

Two Kinds of Defilements

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As the Buddha said, there are two kinds of causes of suffering. There are the ones that go away if you simply look at them with equanimity. And there are others that won't go away unless you, as he says, exert a fabrication against them. In other words, you have to put in effort to figure them out and really actively uproot them.

Another reason why there are two causes of suffering is because there are two kinds of defilements. There are the ones that cause trouble simply because you don't admit or clearly realize that they're there. Then there are the others that are brazen. You know they're there, and part of you says, "What's the problem?" That's the part you've got to dig out: the part that wants to see things in line with the defilements.

A lot of neuroses come from things that we don't admit to ourselves. And because a lot of people come to the practice with neurotic problems, that's why so much of the emphasis in popular Dhamma is on just allowing things, admitting things, accepting things. That helps take away a lot of the sting. But if you start believing that that tactic works with everything, the second kind of defilement is going to laugh at you.

I once read a book whose author maintained that craving is not a problem if you simply admit that it's there. It was a book on the four noble truths, and I translated that part for Ajaan Suwat. His comment was, "The writer is teaching people to be stupid."

Because the defilements that are brazen: They like that. They're happy to hear that you're not going to attack them, that you're not going to try to dig down. And yet those are the ones that cause the real trouble.

There's a passage in the Canon where a prince is out walking for exercise one morning and he comes across a novice. The novice apparently had had some dealings with this prince before. The prince asked him a question, "I understand that there are monks who can overcome sensual lust. Is that really true?" And the novice says, "You know, I'd rather not talk to you, because you wouldn't understand the answer." And the prince says, "Well I might." And the novice says, "Okay, I'll give you the answer but don't argue." The prince says, "Okay." And so the novice says, "Yes, there are monks who can overcome sensual lust." The prince says, "I don't believe that," and walks off.

The novice goes and reports the incident to the Buddha, and the Buddha says, "You fool! That kind of person isn't going to understand anything about overcoming sensuality, because he's so thoroughly immersed and he's got all the defenses up."

This isn't true only of just princes back in that time. I was reading the other day someone saying, "Why is lust classed as a form of craving? Craving comes when you're dissatisfied, but lust is all about satisfaction." That's about as deluded as you can get. Still, it shows how people think when their defilements have their defenses up.

Now that kind of defilement is not going to go away just by watching it, watching it come, watching it go, and saying that it's all okay—pretending that there's no part of the

mind that's scarred by that, that's affected by that, that's damaged by that. That's the kind of defilement that you have to dig into.

Now to understand the Buddha's term, "exerting a fabrication," you have to think about the three kinds of fabrication. There's bodily fabrication, verbal and mental.

Bodily fabrication is the breath. That gives you one of your primary tools for digging around: learning how to change your breath around a particular issue. When anger comes and there's a catch in the breath, try to calm the breath down. When lust comes, when fear comes, try to keep the breath normal—so that you have a place where you can step back and look at the anger or the fear or the lust or whatever from the outside, without feeling that you have to get pulled in—or that you have to give in to these defilements before you can be rid of them. With the breath on your side, you've got another place to go.

Then you look at your verbal fabrications—in other words, the directed thought and evaluation—that go around the issue. How are you thinking about the issue? How do you frame the issue? What are the questions you ask yourself? What are the little maxims you tell yourself?

You know Thomas Mann's version of the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt. Joseph leaves a holiday celebration to go back to the empty house, and he keeps telling himself little maxims to the effect that "A good slave, a good servant doesn't abandon his duty." But the house is not really empty. Potiphar's wife is waiting there for him. But he keeps finding all sorts of little rhymes and reasons to go back—and that's how he gets into trouble.

Well, a lot of our defilements are like that. They'll give you all kinds of justification for why you're falling in line with them, but then they get you into trouble. So you have to learn how to question them.

That takes you to mental fabrication. What are the perceptions you have around this issue? The perceptions here are the mental images, the labels you apply to things. To make a comparison: Perceptions are like words; directed thought and evaluation are like sentences. What are the basic words? What are the basic images? What is your lizard brain telling you about this? Can you believe these things?

In other words, you have to dig around, using your quality of ardency.

This is why, when Ajaan Lee is discussing the establishing of mindfulness, he locates discernment in the quality of ardency. The discernment lies in your desire to get past these things, to understand them, realizing that you have to burn into them, as he says, to figure out what's going on. If you don't ask questions around these things, there's no way discernment is going to come.

You look at all the stories of the great ajaans and their discernment always comes from asking questions. Sometimes a question just poses itself in the mind and they follow it through. Other times they come across a problem and they try to figure it out.

In Ajaan Lee's case, he said, it was the question of: What kind of knowing is ignorance, and what kind of knowing is real knowledge? Apparently Ajaan Mun had posed that question for him, because he said ignorance is not just not-knowing. There's knowing there, but it's ignorant. And so that was the question that Ajaan Lee probed around and asked

and finally got his answer.

With all the different ajaans there's the question that gets posed. And they had to dig around. The answer is not immediately obvious.

This is why Ajaan Maha Boowa says, when he talks about gaining insight, that it's a matter of exploring and digging around. It's not just watching things coming and going and thinking about the unbearable lightness of being or the unbearable lightness of knowing and just being content with that. The defilements who go away when you just watch them in that way are the ones with a sense of shame. If you see them, they just wither away.

There are the other ones, though, that are shameless. And they've appropriated a part of you. This is why it requires so much digging, because you're going to be digging out a part of what you identify with: some of the values you have, a lot of the things you take for granted.

This is one of the reasons why we have to develop really strong concentration. We need the strength to dig around, we need the stillness so we can see subtle things happening in the mind—the things you can see only when you pose questions in a mind that's still.

And it's not the case that, once you pose the question, the answer immediately comes. You have to think about it and test it, dig a little bit deeper and look at things from different angles. That's what the quality of ardency is all about. That's why ardency goes together with discernment—and why it requires so many different tools and strategies. After all, the defilements are clever. If you attack them from one side, they'll support themselves from another side. So you have to be able to dig all around.

It's like a tree with lots of roots. You cut off the roots on this side, but it turns out it's got roots on the other side and those will keep the tree going.

But if you have a strong sense that these defilements really are causing trouble, even when part of you likes them, that's the part you've got to dig around in, to see why you're protecting them.

So be prepared to use lots of different tools in the practice, because there are lots of different problems. A solution that works for one problem tonight may not work for a slightly different problem tomorrow. Which is why your discernment has to be alert.

But as all the ajaans say, if you really keep at it, and use your ingenuity, you're bound to come up winning in the end.