

What Are You Bringing?

April 4, 2007

It's April 4 here in America, the morning of April 5 over in Thailand. It was on April 5 five years ago that Ajaan Suwat passed away in Thailand. So tonight I'd like to talk about some of the lessons he would often give for meditation, because that's how he lives on: in his teachings. And, of course, we make his teachings live on in ourselves if we put them into practice.

His first lesson was almost always: Put your mind in the mood to meditate. Bring an attitude of respect, of conviction, of confidence, because 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 toward meditation is more like an exchange or a monetary trade. You won't put anything into it until you're convinced you'll get something out of it. But if you don't put anything into it, if you're waiting for the results before you're willing to commit yourself, you'll never get the results.

And the attitude you bring is going to shape how you do it. If you're here to squeeze or force as much concentration out of the mind as you can, that attitude starts affecting the way you breathe. 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, and try to bring the right attitude. We're here to do something that's going to require a lot of delicacy, 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. Think about the decisions you've made in your life, just on your own steam, and 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, often it's hard to foresee what the results of our actions are going to.

And we live with minds that are affected by greed, anger, and delusion, so they color our perceptions of what's going to work and what's not going to work. So it's good that there has been someone who went through all the effort to find a way of training the mind so that it's not colored by those things. That someone then taught that method for 45 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, for the people who've gone through the effort of putting this teaching into practice all these thousands of years and passed it on, both through word and example, and they didn't charge for it. It's a free gift.

The teaching is offered to you in genuine generosity, so it's good that you offer some generosity in return. Again it's the question: What do you bring in? It's good to reflect on how the Buddha would start his teachings, and generosity was often one of the first things he mentioned. If not generosity then gratitude, but 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, that you're going to give whatever energy is needed, whatever effort is needed, without holding anything back, you find the meditation goes a lot better. You yourself feel a lot 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. When you look at the teachings on dependent co-arising, without having to get entangled in all the details, one of the important things to notice at the very beginning is how many of the factors come prior to sensory contact. It's not as if everything begins with sensory contact. There's a lot that you bring to the sensory contact, and it makes all the difference between whether you're going to suffer or not.

So what do you bring in? Try to bring in an attitude of generosity, an attitude of gratitude, and an attitude of goodwill. One of the things that was special about Ajaan Suwat was that you could sense the goodwill he radiated to all people, everybody. That's a lesson he learned from Ajaan Mun. He said that Ajaan Mun, on waking up every morning before doing else, would spread thoughts of goodwill to all beings. That's one of the things he would bring into the day. That, too, is a good lesson not only for meditation but also for everything you do.

Goodwill doesn't mean creating a fog machine in the mind to spread big clouds of white goodwill 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, trying to feel an attitude of genuine goodwill for them all.

Of course, the people you dislike are the hardest ones. Don't pretend that you feel goodwill when you don't, but you've got to dig out: Why would you want to feel ill will for anybody? Even the people who have harmed you, people who have done horrible things to you or those you love: What advantage you get from their suffering? There may be a certain sense of justice done or revenge taken, but does that really end the issue? How many people really learn from suffering? If you wish suffering on other people, does that mean they're going to start being nice to you? That they're going to learn a lesson they shouldn't mess 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 would have

all gone to nibbana a long time ago. Most people resist learning from suffering. They can actually turn around and get worse. Most of the cruelty in this world comes, if not through the fact that people are already suffering, then through 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. In other words, it's not just wishing goodwill, it's not simply saying: "Well, may you live as you are and be happy." Happiness comes from finding the causes for happiness within yourself, and then developing them. That's what goodwill is all about. If everybody in the world could find happiness within, 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, and before you meet them, try to develop an attitude of goodwill and bring the goodwill into your relations with them. This doesn't mean that you suddenly have to be very friendly and pretend like nothing has ever happened. You know that there are some people who are very difficult to deal with. You don't abandon common sense in your dealings with people. Just don't wish anybody any ill.

And if you can bring a genuine attitude of goodwill into the relationship, if nothing else, you're 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 dense, at least you don't have anything to fault yourself with. You've brought the best you could into the situation.

All these really basic things in the teaching—goodwill, generosity, 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.

In this case, you want to bring an attitude of respect, an attitude of gratitude, that 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, makes better decisions, decisions that lead to genuine happiness. That's the opportunity we have here, the opportunity that Ajaan Suwat helped to provide.

So if you bring the right attitude to this opportunity, *then* you can get the most out of it.