

## *Poison Your Fantasies*

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Buried down among the many layers of voices in the mind is a voice that's always asking a question: "What to do next? What to do next?" This is because the mind is active. It can't just sit still. It keeps moving, moving, moving; planning this, planning that; trying to decide, when it realizes it has a choice, what the better choice might be. And that's the part of the mind we have to train, which is why insight is a judgment call as to what's worth doing.

There's a very naïve idea about insight that all you have to do is realize that things arise and pass away, things are made out of fabrications, and that's enough to let go of any attachment you might have to them. But that's like thinking that when there's a sexually arousing picture on your computer screen, and you know that it's pixels, then somehow knowing that it's pixels would be enough to say, "Okay, I'm not going to be aroused by it." It doesn't work that way. The mind can know that things are put together and yet still go for them because it thinks it's worth the effort. That's part of the dialogue in the mind we've got to train.

Or to make another comparison: You know that food is impermanent, your stomach is impermanent, but that's not enough to make you decide you're going to stop eating. The needs of the body, the needs of the mind, force you to keep on eating. You've got to look into what creates those needs. This is why we have to get the mind still: to see these processes in action, and to see the pattern of cause and effect that underlies them.

When you go for a particular idea, a particular way of thinking, or a particular world of thinking, you want to be able to ask yourself, "Is this really worth it?" If the mind is hungry, it'll say, "Yes, yes, yes," to almost anything. So we give it concentration as better food, something better to nourish it. Find someplace, such as the breath, where you can stay with a sense of well-being. And when the question is: "What to do next? What to do next?" the answer is always, at least for the time being: "Just stay right here. Stay right here. Stay right here."

In the beginning, this requires some adjustment. That's why in the first jhana, there's directed thought and evaluation. You're talking to yourself about how well you're staying with the object: adjusting the mind, adjusting the object so that they fit together well. You hover around both the mind and the object. When you feel that the object is good enough, you can just be with the object. Just be with the breath. It gives you something to rest with. When you can have that answer—just, "Nothing new, nothing new. Just stay right where you are"—that's restful. As

the Buddha said, there's no happiness, there's no pleasure other than stillness, other than peace. This is what he means. If the mind can stay with something for a while and doesn't feel the need or desire to keep moving on to something else, then it can be happy.

Of course, this is not perfect happiness. But it's more restful than jumping around all the time. The mind can get a sense of pleasure and well-being from being here. Then, when the temptation arises to go to something else, you have the breath as something better to fall back on. You can say, "I'm not all that hungry. I don't need something else. I've got some pleasure right here. Why should I go for something that I know has drawbacks?"

And this is where you want to look at the drawbacks.

We talked this afternoon about poisoning the fantasy. If you have a fantasy about something, you can remember that there's got to be a downside to it someplace. Look for it. This is why we have the contemplation of the parts of the body. Someone may look beautiful, but would they look beautiful if you turned them inside out? No. When you're with somebody like that, the skin is just between you and their internal organs. It's just a very thin skin. Is that where you want to be? Just a millimeter or two from the contents of the stomach? Think about the downside of that. And then you can think about the emotional downside of getting involved with somebody else, getting into a relationship with someone who has family and friends and unexpected baggage—or the downside of whatever it is that you're greedy for or lustful for or angry about. If you're enjoying your anger, learn to see the downside of the things that make you enjoy the anger.

Ajaan Lee has a great example of poisoning his fantasy. When he was a young monk, there came a period when he was thinking about disrobing. So one night he went into the hollow of the chedi there at Wat Sa Pathum in Bangkok, where he was staying. He said to himself, "Okay, what would it be like if I actually disrobed?" And in the beginning, the fantasy is way out of reality. Here he is, a son of a farmer, and he imagines himself getting married to the daughter of a nobleman. But then reality hits him. Daughters of noblemen aren't very strong. The kind of life that he would live requires a strong wife. Well, she gets sick after having a kid and dies. He then has to hire a wet nurse for the kid, and ends up marrying the wet nurse. Then she has a kid of her own and starts playing favorites. And things just keep getting worse and worse and worse.

He poisoned his fantasy with a touch of reality. By the time he was done with it, he was feeling a lot less inclined to disrobe because he realized that there was going to be a horrible downside to disrobing. He was going to be trapped. In fact,

the fantasy is so real that many people have read Ajaan Lee's autobiography and thought that he actually did disrobe and marry the woman.

The lesson here is that reality bites. The fantasy paints one side of things, but reality can come in and show a totally different side. This is why Ajaan Lee says that when you look at something, then if you're attracted to it, look for the bad side. If you find it repulsive, look for the good side. Be a person with two eyes, not just one.

