

## The 6 kinds of existential struggles (3 of 3)

An excerpt from *SD 60.1f*

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### 5.4.9.5 The preta struggle

Like the animal strugglers, **the preta strugglers**, too, keep to a routine. However, while the routine of the animals are longitudinal (keeping to the same routine endlessly), the preta strugglers tend to be spiralling out of control, that is, seeking ever more sources to assuage their addiction.

There are 2 kinds of preta strugglers: the collector and the addict.

(1) **The collector** preta struggler or simply, “preta collector,” is one who is always lusting after things, usually palpable things (which can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted or touched/felt). Palpable things of which a **preta collector** can never have enough include any kind of collectibles, like property, cars, art-works, books and other valuable objects. Such a collecting habit may be because we, as collectors, can afford it, and do so for the benefit of the learning and joy of others (like setting up a museum or a library), which would be regarded as philanthropic.

Here, however, the collecting is *unwholesome* or pathological: we collect only for ourself, but would go to any length to get what we desire, even break the law (such as by stealing or cheating). This collecting habit is for personal enjoyment and a sense of power; but once the prey has been hunted and shot down, the sense of craving and dissatisfaction arises again for the “next” object to be hunted and collected.

Other objects of desire which the collector is driven to accumulate includes wealth (money and property), status and power, even sex. The collector finds thrill in the hunting and collecting; once the object is gotten, the hunt must begin again. Thus, as collectors, we are doomed hunters, doomed to hunt even when we have to kill, to steal, to rape, to lie and to cheat—to break any precept. This is the preta collector syndrome.

So long as we do not know we are struggling on account of this craving, we will be driven to collect things—because we are neither happy nor satisfied with what we *have*. We are always thinking of the past, of what we never *had* or what we *had* and was lost, and imagining the future, of what we *will have*. The present moment of *having* that desired object immediately makes it no more desirable as a trophy or collectible. We need to look for others. It is a Sisyphian struggle but we seem to be drowned in it without any sense of enjoyment nor satisfaction. Like the Sisyphus myth,<sup>1</sup> this is a metaphor for our persistent struggle against the essential absurdity of life. We keep helplessly doing something because we are deluded that we actually enjoy it!

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<sup>1</sup> Sisyphus, in a Greek myth, is caught for literally cheating Death, and the gods condemned him for eternity to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll down again once he got it to the top: SD 23.3 (1); SD 48.3 (1.2.2.2); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.1); SD 50.8 (1.2.1.7; 2.3.2.6).

(2) **The addict** is a darker version of the collector: the preta addict can desire for the very same things as a preta collector. The only difference—this is a vital difference—is that the preta collector seems to enjoy *only the moment of capture*. This is like Sisyphus pushes the boulder up the steep hill and the boulder reaches the peak, only to at once inevitably roll downhill again; and he has to run after it. One must imagine that he is enjoying it. (The significance of such an “enjoyment” is worth discussing.) Classic cases of the preta addict are the kleptomaniac and the rapist (or molester).

(2.1) **Kleptomania** is a type of impulse control disorder, affecting mostly women.<sup>2</sup> A kleptomaniac is one impulsively driven to steal, and to do so repeatedly, being unable to resist urges to steal items that we generally don't really need. Often the items stolen have little value and we could afford to buy them. Kleptomania is rare but can be a serious condition. It can cause much emotional pain to us and our loved ones—and even legal problems—if not treated.

The diagnostic criteria for kleptomania are as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- recurrent failure to resist impulses to steal objects that are not needed for personal use or for their monetary value
- increasing sense of tension immediately before committing the theft
- pleasure, gratification, or relief at the time of committing the theft
- the stealing is not committed to express anger or vengeance and is not in response to a delusion or a hallucination
- the stealing is not better accounted for by conduct disorder, a manic episode, or antisocial personality disorder.

Although there is no cure for kleptomania, treatment with medicine or skill-building therapy that focuses on dealing with urges may help to end the cycle of compulsive urge to steal.

(2.2) For **the rapist**, sex is only a means to the end, that is, a sense of power. The rape itself is not really sex but simply violence: the power over another. The rapist has low self-esteem or an inferiority complex and uses this violent act to imagine himself to be not so. Since this negative self-image is inborn, it cannot be righted with an outward act of violence; it needs an inner self-healing. Hence, the one who has raped must keep on reminding himself that he *will not* feel low or inferior, and that he needs not commit a violent act to “prove” himself.

**Molestation** is the crime of engaging in sexual acts with minors, including touching of private parts, exposure of genitalia, taking of pornographic pictures, rape, inducement of sexual acts with the molester or with other children, and variations of these acts, all for sexual gratification. The victims often suffer severe and lasting medical and psychological

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<sup>2</sup> DSM-5 2013:461-480.

