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Fr. James Wiseman: Discussion Suffering Caused by Greed and Consumerism

Zoketsu Norman Fischer, Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, Sr. Joan Kirby, RSCJ, John Daido Looi, Ven. Chuen Phangcham, Geshe Sopa, Fr. Julian von Duerbeck, OSB

from [Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002](#)

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Dialogue after James Wiseman's Presentation

Julian von Duerbeck: I was glad, James, that you mentioned that passage in John of, "Do not cling to me," because that really emphasizes that with the resurrection we have a new relationship with Christ. The old ways are no longer to be extant. One of the ways, then, to deal with grief is to have that sense of always beginning anew, always letting go.

Chuen Phangcham: Great craving or desire has different degrees of effect or result in action. In the subconscious we may not be aware of sufferings, our own or other people's. In Buddhist practice, it is only enlightened beings that can uproot very deep, unwholesome thoughts or defilements. The Buddha compared the greedy or craving mind to fire. Whoever has the thought of greed or craving always causes suffering.

Geshe Sopa: James Wiseman talked in his paper about attachment, greed, and all these problems facing the religious person. Greed is one of the three poisons, along with ignorance and attachment. We use the word "love" a lot to describe our different relations—loving oneself, one's mother, the love of one's children, sexual love, even preferences for things—"I love that." There is also the special love of God we may have. Love is, however, attachment, and with wrong perception can

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Zoketsu Norman Fischer is a Soto Zen practitioner, teacher at the San Francisco Zen Center, and founder of The Everyday Zen Foundation. He took part in both Gethsemani Encounters and was a contributor to *Benedict's Dharma*.

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change to hatred or jealousy. This is why we must attempt to uproot the causes of such emotions from the root before they are twisted and grow so strongly that they cannot easily be destroyed.

Mary Margaret Funk: We only have about half hour or so. We've had a day on suffering caused by greed and consumerism. I would like to take a moment of silence and find what's hooking our hearts on that topic. Secondly, what is the monastic response in our monastic dialogue to those hooks? If we could get as many of those hooks up in the open dialogue that would be a good conclusion of the day.

Norman Fischer: I'm still hooked from the last session. I think there is a kind of a dialectic between, spiritual practice changing your life and improving it and on the other hand, not being able to do a spiritual practice for that reason. We didn't really develop it, but when Father Leo indicated that he felt Christians could use the problems Buddhists have, I was impressed! There is a desire, almost a greed for practice. You want to practice to make a change because there is a pain inside the heart. One of the sources of pain is the consumerist society that we live in, which manifests greed that we see around us and doesn't satisfy our need. Then we have a spiritual need, and so go toward practice. I think that has to be affirmed. We need that. But the way to satisfy that need is to recognize that that which has such a need cannot hold. So the satisfaction of that need is the letting go. How do we work with that dialectic in our traditions without getting caught by all that we heard this afternoon? That's what hooks me, as a monastic and practitioner, in the whole question of greed and consumerism.

John Daido Looi: Several of the Buddhist speakers have brought up the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. The other side of the three poisons are the three virtues of wisdom, compassion, and enlightenment/realization. I want to look at just the part about greed and compassion. They are opposite points of view. In a sense, greediness for all sentient beings is what compassion is; wanting all sentient beings to be loved, fulfilled, happy, and joyful, rather than me wanting to be happy and joyful, fulfilled. There is still a kind of greediness, but it's not a self-centered greediness. It's the kind of a greediness that a mother might have for her children. She want things for her children, not for herself.



Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, was the executive director of the MID board from 1989-2004. She was prioress at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana and is the author of a number of books, including *Thoughts Matter* and *Islam Is . . .*

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Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, is professor of theology at Conception Seminary College and a member of Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri. He

Donald Grabner: When Meg asked about the hook, my hook is baited with the way in which St. Augustine looks at the tenth chapter of Genesis when we hear about the Tower of Babel. Here we have society beginning to form and degenerate, because of people's ability to use the new science and technology they have discovered and start to build a tower to the heavens. This is where God comes and says, according to the story, that God has to confuse and scatter mankind by splitting their tongues and making them unable to communicate and speak with one another. There is a way in which I see the whole issue of science and technology as a product of a social humanity that seems to have gone so badly awry. Maybe in some sense it's the source of the many difficulties we are trying to explore here.

Joan Kirby: I heard Sr. Kathy this morning say that monasteries have a prophetic message. The message that I'm so anxious to hear from the monasteries is that of the crisis of the earth. All the monasteries are founded in beautiful places in the earth, and every one of you loves your earth and your piece of it. But, as Father Dan Ward said, this is a systemic problem. Globalization is destroying the earth. It's not only increasing poverty. We are at a crisis stage. I work at the United Nations. The worst issue is nuclear power. The second worst thing we deal with is sustainable development. And it strikes me that if all the monasteries spoke out in favor of saving the earth, this would be a really prophetic message.

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