

Hunting Down the Defilements

April 23, 2015

It's when the mind is really quiet that it can see things clearly, hear things clearly. If you're listening for a far distant sound, you have to make yourself very, very quiet.

It's the same with the mind. We want to know about greed, aversion, and delusion when they're still subtle, so we have to make the mind really, really still so that we can tell when they begin to peep out and begin to show themselves.

The least little bit you don't want to be allowed to grow because otherwise they turn like the bamboo outside of Taan Dan's hut and grow all over the place. You constantly have to cut them down, pull them out. It's a lot of work. If you can catch them right at the very beginning, though, it's a lot easier.

So get the mind really, really quiet and be on guard. We can't be quiet expecting that everything's going to be peaceful and nothing's going to happen.

One of the forest ajaans, Ajaan Khamdee, says it's like being a hunter. You don't know when the animals you're looking for are going to come by. You have a general idea of where they're likely to be. But you can't say, "Well, dinner tonight is at five, so we're going to need the rabbit by four." You just go out to the spot where rabbits tend to go and you get very, very quiet, but very alert. You're quiet so that you don't scare them off and so you can hear them when they're coming. And you're alert so that as soon as they come, you've got them.

So we're hunting down our defilements. And as opposed to the life of a hunter, there's no bad karma in hunting down your defilements.

So when the mind settles down with the breath and is comfortable, you have to make sure it doesn't drift off, because a drifting quietness doesn't accomplish much. It's restful but it doesn't really let you see anything. So try to be alert: As soon as the mind settles down, give it a little work to do here in the present moment to make sure that it's engaged and sensitive to what's happening.

You go through the feelings of the breath energy in the different parts of the body. If there are parts where you've never felt breath energy before, just focus on those. See, when you breathe in: How does it feel? When you breathe out: How does it feel? Maybe you can detect something. Give the mind its assignments. And that way, it knows to pay attention.

So, like the hunter, you want to be very still and very quiet.

They say that when anthropologists go out and study tribes, they try to master all the skills that are practiced by that particular tribe so that they know what it

feels like from within. But they've found that hunting in traditional ways is impossible for people who've been raised in modern civilization.

It may be impossible with regard to animals because it requires a lot of concentration and a lot of alertness, but these are precisely the qualities we want. So let's work on them here.

We're hunting down our defilements because they really are troublemakers. And there's no bad karma in getting rid of them. In fact, there's a lot of good karma. So be a hunter of defilements and catch them while they're small. That way they can't have time to do much damage.