



Welcome to week two. Let's take a breath together. When you inhale, become aware of your body, and when you exhale, become aware of feeling —pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, or a mixture of all three.

This week, we explore together how we create extra suffering in our lives. This is the second noble truth: the origin of suffering and the path that leads to more suffering. Those of us with addictions have trodden that path many times. Whenever we are on that vicious cycle, we go down the path that leads to more addictions.

Let's explore this a bit, looking at some of the verses of the *Dhammapada*. All that we are is a result of what we have thought, founded on thought, made up of our thoughts.

A person who speaks with an impure mind, pain will follow them as the wheel follows the foot that follows the ox that pulls the cart. All that we are is a result of what we have thought, founded on thought, made up of our thoughts. A person who speaks with a pure mind, happiness will follow them like their shadows...

He beat me. She robbed me. He insulted me. She defeated me. Those who harbor such thoughts, only hatred will stir in their minds. He beat me. She robbed me. He insulted me. She defeated me. Those who don't harbor such thoughts, hatred will cease.

You can see from these verses that some kinds of suffering are optional, and joy is optional too. Have you ever been in a bad mood and somebody says, “Cheer up,” and you say, “I don't want to cheer up. I'm okay as I am”? You're holding on to that mental state of being in a bad mood. Have you ever felt depressed and there are people around you laughing, having a good time, and you get really irritated? You're irritated because you don't want to be cheered up. This is how we create extra suffering in our lives.



The Buddha taught that attachment to the desire to have is called craving, and the attachment to the desire not to have is called aversion. Craving and aversion are part of the same problem. They belong together.

But firstly, let's speak about desire, because desire isn't the problem. Of course, all of us have desires. The problem is that when we have a desire, we want to feed it. Those of us who have addictions can't stop the desire. We feed the desire into that loop of addiction. When we yield to desire, we become a prisoner of addiction, a prisoner of suffering. Craving takes root in the eye, ear, nose, body, tongue, mind. Craving takes root in sound, smell, taste, touch and what the mind takes hold of. Craving, aversion, craving, aversion. When we become attached to something pleasurable, we begin to crave. When we become attached to something that is unpleasurable, we repel it.

We play this game of craving and aversion. It's like a pendulum, swinging from craving to aversion. We play this constant game of sensation, moving from craving to aversion, and the pendulum needs to still. When we have addictions, it means that we are reborn in this moment into an unfavorable state, the unfavorable state of the hungry ghost. The realm where we need to be satiated by food, drugs, sex, gambling—whatever the distraction is, we need to be satiated. In the next moment, we can be reborn into another unfavorable state of negative mental states, which can spiral us down into a deep, dark depression.

Again we're playing that game of sensations, because when we have these strong negative mental states, we want to move away from them, and we move away from them by reaching out for our choice of distraction. Why wouldn't we want to move away from being depressed, from moving away from having negative mental states? It's what I call misguided self-compassion, or misguided self-medication, because when we move away from these unfavorable states, we just perpetuate that cycle of addiction.



The Buddha spoke about craving and he taught us three types of craving. The first craving is craving to sense pleasure, *kama-tanha*. *Tanha* is thirst, the thirst for fine foods, fine restaurants, fine clothes. We have this thirst for everything to be pleasurable. We often speak about turning away from negative mental states, but we also turn away from positive mental states. When we have this kind of craving, we are continually in the pursuit of pleasure.

For example, sometimes I'm out in the woods having a wonderful day, walking through the woods, smelling the foliage, and I come across a waterfall. I sit down and listen to the music of the waterfall, and everything is pleasurable. As I sit, the thought crops up: “Wouldn't it be perfect if I had a spliff? Wouldn't it be perfect if I had a glass of champagne or a can of beer?” Fortunately, I'm not carrying any of those things, because I'm moving away from the pleasurable moment of now. It's as if some kind of unsatisfactoriness has arisen, and I want to hold on to this pleasurable moment by moving to the spliff or the champagne. Even if I did have that champagne, in the next moment, I would think, “Well, I should just have another glass to make it perfect.”

