

## *The Whole Story*

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As the Buddha said, there are three roots of unskillful behavior: passion, aversion, delusion, with delusion the big one. Passion and aversion gain their power from delusion, which is not simply a matter of not knowing, but often a matter of lying to yourself, of setting up walls in the mind. Learning how to take down those walls and really tell the truth to yourself is what strips these roots of their power. For example, with passion: That chant we had just now in reflecting on the parts of the body is not a complete chant. There are lots of other parts that aren't listed. But it's enough to remind you that if you're feeling lust for the body, desire for the body, attachment to your body, attachment to someone else's body, it's because you're not telling yourself the whole story. You're focusing on a few details and turning a blind eye to what you don't want to see.

A glance, a word, this part of the body, that part of the body that you can weave into a story: The whole point of the story is to act as a disguise. It's like a cloth that we weave to cover up parts of the body. In this case, it's to cover up what lies inside, even what lies outside. If you look at it very carefully at the body, though, there's nothing really to excite lust. If you took hair of the head and put it in one pile, and the hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin in separate piles and then looked at them, would there be anything really to get attached to? Anything to turn you on? Not really. The nature of the body is such that if we didn't bathe and take care of it, after a while it would get so foul that we could hardly live with ourselves, much less get near other people. These are things we don't like to think about. And when you go inside the body, it's even worse: all those different organs and all the different fluids in the body. If you take the whole story into consideration, there's really nothing you can get excited about.

So this is one of the things we do as meditators: We look at the whole story. And that's just dealing with the physical side of the lust. There are also the stories that we tell ourselves about the activities motivated by lust. What's going to happen? We don't like to think about all the deceit that goes into a lot of relationships, the calculations, the strategies—or the fact that the other person, if you fall in love, doesn't really belong to you. As the Buddha said, it's like taking someone else's property and using it as your own for a while. The owners can take it back whenever they want.

It's like that story Ajaan Lee told himself when he was thinking of disrobing. As he said, other people, when they get ready to disrobe, get a pair of lay pants and a shirt, a little bit of money. But he wanted to prepare himself mentally, not just materially. So he went up to sit in a hollow spot in the chedi of the monastery where he was staying and thought through the story: What would it be like if he disrobed?

The beginning of the story is nice. He gets a good job. And then it starts getting super nice, to the point where it's unrealistic. He gets a woman from a social class way beyond what he could possibly attain: the daughter of a nobleman. But then it takes a realistic turn, realizing that a woman that delicately brought up wouldn't be able to work. Her parents wouldn't accept him as a son in law. In the story, she gives birth to a child and dies, so he has to hire a wet nurse. After a while, he falls in love with the wet nurse and marries her. At first she's good with the other woman's child, but then she has a child of her own and starts playing favorites. At work, he's realized that there's no more chance for advancement given his level of education. He comes home from work every day and there are three different versions of what happened and why everybody's upset. In the story, he says to himself, "Boy if only I hadn't disrobed!" And then he remembers, of course he hasn't disrobed yet. It gives him the energy to stay on.

But it was the fact that he was willing to look at all sides of the story, not just the ones he wanted to think about: That helped cut through a lot of his delusion. Ending the delusion cut through the lust, cut through the desire and all the other unskillful qualities that had developed around it.

So as soon as you find yourself being attracted to something, remember: Look at things with two eyes, not just one. Look at the whole story, in every aspect. Otherwise, you fall for the tricks that the mind likes to play on itself. It wants to believe something and it's willing to hide all kinds of things from itself in order to hold on to its belief. The same as when you want to believe that somebody's totally bad: You forget about all the good things they do, all the good things they've done, the good things they've said. You tell yourself only one side of the story. This is how all the unskillful behavior in the world gets started: We look at things only partially. We listen to one side of the story, the side we want to hear, for the sake of the lust or the anger we want to engender.

This is where the Buddha's term *asava* comes in: something that flows out of the mind. We tend to think that other people's behavior either attracts us or repels us, or the features of certain objects attract us or repel us. But they have other features as well. People have other actions as well. Largely what's happening is that the mind is out looking for something to get worked up about, looking for

something to get angry about, looking for something to lust after. It casts its gaze around and finds something that at least gives a little bit of grounding, a place for that desire to land. Then it can embroider on that, and if anything out there in reality doesn't fall in line with what it wants, it just ignores it, puts up a wall, throws a veil over it.

