

# Who Is Craving?

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## Understanding Craving as a Conditioned Process Rather Than the Possession of a Self

- **The Buddha's shift from "Who?" to "What causes and conditions?"**

When asked *who* craves, the Buddha redirects the question because craving does not arise from a person or an essence. It arises from causes: contact, feeling, perception, habit, and underlying tendencies.

Looking for a "craver" reinforces self-view; looking at conditions reveals a process.

- **Craving feels personal because the mind constructs a sense of "I" around experience.**

The body, emotions, and thoughts create a felt sense of ownership—*"this is happening to me."*

But that sense of "me" is an interpretation layered **after** raw experience.

Craving arises first; the story of a "self who craves" forms around it.

- **Craving is not a choice but a conditioned reaction.**

Given the conditions—pleasant feeling, memory traces, biology, stress, habit loops—craving naturally appears.

### **Craving includes both attraction and aversion.**

It is not limited to wanting more of what is pleasant. It also appears as wanting less of what is unpleasant — resistance, irritation, impatience, or the wish for experience to be other than it is.

In this sense, craving functions as dissatisfaction with the present moment: a push toward *more, less, or different*.

No agent causes it. There's no need for blame.

Noticing craving as a conditioned appearance already begins to untangle its force.

- **Personalizing craving through "me, my, and mine" strengthens the sense of ownership and reactivity.**

When craving is interpreted through the lens of "**me,**" "**my craving,**" or "**this craving is mine,**" the system contracts. As soon as craving becomes "**my craving,**" the system tightens:

"My desire." "My weakness." "My failure." "My indulgence."

That ownership-language — usually automatic and unnoticed — creates a tighter identification with the experience.

It adds judgment, pressure, and self-evaluation: a felt sense that there is someone who desires, someone who should control it, someone who is responsible for it.

This personalization magnifies friction and reactivity.

Seeing craving as a conditioned event rather than something belonging to a self opens space, softens defensiveness, and reduces the emotional load that comes from taking craving personally.

- **What we call “self” is the conditioned overlay through which experience is understood — and it is inseparable from the experience itself.**

There is no experience on one side and a self on the other.

The interpretive overlay — memory, perception, habit, conceptual framing, biological conditioning — arises **with** experience, not after it.

This overlay functions as what we call “self,” but it is not a separate entity.

Self and experience co-emerge as one continuous process.

This is why craving feels personal even though nothing in the flow of experience has the stability or independence to qualify as a fixed self.

- **Not-self is not denying experience; it is shifting how we relate to it.**

Pleasant feels pleasant; unpleasant feels unpleasant. Craving arises when the system moves from simple feeling to wanting an experience to change — holding on to the pleasant or pushing away the unpleasant.

This movement happens automatically, without a self directing it.

Not-self simply means we stop assuming there is a solid someone behind these sensations.

When we drop the extra layer of ownership, reactivity naturally softens.

- **Freedom comes from awareness and understanding, not suppression.**

We don’t fight craving.

We study how it arises, how it moves through the body, how it triggers narratives, and how it fades.

Clarity weakens the illusion of a controller.

Responsiveness becomes more possible because the mind is no longer locked inside the story.

- **The core insight: craving arises, but no one craves.**

Craving is a genuine experience arising from causes and conditions --- not from a self.

The “craver” is a constructed overlay — useful for daily functioning but not ultimately accurate.

Seeing this breaks the tight coupling between craving and identification.

It allows a more spacious, wiser engagement with experience.

## **Discussion questions**

- When craving or aversion shows up, **what makes it feel personal?**
- What changes when craving is seen as **something happening rather than something owned?**

## **Reflection prompts**

- When craving appears, **where is it first noticed** — body, emotion, image, thought?
- Before the words “*I want*” appear, **what is actually present?**
- What happens in experience **when “me” language drops**, even briefly?
- Does craving stay the same when it is observed **without blame or justification?**
- Can you notice the moment when a **story forms around the sensation?**