

Dharmette: Two Stories

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So what's in my mind is to tell you two stories. I think their stories have to do with having an absence of desires. Sometimes it's hard for us to appreciate the goodness, the value, the blessing of going through parts, everyday moments in our day, the whole day, with a minimum number of desires. Chances are that for most people, they probably go through the day with more desires than they need, and it's just nicer not to have so many. Sometimes, especially if the desires come with a lot of authority, they can be really oppressive. That can kind of be stressful to have.

One of the functions of meditation is to have some qualitatively good experience of being alive where the desires have been put to rest. For those few moments they're not there, and then to experience that. That's a possibility. More than a possibility, I like to call it a potential. It seems bigger or larger. Call it a potential that we have in us, this wonderful potential to have the mind, the heart, to be at rest in some deep way.

It doesn't mean we're never going to have a desire again, but to know the goodness of just being without the desire. So these two stories may be in, if one is from the ancient Buddhist tradition, where there was a very wealthy person. You may think he was a merchant kind of person who became very wealthy, and at some point he decided to leave it all behind and become a monastic. He was as a monastic. He was off in the woods meditating, and now he was living also in a monastic community, kind of in the forest. At some point, the other monks would think about him and realize he had a life of luxury and wealth and food and all kinds of things, and they kind of assumed that he wasn't going to last as a monk.

You know, it's kind of rough to live in the woods and live on alms and have no one take care of you. One day the other monks heard this formerly wealthy person exclaim very loudly something like, Happy, happy, so happy. They looked at each other, and said, Oh, you see,

he's decided to go back to his life. He's decided that's where the denotes easy and stuff. So when he came out of his meditation, they asked him, What happened there then? Are you going back to your old life?

No, you know. When I had that old life, I had to have guards. I had to have locks. I had to constantly be concerned and worried about robbers and people wanting to take advantage of me. It was like a distressful life. Now that I don't have anything, I can just live in the open here in the woods and not have to worry about thieves and people taking advantage of me. I'm just so happy to have nothing and have this easy go life. That's one story.

The other story is of a person who's upset and may be depressed or discouraged. Or, you know, life is hard and not getting what he wants, and just a difficult life for—you can fill in whatever difficulty you like. I've been trying all kinds of things to find a way to be happy or to be something. Nothing seems to work. So he finally goes to a very wise woman and says—probably she is deep in the woods and beautiful. He explains the predicament and she said, OK, there's only one thing that's can help you. You have to go and find the happiest person in all the land and ask that person for the person's shirt so you can wear it or something, OK?

Well, that seems like a pretty easy thing to do. That's all it takes. So this person spends years asking, Who's the happiest person? and goes to find that person. That person says, No, I'm not the happiest person. You know, not that person over the next mountain. Goes to search for that person and finds that person. No, no, it's not me. Goes on for a few years, searching for the happiest person, and finally everyone's pointing to one person, one person that's far away. Everyone's pointing in that direction, and so the person—look at that's the person. I'm so lucky that everyone's consensus, This is the one. This is the one.

He goes and finds this man who is deep in the deep, far in the mountain of some place. It's just obvious. You can even kind of feel it before even getting in the person's presence. But then, especially in the presence, why, this is a really happy person. I'm so lucky. I'll finally, you know, be able to ask for the shirt. Looks—the person actually has no shirt. The person has almost no possessions. That's the lesson. What does it take to be the happiest person? Not that you have to give all your possessions away and be shirtless, but this idea of desire and needing to fulfill our desires and get our desires met so that we can be happy—it becomes a conditional desire.

It desires with conditions. I'll have to get the best shirt. I'm sure that, you know, probably the local department store has the shirt that—since I evoke the idea of shirts now, I'm sure that you can fantasize and think about just the right shirt will do it for you. Or it's the partner that's going to do it for you, or the job, or, you know, something that's going to do it for you. This

is what's going to make me happy, and that's all conditional happiness and unconditional desire—that if I get this, then I'll be happy. The problem with that is that sometimes it works, and then just be ready for the next desire.

I've been in situations where my desire was fulfilled, in case I got to do what I wanted to do, and while I was doing it, I started thinking about the next desire, the next thing to do, the next thing that's going to do it. Not really kind of settling, and enjoying what I'm doing, because there's always more, something else. So what's the happiness that's possible, that doesn't require desires, that doesn't require the fulfillment of desires? Is there such a thing, or is that just ridiculous? Is that impossible? Now, the only desire that really counts is the one that fulfills what we want, but is there a possibility of desire, of happiness that's from the lack of wanting, that comes from the mind being freed or settled or quieted from the desires that are there?

The wanting that's there, and that's one of the things that meditation can teach us, one of the things we can learn from something like meditation is—a little bit shocking for some people—is only through meditation do some people realize that their desiring is incessant. It's just simply that somehow almost every thought has some kind of desire built into it. Wanting something—it is kind of exhausting. But meditation, when you get quiet enough, really quiet to be able to see what you're thinking and have space between your thinking and not be caught in the web of thinking, we begin having a feeling, a sense of what it's like for the mind to be at ease, be contented just in itself, without the need for any desire to be fulfilled. That is, in fact, having desires interferes with that ease, with that peacefulness. So then a person understands that desires interfere, can interfere with a healthy state of mind.

To discover this wonderful well-being and happiness that can be available, that comes from the absence of desire. So I offer this little talk intentionally with a desire to challenge you, to challenge you to reflect on the role of desires in your life, to see how subtle they operate, and not to feel bad about having desires. Please don't do that. But instead, can you look kind of behind them, or under them, or something next to them? To see that there's another way of being alive—there is. There is a way of being alive that's desirelessness, that's desireless, that's without desire.

Then there's a vitality and vibrancy and a clarity and peaceful peace that can be found in that space where there is no desire—between your desires or after your desires, or before your desires, or behind the desires, something. So may you be challenged to take a second and third and look at this whole area of desires in your life. Thank you. So I have one request for you in terms of a—now we're on to the cleaning period, fifteen minutes. One thing I'd like

to ask is when I walked down here today, there was a different kind of litter on the sidewalks and a little bit on our property, the gravel, and sometimes a bit in the gutter too. It's nice if we can keep this, our little domain of the world, litter free.

Would someone like to be the litter gatherer? Fiona. Thank you. Fiona will do it. Thank you. And then Nina has the—let's see. So we'll see. So we have four people to do the bathrooms. One, two, three, four. Great. If you haven't done the bathroom before, Bonni here knows how to do it. Can we have four people to go outside? One, two, three, four.