Delight in Stillness

April 5, 2023

It’s twenty-one years now since Ajahn Swat passed away, April 5th, 2002. It’s always good to reflect on the person who founded the place where we’re meditating, and to at least have some gratitude for the fact that he made it possible for us to meditate here, to practice here. He saw the need of a place. We could be out with a lot of seclusion, where people of all nationalities, as he said, and all languages could come. He was in his seventies at the time. He could have rested on his past accomplishments, stayed in any one of the several monasteries that he founded. Now he wanted to found one more that was more in line with his idea of what a really good place would be. When you’re young, you don’t appreciate how difficult it is, as you get older, to do things like this. So it’s good to stop and think that he made a lot of sacrifices for this place, and so we should be willing to make some sacrifices in our practice. One of the themes that Ajahn Mun would talk about frequently when he was staying with Ajahn Mun was practicing in line with the customs of the noble ones. There are two places in the texts that refer to this. One is in the Canon, the passage that we chanted last night, being content with food, clothing, shelter, as you get it, and also being very careful not to pride yourself over the fact that you are content with these things. I do know some monks who do it out, and they have some very strong criticisms of monks who live more luxuriously. But that’s not the point of living simply. It’s to look at your own defilements. That relates to the fourth of the customs of the noble ones, which is to delight in abandoning and to delight in developing. This is a reference to one of the Buddhist categorical teachings, which is to delight in developing skillful qualities and to delight in abandoning unskillful ones. It’s important that we learn how to take delight in these things, because if we don’t delight in the path, our delight is going to go someplace else. So you have to see that it is a good thing when you can recognize some craving that’s leading you in the direction of suffering and you can say no. And you can make it stick, at least for a while. Or you can delight in getting the mind to settle down. Ajahn Swa was one of the few teachers I know who stayed with Ajahn Mahan and commented that Ajahn Mahan would talk about jhana. I don’t know why the other ones don’t talk about that. There was one time when Ajahn Swa was a very young monk who went to stay with Ajahn Mahan for the first time. He found himself one morning just one-on-one with Ajahn Mahan. He didn’t know what to say. So he asked if Ajahn Mahan had slept well that night before. And Ajahn Mahan said, “When someone has attained jhana, you don’t have to worry about sleeping well.” So Ajahn Swa would talk a lot about that. Getting the mind secluded from unskillful qualities, secluded from sensuality, getting it to settle down. So learn how to delight in that. Delight in the effort. We delight in it when the effort goes well. And when the effort doesn’t go well, we don’t delight in it. But we should delight in the fact that we have the opportunity to keep working at this. Delight in trying to figure out when the mind is not settling down. How to figure it out. How to understand what’s the obstacle. Because the obstacle is for the mind to settle down. As Ajahn Swa made a comment one time, he said, “That’s the suffering the Buddha’s talking about. You don’t have to look elsewhere. Anywhere far away from the suffering, the four noble truths, right there where the mind is disturbing itself.” You want to figure out why. What’s the craving that’s getting in the way? What are you clinging to? So do your best to get the mind to settle down. Find the greatest point of stillness in the body and stay there. Connect with that. And keep your gaze as steady and as still as you can. And then see what disturbs that. It can be either a physical disturbance or a mental disturbance. But ask yourself, what are you holding on to? And keep questioning the disturbances in the mind. In that way, you’re developing both insight and tranquility at the same time. It’s like that passage in the Canon where the Buddha talks about getting the mind to settle down and appreciating the fact that once it settles down, it’s empty of a lot of the disturbances that would come first with being entangled with other people. And then as you settle down even more, the disturbances come from outside, somewhere out under the trees. It’s pretty quiet, but there are still some disturbances there. It’s the sounds of the different animals going through the leaves, the sounds coming from far off. And if you allow yourself to get disturbed by them, then you’ve got a problem. Why are you disturbed by them? Chan’s comment is really good there. He says, “It’s not that the sounds are disturbing you. You’re disturbing the sounds.” So what are you doing that’s making the sound an issue, aside from the fact that we don’t want the sound of the helicopter to be in the recording? The Buddha recommends that when you’re out in the wilderness and the perceptions of wilderness are your only disturbance outside, that you think of earth. Your body has the earth element in it. The things around you have the earth element. If you just earth with earth, there’s not much to disturb things. So just stay with that perception. Then appreciate that you’re free from a lot of the disturbances that were there before. But as you stay there, you find that there’s still some disturbance there. You want to go to the perception of space, which is even less disturbed than the perception of earth. You can follow this all the way through all the different formless states. But the important thing is that the disturbance is not coming from outside. It’s coming from within. So you get the mind more and more still, more and more quiet. Appreciate the quiet. Appreciate the stillness, because that enables you to delight in the fact that you’re getting the mind to settle down. Then see what disturbance is left. You peel away like this. That’s one of the approaches the Buddha recommends for getting awakened. So learn to delight in the fact that you have this opportunity and you’re engaged in something really good. That was another one of Ajahn Suet’s favorite comments at the very beginning of many of the meditations. He said, “Come to this with a sense of being inspired by what you’re doing.” This is high-level work, he said, training the mind, bringing it to stillness. Bringing it to insight. Have a sense of confidence, conviction, inspiration that you’re involved in something really good. Whether the results are quick or slow, the work itself is good. Learn how to delight in that and help you get through a lot of barren patches in the practice. Because there will be barren patches. It’s not the case that everything develops smoothly and continuously. But have a good sense of conviction that you’re on the right path. Whether the progress is fast or slow, you want to stay on the path. If you find yourself winding up, just get right back. The delight of being here is food, so you keep on going. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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