<sup>3</sup> B Saluja, L G Chan & D Dhaval, “*Kleptomania a case series*,” *Singapore Medical J* 55,12 2014:e207-e209. doi 10.11622/smedj.2014188 [\[Download\]](#) 2 Aug 2023. Zi-Hao Zhang et al, “Kleptomania: recent advances in symptoms, etiology and treatment,” *Current Medical Sciences* 38,5 2018:937-940 doi <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11596-018-1966-2>.

symptoms.<sup>4</sup> The psychology of this wrong act is similar to rape, that is, a desire for a sense of power and control over the victims, a demand to be loved. This crime is mostly committed by men.<sup>5</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there were many reports of cases of sexual abuse of children by priests, nuns, and other members of religious life in the Catholic Church. Most of the abused were boys, some as young as three, with the majority between the ages of 11 and 14.<sup>6</sup>

The following factors were said to contribute to Catholic Church abuse of children:<sup>7</sup>

- moral relativism: prominent theologians proposed a relativistic perspective on morality where “there could no longer be anything that constituted an absolute good, any more than anything fundamentally evil; (there could be) only relative value judgments.”<sup>8</sup>
- clergy themselves have suggested their seminary training offered little to prepare them for celibate sexuality.<sup>9</sup>
- psychologists of the previous decades thought that child-molesting priests could be cured and returned to their work.<sup>10</sup>
- shortage of priests in N America, Europe, Australia and NZ compelled the hierarchy to keep priests despite allegations that they were unfit for duty.<sup>11</sup>
- most sex abuse victims were post-pubescent boys: the ephebophiles needed special study.<sup>12</sup>
- clerical celibacy was seen as “morally superior” (to other people) even for abusive priests.<sup>13</sup>
- child molesters fixated on children as sex object joined the clergy to gain access to children; gay people with adult sexual orientation generally do not fixate on children.<sup>14</sup>
- the Vatican introduced rules for clergy who had fathered children,<sup>15</sup> protecting those who broke the celibacy rule (after all, surely, God’s will is above human law).

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<sup>4</sup> For refs, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child\\_sexual\\_abuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_sexual_abuse). 2 Aug 2023.

<sup>5</sup> For sexual abuse in religion, see SD 64.17 (10); also SD 10.16 (4.4.3.1).

<sup>6</sup> For refs, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Church\\_sexual\\_abuse\\_cases](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_sexual_abuse_cases).

<sup>7</sup> For refs, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debate\\_on\\_the\\_causes\\_of\\_clerical\\_child\\_abuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debate_on_the_causes_of_clerical_child_abuse).

<sup>8</sup> Full text of Benedict XVI essay, “[The Church and the scandal of sexual abuse](#),” *Catholic News Agency*, 2010. 2 Aug 2023.

<sup>9</sup> C W Baars, “The role of the Church in the causation, treatment and prevention of the crisis in the priesthood,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 1972 39,1 1972 ISSN 0024-3639 [[Marquette](#)] [[Worldcat](#)].

<sup>10</sup> P Steinfels, *A People Adrift: the crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2003: 40-46.

<sup>11</sup> “Catholic priests in India ‘outsourced’ to meet clergy shortage in West.” 2004-06-11 Archived 2011-01-14 [[Wayback Machine](#)] [[VOA News](#)] [[VOA News](#)]

<sup>12</sup> P Cimboric & P Cartor, “Looking at ephebophilia through the lens of priest sexual abuse,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 13,4 2006:347-359. P Cartor, P Cimboric & J Tallon, “Differentiating pedophilia from ephebophilia in cleric offenders,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, Volume 15,4 2008:311-319.

<sup>13</sup> [Western People](#), 2 Nov 2005. Archived 2009-02-09 [Wayback Machine](#).

<sup>14</sup> “Psychiatrist thinks celibacy not major cause of abuse in Catholic institutions” [[ABCNet](#)]. “Catholic celibacy does not drive child abuse, royal commission hears” [[Guardian](#)]. “Celibacy not driving clergy abuse: expert” [[SBS News](#)]. 2 Aug 2023

<sup>15</sup> “Vatican reveals it has secret rules for priests who father children,” [[TheGuardian](#)] 19 Feb 2019. “Vatican confirms secret Catholic Church guidelines for priests who father children.” [[CBSNews](#)] 2 Aug 23

Hundreds of child sex abuse cases have also been revealed amongst Protestant Churches from around 1950-2020.<sup>16</sup>

(3) There is the macro-samsara out there, and there is the micro-samsara that we are. We have been keeping our samsaric routine since day one. We may not always show that we are actually doing a routine but our mind does the routine anyway. Our thinking patterns are just that: patterns, routine thoughts. We are conditioned karmically to act and react. With lust we pull what we like towards us that we may *have* them; with hatred we push away what we do not like so that they *aren't* any part of our life.

