

Home Schooling Your Inner Children

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You've probably seen those signs in national parks that say: Leave only footprints, take only memories. But when you leave here, I hope you take more than memories. I hope you take a skill, a skill of training your mind—like we're doing right now: focusing on the breath, being mindful to stay with the breath, being alert to the breath, and developing a quality that's called ardency, in which you see the disadvantages of having an untrained mind, so that you get earnest and active in doing your best to train it.

Part of the skill, of course, is knowing how to do it. The other part is learning how to motivate yourself to keep doing it. Here the environment helps. You've got a very quiet place with very few responsibilities. Everybody else is meditating, so it's easy to sit down and meditate with them.

When you go home, the environment is not going to be that conducive. But you have to think about the environment in two ways. Or, rather, there are two kinds of environment. There's the outside environment, and there's the environment that you create yourself. It's not that we're totally victim of the situation around us. Our actions and our attitudes also create an environment.

So you have to develop the right attitudes, and remember that there are going to be parts of the mind that won't go along. Especially if this is a new habit you're trying to develop. You sit down for a few minutes and all you see is what a mess your mind is. And then you think: "There's something else I should be doing it right now." Ajaan Fuang used to call those thoughts "Deva Maras." Mara, of course, is the symbol of the temptation, and a deva is a higher being, higher than human beings. These higher beings tell you good things you do: Go fix some food, go arrange this, go clean that up. These are all good things to do in their proper time and place. But you need to have at least one part of the day where you tell yourself: Okay, this is for the mind. All the good things in life, all the good things in the world, come from the mind, and the mind needs to be trained. Otherwise, its greed, aversion, delusion, and ignorance will just take over, along with all the other members of the committee, and there will be nothing left of your meditation.

Notice that not all of the members of the committee are adults. We do have some children. The Buddha's attitude is not that you pamper your inner child, although, as the one psychologist friend of mine once said, the only people in the

world who have the right to talk about an inner child are pregnant woman. But we do have some very childish members of the committee. They complain. They whine. They squirm. They don't like sitting still. They want to do something else. And they'll come up with some nice thing for you to do so you don't feel bad about quitting the meditation.

But an important part of the meditation is learning how to sit with the mind regardless of what shape it's in, so that you can understand it—so that when there's greed in the mind you understand the greed, when there's anger you understand the anger. Ajaan Suwat said that when he first went to stay with Ajaan Mun, his mind was a mess. He was embarrassed to talk to Ajaan Mun about his meditation because there wasn't much to talk about. But one day Ajaan Mun asked him how his meditation was going. And so very truthfully he said: "I just sit there and my mind seems to be distracted all the time." And Ajaan Mun gave him some encouragement. He said, "Well, the fact that you know it's distracted is a step up. It comes in the Satipatthana Sutta, knowing the distracted mind as a distracted mind is an important part of the meditation."

Now Ajaan Suwat was wise enough to realize that Ajaan Mun wasn't saying: "Good, that's good enough. Just stay right there." He realized that he wanted his mind to be undistracted. But at the same time, he was given encouragement: Everybody has to go through these stages where the mind is just all over the place.

And it's not like one inner child. You've got your whole inner classroom in there. So you have to remind yourself of the ways that you've dealt with children in the past. Sometimes you have to humor them; other times you have to be strict with them. When you set tasks for them, you have to figure out what their capabilities are. Don't think that when you go back you're going to have to sit for an hour every day—and then you find yourself unable to do it at all. Give yourself an amount of time you can manage, that you know you can manage, even if it's just 10 minutes, 15 minutes. It's not too much. And then experiment to see which time of day is most congenial for you to meditate. For some people it's the evening, but for others it's in the morning. For other people, it's right after work. For some people, it's during a break during work. So experiment. See what time is best for your time.