What he's doing here is giving you some new lines for the dialogue in your mind about what's worth doing; what's not worth doing, so that you can change your value judgments and change the outcome of the discussion—and make a different judgment call.

Otherwise, we can see that things arise and pass away, but with some of them we say, "Well, at least when they arise and pass away, they're pleasant. And there's not that much effort that goes into having that pleasure. When it goes, it's not all that bad. So I think it's worth it." This is where the insight into fabrication makes a difference: when you can see that, yes, there actually is an awful lot of effort that goes into maintaining a little skim of pleasure over the surface of something that's a lot more turbulent. When you can see this and see that it's not worth it, that's when you can let go.

So insight isn't just seeing things arising and passing away. It's seeing things *originating* and passing away. In other words, you have to see what causes them to arise to begin with. And you have to look at it further: "Well, what causes the origination?" And then the next question is, "The extent to which I'm responsible for this, is it worth my involvement?" That's the other part of insight that's often missed: You're putting a lot of your effort into fabricating things. When the Buddha says that things are fabricated, he's not just saying that things are conditioned. He's saying that your experience of things requires effort on your part. This food that you're feeding requires that you do a lot of hunting and gathering and fixing.

Years back, we had a dish here at the monastery, a Thai palace dish called *khao chae*. It's basically iced rice porridge: palace food for the hot season. It has lots of special little fixings. And it's very much a palace dish because it requires a whole day to fix it. If you're a king and you've got lots of people hanging around the palace with nothing to do, that's something you can get them to do with their time. But the general consensus after someone here decided to fix it was that it wasn't worth all the effort.

Well, that's a lot of what goes on in life. We put more effort into things than we really realize. The resulting pleasure's very small, but then we tend to dress it

up beforehand and dress it up afterwards to make it seem worthwhile. And it's the dressing it up before and afterwards: That's where you've got to bring reality in to poison the fantasy, to remind yourself, "Well, the pleasure isn't all that much. And the effort that goes into it is a lot heavier than you might remember." That way, you're less and less inclined to want to go for it again.

That's when insight has hit. That's when insight can make its mark on the mind.

So look carefully at the dialogue that's going on in the mind about what's worth doing, what's not worth doing, what's really cool, what's neat, what's not neat, what's awesome, whatever the word your mind uses. Remember that you're not just on the receiving side of things. You're actively creating them. And the question is, why do that when you create a lot of suffering for yourself?

This means that you have to look into the role that you're playing as you create these things—and realize that you're implicated in the suffering, that this dialogue in the mind is something you've got to watch out for. That's a lot of the training. This is why we have practice not only in meditation, but also in reading about and understanding what the Buddha taught, because it gives new voices to your inner dialogue, or new perspectives.

And, as you notice, if you read the Pali Canon carefully, a large part of a wise perspective is having a sense of humor, seeing how ridiculous some of the things that there are in the mind that you take so, so seriously. Your ability to step back and see the humor in something that you've been taking very seriously: That's a lot of insight right there.

What it comes down to is that, at some point, you're going to see your stupidity. You're doing things that you knew, someplace inside, weren't worth the effort. You told yourself, "Well, this is the best I can manage. I might as well go for it," and then you forgot all the drawbacks. You just kept going, going, going back for more suffering. But now you see that it really was stupid because you've got something better.

This is the other point where a lot of naïve thinking about insight comes in, telling us, "Well, you just learn how to accept things, because there's nothing better than this." That's not what the Buddha taught at all. There's something *much* better than what you've been doing. It's through human effort that a totally unfabricated happiness, a totally free dimension, can be attained. And once that's been attained, then everything else pales by comparison.

Even the first taste of the deathless allows you to reorder all your priorities and all your ways of looking at things, because you realize that what the Buddha said was true. That kind of happiness is possible. At the moment, though, that

happiness is simply news, but at least allow it to be the dominant news in your heart. Allow that possibility to have a big role in the discussion as to what's worth doing and what's not, where the voices say, "What's next? What to do next? What to do next? Let's go in that direction." Try to get all the voices together so that ultimately they'll say, "The deathless: That's the direction we want to go."

Like those beehives, when a scout bee comes in: The scout has found a place where there are a lot of good flowers. It starts dancing to tell the hive where the flowers are. After a while, a few of the bees pick up the message and dance in tune with it, and ultimately the whole hive is dancing in unison. Then they all head off to the flowers. Well, try to get all the voices in your mind to be in unison, to dance in unison, around the idea that human effort can lead to a happiness that's totally unlimited, totally free—even free of the voice of having to ask what to do next. Because at that point, there's no need to do anything at all. That's when the mind finds real peace.