What Are You Bringing

April 4, 2007

It’s the night of April 4th here in America, on the morning of April 5th over in Thailand. It was on April 5th, five years ago, that John Sawatt passed away. So tonight I’d like to talk about a few of the lessons he would often give for meditation. That’s how he lives on in his teaching. And, of course, we make the teaching live on in ourselves if we put it to practice. The first lesson is almost always to put your mind in the mood to meditate. Bring an attitude of respect, an attitude of conviction, an attitude of confidence. That makes all the difference in the meditation. If you’re simply here thinking, “What am I going to get out of this?” your attitude towards the meditation is more like an exchange or monetary trade. You’re not going to put anything into it until you’re convinced you’re going to get something out of it. Well, if you don’t put anything into it, you’re waiting for the results before you’re willing to commit yourself. You never get the results. And the attitude you bring is going to shape how you do it. If you’re here to squeeze as much concentration out of it or force as much concentration out of the mind as you can, that attitude starts affecting the way you breathe, and then the way you breathe gets uncomfortable and it’s difficult to settle down. So ask yourself, “What are you bringing to the meditation?” It’s always good to stop and take stock. Try to bring the right attitude. We’re here doing something that’s going to require a lot of delicacy. It’s going to require a lot of steadiness. So think about things that put the mind in the right mood to settle down and be still, to be content. Gratitude is a good thing to think about. You think about the decisions you’ve made in your life on your own steam, how easy it is to make mistakes. We’re sitting right here now with the results of our efforts at finding happiness. That’s a sobering thought. Because we live in time, many times it’s hard to foresee what the results of our actions are going to be. And we live with minds that are affected by greed, anger, and delusion. So they color our perception of what’s going to work and what’s not going to work. It’s good that there’s someone who went to all the effort to find a way of training the mind so we’re not colored by those things. And then there’s someone who taught that method for forty-five years without really needing anything in return. It’s good to have an attitude of respect as you come to the meditation, an attitude of gratitude. People have gone to the effort to put this teaching into practice all these thousands of years and have passed it on, both through word and example. And they didn’t charge for it. It’s a free gift. So the teaching is offered to you in genuine generosity. It’s good that you offer some generosity in return. Again, it’s a question of what you’re bringing. It’s good to reflect on how the Buddha would start his teachings. Generosity was often one of the first things he’d mention. If not generosity, then gratitude. The two of them go together. What you bring to any experience is going to make all the difference in the world. If you come with an attitude of giving, you’re going to give what you bring. You’re going to give what energy is needed. You’re going to give what effort is needed, without holding anything back. You find the meditation goes a lot better. You yourself feel better about yourself as you meditate. That creates a kind of warmth to the practice that puts everything in the right perspective. This lesson of what you bring to any experience applies all across the board. You look at the teachings on Dependent Co-Arising without having to get entangled in all the difficulties. One of the important things to notice at the very beginning is how many of the teachings and how many of the factors come prior to sensory contact. It’s not like everything begins with sensory contact. There’s a lot that you bring to sensory contact. It makes all the difference between whether you’re going to suffer or not. So what are you bringing? Try to bring an attitude of generosity, an attitude of gratitude, an attitude of goodwill. This is something that’s really special about Ajahn Suwat. You can almost sense the goodwill that radiated to all people, everybody. It’s a lesson he learned from Ajahn Mun. They say that Ajahn Mun, on waking up every morning before doing anything at all, would spread thoughts of goodwill to all beings. So that was one of the things he would bring into the day. That, too, is a good lesson, not only for meditation, but for everything you do. Goodwill doesn’t mean that you’re creating a fog machine in the mind, spreading big clouds of white fog out in all directions. You consciously go through the people you love, the people you like, the people you’re neutral about, and even the people you dislike, and try to feel an attitude of genuine goodwill. Of course, the people you dislike, the people you dislike, those are the hardest ones, but you don’t pretend that you feel goodwill when you don’t, but you’ve got to dig out. Why would you feel ill will for anybody? Even the people who have harmed you, the people who have done horrible things to you, what advantage do you get from their suffering? There’s a certain sense of justice done or revenge taken. But does that really end the issue? How many of you can really learn from suffering? If you wish people suffering on people, does that mean they’re going to start being nice to you? They’re going to learn their lesson that they shouldn’t have messed with you in the first place? That’s not how the world works. Most people are nasty and mean and cruel because they’ve been suffering. If people all learned from suffering, we all would have gone to Nirvana a long time ago. Most people resist learning from suffering and actually turn around and get worse. Most of the cruelty comes in this world if not through the fact that people are already suffering. It’s their fear of suffering. So you wouldn’t gain any advantage from their suffering. You’d be much better off if they could find true happiness from within. Remember, wishing goodwill is not simply saying, “Well, may you live as you are and be happy.” It’s making you really find the causes for happiness within yourself. That’s what goodwill is all about. If everybody in the world could find happiness within themselves, it would be a very different world. So go through all the people around you, the people you meet in the course of the day, before you meet them. Try to develop an attitude of goodwill. Bring the goodwill into your life. Bring the goodwill into your relations with them. This doesn’t mean that you suddenly have to be very friendly and pretend like nothing’s ever happened. You know that there are some people that are very difficult to deal with. This doesn’t mean you abandon common sense in your dealings with people, but it means you don’t wish anybody ill. If you can bring a genuine attitude of goodwill into the relationship, if nothing else, you are less likely to do unskillful things. Say unskillful things, think unskillful things, and the other person may start picking up on that. If they don’t pick up, if they’re really dense, at least you don’t have anything to fault yourself with. You brought the best you could into the situation. All these really basic things in the teaching of goodwill, generosity, and gratitude are not unrelated to the practice of meditation. They all teach you the lesson that what you bring to an experience makes all the difference. So in this case, you want to bring an attitude of respect, an attitude of gratitude. You’ve got this opportunity to practice a teaching that’s been tested for all these thousands of years. You’re training the mind to overcome its greed, anger, and delusion so that it sees things more clearly and makes better decisions, decisions that lead to genuine happiness. That’s the opportunity we have here. If you bring the right attitude to this opportunity, it makes all the difference in the world.

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