

## *Bring the Right Attitude*

*November 8, 2006*

It's often useful to start each meditation with thoughts of goodwill. We carry so many random thoughts around in our mind that before you do the actual work of the meditation, you want to clear away some of the underbrush. In other words, clear a space for yourself where you can really do the work without a lot of interruptions. As you're sitting here, there won't be too many interruptions from outside, but a lot of things can come up from within: thoughts about what this person did to you, what that person did to you, things that have been going well in your life, things that have not been going well in your life. The negative things can have more staying power and really tend to get in the way. So you really want to clear those things away. A good way to do that is with thoughts of goodwill, to have goodwill for yourself and goodwill for the people around you.

This is one of the reasons why we have the chants every evening—not just the chants on goodwill, but also all the other chants that we recite—to get the mind in the right mood to meditate. The chanting gives you a chance to step back from your normal issues, your concerns of daily life, and to remind yourself of your larger values: the desire to find true happiness, the desire not to let your life get eaten up by lots of little tiny concerns that ultimately don't mean much of anything, don't amount to much of anything, and even if for just a little while, to work on developing skillful qualities in the mind.

Ajaan Fuang, when you would first come to meditate with him, would have you pay homage to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha as examples of the values you want to have in your life. Then he'd have you focus on the breath. But in some cases, he'd have people spread thoughts of goodwill, to realize that the search for happiness within is one area in life where your happiness doesn't have to conflict with anyone else's. So it's really a good happiness, not a narrow happiness. The happiness of the world is such that you gain some little thing, but there are other people who want that same little thing. So it's either your thing or their thing. It can't be both. The battle goes back and forth.

As a monk, I don't get to see many movies anymore, but occasionally when I'm sitting on an airplane, I can't help but see the video screens. I'm struck by the number of romantic comedies they show on planes, and how a typical ending is that the hero finally gets the woman he wants, the woman finally gets the man she wants, they kiss, and all the people around them applaud. Their happiness makes everybody else happy. That's actually very rare in the world. Often when you gain

happiness, that means that somebody else is missing out, has been deprived. So it may make a nice ending in a movie, but it doesn't have much to do with real life.

A true happiness is something that comes from within. And this is a broad happiness, a happiness without any boundaries—if you really work at it. Your happiness doesn't take anything away from anyone else's happiness, and because you're working on being generous, trying to be virtuous, trying to gain some control over the impulses in your mind, other people are going to benefit from it. That's adding to their happiness as well. So as you practice the Dhamma, you're finding a way where your happiness dovetails with the happiness of other people.

A common image is of a light in a candle. You light your candle and then you can use that candle to help other people light their candles, and yet the flame in your candle is not diminished. The light gets spread around and is brighter for everyone. So keep that image in mind as you meditate. You're lighting a candle that gives light to yourself and to the people around you.

Then you get to work. Focus on the breath, allow the breath be comfortable, and keep remembering word, "allow." You can't make the breath comfortable, but you can create conditions that let it become comfortable. Try to find the right amount of focus. You can focus on any part of the body where you have a sensation of the in-breath and a sensation of the out-breath. Think of the breath as something that's supremely nourishing for that particular part of the body and nourishing for the mind as well. You're drinking in the nourishment that comes from the fact that you're breathing. If you weren't breathing, you'd die.

So this is the force of life. Allow the force of life to come in as easily and smoothly as possibly. Don't have think yourself as straining or pushing or pulling to bring the breath in or to let it go out. If you allow it, it'll just come in, go out, on its own. All you have to do is hover around it, to make sure that it stays comfortable and that nothing else comes in to destroy it. Ajaan Fuang would use the word, *prakhawng*. It's the word you use when you're holding something lightly to make sure that it doesn't tip over, it doesn't fall. Like a child learning to walk: You hover around the child, allowing the child to walk in a safe space, so that if it trips, you're there to catch it. But you're not going to yank the child around. You let the child make the attempt to walk.

The common image in the texts is of holding a baby chick in your hand. If you hold it too tight, it dies. If you hold it too loosely, it's going to fly away. So find just the right amount of pressure to keep it in your hand, but not so much that it harms the bird.

This is very sensitive, delicate work that we're doing here. So try to bring as much attention as possible to it, as much calm attention, and you'll find that the

calmness of your attitude starts a feedback loop as the breath calms down. As the breath calms down, the mind can calm down. Stick with that sense of being nourished by the breath. This is what keeps the concentration work from getting too tight, too unpleasant, too confining. When there's a sense of ease in the breath, think of that sense of ease spreading throughout the body. Survey the body to see if there are any areas where the comfortable breath energy doesn't seem to reach. There's usually going to a tension or tightness in some part of the body that's preventing the breath from getting to some other part of the body. So sometimes there may be at a lack of energy in one part of the body, but you've got to survey other areas to see where that tension or tightness originates. It's not always in the same place.

You're like a dog lying down asleep. The dog will circle around a couple times. If there are any roots or stones or anything in the spot where it plans to lie down, it'll scratch them away. Then it'll lie down. If it finds it didn't get everything, it gets up again, circles around again, scratches this, scratches that, then lies down again.

In the same way, for a while you'll find yourself circling around the body to find the parts of the body that need some work. Then you try to settle down, find one spot that feels especially nourishing, and just let your awareness be nourished right there. But if you find that there are other areas that are not comfortable, get up and circle around a little bit. Keep this up for a while until you find you can really stay with that one spot, not because you're forcing the mind, but because you're tapping into something that's really nourishing: a sense of fullness, a sense of ease. While you stay at that one spot, you can think of it spreading, but you don't have to follow it out to make sure that it's spreading everywhere. It just feels really good being right here. That's the attitude, that's the quality you want to develop.

Ajaan Lee says there are three basic things you work on, three qualities you develop. There's the quality of your intention, the quality of the object, and then the sense of ease and well-being that come from finding the object and adjusting your focus so that it's just right. In other words, you stick with the intention to stay with the breath no matter what. No matter how many times you trip and fall, you get up, keep going. No matter how many other compelling thoughts come into your mind, you just let them pass. You're going to stay with this one object. This is called having the right intention.

Then there's the right object. Adjust the breath so that the mind can stay with it easily. You don't want it to be so light that you can't keep track of it, and you don't want it to be so heavy that it feels burdensome. Try to find just the right

rhythm. Then, when there's that sense of calm and ease and fullness, allow that to spread, so that your heart feels full, the lungs feel full, the whole body feels full, all the nerves in your body feel full. You're not starving. You're not lacking in anything. That's the quality you're trying to work on in the meditation.

So we're creating a skillful feedback loop. Bring the right attitude to the meditation, and that helps engender the right physical sensations. Then you let those comfortable physical sensations nourish the mind so that you can maintain the right attitude. They strengthen each other this way, to the point where it seems that the boundary between the body and the mind begins to dissolve. There's just a sense of fullness, and it's hard to say whether it's physical or mental, because it's both.

So work on developing and maintaining the right intention, the right object, and the right quality. Then the deep sense of nourishment you want from the meditation will have space to grow.