

it's the strongest desire we have, the most difficult to control and therefore capable of creating lots of suffering.

I live in a village where there are a lot of cats. Every year in February and March, in their breeding season, I can see male cats walking around that are dirty, skinny, bleeding from their wounds, stressed and looking miserable. Maybe they have some short moments of pleasure, but most of the time they have to chase, run, fight and struggle. When the breeding season is over, they return to normal life, in which they have time for eating, washing and grooming themselves, and playing. And they look definitely much happier. Only the cats who have been castrated show no interest in the breeding rituals and avoid all of its pain and stress. They don't seem to be sorry that they are missing something important, and they live approximately twice as long.

I don't think human beings are much different from cats, except our breeding season lasts all year long. Does this mean that if we all get ourselves castrated then this world would become a happier place? I don't know, and I hope we will not need to find out. Desire for sex is part of our lives. It is present in our culture, in social life, even on spiritual paths.

One of my favorite writers, Terry Pratchett, used to make a lot of fun of spirituality, and Zen in particular. He once wrote something I'll try and recap from memory: *What would be the point of being a hermit who, after years of meditating and renouncing sex had attained great spiritual powers, if there were no young women passing by the meditation cave from time to time, who would see you and say "Ooooh . . ."*?

Because we are human, there always exists the potential for sexual attraction between us. I even heard people say that the monks and nuns who vowed to live in celibacy are actually very sexy. Naturally, that's not what they intend, but it's present. So what can you do about it?

Speaking of celibacy, I'm not a monk and never wanted

to be one, so I don't know how it works in their lives, and what they do about sexual desire. Maybe one of them will write something about it here one day. But some believe that celibacy is essential for making progress on a spiritual path. Still, what is the relationship between celibacy, sexual desire and spiritual practice?

I believe it's good for each of us to decide what we want to do with our desire for sex and how we are going to control it. Each of us has to face this decision, whether we want to or not. Some pretend they don't have that ability or that there is nothing to decide. Some of us embrace this as a decision, not only to make spiritual progress, but also to live a happy life. Monastic vows are one such way to make a decision. Another is marriage, and it works for me. But even within these two choices, we still have to decide how to relate to our sexuality. There are also other ways that may work for other people. The key point, in my opinion, is to be clear about it and honest with ourselves and with others: "Am I potentially available for sex, or not?" And that's not easy, because when playing with our desire for sex, and others' desires too, this "maybe, who knows?" approach seems much more attractive. Thus, it is more seductive to pretend we aren't making a choice and don't bear responsibility.

So, keeping monastic vows, marriage vows or any other kind of vow is not enough. Moment to moment, mindfulness is necessary, not only with keeping celibacy or being true to your wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend/whatever, but with all your speech and actions, because our sexuality is always present. Fighting it makes no sense to me, because if we do, it will fight back and finally can take control of us. Keeping this spiteful snake far away is not a good idea to me, either. You may forget it's there and one day you may step on it. I'd rather see it for what it is and act with understanding, clarity and compassion toward ourselves and others.

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## Desire for Fame: Unsurpassed Humility

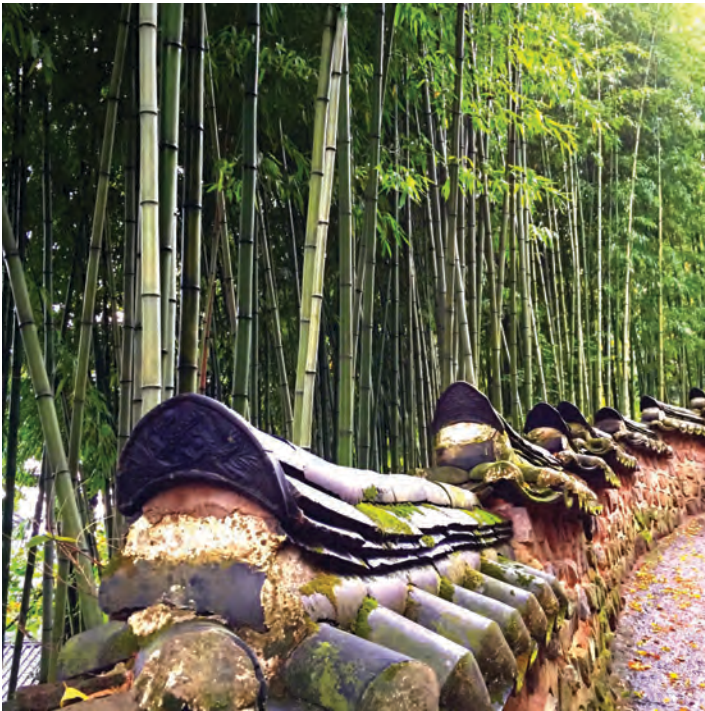
Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN




