

Resourceful

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A lot of modern practice traditions have a particular technique. But the forest tradition doesn't. Ajaan Lee has his way of teaching concentration, Ajaan Maha Boowa has his, Ajaan Chah has his. And as for developing insight, they all have their own approaches.

What they have in common is more an attitude. And the attitude developed by monks living alone in the forest was self-reliance.

One of the main ingredients in that attitude was learning to be resourceful. When you're alone facing difficulties, you have to be able to think up a solution to the problem: one, how to frame the problem in a useful way, and two, learning how to come up with a solution using your ingenuity.

As I've said before, Ajaan Fuang would often talk about being observant and learning how to use your ingenuity as the two most important ingredients in your meditation. A lot of times you'll have problems coming up in the meditation, problems that don't fit into any texts that you may have remembered. And your teacher is miles away—days away, in fact, in the past. So what are you going to do? Well, you try to frame the problem and then come up with an answer. Try something out.

Now, being resourceful here doesn't mean that anything goes. You're being tested in an environment where, if you're too experimental and too far off track, things can get dangerous both physically and mentally—which is why this is more than just being observant and being ingenious.

Ajaan Lee, toward the end of his life, wrote about taking the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha as your refuge both on an external level and on an internal level. The external level basically gives you examples of what to do and what not to do.

As I was saying last night, a lot of the Buddha's teachings are not just about what you should do as a meditator but also about things you should not do. Those are all things you have to keep in mind.

The examples of the Buddha's disciples, the examples of the great ajaans, stories that would be passed down about what did and didn't work: You want to remember those examples, take them to heart, and then try to develop their qualities within you. The qualities you develop inside: Those are your refuge.

And in line with what the Buddha said about developing your refuge by working on the establishing of mindfulness, Ajaan Lee focused on the establishing of mindfulness as the way in which you develop this internal refuge. You have to remember that his approach was interesting in that he focused not so much on body, feelings, mindstates, or mental qualities. He did talk about those, but his real emphasis was on the three qualities you bring to this

practice: ardency, alertness, and mindfulness. These are the qualities that underlie your ingenuity and your powers of observation. They give you a framework from which to look at things, a place to stand, and an idea of what should be done.

This is what the mindfulness is all about: to remember what we're here for. We're not here to entertain ourselves, we're not here to play around. You play, but within the rules. Like any game, you have to know the rules if you're going to get good at it. The rules here being: If you want to put an end to suffering, this is what you've got to do. Certain things you have to avoid, certain things you have to develop: You keep that in mind.

And then you find that there are large chunks of meditation where even with the stories you've learned about what works and what doesn't work and the principles you've learned, there will still be things falling through the cracks. Or you may not be sure how the stories and principles apply to the problem at hand. That's where you've got to bring in the quality of ardency, which includes both your effort that you put into it and your ingenuity. You try to do this well and, if you can't figure out from what you've learned in the past how to do it well, then you try to think, "What might be the real problem here?" You go back and reframe the problem a bit—maybe you're not understanding it properly—and then try to come up with a solution. Then you test it.

This is where your alertness comes in to watch: Is this really working?

So these are the qualities that make you self-reliant: ardency, alertness, and mindfulness. They're driven by heedfulness, the realization that if you slip up, there can be consequences so you have to be careful.

These are the qualities that anybody who's going to live in the forest and be self-reliant has to develop.

"Heedful" means that you're aware that there are dangers. This is why you have to be mindful, remembering what the dangers are.

"Heedful" also means looking for ways that you can act to avoid the dangers— and to keep working at this. After all, no one else is going to do the work for you. And no one else is going to be able to protect you in every case.

They talk about ajaans having a duty of protecting their students. Well, the way to protect students is to give them teachings that will make them safe, will remind them of dangers.

Like the danger of sensuality: I was reading today someone saying that now that we've come into a new culture, Buddhism has to change, and old teachings that are not viable have to be discarded. They were arguing this way to justify the idea that maybe we should start celebrating the body and celebrating sex again—as if that were a perfectly legitimate way of reinterpreting the Dhamma now that everybody has changed.

