

A Clean Life

March 27, 2016

Close your eyes and watch your breath. As the breath comes in, think of it sweeping through the whole body, cleaning out any cobwebs of tension you might feel in the back and in the front. Any place you might notice where you're holding a lot of tension in the body, allow it to relax and just breathe right through. Clean it out. Try to clean out your mind as well. Any thoughts that deal with the past and the future, for the time being just put them aside. You just want to be alert and awake, right here, right now.

Today we're commemorating the passing away of Luang Lung, who was very helpful to our monastery. He was a city monk in Bangkok, yet he lived a very simple life. He was the bhattuddesaka, the monk in charge of assigning meals and assigning invitations at Wat Makut, which was one of the wealthier monasteries in Bangkok, and yet he never kept anything for himself. There was a period when there was a scandal around a bhattuddesaka at another monastery. The newspapers started checking on the bank accounts of the different ones throughout the city. They found that Luang Lung was the poorest of the group. Whatever he got, he gave to other people. He didn't keep things for himself. He saw that the virtue of generosity was much more valuable than the things that people could amass. So he was very generous. He lived a very clean life.

When we commemorate someone who's lived like that, we want to turn around and look at ourselves. Is our life clean? In what ways are we holding on to things that we shouldn't be holding onto? Learn how to let go, let go, let go. Let go of your greed. Let go of your aversion, your delusion. Let go of, as the Buddha called, the four bases for going off course. We go off course sometimes because we like somebody, we play favorites. Other times, because we don't like people, so we mistreat them. Sometimes we're deluded and fooled by people, and sometimes we're afraid of them. We do things that are unfair because we are afraid of somebody's power.

We have to learn not to let those things take over our minds. Clean them out. After all, the most valuable things we have are our actions, and if our actions are made dirty by things like this, then the results of those actions are not going to be clean, either. So when you're acting, make sure that you're trying to be as fair as possible. Of course, you want to be treated fairly by other people, so try to be fair in your dealings with others as well. If you see that you're beginning to get biased because you like somebody or you hate somebody or you're afraid of somebody,

step back and ask yourself: What are you going to gain in the long term by following through with that bias? Nothing at all.

It's like a person who walks bent over. As you bend over and keep bending over, then over time you get to the point where you can't walk straight. So try to straighten out your life, clean up your life, clean out your mind. Try to be fair in all your dealings with other people.

In that way, we take the goodness of other people and we make it part of our own. This is one of the reasons why we have commemorations like this: to try to remember that there have been good people in the world, and we don't want their goodness to die. It's one thing to think about them, but it's even better to imitate them.

This is what the Buddha said. This is what admirable friendship is all about. You find admirable friends, but to make the friendship with them an admirable friendship, you have to imitate their good qualities. You imitate their virtue, their generosity, their conviction, their discernment. That's when the friendship itself becomes admirable, and you become an admirable person as well.

So, think of all the good people in the past—Luang Lung among them—and of all the good things they've done. See what you can do to maintain their goodness, keep their goodness alive in your own thoughts, words, and deeds. Meditation, of course, is one way of helping with this because it gives you the strength to pull back from any unskillful habits you have. You can tell yourself, "I've got a better alternative here. I can live my life in line with a mind that's in line with the Dhamma, rather than going off course."

And when you stay with the Dhamma, that's when you're safe.