What is wrong with fame? Nothing at all! Like everything in the universe, it is not good, not bad. A strong voice makes a strong echo. That's all. In the case where our actions are beneficent, it can be natural feedback from the world that we have done some-

thing valuable, that our contribution to society is appreciated, that people see us as somebody who can enrich

human culture in some specific way. As long as our intention to help this world in the best way we can is pure and sincere, fame is only a by-product of our activity. But the problem is that our "I, my, me" mind wants to make that its business. That's the birth of ignorance and distortion. This kind of mind produces constant desire, which poisons our original clarity and makes us blind. Because this "I, my, me" is by nature something unreal and empty, it needs constant approval as food to exist, even at the cost of other beings. It is like a hungry ghost that never




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has enough. In fact, desire for fame usually means, “I am, and I want to be better than others.” Or, “I want to be great and admired.” This kind of attitude is easily ascribed to people who have high social position: artists, actors, athletes, politicians, celebrities and the like. But it doesn’t only refer to those kinds of people. Desire for fame often becomes a companion of every human being. It can be secretly hidden even in our spiritual path. Let me share with you a funny and ridiculous story.

Somewhere there was a monastery inhabited by many monks and guided by a highly respected abbot. He was really special: the pure embodiment of wisdom, compassion, humility and all noble virtues. At least it looked like this. He was the first one to help others, the last one to expect any profits, always ready to shoulder the hardest task and silently serve his fellows. Although he didn’t look like a sinner, he always liked doing repentance practices, apologizing often to everybody for everything. All monks loved and admired him and were happy to have such a teacher. In fact, he became famous not only in his monastery, but in the whole country. They thought he was a saint: a holy, fully enlightened man. The energy of inspiration radiated from him like the light from the sun.

But one day something strange happened. During the sermon, while preaching about the holy life, he said, “Please look at me! As far as humility is concerned, nobody can surpass me.”

And what happened? Kind of an earthquake, yes? In one moment, everything was turned upside down! They felt cheated, like buying a nice box of food and discovering that it is completely rotten. Even one drop of poison can make a whole pot of nutritious soup inedible.

Our practice and teaching always puts the essential question in front of us: “Why do you eat every day?” “When you do something, why do you do this?” “What kind of intention is your activity rooted in?” The problem of “I, my, me” mind is that it looks for happiness but finds only temporary satisfaction. It is unstable, weak and easy to destroy by external, impermanent circumstances. Fame easily becomes infamy. Success easily becomes defeat. Attachment to and constant desire for them make our minds crazy, never satisfied and always hurting others. That’s why Buddhism instructs us to meditate correctly and get insight into this old “I, my, me” habit. It is originally empty and doesn’t exist outside the deluded mind. When we realize its emptiness and delusion, desire for fame—and all other desires as well—loses its power and control over our lives. Dissatisfaction turns into complete mind. Our true self doesn’t need any acclaim or applause. It is always here and now, present and ready to help and love others. Then all beings reflect and return our love, and we are already bodhisattva celebrities without even knowing or being concerned about it. That’s correct fame!

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## The Wheel of Food: Together Eat, Together Die

*Namhee Chon JDPSN*



Not long ago, I asked one young resident woman at the Zen Center Berlin, Sophie Vandenkercove, to give an introductory dharma talk. Since we both share a passion for making kefir, I suggested she talk about the fermentation process. She happily agreed and gave a beautiful speech about bodhisattva bacteria:

Since my wish to keep a pet at the Zen center could not be met, I am happy now to own kefir grains to raise. A kefir grain is a mixture of yeast and bacteria. It is white in color and has the shape of a mini-walnut. It needs to be fed with milk and must be kept in a warm place to feel well and to grow. So I take care of them. While they are growing, a process of fermentation takes place. At the same time, something

good happens to me: I get this delicious and nutritious kefir drink! These kefir grains most probably don’t think, “We want to keep clear mind and help other beings.” They are just naturally helpful, while they are doing what they do. And they do it without wanting to be someone or something else. Through them I realize the meaning of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching: “If you are clear, you help the whole universe.” And thanks to them, I hear Zen Master Seung Sahn asking me strongly the question: “Why do you eat every day?”

Kefir grains are complete as they are and in what they do. We are the same, so long as we do not make anything special. So at this point everything is just simple and clear: If you are hungry, what do you do? Eat. If someone is hungry, then what? Give food to this person. Thus, eating food is dharma, and giving someone food is dharma.

So why is food considered one of the obstacles that