Well, how much have we really changed since the time of the Buddha? If we had evolved so that our bodies were totally different from what they were at the Buddha's time, and our minds were totally different minds, then maybe we might want to rethink things. But we're still

the same human beings with the same problems, and sensuality's still the same old problem now that it was then.

So you have to realize that certain changes are off-limits. As the Buddha himself said, when you're practicing an establishing of mindfulness, you're in one territory; indulgence in sensuality is in another territory. That's the dangerous territory—you have to remember that. If you go wandering off there, a hawk can come swooping down and catch you, or a hunter can come and set up a trap. And then you're done for.

If you've lived in the woods, you realize that there are lots of dangers out there that you have to keep in mind all the time. And with certain territories you say, "I'm just not going to go there because it's too dangerous." Because the territory you do have to develop: There's plenty of room for you there, plenty of room for ingenuity and plenty of room to enjoy yourself.

I was reading a new sutta I'd never read before in which the Buddha was making a comparison: When you're a little kid you play with some things, then as you get older you play with other things, and then as you start practicing you play with jhana. This becomes your entertainment. Like the image of the elephant: The pleasure and rapture of jhana are your pleasure that corresponds to the pleasure the elephant finds by scratching himself with a branch. This is how you allay your itch.

It's a safe pleasure in the sense that it doesn't cloud up your mind. And it doesn't get you in debt to other people. When you're following sensuality, this thing has to be that way and that thing has to be this way, and you want this out of that person and that out of the other person. You're in debt to them. Whereas when you're practicing how to find your pleasure in being here in the present moment, this is a safe place to be. You're not incurring any debts. You're not wandering into any territory that's not yours.

So this is what you have to be mindful of: that there are dangers in the practice and there are dangers in your own mind. But we do have instructions that we can trust. It's just a matter of learning how to apply them properly to what your problem is right now. That's where the ingenuity has to come in.

It may seem paradoxical that, on one hand, here is a tradition that holds very strictly to the Vinaya and has a very clear idea about what is Dhamma and what's not Dhamma, and yet they say, "Be ingenious. Be resourceful." But actually, there's no paradox at all within the parameters of what's skillful and what's not. You have to use your ingenuity to figure out what's skillful right now with this particular problem.

Because sometimes, when you're dealing today with lust, say, or anger, a certain approach will work, but tomorrow the same approach doesn't work anymore. You're not going to let that defeat you. You're not going to give up on the idea of trying to overcome your anger or overcome your lust. You say to yourself, "This is the principle you hold in mind, this is what you're mindful to do, and this is what you're ardent to try to do. Then you bring in your ingenuity to figure out how to accomplish what you've set out to do. What would be a new

way, a more effective way, this time? What exactly is triggering your lust? What exactly is triggering your anger?

Try to be alert.

It's in this way that these three qualities—ardency, alertness, and mindfulness—make you self-reliant, make you somebody you can depend on.

Because this is it. This is work that nobody else can do for you. We like to think, “Well, I've made a mess, maybe someone else will come and clean up the mess for me.” You made the mess, you've got to clean it up. You're the one who's created this tangle, you're the one who has to untangle it.

No one else can make you skillful. They can teach you the basic principles; you keep those in mind; but then you have to use your own ardency, alertness, and mindfulness to take those basic principles and make them work for you.

Fortunately, these are qualities we all have. These are the qualities that the Buddha himself developed to gain awakening. And there's no place where he said that he was any kind of special deva who had special qualities that nobody else had. These are all qualities that any human being can develop. You're a human being. You can do it.

They talk also in the texts of people gaining awakening by being heedful, ardent, and resolute: terms that put a slightly different angle on the same issue. You keep in mind the fact that there are dangers in your mind. You're ardent in trying to overcome them. And you're resolute: You just keep coming back, coming back, coming back to fight your unskillful qualities. You don't give up.

When you find something that works, you don't get complacent. You watch, “Okay, this solution I made just now: Is there any danger around that solution? In what way do what seems to be true also be false?”

You keep at this, checking things from all sides. In this way, you can survive the jungle of your own mind because you're developing qualities you can depend on.