

Timeless & True

Ajaan Fuang Jotiko

Note: This is translated from a talk given in July, 1978, to a group of monks and nuns, most of whom were relatively new to meditation. Because his listeners were already familiar with the basic techniques of concentration practice as explained in “Method 2” in Ajaan Lee’s book, Keeping the Breath in Mind, Ajaan Fuang here focuses less on technique than on the proper attitude and understanding to bring to the practice. The style of the talk is fairly repetitive and so works best when it is read aloud.

Our teachers have laid the basis for our practice, setting out everything, with nothing lacking. The fact that the developments we experience in the practice aren’t complete comes from a lack within ourselves, in our own practice. We haven’t practiced enough to cut things away. We haven’t given the practice our full effort. So let’s take the opportunity today to make an effort, i.e., to fix our mindfulness—each and every one of us—securely on the in-and-out breath. There’s nothing much to it. Each of us has a breath. It’s a meditation theme we already have within ourselves. We don’t have to go looking for it anywhere else. And there’s no need to doubt as to whether or not it’s true. So let’s come and look within ourselves, observe, investigate, ponder what’s within ourselves. The Buddha knew for himself what was true within himself; and we follow him by practicing in line with his teachings so as to see whether what’s within ourselves is true or false. So try to be as observant as possible within yourself.

This practice is said to be *akāliko*—timeless. The Buddha’s teachings are timeless. The fact that there are no developments in our practice is because we have times. The Buddha says, “timeless.” We say there are times. Our times are more than many. Time for this, time for that, times for walking, times for sitting, times for sleeping, times for eating, times for talking—there are lots of them. Our life turns into nothing but times. So now let’s try practicing in a way that it becomes timeless. The truth will then appear in our minds—each and every one of us. Everything that’s ready to develop is already there. We don’t have to get it from anywhere else. Awareness itself—the “knowing” in the mind—is already there within us. So use

your mindfulness to keep the breath in mind so that what's already there will appear clearly, continually—and developments in the mind will appear as well.

We've got to be observant as much as possible. Use your mindfulness to keep the breath in mind—the breath that's already there within you, that's been there from the day you were born up to the present. The effort lies in taking what's already there and keeping it continuous, without break, so that it grows, so that it's steady and constant. It'll then gain momentum. There will be strength in the breath. Developments will appear. Our in-and-out breath will become timeless. It will appear continuously to our awareness. This is something we have to pursue as much as possible, do as much as possible. The more we do it, the more all sorts of good things will appear within us. If we don't work at it, our goodness won't develop. It'll turn into times. The opportunity to know the truth won't appear clearly within us. The truth will stay incomplete. So we have to use the power of our mindfulness to keep the breath in mind in a way that becomes more and more complete. Then developments will appear within us.

The Dhamma—our meditation theme—is something we all have within us—each and every one of us. It's something we're doing as we sit here. We're practicing it, training in it. The question is how we take what's already here and make it more complete. We have to make an effort to use our powers of observation to acquaint ourselves with what's already there. Our teachers simply tell us, point out the way. As for us, we have to train ourselves to use our powers of observation within ourselves: to know in line with the truth within us. Once we see that it's true, we look after it so that it develops—we keep looking after it as much as possible, and there's no two ways about it: it'll simply have to progress.

There aren't a lot of complicated steps to all this. We simply look after what's already there so that it can become more full and complete. It'll grow day by day, month by month, year by year. The developments in our minds will get better and better. It's not the case that things appear only for a moment and that's plenty enough. That's not the case at all. Whatever appears here and now, while we're sitting here, we have to keep looking after it continually, all day, all night, all month, all year long. We have to keep after it continuously, without stop. If we keep looking after it, the developments in our minds will keep developing further along.

If things happen just once, that's not enough. It's the same as when we eat. One mouthful of food isn't enough. We have to keep eating and eating until we're full. The same holds true in the effort to develop good qualities, noble qualities, within ourselves. Whether we build them through our thoughts, our words, or our deeds, it all comes down to the one heart. We have to train our heart to gain a sense of respite and peace. We have to train it to grow better and better, for all good things arise from the heart. This is why we train it to be mindful, to stay with the in-breath, the out-breath. We train it in its meditation theme so that it will have roots, a foundation—so that it will be steady and solid and won't go straying off after its

thoughts and concepts. We get it to gather together solely at the in-and-out breath so as to give it respite from its Hindrances, so that the Hindrances won't be able to come in and interfere with its goodness. That way we'll be able to develop more goodness, to get the mind firmly established in concentration.

This is something each person has to do for him or herself—each and every one of us. It's our very own personal duty. Whatever techniques actually solve the problems of our hearts so that they can experience peace, whatever methods work in getting the mind to stay with the body in the present—whatever the methods—the important thing is that the mind stays firmly in its goodness all day, all night, whether we're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. After all, we don't get much of a chance to do good, you know. It's not the case that we'll get to do this forever. There are always obstacles ready to get in the way. So while you've got the chance—right now and on into the future, as long as you've got the opportunity—you should try to *accelerate your efforts*. Keep at it. Keep at it as much as you can until the mind gains full strength, so that it can prevent all its lower qualities, its unskillful qualities, from getting in the way, from interfering with it, so that you'll have the opportunity to develop your goodness in full.

