

## *Ajaan Suwat 100 Years*

*August 29, 2019*

Ajaan Suwat would often begin his meditation instructions by telling you to bring an attitude of respect and confidence to what you're doing. You're developing the mind. You're doing the work of the Buddha's teachings. And you're hoping to learn things that you don't yet know. After all, the basic cause of our suffering is ignorance, or—as Ajaan Suwat would translate the word *avijja*—our stupidity. It's not just that we don't know. There are also things we do know that we tend to be stupid about.

So on the one hand it's good to have some humility as you practice. There's a lot you don't know, a lot that you misunderstand. But on the other hand, you should also have some confidence that you can learn. You know, of course, the story of the teacup. The Zen master gets a new student and he starts pouring some tea for the student into a cup, and he keeps pouring and pouring and pouring, and it overflows. The student gets upset. "Can't you see what you're doing?" And the Zen master says, "Throw out your old water."

Basically, throw out a lot of your old ideas. Be willing to sit here with something very basic: the breath. Or the meditation word *buddho*. Or both, together. Give them time to do their work. If we come with a lot of preconceived notions of how the practice should go, things don't have an opportunity to develop as they would if you simply put some trust in the Buddha. This is an attitude Ajaan Suwat held to very strongly.

It's also why another one of his favorite teachings, and one that he said that Ajaan Mun would teach a lot, was to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, and not in accordance with your opinions. After all, your opinions are based ignorance—or, again, as Ajaan Suwat would say, they're based on your own stupidity. And in the Buddha's words, it's the case that when a foolish person has a sense of his or her own foolishness, that person is to that extent wise.

So admit to yourself that there's a lot you don't know and there's a lot that you can learn, and have some faith in the basic steps of the path. As the Buddha said, when he set out the path, he set it out in such a way that there's nothing lacking and nothing in excess. In other words, we don't have eight factors just in case we might like an extra two or three, when only six or five or whatever would be enough. We need all eight. At the same time, though, we have to watch out for the opposite tendency: our desire to add to the path a lot that's not necessary.

So, putting aside sensual thoughts, putting aside unskilful qualities, talk to yourself about the breath. Watch the breath. Breathe in a way that gives rise to

a sense of ease. And then maintain that. We've all read the maps. We know how many jhanas there are. We've read the maps of the *vipassana-ñanas*. But you have to throw those maps away. For the time being, there's only you, your awareness, with the breath. Let the steadiness of your gaze change things inside.

Because after all, we're here to attain something we've never attained before; to realize something we've never realized before. So we have to do things we haven't done before. And it starts with being really steadily focused right here. And then watching what comes up. Then, when things come up, remember the Buddha's instructions. If it's something unskillful, put it aside. As for the skillful things, ask yourself: Is this the right time and place for them? Because there are some things that will come up in the mind that aren't necessarily bad, but they're not really related to what you're doing.

Try to pare things down to what's really relevant to getting the mind to stay still right here, right now. And as for any disturbance in the mind, simply regard it as an instance of the first noble truth, or the second. In other words, something to be comprehended and then to be abandoned. Even little disturbances in the mind, you learn how not to accept them. You really give yourself to the concentration. Give yourself to wanting to do this well.

Think about the forest ajaans. Many of them came from a very poor background, and the practice was their only way out. So they gave themselves totally to the practice. We have lots of alternatives, and so we sometimes give ourselves fifty percent, forty percent, twenty, and hold on to a lot of our other alternatives, just in case. But if you take a good look at the alternatives, you have to realize that we're coming from a culture that doesn't know how to put an end to suffering. It knows a lot of other things, but it doesn't know anything much about the big issue in life.

Here, the Buddha's offering a way out, which is going to require that we put aside a lot of our old beliefs, a lot of our old preferences, and take him at his word. Give him the benefit of the doubt. We all have doubts. They're not going to be wiped out until the first level of awakening. But the question is, how do we handle those doubts? If we hold onto them and see that they're precious, part of our identity, part of who we are, part of the culture we come from, then we're never going to get past them.

The Buddha's offering us something our culture doesn't have any answer for: a solution to the problem of suffering. It was the same in India in the Buddha's time. The culture there had no solution to that problem. He saw that the people were wandering around bewildered and he offered them a chance to end their bewilderment.

When Ajaan Suwat came here to the States, first it was for the Thai people who were here. And then his sense of what he could accomplish started

spreading out. When he first thought of starting the monastery here, there were a lot of the supporters up in the town of Ontario, near Los Angeles, who were not happy with the idea. They just were in the process of building the monastery there. They didn't want to see the effort diluted. But Ajaan Suwat saw there that was something more important than just the Thai community. He wanted a place where monks could practice, lay people could practice, regardless of background. Because he saw America was so poor in the issue that mattered most.

So here we are, we've got the benefit of his determination. The monastery is here, it offers a place to practice in an environment where we really can give ourselves to the practice. There's one aspect of what he said, when we were getting started, that really appealed to me. He said, "We're not here to get other people. We're here to get ourselves." In other words, we're here to practice. If other people like the way we practice and they want to join us, that's fine. But we're not going to change anything to attract people. We've tried to maintain that attitude ever since, so that people can practice the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.

As the Buddha said, that's the true way to show respect for him. It's the true show way to gratitude and respect for Ajaan Suwat. And of course, it's the way to taste the benefits of what the Dhamma has to offer. If we change the Dhamma to fit in with our preferences, we'll never have an opportunity to test what the real Dhamma has to offer. If we practice fake Dhamma, then we're going to get fake Dhamma. And if we're fake people, we probably won't even know. So try to be true to the practice. That way you have the chance to get a taste of what those true results can be.