Many people have commented on the Buddha's list of roots of unskillful behavior, passion, aversion, delusion: Where is the fear?

Modern psychology derives a lot of unskillful behavior from fear. And it's interesting that it's not in the Buddha's list. He does list fear as a source for going off course. But that's a particular kind of fear: fear imbued with lust, fear imbued with delusion or with anger. Because the quality of fear in and of itself is not necessarily bad.

There's the fear of doing something unskillful. There's the fear of doing something that you would later be ashamed to think about having done, the fear of doing something that would have bad consequences. The Buddha actually encourages these kinds of fear. He gives them different names: Shame is one; compunction another. But they are forms of fear. And they're skillful. As the Buddha said, you want to see danger where there is danger, and realize there's no danger where there is none. Our problem is that we get these things all mixed up through our delusion.

Ultimately, there's a fear that keeps us on course: the fear that we're going to heedless, the fear that we're going to do something unskillful. That's what alerts us to the fact that we have to be very careful. We just can't go around acting on our greed, acting on our aversion, or acting on delusion without any consequences. Even though we don't tell ourselves the whole story, the whole story actually happens. We don't want to think about the consequences, but the consequences happen. So it's in our best interest to cultivate that kind of fear—not an irrational or illogical or neurotic fear, just a realistic fear. There is aging and there is illness and there is death. And they're followed by more aging, more illness, more death.

The question is, how much longer do you want to go through that process? The tears you've shed so far, as the Buddha said, are greater than the water in the oceans. The blood you've shed so far from having your head cut off, in all your various previous lifetimes, is greater than all the water in the oceans. All that suffering. All that anguish.

It comes from a simple thing: being careless, willingly lying to yourself, wanting a little entertainment, wanting a little gratification, for whatever particular desire comes up. All because you like the lust, you like the anger.

As politicians have discovered, most people like to be lied to. It's because they lie to themselves and they've gotten used to it. The only thing that can really cut through that is the skillful sense of fear: the fear of doing something unskillful, together with the desire for a true happiness.

So again, not all desire is bad. Delusion is the big problem, which is why we work on developing our mindfulness, and why we teach ourselves to look at things with both eyes. Listen with both ears. If you find yourself fixated on the good side of something, look for the bad. If you're fixated on the bad, look for the good.

This way, you can focus in on the real troublemaker: the part of the mind that wants to lust, the part of the mind that wants to be angry, that wants to get worked up about some issue. Where does that come from? That's the real troublemaker. The body itself is not a troublemaker. The world outside is not the troublemaker. The troublemakers are these desires that come flowing out of the heart, flowing out of the mind, and threaten to flood us if we're not careful.

So have a true sense of where the danger lies, and use the Buddha's reflections on the body, use his reflections on goodwill—all the reflections that show us the whole story, that force you to step back and say, "Wait a minute, what I've been looking for is not really out there, or it's out there, but it's got all these other things tied to it. And then they're not tied in a wonderful sense that I'd want to celebrate it. They're tied to all kinds of suffering. All kinds of harm. So why have I been allowing myself to be so careless? So cavalier about the whole thing?"

Those thoughts inspire you to look inside to where the real problem lies—and where the solution lies as well. Because that's part of the whole story, too. The Buddha didn't say that life is suffering. Life has four truths that he has you use as a pattern for understanding things. There is suffering and there is the cause, but there's also a path to the end of suffering and a true end to suffering that comes when you abandon the cause of suffering. Those are all truths.

And so in addition to fear as a motivator, there's also the desire to see what it's like to put an end to suffering, to test the Buddha's teachings to see if they're true. Because the fear of what's unskillful and the desire for true happiness: Those are the motivation for us to want to know what the whole story is. That way, we can avoid the dangers and find for ourselves that the Buddha's promise for true happiness is genuine. His promise is dangling there, and it'd be a shame not to give it a try.