

All Your Old Baggage

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There's a Pali word, *upadhi*, which means all your baggage, all your belongings. One of the purposes of the practice is learning how to put the baggage down, not to carry it around with you all the time. Even though the baggage isn't totally let down or totally put down until you attain the total end of suffering, still it's good to learn how to practice putting things down temporarily when you catch yourself carrying baggage around. At the very least, try to keep the baggage as light as possible.

As when you're sitting here right now: There's not much sitting here—just awareness and the body sitting here. But you find yourself carrying all kinds of other attitudes along with you. Some of them are helpful in the meditation and some of them are not. So learn how to sort out the ones that aren't helpful and put them aside.

There's a story that Ajaan Fuang told of Ajaan Lee: Ajaan Lee was going off into the forest one time with a group of lay students. A lot of these people had never been out in the forest meditating ever before in their lives. So when they all showed up at the train station in Bangkok, they had brought along a lot of baggage, figuring, "Well, we're going to get on the train and then when we get off the train, they'll be people we can hire to carry our bags for us, and then we'll hire a ride to take us into the little spot in the forest." So each person had about three or four bags.

Ajaan Lee saw this and, instead of getting on the train, he started walking down the tracks. And when the ajaan walks down the tracks, *everybody* else has to walk down the tracks. So here were these people struggling with these huge loads they were carrying. So of course, they started complaining, "Why are we doing this? We can't do this, we can't walk down the tracks. We're carrying all these heavy loads."

And at first Ajaan Lee didn't say anything. He just kept walking. And then finally he said, "Well, if it's heavy—throw it away." And so, one by one, people stopped and sorted out their bags and actually threw away a lot of their bags, off to the side of the railroad track. Finally, each person ended up carrying only one little bag of stuff that was just really necessary. Everything else got thrown into the lotus ponds that they have on either side of the railroad tracks in Bangkok.

By the time they got to the next station, Ajaan Lee looked around and saw that everybody had only a very small load. That was when he allowed them to get on the train.

That's a good lesson for your meditation. As you're sitting here, you may have had a tiring day—well, don't let that be a burden now. Or the meditation may have not been going well today—don't let that be a burden in your meditation right now. Put all those thoughts aside and just be with what you've got right here.

And what have you got right here? You've got the body sitting here breathing, you've got the mind thinking and aware. So you've got all the raw materials you need, all the tools you need for a good meditation. And regardless of however well it's going to go, try to keep a good attitude toward the whole thing. In other words, in the beginning it may not seem to be going very well, but don't let that color your attitude to the next breath or the next breath or the next.

Keep a fresh attitude to each breath. Because the breath can change; the state of your body can change. As you're sitting here, you may get a sense of rest, a sense of ease. Okay, use that as part of the energy for sticking with the next breath and then the next. And as for any thoughts about, "This is impossible, how can I be expected to sit? How could things go well when they haven't gone well today?": Just put all that aside.

Remember, the most important thing you're bringing to the meditation is your present input—not events from the past or stories from the past. This is probably one of *the* most important lessons in meditating: that you can learn how to deal with anything that comes from the past if you have the right attitude in the present moment.

It's like a being a really good chef. You don't need a lot of ingredients. If you're a really good chef, you can walk into a kitchen and make good food out of whatever is there.

So practice developing that attitude toward the meditation. And don't be afraid of having the attitude that there is such a thing as good meditation and not-so-good meditation. Where that attitude *is* useful is when you're looking back on the past few meditation sessions and they haven't gone particularly well. Well, just don't let that be a burden on the mind.

But for the present moment, you've got all these possibilities, all these choices, and you want to make the most of them. You want to do this well. You could focus on the breath in a particular way, you can breathe in all kinds of different ways. You can do long breathing or short breathing; warm, lukewarm, cool, cold breathing; fast or slow; deep or shallow; broad or narrow. And there are all kinds of ways you can conceive of how the breath energy's coming in and out of the body. There's lots to play with here.

So get a sense of what's working and what's not. After all, the whole notion of skillful causes and good results, unskillful causes and bad results lies at the essence of the four noble truths. So the Buddha never said not to pass judgment on things or not to be judicious in what you're doing. There's a difference between passing judgment and being judgmental. Being judgmental coming to a situation with a lot of preconceived notions. Passing judgment means you look at what you're doing, you look at the results, and you decide whether it's working or not. If it's not working, you change.

Keep using your ingenuity to figure out what way of breathing is going to be good for the body right now. Sometimes, if you're tired, you need some good, heavy, deep in-and-out, long in-and-out breathing, or long in-breaths and short out-breaths, to give yourself energy. If you're tight or tense, then short-in, long-out can be relaxing. But you've got the choice. If neither of those two kinds of breathing works, you can try all kinds of other breathing.

You've got a whole hour to experiment with the breath, to see what really feels right right now. And you find that as you get more and more engrossed in the idea of choosing the right way of breathing right now, right now, right now, all the baggage you've been carrying in from the past gradually gets put aside as more and more of your attention, more and more of your alertness gets applied to the present moment.

So there is such a thing as good meditation; there is such a thing as a meditation that doesn't go as well. But remember that the important element is what you bring to the present moment as opposed to what you're bringing from the past. And that way you find that things coming in from past karma—feelings of pain, pleasure—are not nearly as important as what you make out of them. It's possible to take the potential for pleasant feeling and actually make it painful. And vice versa: the potential for painful feeling is something you can sometimes make more pleasant by the way you look at the feeling, by the way you relate to the feeling, how you perceive which side of the feeling you're on.

So the crucial element is what you're applying to the present moment. And as you get more involved in this task of dealing with the present moment, as your hands get filled with the tasks of the present moment, you find that you don't have any hands to hold the old baggage. So you can start letting some of that old baggage go.

Carry only what's necessary. What's necessary? Being mindful: just keep remembering, "Stay with the breath, stay with the breath." Being alert: noticing what you're doing with the breath; how you're focusing on it and which ways of focusing, which ways of conceiving of the breath, are helpful and which ones are not. And then just sticking with it.

That's really all you have to carry right now. All your other baggage you can put aside. If it really has useful things it'll be waiting at the door when you leave. But you don't need to load yourself down right now.