate the pain or craving by - how? Ignoring? Indulging? Substituting?
- This becomes a habit that reinforces itself every time the process takes place.

Taking a step back, why does the hook happen?

- Dependent origination: contact with the world through the sense doors leads to a feeling-tone: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. We seek to have more of the pleasant, less of the unpleasant, and ignore the neutral. This is craving - for more or less of what is causing the feeling. This craving, if indulged, leads to **clinging**. THIS IS THE HOOK. After that, in the progression of dependent origination, clinging leads to "becoming" and "birth." In this sense, this birth is the birth of a habit, or of a new being (you) who has this particular habit.

(These are two ways of describing the same thing)

Befriending your hooks

"There is the mud, and there is the lotus that grows out of the mud. We need the mud in order to make the lotus." – Thich Nhat Hanh

- Mindfulness allows us to stay with the hook and get to know it, rather than pushing it away or indulging it
- The space provided by mindfulness gives us the opportunity to realize that our hook is not going to kill us.
- A general feeling of friendliness towards yourself is useful here: invite the hook in to sit down and have a cup of tea; regard yourself with compassion, maybe as you would regard a small child.

Taming your hooks

"Obstacles test our balance and poise in life. We learn from life's situations so that we don't try to avoid, control, manipulate and contain every experience, but allow the possibility of just being with something, as it is, equanimously." -Shaila Catherine

In order to befriend our hooks we have to tame them so they are approachable and so they do not control us. How do we tame them?

- Substitute skillful mind-states for unskillful ones.
 - The Brahma Viharas: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity
 - With practice, skillful mind-states become the default mode of our mind
- RAIN (Michelle McDonald)
 - Recognize; accept; investigate; non-identify
- Pema Chodron: *Shenpo*
- Mindfulness of the body, feelings, and mind-states (See above)
- Renunciation
 - "Both within and outside of retreat, renunciation is a practice worth experimenting with. What happens when you let go of your opinions? Of self-preoccupation? Of a strong desire? In what areas in your life would letting go bring greater benefits than continuing to hold on tightly? When letting go is difficult, what does your clinging indicate about your beliefs in what will make you happy?" - Gil Fronsdahl

Hooks as teachers

Your hooks are doors that lead to understanding, liberation, and freedom.

Here is a story Pema Chodron told about GI Gurdjieff, an early-twentieth-century Buddhist teacher: "There was a man in his community who was really bad-tempered. Nobody could stand this guy because he was so prickly. Every little thing caused him to spin off into a tantrum. Everything irritated him. He complained constantly, so everyone felt the need to tiptoe around him because anything that might be said could cause him to explode. People just wished he would go away."

"Gurdjieff liked to make his students do things that were completely meaningless. One day there were about forty people out cutting up a lawn into little pieces and moving it to another place in the grounds. This was too much for this fellow, it was the last straw. He blew up, stormed out, got in his car, and drive off, whereupon there was a spontaneous celebration. People were thrilled, so happy he has gone. But when they told Gurdjieff what had happened, he said, "Oh no!" and went after him in his car."

"Three days later they both came back. That night when Gurdjieff's attendant was serving him his supper, he asked, "Sir, why did you bring him back?" Gurdjieff answered in a very low voice, "You're not going to believe this, and this is just between you and me; you must tell no one. I pay him to stay here."

Working with your hooks offers precious opportunity to attain **Insight into the three characteristics:**

- Not-self
 - Who is having these thoughts?
 - How do I construct a self through likes, dislikes, preferences?
- Dukkha (suffering, unsatisfactoriness)
 - Recognizing the pain of craving
 - Who is suffering?
- Impermanence
 - Observing the arising and passing away of powerful mind-states

Unpleasant circumstances and people, or pleasant circumstances and people that lead to craving and addiction show us where our energy lies. We can use this energy - lust, fear, anger - to power our practice: turning the demon into an ally. Tibetan teacher Tsultrim Allione has developed a process called "feeding your demons" to help people suffering from strong craving or aversion to transform their pain.

Prepared for Beginners Mind sitting group of Dharma Zephyr Sangha, Carson City, NV, for a study taking place over the summer of 2015, by Anne Macquarie. This is a draft. If you have questions, comments or other ideas about how to approach the hook, Anne would be glad to hear from you. You can contact her through the contact page at dharmazephyr.org