The goodness that arises from our thoughts, words, and deeds is something we all have. It's not the case that anyone without any goodness is sitting here. The question is how we take this goodness and *make it even better*—making it better, here, means meditation, the goodness accomplished in the area of the mind. For this, we have to make an effort to train the mind to be more solid and steady. We have to make an effort, persevere, be resilient, put the mind through its paces—for who else can train the mind for us? We ourselves are the only ones who can train our own minds. We have to draw the line to teach ourselves. Only then will things be able to develop.

Other people can teach you only the outer skin, the rind, but as for what lies deeper inside, only you can lay down the law for yourself. You have to draw the line, being mindful, keeping track of what you do at all times. It's like having a teacher following you around, in public and in private, keeping watch over you, alerting you, telling what to do and what not to do, making sure that you stay in line. If you don't have this sort of teacher inside you, the mind is bound to stray off the path and get into mischief, shoplifting all over town. That's the way it is with the mind. So we have to draw the line to keep it in place. We can make it stay in place from morning to noon, or from noon to late afternoon—whatever the boundaries we set for it, we have to make it stay in line, to make it stay in school. Like a child in a schoolroom: we give it directions and set a goal for its work so that the results will be substantial and solid.

We have to keep training the mind in line with the path of our practice, and as a result it'll get gradually more familiar with the work, bit by bit. It'll keep getting more tractable, more tame, so that it wanders off only occasionally, only once in a

long, long while. It'll rarely get lost. If we strap it down too tightly, it may struggle to get away. So we may have to put it on a long leash. But whether you keep it on a slack leash or a tight leash all depends on which technique you find works for you. The strategies needed for training the mind aren't the same for everyone. Some people really have to force the mind, come down hard on it, go without water and food. But it all comes down to whatever works in keeping the mind within its proper bounds.

To summarize, our practice is to keep the breath in mind. This is the path our teacher, Ajaan Lee, set out for us while he was still alive. We practice staying with the in-and-out breath. We focus on keeping track of the in-and-out breath. We watch, follow, know the in-and-out breath. Stay with the breath. Don't wander off. Observe the in-and-out breath so that it's clear, so that it's complete. If we can maintain this, continue keeping this in mind, there's no problem—for the breath is always there. It's already coming in, going out, all day, all night. Whether or not we watch it, whether or not we focus on it, it's always there by its very nature. All we have to do is maintain what's already there, look after what's already there.

Actually, it sounds pretty easy: it's not the sort of thing you have to go borrow from anyone else anywhere else at all. It's already there, already happening. All you have to do is look after it, or keep it in mind. And you don't have to invest a lot of capital. Just keep the breath in mind, gently support and protect what's already developing there so that it becomes more complete. If you do just this, you'll experience a sense of ease. Bodily pleasure. Mental pleasure. The mind will experience peace.

So straighten out your views. Make them right. If your views are right, the mind will immediately experience a sense of ease. If your views are wrong, everything else will immediately be wrong—for the things we're talking about are already there, already happening. So keep your views straight in line with the breath. You won't have to exert a lot of energy. You'll experience a sense of ease. Your mind will immediately feel peace.

Now, how do you use your powers of observation to get acquainted with the breath? Ask yourself: Do you know the breath yet, or not? Is the breath truly there, or not? If you can't see whether the breath is true, look further in until it's clearly there. There's no trick, no mystery to it. It's always true, right there. The important thing is whether or not *you're* true.

Are you?

Yes.

Then that's all there is to it—this little, tiny point. There aren't a lot of complications. Once that awareness is true, you simply maintain it, maintain that truth, your truth, continually. Keep it constantly in mind, and the developments in the mind will be able to continue developing. They'll gradually grow stronger, and the mind will grow calm. Just be clear about what you're doing. Don't have any

doubts. If you can doubt even your own breath, then there are no two ways about it: You'll doubt everything. No matter what happens, you'll be uncertain about it. So being true in this way is what will solve the problem of *vicikicchā*, the Hindrance of uncertainty.

So reflect, ponder, investigate what's going on inside yourself, as you're sitting here practicing, to see why the mind isn't experiencing any peace, why there's no sense of physical or mental pleasure. Why is it? Why is the mind still restless and distracted? Set your mind on what you're doing. Don't let yourself have any doubts. Be straightforward and true in whatever you do, *for everything comes down to whether or not you're true.*

So you have to keep using your powers of observation as much as possible. You have to get acquainted with your own breath—coming in, going out—and make it clear. Once you're clearly acquainted with it, then maintain it, keep looking after the way it develops, keep it in mind at all times.

There's just this one little point in our practice. All I ask is that you recognize it, that you're aware of it, for this awareness is already the basis of cognitive skill. The trick is to make it more and more aware, more and more developed. To be aware just once isn't enough. You have to keep becoming more and more aware, more and more aware, until it's totally full—your awareness is totally full, with no lapses, no gaps. It stays steady and continuous at all times. That's when it's called *knowing in full measure.*