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**Poison Control**  
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In the Buddhist tradition, the cause of human suffering is threefold: greed, hatred, and delusion – called the “three poisons.” These three “poisons” are deeply ingrained, programmed, in our being, our personality and leak out, spilling toxicity, as we live our lives – at work, at home, at play and in relationship. How so?

"There is no calamity greater than lavish desire. There is no greater guilt than discontentment. And there is no greater disaster than greed." - Lao-Tzu

We manifest greed as selfishness, attachments, and trying to glom on to happiness outside ourselves. Greed is an insatiable craving for objects we feel will bring us untold happiness – a happiness we believe will fill us up, make us feel whole and complete. Under the spell of greed, we, like Sisyphus, continually struggle to obtain the unattainable – always fleeting, always ephemeral. There is no lasting happiness. So, it's always on to the next thing, and the next and the next. Greed also manifests as a lack of compassion for others. Greed is a poison that affects our personal and professional lives, a poison that leads to an endless cycle of suffering and unhappiness – mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically.

"Holding anger is a poison. It eats you from the inside. We think that hating is a weapon that attacks the person who harmed us. But hatred is a curved blade. And the harm we do we do to ourselves." - Mitch Albom (The Five People You Meet in Heaven)

Hatred is manifested by our anger, hostility, resentment and aversion to people, events and circumstances which we feel cause us discomfort and unpleasantness. We even hate our own self, our own feelings. When we hate we consciously and unconsciously emit an energy of ill-will, jealousy and revenge. When we hate, we seem to constantly be in some degree of conflict – at work, at home, at play and in relationship – we seem to always be fighting “an enemy” – both external and internal. We feel agitated, vigilant, and vengeful. Too, we always seem to be in conflict with our self – rejecting who we are, how we feel.

"There are men who would quickly love each other if once they were to speak to each other; for when they spoke they would discover that their souls had only separated by phantoms and delusions." - Ernest Hello

Delusion points to our misperception, misconception and misunderstanding of reality, how the world works, and how natural law works. Delusional, we lack harmony within ourselves, with others or with life itself. We lack an understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings, of all of life. The poison of delusion forces us to look for satisfaction, happiness and solutions “out there.” The result, of course, is even greater unhappiness, frustration and dissatisfaction – a vicious cycle.

The Antidote

These three poisons – greed, hatred and delusion – have a single cause, and that is our separation from our True, Real and Authentic Self – the Self of loving kindness and compassion.

The antidote is twofold: (1) understanding and clarity as to how and why these poisons cause us suffering and unhappiness and (2) making the choice to reduce and eliminate

these poisons from our lives.

As in all change, when we become more self-aware, clear, about the causes of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction, we can then take the steps towards change, empowerment and freedom. As with all change, we need to be loving, kind and compassionate towards ourselves through the slowly-unfolding change process.

So, the antidote begins with the source of the three poisons – our mind – our ego personality. When we learn to still the mind, explore our self more deeply, and become “mindful,” we move to the source of the poisons. At the source, we can discover how these poisons are influencing us – our thoughts, feelings, emotions, speech and actions. The practice is mindful awareness.

We practice mindful awareness through deep breathing, meditation, journaling, self-reflection, the martial arts, painting, dancing, writing, walking quietly in nature and the like.

In a state of mindful awareness, we watch, observe and witness our feelings, emotions and thoughts – watching, not engaging, not reacting, not judging. Mindful awareness supports our being “present” in our everyday interactions – noticing what triggers us, what pushes our buttons, what disturbs us. Watching and observing, not reacting, not allowing greed, hatred or delusions to get in the way.

Mindful awareness supports us to treat each poison with its antidote, for example:

Greed – generosity, charity, sharing, humility, detachment, contentment and cooperation

Hatred – patience, forgiveness, loving-kindness, inclusivity, and openness towards others and our self

Delusion – wisdom, insight, intuition, right understanding, harmony with an interdependent and interconnected world

The antidote – mindful awareness – supports us to become liberated from the poisons, from our habitual, programmed ways of be-ing, thinking, and do-ing – from our unhappiness and suffering.

Poisons are serious stuff – they are dangerous and cause harm and sickness – mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological.

Poisons cause us to act in self-limiting, self-sabotaging and self-defeating ways in which we make unhealthy choices and decisions. Poisons cause us to act unethically, immorally and dishonestly.

By working with the antidotes, we can change; we can transform. And it’s this change and transformation that eventually leads to True and Real Happiness – eliminating the fake and phony appearance of happiness that we’ve been relentlessly pursuing – oddly enough, a fake and phony happiness that has been, poisoning us, making us sicker and sicker.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Do you think you've been poisoned? If so, when, how and by whom?
- Do any of the three poisons drive your everyday moral and ethical actions - at work, at home, at play or in relationship?
- How do you know when you are free of the three poisons, when greed, hatred and delusion no longer exist in your life?

- How do you experience what's good in your life?
- How do you generally feel when you wake up in the morning, go to bed at night? Why?
- Do you experience extreme highs and extreme lows in your life?
- What role do patience, kindness and grace play in your life - at work, at home, at play and in relationship?
- What frustrates you, makes you angry, sad, or glad?
- Do you have a spiritual life or practice?
- Can you envision a world where greed, hatred and delusion don't exist?
- Have you ever experienced true and real happiness? How do you know?

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