

Zombie Animals

October 31, 2014

Today's Halloween, the day when people start thinking about things that go bump in the night. But what you've really to be afraid of is the things that go bump in your own mind: your own thoughts, your own consciousness, your own perceptions.

Sometimes, defilements take over and it's like you're being turned into a zombie. You're not following your own free will. You're blindly following something else that doesn't have any concern about your well-being.

There was an article in the recent *National Geographic* about zombie animals; cases where a parasite takes over an animal's nervous system and has the host animal do its own bidding.

That's how it is when greed, aversion, and delusion take over your mind. They're not interested in anything at all that has to do with your own well being. They're like alien beings that want to take charge of your behavior for their own purposes.

The first thing that happens is that your sense of shame, conscience, and compunction get shut down, so you can start doing anything.

At the same time, your heedfulness also gets shut down, and you don't care. You can warn yourself many times, "Tomorrow morning, I'm not going to be happy that I did this," but another part of the mind says, "I don't care."

You've got to watch out for that.

That's one of the voices inside you, but it's one that you can't listen to. You've got to listen to the voice that says, "Look, you've got to think about the

consequences of your actions, now and on into the future, and have some concern and some care about the results that you'll be experiencing.”

When we've had to put up with so much suffering already in life, why pour on more suffering on top of ourselves?

So make sure that you've got heedfulness on the one hand, and your sense of shame and compunction on the other. These things protect you from being taken over.

That way, when thoughts come bumping into your mind, you can bump back. You can tell yourself, “Okay, I know you. We've been through this many times before; we don't need to do this again.”

And just recognizing those other voices as defilements is what deprives them a lot of their power.

It's when you start to think that *you* want to do this or *you* want to say that, even though part of you knows better: That's when they've taken over.

So learn how to question that. If you know something's unskillful, tell yourself, as Ajaan Lee used to say, that there's a consciousness in there that doesn't mean you well. Just because it's there in the mind doesn't mean that you've got to follow it. You don't have to adopt it as your own. If you find yourself already inside in a consciousness like that, you can get out.

And being mindful and being alert: These are the qualities we have to strengthen all the time, so that we can be on top of things like this.

When we can do that, we find that there's really nothing to fear.