

## *Always Looking Inside*

*May 16, 2005*

Once during my first year staying with Ajaan Fuang, we had a monk visit us from the city. Evening came, and we were sitting on Ajaan Fuang's porch. The monk looked down the valley, and the golden sunlight of the late afternoon was bathing everything in the valley. He happened to comment on how beautiful it was. The words had hardly gotten out of his mouth when Ajaan Fuang said, "Don't look outside. Look at what's in the mind saying that it's beautiful. That's where the problem is."

I was really struck by his comment, because the monk's remark seemed innocent. But Ajaan Fuang was getting to an important part of the practice: You come to a quiet place like this not to enjoy the beauties of nature, but to make use of the quiet, to make use of solitude, to see your own mind. Whether nature is beautiful or not is not the issue. Whether we appreciate the beauties of nature or not, that's not the issue either. The issue is that you've got this mind running around making comments on things all the time, liking this, not liking that, focusing its awareness outside, so that it's hardly aware of what it's doing. And yet it's the big troublemaker.

There was another time when we got a letter from a meditator in Singapore. He was explaining to Ajaan Fuang his meditation technique, which was that whatever he was focused on, he tried to see it as impermanent, suffering, and not-self. Again Ajaan Fuang's comment was to turn around to look at who's doing the commenting, who's saying that things are impermanent, stressful, and not self. That's the troublemaker.

So this is what our practice is: always looking inside, looking at the movements of the mind—the comments, the fabrications of the mind—because they cause trouble, they cause suffering. But as part of the path, we have to use fabrications. After all, the noble eightfold path is a path that's fabricated. It's put together out of our intentions. Right views, right resolves, right mindfulness, and right concentration: All these things require the mind to do some work, and the process of putting together a path is what we should focus our attention on inside.

Our issues are our views, our resolves. To make them right, we have to pay attention to them. And where do they happen? They happen right here where the body in the mind meet at the breath. So focus your attention right here. See what moves here. A lot of the movement, of course, has to be physical: the breath coming in, going out, other things happening in the body. But as the breath grows

more and more still, you begin to see the movements of the mind more and more clearly.

It's the same principle when finding a place of quiet and solitude: When outside movements get less and less oppressive, insight movements begin to come to the fore. It's so easy when you live with other people to say, "I'm unhappy because of that person or this person. I'm stressed out because of the noise," or whatever else is the outside factor that's impinging on the mind. But you come to a quiet place like here, you sit under the tree, and the mind is still complaining, still chattering away to itself. We once had someone come here and, after a day of meditating under the trees, he came out and complained that it was too noisy: all those bugs in the leaves, the wind going through the branches, the birds singing. He was used to meditating in hermetically-sealed meditation room. It just shows you how it's possible for the mind complain about anything at all.

So the issue when you're meditating is to keep focusing back on what is it you're doing that's contributing to the disturbance here in the present moment. It's not a matter of saying, when people outside treat you unfairly, that it's your fault. But it *is* saying that the amount you're going to suffer from their unfair treatment *does* depend on your own actions, your own views about things, your own attitudes about things, where you feed for happiness. That's something you can change. That lies within your power, which is why it's so important to focus your attention on what your mind is doing right now. To see the movements of the mind, you give it not only a quiet environment, but also a still point inside, focusing on the breath, so that you notice whenever it moves away from the breath, you're sensitive to its having moved.

It's like having a very precise ruler that has all the sixteenths and thirty-seconds of an inch all marked out. You place it down so that if anything next to it moves the slightest little bit, then—because it has a very precise level of marking—you can detect the tiny movements that you might have missed if your ruler only marked whole inches or feet. You want to have something very precise, be very still, so that you can see these movements of the mind.

So we come to a quiet place like this not just to enjoy the quiet. It's going to be there in the background. The fact that it's so quiet and so peaceful is a help, but that's not the main issue. We can't have it totally quiet here. After all, we have neighbors who live in the human world. But it's quiet enough so that you can focus inward to see what's going on in the mind. And not just to see, but also to have an activity to work at, bringing the mind to stillness, putting together the various factors of the path that keep you focused on where the real issues are.

This habit mind has of creating suffering for itself even though it wants happiness: You'd think everything you'd do would be for the sake of happiness and actually produce happiness. Well, it may be for the sake of happiness, but it doesn't always produce that happiness. And the question is: why? One reason is ignorance. There are some things we'd like to do but they don't lead to happiness and we'd prefer to forget about that fact. There are other things that would lead to true happiness but we don't do them, because we don't like them.

The question is: Why is this? Sometimes it's just plain old not knowing; other times, it's willful not knowing. In fact, most the time it's willful, because there are certain things we'd just rather forget. And a very easy way to forget is to keep focusing your attention outside, outside, on things outside.

This is why we want to see through those walls we set up inside. You want to focus your attention inside, right here at what you're doing. That's how you make the most of being in a quiet place, being in nature, where the disturbances are few, so that you can see the disturbances the mind is creating all the time, and learn how to do something about them.