The second type of craving is the craving for existence, *bhava-tanha*: the thirst of wanting to be successful, famous, the best, a better person in the world, a better parent, or a better teacher. You may say, “Well, what's wrong with this?” Of course we want to be better at this and of course there's nothing wrong with it, but the problem is that when we crave to be successful or a better person, we are not in acceptance of now. We're not accepting ourselves in the present moment of now. We're moving away from this experience and telling ourselves that things should be better, that if I were a better, more successful person, life would be a lot easier. We're holding on to these views like when a dog has a slipper in its mouth and it won't let go.

Finally there is the craving for nonexistence, *vibhava-tanha*: the thirst not to be criticized, rejected, judged, or told off. What's wrong with this? What's wrong with us not wanting to be judged or criticized? The reality is that, sometimes, people will have a different view. In fact, most of the time, people have different views, and we have to accept that. We enter the game of



the eight worldly winds. It's a pendulum going back and forth from pleasure and pain, pleasure and pain, blame and praise, blame and praise, loss and gain, loss and gain, fame and disrepute, fame and disrepute. We get caught in the worldly winds, being blown around from what we consider as the negative and the positive.

In a way, there is no negative or positive. We just have to accept whatever experience arises in the moment. In this craving for nonexistence, we can move into a depression or other negative mental states. We can move away from those negative mental states by our choice of distractions and addictions. Sometimes, it can be for the wish for the annihilation of the self. As I said last week, sometimes that can manifest in people trying to take their lives, or perhaps successfully taking their lives.

We need to be aware of all these types of craving. We can become aware of craving by realizing that all craving is energy arising in the body—that's all craving is. If we can acknowledge this, we can begin to reflect on one of the teachings that the Buddha taught, the four foundations of mindfulness. He taught that we should become mindful of the body, which is very important because craving emerges in the body. We have to have mindfulness of feeling, because if we have mindfulness of feeling, we will begin to learn what craving feels like in the body. Craving can feel like sweaty palms. It can feel like butterflies in the stomach.

Craving, for me, can be salivating. I will give you an example. We could be in a restaurant with our friends, happily having a meal, happily drinking our water or our Coca-Cola and a waiter passes our table, and this waiter is holding or carrying a bottle of wine, and our eye catches it. We have contact with this bottle of wine and we salivate. This is craving arising in the body, energy arising in the body. If we have mindfulness of feeling, we will recognize this warning sign, an early warning sign that we are at risk and all we need is to take a breath and pause.

The Buddha taught that we should reflect on mindfulness of the mind. This is where the thoughts arise. If we don't catch the feelings, maybe we would catch a thought, a thought that says, “I



want that bottle of wine.” The feeling arises, we salivate, and we think, “I want the wine.” If we can catch what is arising in the mind, this will give us the opportunity to make a choice and let go of it. Then the Buddha taught that we should have mindfulness of the dharma and the teachings, mindfulness of the things that lead us astray. We can also have mindfulness of the positive teachings, like the seven factors of enlightenment, which are concentration, rapture, investigation, energy, mindfulness, tranquility, and equanimity. If we can reflect on one of these, it may help us to step out of this vicious cycle of craving.

Today, we explore our high-risk situations through a meditative practice. First, become aware of your body. Imagine a high-risk situation where you could be triggered. For example, my high-risk situation is in a restaurant where there is a buffet. As you imagine your high-risk situation, see if you can notice the craving energy arising in the body. For me, it arises in the mouth area, tension in the jaw, and salivation. What does this craving energy feel like for you? Out of the craving energy, thoughts quickly arise upon the heels of it. For me, those thoughts can be like, “I want everything in the buffet.” What thoughts are arising for you right now?

When I identify with my thoughts, my body becomes agitated. But when I don't identify with these thoughts and I allow the thoughts to arise and cease, something different happens. Allow your thoughts to arise and cease. Sometimes an even stronger thought may arise, but if we allow it to pass, eventually our bodies and mind will become calm again. If you're not feeling calm, then take a deep breath in and expand it throughout your whole body, helping to calm your body.

If you would like to explore craving even more, you can investigate it through the second step of the eight step model, seeing how we can create extra suffering in our lives. May you be well.