

PERSPECTIVE: Sometimes the Worst Lies Are the Ones We Tell Ourselves
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Lies erode sanity and distort common sense. Lies are the door to misfortune. They inflict a kind of violence.

— SGI President Ikeda

I was preparing for a study meeting when this passage from *Learning From the Gosho* grabbed hold of me and wouldn't let go. These three sentences kept playing over and over in my head, like a song I just couldn't get rid of.

After a few days, a light bulb came on. I was walking to the bus stop when I got it.

I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and stood with my mouth open. It was one of those inconspicuous benefits that change the way you practice this Buddhism from that moment on.

Lies erode sanity and distort common sense....

The worst kind of lies are those I tell myself, the ones no one else knows about. These are based on delusional thinking and are the kind of rationalizations I used as a child to make sense of a world in which I had no control. They guard my deepest, darkest fears.

Here's an example: All my life I've avoided conflict with the people closest to me because of a vague, paralyzing anxiety. Even my relationships with men only developed to a certain point, then fizzled, because I didn't have the courage to speak up, to confront whatever issues I had. I was afraid we would fight, so I kept silent until whatever bond we shared simply withered and died.

And that October morning, walking to the bus stop, I realized it was not the conflict but the drama surrounding it that made me afraid.

One of my clearest childhood memories is of my parents fighting, verbally and physically, and the police escorting my father out of my life. My young mind thus convinced itself that if I confronted someone close to me about some issue I had with him or her, then that someone would leave me. And the pain of abandonment would be more than I could stand.

As I grew up, we became one, me and that lie. And there are others.

Lies are the door to misfortune....

Some lies came from the things my parents told me — half-truths or little white lies that seemed so innocent back then. Those lies helped me make the right decisions, told me who my friends were, whom I should trust, what I should do. And they worked. For a while they helped me survive, to find my center in a crooked world.

But then I left home and saw things that didn't jibe with the script. What to do? Ignore what I saw and stick to the script, or change what I believed?

Unfortunately, most of the time I chose to ignore what I saw. I developed the script with the people I love: my parents, my family, my friends. To go against the script would have put me at odds with those people. And that would have been too uncomfortable to live with.

Nor would it have been easy. I would have had to change my belief system, my thoughts and the language I used inside my head. I would have had to correct the lies I told myself and change my actions. I would no longer have been able to go against my feelings.

They inflict a kind of violence....

As I stood in the middle of the sidewalk that morning, I saw clearly how the old script was, in fact, making me miserable. The defenses I learned so many years ago had become a

straight-jacket, made of lead, pulling me down, wearing me out.

The thought of letting go of these lies was scary, but the alternative was to continue to disrespect my life. I had to change all those negative messages I was telling myself if I were going to become truly happy. And that day, in the middle of the sidewalk, I decided to let go.

It has been so rewarding, because I can finally hear my voice — the same voice that told me right from wrong, the voice of the child that I silenced because it didn't agree with everyone else.

This voice knew the truth, even then. It was not afraid of not being liked. It was not afraid of being hit or hurt or violated.

And it no longer has to shut up and be quiet. Now, that voice can laugh out loud, shout when it feels like it, sing new tunes and speak foreign tongues. This voice I know to be me.

Lies erode sanity

This small voice has been talking to me all along, but I couldn't hear it until all the shouting and screaming and crying died down. All the drama, the noise that I used to keep me from hearing my thoughts, to keep the "peace," to not rock the boat, to just make it through the day.

This voice, my voice, was here all along, waiting for me to pay attention. And now I'm listening — no more brass, no more tears, no more drama. I'm recreating my truth with my prayers and watching my life unfold like the lotus flower. The door to misfortune has become the portal to my inner wisdom. And I'm not afraid anymore. Instead, I am quiet, trusting, listening. To me.

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