

## *Levels of Seclusion*

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Ajaan Suwat used to call this “a quiet corner,” a place where you can get away from the affairs of the world, the affairs of your home life, and the affairs of your work, to find some seclusion.

The problem with seclusion is that the simple fact that your body is secluded doesn't mean your mind is secluded. All too often we bring issues in from outside. So we're sitting here with all kinds of friends: all the thoughts of the past, plans for the future, our desires for this, our desires for that.

But now that you're here in a quiet corner, try to make your mind a quiet corner. In other words, learn how to separate things from itself. As the texts say, “secluded from unskillful qualities, secluded from sensuality”: no thoughts about how you'd like this, that, or the other sensual pleasure; no thoughts about wrong effort, wrong resolves. Get the mind to be with one good resolve, the resolve to find true happiness inside. That's called a mind secluded. Just stick with that one.

As for the other friends, they may chat away in the background, but keep them in the background. Don't bring them into the foreground. Sometimes the simple fact of trying to chase them away makes them worse. So if they're going to chatter, let them chatter, but you don't pay any attention to them. Like a beggar coming to get something out of you: As the beggar sees that you're not paying him any attention, the beggar will go away. If you try to chase the beggar away, then you're in trouble.

So, no attention to those other thoughts, just attention to this one thought: that you want the mind to settle down and find true happiness inside. You're going to find it around the breath. The breath itself can be made pleasurable, although it's not the true happiness we're looking for. There's something deeper inside. But this is where it's going to be found.

So keep looking right here, right here, and see what's going on, both in the body and in the mind right here. Learn how to sort out what you can trust inside and what you can't trust inside. The things that you can't trust, leave them outside. You pare things away, strip things away bit by bit by bit, until finally you get to something that's really, really good. And that's secluded in other ways. It's secluded from defilements entirely.

So we're working here in levels of seclusion. At the very least, learn how to get that second level when you're putting your thoughts aside and you don't have to take them on and get into a conversation with them. When you leave this physical seclusion here, you can still carry the skill of mental seclusion with you out into the world. And that'll provide you with a lot of protection.

So even though you can't carry the monastery around with you, at least you can carry the skill around with you. And that gives the mind a space of its own.