



Welcome to week three. First, let's take a deep breath together. When you inhale, become aware of your body. When you exhale, become aware of thoughts arising.

This week, we explore breaking the craving habit: the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering. It's important for us to believe that our suffering can end, to believe that we can let go of our addictions. A question we must ask ourselves is: Are we prepared to go to any lengths to get our recovery? Are we prepared to let go of self-view, the views that keep us on the vicious cycle of addictions, all the identities that we hold onto?

Self-view is part of a teaching called the Ten Fetters, the ten mental bonds that tie us to suffering. It's also part of another teaching called the Three Lakshanas, or the Three Marks of Existence: anicca (change), dukkha (suffering), anatta (non-self). If we are to break the craving habit, we have to see through this illusion of self that has kept us trapped in a life of addiction.

I want to recite from one of the most famous suttas, which is recited all over the world in Buddhist traditions: the *Heart Sutra*. The Bodhisattva of Compassion, when he meditated deeply, saw the emptiness of all five *skandhas* [the five aggregates] and sundered the bonds that caused him suffering. We learn that the Bodhisattva was able to see into the empty nature of all five *skandhas* into the empty nature of form, feeling, perceptions, formation, and consciousness. When he saw through all of this, he was able to break the bonds of suffering. We too can break the bonds of suffering. The Buddha taught that if we were to break this craving habit, we had to learn to control desire, we had to practice or we have to practice nonattachment. When we are able to control desire by practicing nonattachment, liberation will arise. It will free our mind and nirvana will arise.

Let's look at the legend of the prince who broke the craving habit. Legend says that the prince got to the point when he was so frustrated of practicing ascetic practices, self mortifications, for six years, he said something like this:



“Six years of austerities, my body starved, my eyes sunken and still separated from this world. I sit beneath the banyan tree and I vow never to leave this spot until I have found an end of suffering.”

From this we learn that the prince was determined to find an end of suffering, and we must be determined to let go of our addictive behaviors and our distractions. The legend continues, telling us that the prince sat for approximately five weeks; during these five weeks, he experienced the most profound detoxification of the mind. We too have to experience a detoxification of the mind if we are to let go of our addictions.

Every negative mental state you could imagine, every emotion that you could imagine arose in the prince’s mind: conceit, arrogance, ill will, anger. It’s said that the king of evil, Lord Mara, came to taunt the prince and tried to distract him. But the prince was so determined that whenever a negative mental state arose, he remained calm. He didn’t turn away from it, he just observed these mental states arising and ceasing. When the king of evil sent three daughters to taunt the prince so that they could flaunt themselves in front of him in order to distract him, he remained calm, undistracted by the daughter of passion, the daughter of boredom, or the daughter of craving. He just watched these emotions arising and ceasing.

It’s also said that Lord Mara became so frustrated that he showered the prince with spears, and as he observed these spears coming towards him, he transformed them into beautiful lotus flowers. Lord Mara was absolutely furious, saying to the prince: “Who gave you the right to take the seat of enlightenment?”

The prince sat and responded, “Lord Mara, you are my mother, you are my father.” Then he reached for help by touching the earth and said, “Let the earth be my witness.” In that moment, the prince broke the craving habit and found the cessation of suffering, saying: “These



conditionings that have labeled me a Buddha, a deva, an *asura*, a man, a human being, these conditionings have been broken by me, these conditionings have been destroyed by me.”

The prince had woken up to the truth, had gone beyond recovery and had become a Buddha. The prince had broken the ten mental bonds of self-view, doubt, rites and rituals, ill will, craving, the lust for an immaterial rebirth, the lust for a material rebirth, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance, and he became a Buddha.

Now you may be saying, “Well, that’s impossible. How can I break through all of these ten mental bonds?” It’s possible to see through the illusion of self, and it’s possible to break the first Three Fetters. That can be enough for us to break the craving habit. We will still be in recovery, though we won’t be buddhas. Some people say it’s possible to gain enlightenment in this lifetime, but we can think of taking natural steps and we can think of just perhaps breaking those first Three Fetters.

Let’s unpack the story a bit, because we don’t have to take this legend on a literal level, but on a metaphorical level. Mara was all the more negative mental states arising in the Buddha’s mind. In fact, the mental states were so gross that the Buddha could see Lord Mara. Imagine as you walk along a road, you come to a shop. You think you see a bottle of wine, or cream cakes, or pornographic magazines, but as you get closer, it wasn’t the bottle of wine, or cream cakes, or nude magazines—it was something else completely. Our minds can fabricate and concoct anything we like.

What was happening in the prince’s mind was fabrication and concoction arising in the mind. Every time something arose, it ceased and then got stronger. Sometimes we think that when we step onto the path of recovery things will get better and better, easier and easier, but we can see from this legend that actually things got tougher and tougher and tougher. As one thing ceased,



something even stronger arose to the point that the prince even doubted his right to take the seat of enlightenment.

We have to work with the five hindrances of the mind to break this craving habit. We could see in the prince's mind that ill will arose and he swung to sense pleasure, but he didn't react to it. He just allowed ill will and sense pleasure and desire to arise. Then restlessness and anxiety arose, and in the next moment, sloth, torpor, and boredom arose, but the prince didn't allow his mind to be a pendulum swinging from these two polar opposites. Then doubt arose, and underpins these four hindrances of the mind. In this moment of doubt, the Buddha asked for help. He reached to the earth to be his witness, and he could see in this moment that he was interconnected with the earth, interconnected with these negative mental states and with Lord Mara. He was not separated from Lord Mara or these negative mental states. This realization is how he broke the craving habit.

You may say, “I don't have five weeks to sit there and navel-gaze.” But how many years have you spent on the cycle of addiction? Some of you have tried to break that cycle of addiction. Perhaps you've gone to a rehab and spent thousands and thousands of dollars, and still you have not broken this craving habit. We can help ourselves to break this craving habit by taking gradual steps. Think of the Buddha's teaching of the four right efforts: the right effort of eradicating unwholesome mental states, preventing unwholesome mental states, cultivating positive mental states, and maintaining positive mental states.

We can do this by cultivating the five spiritual faculties: energy, faith, mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom. We need energy if we are to break this craving habit. We need faith to know that it's possible to let go of this craving habit. We need mindfulness, the four foundations of mindfulness that I spoke about last week. We need meditation, and we can meditate standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. We don't have to be sitting in a cross-legged posture to meditate. Meditation is every single moment of our waking hours and every single moment of our sleeping



hours. Meditation is breath by breath. Finally, we will cultivate wisdom by cultivating the spiritual faculties of energy, faith, mindfulness, and meditation. This is how we begin to break the craving habit of addiction.

Today, we explore a practice to help us break the craving habit.

Become aware of the body as you breathe in. As you breathe out, scan your body from head to toe.

Now begin to notice thoughts arising and ceasing in the mind.

Notice thoughts of sense pleasure, thoughts of desire, or thoughts that want to take us away from our experience right now in this moment.

When we notice these thoughts, we can say to ourselves, “This is a moment of craving.”

“Craving is energy arising and ceasing.”

“I don’t have to identify with the craving.”

“The energy of craving will arise and cease.”

Now take another deep breath in, and when you breathe out, scan your body from head to toe.

If you would like to explore breaking the craving habit even more, you can look at the third step of the eight-step model, embracing impermanence to show us that our suffering can end.

May you be well.