

Bigger than the World

April 2, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out.

We do this to train the mind: We make the breath comfortable so that the mind likes to be here and can gather its strength. We want to give primary importance to our minds over and above the importance to the world outside, because our minds play a huge role in shaping the world outside. We want to make sure that the mind itself is in good shape, so that the things we do and say and think will be in good shape as well—and that they will be good for the mind, too.

Today we're commemorating the passing of Ajaan Suwat, who passed away thirteen years ago on this day. And it's always good to stop and think of some of the teachings that he gave that were especially salient. And one was his comment that people spend too much time giving power to the world. The mind itself has a power inside, and yet we hand that power over to the world. We make the world bigger than us, more important than us. Things outside become more important, material things become more important. As a result, they develop a power. But what does that power go for? It goes for greed, aversion, and delusion. It can be used to create all kinds of suffering. But if you use that power to put an end to suffering or the causes of suffering in the mind, that's the right use of it. And that's what gives the mind its power back.

Because after all, you think: Why do you do anything at all? Why do you engage in the world at all? It's for the sake of happiness. Yet when you look at your actions, often you find yourself doing things that are going to cause suffering because of your ignorance. So we want to be able to watch the mind as it's acting to get rid of that ignorance. That's why we meditate. That's why we try to stay right here in the present moment—not because it's a wonderful place to stay but because it's a very important place to stay. It's where the work to clean up the mind is done. It's also where the defilements do their work: Greed, aversion and delusion do their work here, too, you know. So you want to be right here to watch them. Give the mind the power it needs to be bigger than they are, so that you're not overcome by the world.

Because the world comes flashing at you. We've got screens in our pockets now, the whole world can come and get at you, because you leave this huge opening for them. You've got to set up some defenses so that you don't just take everything in. You have to be more selective as to what's good for the mind, what's not good for the mind, both in what you take in and what comes out of the mind.

This is one of the reasons why we take the precepts. Because the precepts give priority to the well-being of the mind. There's some wealth and some pleasure that you can get out of killing, lying, stealing, having illicit sex, taking intoxicants, but it's at the expense of the mind,

the expense of the clarity of the mind, the expense of the mind's ability to be with itself, be comfortable with itself.

So you have to give priority to the mind's genuine needs. As for the benefits that come in the world outside: Sometimes you have to let them go. You don't want to make them bigger than the mind. Make sure that the power of the mind stays with the mind and it's put to a good purpose.

When we do that, we're carrying on the tradition that was passed down from the Buddha all the way down through the teachers of the past on into the present moment, with this message that your mind is more important than the world outside. The world is a product; the mind is the creator. You want to make sure that this creator is in good shape and that it uses its power wisely.

That's why we train the mind.