There are three roots of evil – greed, hatred and delusion. These three roots comprise the entire range of evil, whether of lesser or greater intensity, from a faint mental tendency to the coarsest manifestations in action and speech. In whatever way they appear, they are the basic causes of suffering.

These roots have their opposites – non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. These are the roots of good – unselfishness, liberality and renunciation; loving-kindness and compassion.

These six mental states are the roots from which everything harmful and beneficial sprouts. They are the roots of the Tree of Life with its sweet and bitter fruits.

Greed and hatred, maintained and fed by delusion, are the universal impelling forces of all animate life, individually and socially. Fortunately, the roots of good also reach into our world and keep the forces of evil in check, but the balance is a precarious one that needs to be preserved by constant watchfulness and effort.

On the level of inanimate nature, too, we find counterparts to greed and hatred in the forces of attraction and repulsion, kept in their purposeless reactive movement by inherent nescience which cannot provide a motive for cessation of the process.

Thus through an unfathomable past, the macrocosm of nature and the microcosm of mind have continued their contest between attraction and repulsion, greed and hatred; and unless stopped by voluntary effort and insight, they will continue for aeons to come. This cosmic conflict of opposing energies, unsolvable on its own level, is one aspect of dukkha.

On the human level, Man, who proudly believes himself be a “free agent” – the master of his life and even of nature – is in his spiritually undeveloped state actually a passive patient driven about by inner forces he does not recognize. Pulled by his greed and pushed by his hatred, in his blindness he does not see that the brakes for stopping the frantic movement is in his reach, within his own heart. The brakes are the roots of good themselves, which can be cultivated till greed, hatred and delusion are utterly destroyed.

**Greed (Lobha)**

Greed is a state of lack, need and want. It is always seeking fulfillment and lasting satisfaction, but its drive is inherently insatiable, and thus as long as it endures, it maintains the sense of lack.

**Hatred (Dosa)**

Hatred is also a state of dissatisfaction. Though objectively it arises in response to undesired people or circumstances, its true origins are subjective and internal, chiefly frustrated desire and wounded pride. Buddhist psychology extends the range of hatred beyond simple anger and enmity to include a variety of negative emotions such as disappointment, insecurity and imperfection inherent in all conditioned existence.

**Delusion (Moha)**

Delusion, taking the form of ignorance, is a state of confusion, bewilderment and helplessness. In its aspect of false views, delusion issues in dogmatism; it takes on a fanatical, even obsessive character and makes the mind rigid and encapsulated.

All three unwholesome roots lead to inner disharmony and social conflict. The root of greed gives rise to resentment, anger and hatred against those who obstruct the gratification of desire or compete in the chase to gain the desired objects – whether sensual enjoyment, power, dominance or fame. In this way greed leads to conflict and quarrels. When frustrated, instead of producing enmity and aversion, greed may bring about grief, sadness, despair, envy and jealousy – states which also come under the heading of hatred. The pain of deprivation and frustration again sharpens the keenness of desire, which then seeks an escape from pain by indulging in other kinds of enjoyment.

Both greed and hatred are always linked with delusion. They are grounded upon delusion and on their part, produce more delusion as we pursue the objects we desire or flee from those we dislike. Both love and hate blind us to the dangers besetting our pursuits; they lead us away from our true advantage. It is the delusion beneath our love and hate that really blind us, delusion that leads us astray.

The basic delusion, from which all its other forms spring, is the idea of an abiding self, the belief in an ego. For the sake of this illusory ego, men lust and hate; upon this they build their imagination and pride. This ego-belief must first be clearly comprehended as a delusive viewpoint. One must pierce through the illusion of self by cultivating right understanding through penetrative thought and meditative insight.

Though the wholesome and unwholesome roots are individual mental states, their manifestation and repercussions have the greatest social significance. Each individual in society rises up at once to protect himself, his loved ones, his property, security and freedom, from the greed, hatred and delusions of others. His own greed, hatred and ignorance may in turn arouse others to anxious concern and resentment.

From all these resulting an intricate interlocking of suffering – suffering caused to others and suffering experienced by oneself. Hence the Buddha has repeatedly said that the unwholesome roots cause harm both to one self and to others, while the wholesome roots are sources of benefits for both the individual and society.

The wholesome and unwholesome roots are of paramount human concern on all levels. As the originating causes of kamma, our life-affirming and rebirth-producing intentional actions, they are the motive powers and driving forces of our deeds, words and thoughts. They mould our character and our destiny and hence determine the nature of our rebirth.

The fact that greed, hatred and delusion, in their extreme forms, are the root causes of much misery and evil should be painfully obvious to every morally sensitive person. Such an initial understanding, open to common sense, may well grow into full comprehension. It may then become the insight that moves one to enter the path of deliverance – the eradication of greed, hatred and delusion.

The unwholesome roots fill our lives with suffering, unhappiness and unsatisfactory. They cause us to:-

1) Make unskillful decisions which affect our future

2) Have self-serving and dishonest intentions which in turn cause us to act unethically and immorally.

3) They are the roots of not only our own pain and misery, but those of our loved ones and of society’s.

4) Undermines our individual happiness, impede our relationships.

5) Cause of conflict, oppression, environmental destruction and gross inequalities.