
THE THREE FIRES OF LIFE BASED ON THERAVADA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism, a profound spiritual tradition, encapsulates a profound understanding of human suffering and its origins. At the heart of this philosophy lies the concept of the Three Fires, an essential framework that illuminates the fundamental causes of human discontent and the path to liberation. This abstract explores the significance of the Three Fires in Buddhism, delving into their origins, manifestations, and the transformative journey they inspire. The Three Fires, also known as the Three Poisons or Three Unwholesome Roots, are at the core of Buddhist teachings, representing the root causes of suffering.

The first fire, "Lobha" or desire, encompasses the insatiable craving for pleasure, possessions, and worldly attachments. It is the relentless pursuit of satisfaction in external phenomena, leading individuals into a perpetual cycle of longing and discontent.

The second fire, "Dosa" or aversion, manifests as repulsion, hatred, and avoidance. It arises from a fundamental misunderstanding of the impermanent nature of reality and the attachment to personal preferences and biases. Aversion blinds individuals to the interconnectedness of all beings and fosters an environment of disharmony and conflict. The third fire, "Moha" or ignorance, is the root cause of the other two fires. It represents a lack of awareness, misunderstanding, and the delusion that perpetuates the cycle of desire and aversion. Ignorance clouds the true nature of reality, trapping individuals in a cycle of suffering, preventing them from realizing their inherent potential for wisdom and compassion.

Understanding and overcoming the Three Fires is central to the Buddhist path. The teachings emphasize mindfulness, insight meditation, and ethical conduct as tools to extinguish these fires and attain liberation, known as Nirvana. By cultivating awareness and insight, individuals can break free from the shackles of desire, aversion, and ignorance, paving the way for a life of profound peace, compassion, and enlightenment.

Keywords: Three Fires, Buddhism, Theravada, Dosa, Moha, attachment

1. INTRODUCTION

There are three fires: the fire of greed, the fire of hatred, and the fire of delusion. (It 93) The lists of their synonyms are as follows:

Greed; liking, wishing, longing, fondness, affection, attachment, lust, cupidity, craving, passion, self-indulgence, possessiveness, avarice, desire for the wealth, offspring, fame, etc-

Hatred; dislike, disgust, revulsion, resentment, grudge, ill-humor, vexation, irritability, antagonism, aversion, anger, wrath, vengefulness.

Delusion; stupidity, dullness, confusion, ignorance of essentials, (e-g., of the Four Noble Truths), prejudice, ideological dogmatism, fanaticism, wrong views, conceit.

Greed (lust) is desire and the root of all miseries and has the characteristic of gasping an object, like birdlime (lit-monkey lime). Its function is sticking, like meat put in hot pan. It is manifested as not giving up, like the dye of lamp-black. Its proximate cause is seeing enjoyment in things that lead to states of misery as a swift-flowing river does to the great ocean.

Hatred has the characteristic of savageness, like a provoked. Its function is to like a drop of poison, or its function is to burn up its own support, like a forest fire. It is manifested as persecuting like an enemy that has got his chance. Its proximate cause is the grounds for annoyance (Āghātavatthu). It should be regarded as being like state urine mixed with poison.

Delusion has the characteristic of blindness, or it has the characteristic of unknowing. Its function is non-penetration, or its function is to conceal the true nature of an object.

It is manifested as the absence of right view, or it is manifested as darkness. Its proximate cause is unwise (unjustified) attention. It should be regarded as the root of all that is unwholesome.

2. DIFFERENCES OF THREE FIRES

The fire of Loba or greed.

Too much greed is bad. The fire is hot. There is no fire which is not hot. But everybody, uncontrolled own desire, does not know that “will greed and lust whether make me hot or not?” They can not content with just this and that. They, thus, committed many stupid mistakes. the Buddha said –

Yaṃ laddhaṃ tena tutthaḃbaṃ, atiloba hi pāpako.

Haṃsarājaṃ gahetvāna, suvaṃnā parihāyatha. (Vin: 2.339) “One should be pleased with what is received, for too much greed is bad. By taking hold of the king of the geese, one may lose the gold”. In fact, the fire of lust and greed is so much terrible.

Craving is the Main Cause of Suffering. According to the Noble Truth of Suffering, life is suffering and suffering is life. Here ‘life’ means the five aggregates of attachment and refers to a ‘being’. According to the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering, craving (tanhā) is taken as the main cause of suffering.

