

Living Selectively

July 25, 2018

Close your eyes; watch your breath. Try to find a spot in the body that feels really good. If it doesn't feel really good, at least it feels okay. That's good enough to begin with. Let your attention settle there.

We're trying to take advantage of our strengths. At times there will be pains in the body, but you don't have to go there. It's like finding a rotten spot in an apple, you don't eat the rotten spot. You just cut it out and you can eat the rest. The same with the body, the same with the mind. In other words, if there are areas in the body that are painful, you don't have to focus there. Focus on the areas that you can make comfortable through the way you breathe.

And focus on the parts of the mind that are good as well. You find that the mind has all kinds of people in there with all kinds of opinions on things, and you've got to sort out which ones you want to hang out with. As Ajaan Lee would say, hang out with the wise people inside. Don't hang out with the fools. When you get to recognize the wise people inside, then you begin to recognize wise people outside as well. You know who to listen to, who to put aside.

This way, you can live in the world selectively, building on your strengths and not letting your weaknesses pull you down. After all, the mind has both good and bad qualities inside, and we're trying to develop the good. So which ones are you going to focus on to develop the good qualities? We've got to develop the good qualities through good qualities, in other words, you take what goodness you've got and you use that to pull yourself up.

Fortunately, we do have all these different opinions in the mind. If we had only one mind and it was defiled, there'd be very little we could do. But we have some parts of the mind that are less defiled than others, and they can keep watch over the rest of the mind to give you a sense of what's right and what's wrong, who to listen to, who not to listen to.

For the moment, you want to listen to the voices that say, "Stay with the breath." Don't go wandering off, even though you may have other responsibilities, other things you can think about. You don't need to think about them right now. You can take care of them some other time. Right now is time for the breath, time for concentration, time for mindfulness, so that these good qualities in the mind get stronger, so strong that they begin to push the bad ones out. So work from your strengths.

And work from strengths outside as well. Try to figure out whose teachings you can rely on. The Buddha's very reliable. As Ajaan Suwat used to say, if you don't believe in anybody else, at least believe in the Buddha and you won't go wrong. What he's saying is that you've got the potential within you to gain awakening, to put an end to suffering, and he shows the way to do it. That kind of teaching is really worth listening to. As the Buddha said, it's a miracle. There are other teachings out there that give you some results but don't really give the results promised.

But a teaching like his that really gives results, and promises results all the way to the end of suffering: That's something very rare. So we've been left with something miraculous. Take advantage of it.