

ILL WILL & MENTAL CULTIVATION

We often think of ill will (*vyaapaada*)¹ as shown towards another person, but as stated in **the (Nīvara.na Bojjha.nga) Sutta** (S 46.52), ill will can arise *internally* as self-hate towards our own selves, or *externally* towards others.²

Self-hate often arises in us as a result of *guilt*. The feeling of guilt is likely to be common if we believe in “sin” or a God-idea, or where family upbringing or religious indoctrination has been rather stern and lacking real love and communication.³ Guilt and sin are negative emotions imposed upon us by some higher authority through some kind of dogmatic belief in a supreme being.

Fear, or better, guiltless fear, on the other hand, is a natural response to what brings us pain and suffering, or what is not conducive to our personal or spiritual development.⁴ When we accidentally touch a hot stove and get burnt, we will be careful not to touch it again, but it is senseless to feel guilty about it.

But stoves have no feelings, you might retort. For, when we hurt others, we hurt their feelings. The point is that we are not really in control of other people’s feelings. We are wrong and unethical only when we purposely or foolishly hurt their feelings. Of course, we need to tell truthful and useful things at the right time, too, so that these are beneficial to others.

Guilt and self-hate can also arise where we have had strong family ties, but feel that we have failed to fulfil certain duties or obligations. Unconsciously, we carry this burden of the past around with us, affecting the quality of our lives, and of those near and those dear to us. As a result of all this, we keep blaming ourselves, even hating ourselves to the extent to feeling that we should be punished, or do not deserve to be happy. If we are such a person, we are unlikely to be able to enjoy our meditation due to self-hate.

Brahmavamso, in his *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond* relates such a case. One of the western nuns told him that she went very deep into meditation, almost to the point of dhyana. But it stopped right there because *she felt she did not deserve that happiness!* I have a few meditation students who tell me the same thing—the feeling that they do not deserve to be happy. The hindrance here is obviously ill will.⁵

Self-hate can also arise in us if we have been abused or violated, especially at a young age. We might feel that our body is impure as a result, or unworthy of love from others. In some cases, any suggestion of bodily pleasure could trigger this repressed painful memory, arousing fear and hate in us. Or, we could be violently angry at the perpetrator, and at ourselves for being helpless or doing nothing at that time. The important thing to remember here is that all this is past and

¹ This is the second of the 5 hindrances to mental concentration: see SD 32.5.

² S 46.52/5:110 = SD 62.6. See SD 32.5 (2.1).

³ On *fear*, see *Thīna,middha* = SD 32.6 (3.4.3).

⁴ Cf role of guilt in promoting sloth and torpor, see *Thīna,middha* = SD 32.6 (3.4.3).

⁵ See Brahmavamso 2006: 33-35.

gone. They are only memories, how we perceive things. We should let go of our persistent “victim” role.⁶ We begin by accepting ourselves just as we are.

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⁶ On the “victim” role, see **Self & Selves** = SD 26.9 (4.1).