Tanhā and rāga refers to the mental factor ‘lobha’. Lobha has characteristics: ‘craving’ and ‘attachment’. As an ultimate reality, it never relinquishes these characteristics. Craving craves for and attach to gold, money, wealth, property, luxury, official position, authority, sense objects, mind subjects, ideology, etc. so, it urges people to struggle in many ways to possess these things. Such struggle means suffering. If, in spite of hard struggle, people fail to get them, they are stricken with sorrow and grief. If they succeed in acquiring them, they have to worry for the safety of these things and guard them. This is also suffering. If, in spite of their effort to guard their possessions, these things are lost, they are in great despair.

The desire of greed or craving can never be satisfied. The more it gets, the more it wants. It is like drinking salty sea water: the more we drink, the thirstier we feel. When we put more fuel into it, the flame grows bigger; likewise, when we enjoy more sense pleasure, so too the sense desire grows stronger. To be always hungry and thirsty for sensuality is real suffering. For example, (Mehm Tin Mon 8)

Because of dissatisfaction and selfish desire, people commit theft, robbery, rob, and quarrel, and would cause many unpleasant things, even world wars. Thus, greed or craving causes so many sufferings in the present life. It will produce evil consequence in the future life also. Attachment is the Cause of Suffering. Craving and attachment are the most powerful force causing not only various forms of suffering in this very life, but also the continuation of existence. It builds and rebuilds new existences over and over again. Life depends on the desire and craving for life. “Natthi rāgasamo aggi” (Dhp: Verse-202) “There is no fire like lust”. Craving and lust is, indeed, the hottest fire that is burning all worldliness.

3. THE FIRE OF DOSA OR HATRED

Hatred (anger) or violence of mind is called dosa (hatred). Dosa is not only violent but also soils the mind. It is not only wild and rude, but also depressive resulting in interiority complex and living in fear; they all belong to the category of dosa or hatred.

In brief sorrow, grief, depression, anger, grudge, frightening others with abusive language, attacking, planning to kill other people – all of these is dosa. Since dosa is with both fear and violence, the angry, violent person is also easily frightened. Be aware of such persons. (Violence is called ascending hatred, whereas fear is called descending hatred. (Janakābhivamsa 44)

Hatred brings about disadvantages. When someone is being angry, he can not identify beneficial cause as well as unbeneficial cause. So the Buddha said-

Anattha janano kodho, kodho cittappakopano, Bhayamantarato jataṃ, taṃ jano nāvabujjati. (A: 2.471) Anger fathers misery; this fury does so cloud the mind Of man that he can not discern, this fearful inner danger. Kuddho atthaṃ na jānāti, Kuddho dhammam na passati. An angry man no meaning knows, No angry man sees the Dhamma. (Ñānamoli Thera 11, 1987) For example, in the Mittavindaka Jātaka, (Ja: 1.384) Mittavindaka, the son of rich man kicked his mother’s chest with his leg. And then, he went on a journey with his friends by ship. When they arrived in the ocean, their ship was destroyed by the storm. Therefore, he faced many adversities. However does he overcome various difficulties? He had got to face up to disadvantages of very unpleasant behaviors. Because of kicking his mother’s thorax without controlling his anger, he felt the worst sufferings for many years. This, indeed, is the fault of hatred and anger. It is very clear that hatred is fire. The fire of hatred is so much terrible.

We all know what anger is, and we’ve all felt it: whether as a fleeting annoyance or full-fledged rage. Anger is a completely normal, usually, healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems at work, in our personal relationships, and in the overall quality of our life. And it can make us feel as

though you're at the mercy of an unpredictable and powerful emotion. What is anger? Anger is "an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage". Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person (such as a coworker or supervisor) or event (a traffic jam, a canceled flight), or our anger could be caused by worrying about our personal problems. Memories of traumatic or enraging events can also trigger angry feelings. (Dompht! 5)

In the world, many people committed minor crimes, serious crimes and war crimes by dosa and hatred. Day by day, destruction of living beings, stealing, unlawful sexual intercourse, are increasing by dosa and hatred. The bombs are detonated by the scoundrel and cruel person, at the inner-cities where crowded. Day after day, crimes caused by hatred are convicting by the judge at the court of law and judicature. So, the Buddha uttered this verse in the Dhammapada, 'Natthi dosasamo kali' (Dhp.Verse-202) there is no crime like hate. The fire of hatred is so much terrible.