Then with **delusion**, we struggle with the unfamiliar: this is the absence of liking and disliking: we are not used to this. When we feel a sense of peace and break our routine even for a moment, we are often left with confusion and fear. We are just not used to our routine pause: we seem to have lost our meaning and purpose of life. We struggle to get directions in life again. This may be when we open up to the Dharma, we may then just catch a clear glimpse of it, just enough to know what we need to do. That is, if the cogs and wheels of our routine life does not kick in again so that we are back in our comfort zone, a routine in this cosmic computer, again.<sup>17</sup>

#### **5.4.9.6 The hellish struggle**

(1) The hellish struggle is the worst of struggles, the most troubling, the most violent, and the most destructive struggles of them all. This struggle's troubles, violence and destruction are within us and all around us right here and now, like the very air we breathe, like the wind that touches us. We just don't see them since we are so used to seeing the bright side of things, and we wish that everything will be all right, we pretend that everything is "nice," just the way we like it—so that we do what we like and enjoy what we have.

Traditionally, we speak of the hells as the lowest suffering states, as the place of the greatest and endless suffering where hell-beings treat each other violently, harming one another, devouring the weak and careless. We often think of hell as a *place*, but it is impossible to really imagine a place that is vast enough to hold all the suffering, violent, destructive beings in the universe all in one place.

The ancient Indians used to think that hell was under Rajagaha (the biggest city in India then). Imagine hell being right under where we live; but we have tunnels and storage caverns there. In fact, we naively thought that heaven was up and out there in space. Now we have numerous rockets going into space, and space travel has already begun. No one has seen any heaven out there either.

**Hell** is really all around us like the radio waves, cyberspace, phone transmissions and light itself. We neither see nor feel the hell-states because our good karma has shielded us

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<sup>16</sup> A Denney, "Child sex abusers in Protestant Christian Churches: an offender typology, *CrimRxiv* 2021:42-79 <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.e3e20c48>. For cases of abuses by Buddhist clerics, see **Bad friendship** (SD 64.17).

<sup>17</sup> See "Time and time again," SD 18.13.

from that space-time reality. They exist, for example, wherever there is war, social strife, religious violence and where the climate goes havoc.

Please don't get me wrong, hell is real enough: just like reading this (maybe not as enjoyable or frustrating). When we suffer the fires, fury and agony of hell, we feel the pain, we will suffer all right. We usually imagine such sufferings: what we imagine is in fact more real than what is out there! That's how karma works.

(2) We often think of **greed, hatred and delusion** as bringing about hell, by way of violence, destruction and suffering. Yet, our daily lives are filled with greed, hatred and delusion—we can see it the moment we turn on our computer and look at some social media, we see greed, hatred and delusion all around us everywhere we go in the world, especially where there is a crowd. Somehow we rarely see any violence; we are not really troubled by what we see all around: we may even enjoy them! In fact, greed, hatred and delusion are the engines of advertising and marketing!

There is another kind or level of *greed, hatred and delusion* that are clearly painful, violent, destructive and suffering. These are the greed, hatred and delusion caused by religion and politics, spread by religion and religion. When it is about power, religion and politics often go together. Notice that in all the Buddhist (Theravāda) countries of south and southeast Asia—Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand—there is very little real freedom for all.

Sri Lanka, for example, has been having problems of ethnic intolerance and violence, often instigated by the Buddhist monks! Myanmar has had a cycle of military dictatorships whenever a powerful general felt like taking over the country himself. Thailand has one of the oldest surviving monarchies, and the Bangkok-centred elite—like in the monarchies of Europe—see themselves as the heart of the nation, and all else its periphery, hence marginal. Where does Buddhist justice (*dhamma*) fit into all this; is it the karma of the poor and marginalized to suffer? Is this a socially constructed karmic system decided in the political centre? We will look into this in the spirit of the psychopathology of mindfulness and try to see the bigger picture.

In short, the hellish struggle is often manifested as interpersonal religious struggles, involving conflicts with other people and institutions about sacred issues, such as anger at organized religion. and feeling hurt, mistreated, offended or violated by others in regarding religious or spiritual issues; or that one has offended some clergy, and so on. As long as there is religion, there is hell and hellish struggle.

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