As for the voices that come up that try to stop you, you've got to learn how to counteract them. If they're complaining that you're doing this because of somebody else, remind yourself that you're doing it for yourself. Your mind needs training. You're going to be better off with a trained mind. After all, as the Buddha said, a trained mind is what brings happiness. You can have everything else in the world going really well for you, but if your mind is a mess, you can create all sorts

of suffering. In fact, people with untrained minds who gain wealth and power are the ones who create all the big problems in the world. So remind yourself of how important it is to meditate, and how much you'll benefit from your meditation.

But other times their voices will be saying: "I'm being selfish. I should be using this time for other people." When that happens, remind yourself that other people do benefit from the fact that you're sitting there quietly, gaining some control over your greed, aversion, and delusion.

So whenever a complaint comes up, have something to counter it. Don't just give in. Because training the mind really is important. Your mind is your most important possession. If you don't look after it, what *will* you look after? We brush our teeth everyday, we bathe everyday, we feed ourselves everyday: These are things we do to look after the body. We should give at least some time to the mind. And don't complain that you have no time at all. There's got to be some time in the course of the day. Of course, you have to want it enough to make the time. But it is possible to make the time.

This is where you have to learn to use your ingenuity, both in making the time and in making yourself want to make the time. As the Buddha said, a real test of your discernment is seeing the things that you like to do that are going to give trouble, and learning how to talk yourself out of them. The same with the things that you don't like to do, but are going to be good for you: like meditating every day. You're able to talk yourself into wanting to do them.

You have to ask yourself: well, why don't you like it? You're just sitting here breathing, and if the breath is uncomfortable, you've got permission to make it comfortable. Experiment, learn to gain some control, learn to gain some familiarity with your own breathing. Because this is going to be with you all the way to the end. If you can gain some sense of how to make the breath comfortable, it makes everything a lot easier. You have better associations with the meditation, so that it's something you remember that you do *like* to do. It's a comfortable time. Even if your mind is wandering off, every time you come back to the breath make it comfortable so that you have some pleasant associations with the breath.

And get to the point where you realize that if it's been 10 minutes or 15 minutes that you've allotted to yourself, and it's not quite enough, okay, then you can add as much time as you like. It's like building up an exercise routine. If you really push, push, push yourself right at the beginning, you can do yourself some damage. In this case the damage would be developing an unfriendly attitude toward the meditation. So learn how to pace yourself. How much are you capable of? And when does the time come to stretch yourself a little? A little bit more? A little bit more? It's not all that difficult.

The important thing is making sure that your motivation is in the right place: that you benefit, and the people around you are going to benefit. And what else are you going to hold onto in your life as having real value? What's more important than the mind? Even your body is going to leave you at some point. All your relationships with people around you, all your responsibilities: You're going to have to drop them at some point.

And you can't wait for the work of the world to be finished and then meditate. The work of the world is never finished. There's always some more to be done, more to be done. So remind yourself of that: that you need this time, to take this time in the midst of these unfinished jobs, at the very least to put your mind in good shape.

If you want to listen to a Dhamma talk while you meditate, that's perfectly fine, so you don't feel that you're so alone. But you don't have to give your full attention to the Dhamma talk. In fact, the more attention you give to the breath, the better.

And in this way you learn how to deal with all those inner children. The whole point of dealing with your inner children is that you don't leave them as inner children. You help them grow up. Meditation is something that grownups do. It's also something that children do so that they can become grownups, responsible grownups, happy grownups.

So when you set your list of priorities for the day, remember that meditation has to come up, if not first, then at least second. There's a general in the army I read about one time. She would make a list every day of the things that needed to be done, then rank them in order of priority, one to ten, and then cross out everything from three on down, and work on the first and second items on the list. That's how she got the important things done. In the same way, if the mind isn't your top priority, it's got to be right next to it. After all, the mind is what makes all of your other decisions. Even when the strength of the body is low, if the strength of the mind is good, you'll be able to figure out the right thing to do, and you'll have the strength to do it. This is your most important tool, so take really good care of it. Don't leave it just lying around.