4. THE FIRE OF MOHA OR DELUSION

Moha (delusion) is derived from muh, to delude. It is delusion, stupidity, bewilderment. It is 'moha' that clouds an object and blinds the mind. Sometimes 'moha' is rendered by ignorance. According to the Abhidhammā, moha is common to all evil. Lobha and dosa do not arise alone, but always in combination with moha. Moha, on the other hand, does arise singly- hence the designation 'momūha', intense delusion. Moha is one of the three roots of evil and it is common to all immoral types of consciousness. It is opposed to Paññā- wisdom. The chief characteristic of Moha is confusion with regard to the nature of an object. Moha clouds one's knowledge with regard to Kamma and its consequences and the four Noble Truths. (Nārada Thera 16, 94, 1979)

Delusion and ignorance are the name of avijjā (moha). Avijjā is the mental factor moha which shields the mind so that we can not know the true nature of life. It also covers the ultimate realities which are the most basic natural entities that really exist in nature. It also makes us ignorant of the nature of impermanence (anicca), the nature of suffering (dukkha), the nature of non-self (anatta) and the nature of loathsomeness (asubha) of the ultimate realities. It also shields the causal relations of Dependent Arising and the Law of Kamma and its effect.

Avijjā not only shields the mind to be ignorant of the true nature of life and of the world but also deceives the mind to have the wrong vision. It deceives the mind to see 'non-self' (anatta) as 'self, person, I' (atta); to look at impermanence (anicca) as permanence (nicca), to regard suffering (dukkha) as happiness (sukkhā); and to see what is disgusting (asubha) to be beautiful (subha). (Mehm Tin Mon 99)

5. CONCLUSION

The original Pāli term for Buddhism is Dhamma, which, literally, means that which upholds. There is no English equivalent that exactly conveys the meaning of the Pāli term. The Dhamma is that which really is. It is the doctrine of reality. It is a means of deliverance from suffering, and deliverance itself. Whether the Buddhas arise or not the Dhamma exists. (A: 1.289) It is hidden by the ignorant eyes of human, till a Buddha, an Enlightened One, realizes and compassionately reveals it into the world. The Dhamma is to be studied, and more to be practiced, and above all to be realized: immediate realization is its ultimate goal. Such as the Dhamma is compared to a raft which is meant for the sole purpose of escaping from the ocean of birth and death (Saṃsāra). Some say Buddhism is a mere philosophy. Buddhism cannot be called like that. Philosophy deals mainly with knowledge and is not concerned with practice; whereas Buddhism lays special emphasis on practice and realization. The Buddha said "Sabbam bhikkhave ādittam" (Vin: 3.44, S: 2.251) "O monks! All conditioned thing is in the flames". There are many sentient beings in the world. All of beings who belong to aggregates have sufferings which cause of strong desires with regard to discontents. Indeed, aggregates are the heap of sufferings. Accordingly, the Buddha said "Natthi khandhasamā dhukkha" (Dhp: Verse-202) There is no ill like the body. All of sentient beings are fulfilling desires of lust, and hatred, proud, jealous and so on which is latent in the body (aggregate) for long existences. When someone is not content with his wishes, he is looking to do something to fulfill his needs, and can not control his mind on account of his desperate desires, and commit unproductive terrible actions based on the delusion. The fire of lust (greed), hatred, and delusion which lie latent in the mind of beings are indeed, hotter than the fires of nature. So we should know the nature of fires (unwholesome): lust (greed), hatred, delusion and their liberations. Greed is a root of unwholesome kamma; hatred is a root of unwholesome kamma; delusion is a root of unwholesome kamma. Therefore, I say, these demeritorious actions are either due to greed, or due to hatred, or due to delusion. (M: 1.57) The state of greed, as also that of hatred, is always accompanied by ignorance or delusion, this latter being the primary root of all evil. Greed and hatred, however, can not co-exist in one and the same moment of consciousness. The Buddha said- Dhammārāmo dhammarato, dhamam anuvicintayam. Dhammam anussaram bhikkhu, saddhammā na parihāyati. (Dhp: Verse-364) "The bhikkhu who dwells in the Dhamma, who delights in the Dhamma, who meditates on the Dhamma, who well remembers the Dhamma, does not fall away from the sublime Dhamma."

6. REFERENCES

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