

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message:

Buddha-Dharma: Introduction – 7

Question (1):

Greed/attachment, anger/hatred and ignorance/confusion are called the “Three Poisonous Passions.” In what way do these mental states generate?

Answer (1):

The “Three Poisonous Passions” are the function of the brain. As long as we are alive, our brain constantly takes actions, i.e., processing information we receive through our sense organs:

<i>Sense Organs</i>	<i>Sense Objects</i>	<i>Consciousness</i>
eye<----->	material form	----->visual consciousness
ear<----->	sound	----->auditory consciousness
nose<----->	smell	----->olfactory consciousness
tongue<----->	taste	----->gustatory consciousness
body<----->	tangible	----->tactile consciousness
mind<----->	concepts	----->mental consciousness

Consciousness does not arise by itself. It arises while being caused and conditioned by the sense organ and the sense object. Each moment, any one of the six senses of consciousness arises by the dependent association of respective sense organs and sense objects. When the three, (i.e., sense organ, sense object and its relevant consciousness), come into contact, sensation simultaneously arises. Sensation or information received is a cognition experienced in one of three different modes: pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (that is sensation that does not capture one's attention positively or negatively).

For example, when you drink coffee, at the moment your tongue tastes it, sensation is sent to the brain and the brain immediately processes it either “pleasantly” or “unpleasantly.” Or, when you turn on the radio to listen to music while driving, your brain immediately tells you “comfortable” or “uncomfortable.”

Sensation is a most incipient and primitive level of cognition, where only pleasure and pain is cognized, before this cognition develops into perception or pattern recognition. Pattern recognition unifies the basic elements of the experience of sensation into a coherent experience as pattern recognition or mental formation. By perception a person (1) becomes attached to pleasant sensations and yearns for more of them, (2) dislikes unpleasant sensations and revolts against them, and (3) is unaware of or ignores neutral sensations. One is affected by what one has cognized, due to one's taking delight in, welcoming and hanging onto what one has cognized. Thus, one becomes emotionally involved with what one has cognized. A most primitive and incipient sensation, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, develops into (1) greed, attachment, desire, (2) aversion, anger, hatred, or (3) delusion, confusion, and ignorance. They are called roots of unskilled actions. This emotional phase of the mental process which follows the cognitive phase may be called the affective phase of the mental process.

Question (2):

We experience sensations of “pleasant,” “unpleasant,” “comfortable” or “uncomfortable” all the time. But, what kind of problem do we have with them?

Answer (2):

You may see this process as a natural phenomenon without ethical relevance. However, from the Buddhist standpoint, in such a primitive level of cognition of sensory data, which can still be called knowledge, harmful actions are latent.

In the process by which one “reasons about” or “thinks about,” the perceived sensory data, conceptualization of the primitive level of conception of knowledge called “understanding” starts. It develops into the group of manifold concepts, percepts and associations. The problem is that since sensation and pattern recognition are dominated by the pursuit of one's interest, “reasoning” or “thinking” also bears a certain characteristic of fixity and rigidity, which later on may take the form of bias.

The process of “thinking about” or “reasoning” which is now developed into the manifold concepts, percepts and associations, dominates the person, in respect to the objects of consciousness. In the constantly on-going activity of the mind, one unconsciously stores the information received through the senses. In this process, new information, along with information that has already been obtained, is processed and interpreted. The collected and processed information configures into consciousness which refers to distinguishing one thing from the other or one’s reacting to the object in one’s own way. This process of distinguishing leads the person to make decisions and take action, physical or verbal.

The affective phase is followed by a volitional or active phase where there may be harmful actions such as quarrelling, disputation or discourteous speech, taking the stick and weapons (i.e., fighting) and other kinds of harmful action, which generate “unskilled states that cause negative energy.” This active or volitional phase of the mental process may be called the conative phase. Thus, the mental process which begins with sense-impression involves three phases, the cognitive, affective, conative, and then occurs a physically and verbally harmful action.

We, common and ordinary beings, are not usually aware of these processes of the brain, although it is our own brain. This much we are dominated by our own self-centeredness. The entire process of our decision-making and action-taking is similar to a drunken driver driving a car, which will bring harm to oneself and others.

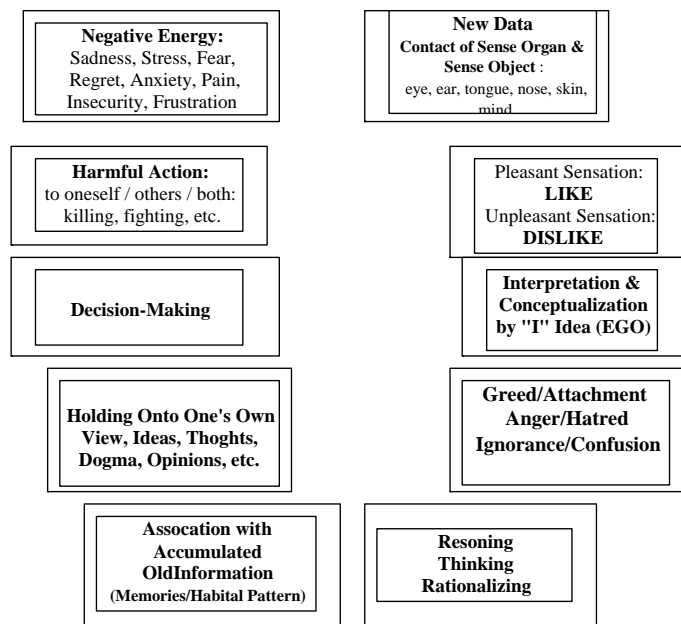
Question (3):

Can you show me what you explained by a diagram?

Answer (3):

The mechanism of the above process can be illustrated as follows:

THE MECHANIZM OF DECISOIN-MAKING



Whenever “I” feel, think, decide and act, feeling, deciding, and acting are all based upon “my personal” liking or disliking, since it is done by “my brain.” When I keep letting my brain do whatever it likes, my feeling, thinking and acting becomes very self-centered and egotistic.

But, when we learn and practice Buddha-Dharma, we will be able to become less self-centered. Thereby we can lead a more positive and happier way of living.

!
!

