

Quality

April 13, 2005

When you want to gain a knowledge that's certain and sure, you have to start out by asking yourself: What do you already know that's certain and sure? Sitting right here right now, what do you know? You know that you have memories and you know that you have expectations. But how true are they? Even your memories are uncertain. They've said that every time you pull a memory out of your mind and make use of it, then when you put back in, if you've changed it in any way, that change is going to permanent.

So even your memories are unsure. As for anticipations of the future, those are totally unknowable—which means that you don't have much. All you have is what you know right here, right now. You've got the body sitting here. You've got the breath. You've got the mind that's both thinking and aware. That's what you know. Anything that goes out beyond that, you don't know for sure. So stick with just what you know. Bring all these things together: body, breath, thinking, awareness. As for anything else, just keep reminding yourself, "I don't know that. I don't know that." What's going to happen in the next few minutes, you don't know. Use this as your razor to shave off all the extraneous thoughts that can get in the way.

All too often, when you sit and meditate, all your anticipations that you want things to be like this, you want things to be like that, how much longer you're going to be able to take this meditation: All these things are unknowable. So shave them away because they distract you. If you let yourself get distracted, you get carried away from what you really can know for sure—and get carried off into lots of unknowable things.

So when any of these voices come up—"What about this? What about that?"—just say, "I don't know. I don't know." How much longer you are going to sit here? "I don't know." How long you've been sitting here already? "I don't know." If there's a pain someplace, how much longer it is going to last? "Don't know." How long has it lasted so far? You don't really know. Our eagerness to pin things down means that we often pin things down that are uncertain. And of course they don't stay pinned down. But once you have them on a leash, they start stirring around and they get you stirred around as well. So let them go.

As Ajaan Lee once said, big things come from small things. Training the mind is a really big job, which means you have to be very careful about the small things, the small steps. It's like physics. If you understand the atom, you understand a lot

of other things as well. But you have to keep looking back into the atom. This is what all the great physicists do: They keep going back to first principles, the tiny building blocks, and look at them again and again and again. They keep finding new things they missed the last time around, because they had brought some presuppositions along with them the last time they looked.

So try to keep things small. Keep things focused right here. As for everything else, just leave it as uncertain, unknowable. Or even it is knowable, you just don't know for the time being.

So let it be. Let it be. If you try to take on too many things all at once, think of Ajaan Lee's analogy of starting an orchard. You've got a large piece of land and so you mow the whole thing and plant the whole thing in trees. As it turns out, there's a drought, so all the trees die, and you've lost everything. The best way to start out is to start small. Plant only a section that you can manage. Then, as the trees give fruit, you can take the seeds from the fruits and plant those. The orchard will grow bit by bit by bit, and you won't have overextended yourself. Things that grow slowly tend to be solid. Look at the trees around here. The pine trees we planted a few years ago are huge pine trees now. They're the first ones to fall down in the wind because they grew too fast.

So content yourself with growing slowly. The important part of the practice is that you be willing to be patient, take things step by step by step, because that's how knowledge comes. One of Luang Puu Dune's teachings was in response to people who meditate a little bit and want to see fast results. He says, the focal point of the meditation isn't to see fast results. It's to build the qualities of mind: patience, endurance, restraint. Those are the qualities that bring the results, not your desire for fast results or your efforts to push things fast.

This is why the Dhamma is so amazing. It requires really good qualities of mind in order to know it. It can't be known by people who don't have those qualities of mind.

So work on quality, not on quantity. If you've got one good moment of meditation, it's a good thing. Then string it up to the next one moment of good meditation, and then the next and the next. Take it step by step by step, and be very observant of each step. That's what quality comes from. It doesn't come from taking on a whole lot of things all at once. It's like the avocados here in the orchard. Suppose there were only one avocado in the whole world: Think of what price it would get, as opposed to the times of year when they're just dumping avocados. When you've got a lot of things going on in your mind, none of them has any particular quality, any particular value. It's when you have only one thing going on: That's when it has price.