

## *Delight*

*December 21, 2010*

Ajaan Suwat would often recommend starting meditation by generating a sense of confidence, a sense of inspiration that what we're doing here is something really important.

We're training the mind. We're developing the mind's good qualities and learning how to let go of its bad qualities.

Because the mind has both. You see this clearly as soon as you try to focus on the breath. Other thoughts will come in that'll try to pull you away. Sometimes they're neutral thoughts, sometimes they're relatively okay—they might be thoughts about generosity or thoughts about other good things—but sometimes they're just downright embarrassing. You wouldn't want to think that that kind of thought could be going to go through your head.

And so one of the customs of the noble ones is to learn how to develop a sense of delight in abandoning unskillful qualities and developing skillful ones. This sense of delight is something you sometimes have to work on. Because often the unskillful qualities are things you like and the skillful qualities are going to require some effort. And some days you just don't feel up to that effort.

So it's good to stop and think about what's good about what you're doing here, why you want to be here sitting here with your eyes closed. The reasons are going to be different for different people, but they basically come down to the fact that the mind is what determines your life. Your state of mind is going to determine what you're going to do, and what you're going to do is going to determine the things that happen.

So you want to look into this source. The source is immediately available—and that's a really good thing. It's not as if our fate has been written in the past, putting us under some compulsion to act out something that was decided a long time ago.

Some conditions in life can be traced back to past actions, but the Buddha's image of our past karma is like a big field. There are lots of different seeds in that field. It depends on which ones you're going to water with craving and delight.

And craving's not always bad. If you didn't have the craving to practice, it wouldn't happen. If you didn't have delight in the practice, it wouldn't happen. So we're deciding right now which of the many seeds in our past karma we're going to delight in, we're going to cultivate. Let's cultivate the seeds for concentration, cultivate the seeds for peace of mind, cultivate the seeds for insight,

the seeds that will help lead us to freedom.

This is a possibility that's available to all of us. It depends on the choices we're making right now. So it's a good thing that we've got this opportunity. Let's make the most of it.

You've got the breath coming in, going out. You've got the mind here thinking and aware. So learn how to think about the breath in a way that's really helpful.

Ajaan Fuang would often counsel two things: Learn how to be observant and learn how to use your ingenuity. As the Buddha said, being observant is one of the prime requisites that he would ask for in any student, learning how to look and really observe what you're doing.

And there are many things that he would leave up to your powers of observation.

He once said there are two kinds of robe cloth, two kinds of almsfood, two kinds of lodging, two kinds of cities and towns, two kinds of countrysides, and two kinds of individuals that you can be associating with. And in each case, he said that there are the ones to be associated with and the ones not to be associated with.

How do you know which is which? Well, by observing. Just look at your own mind when you're using a particular kind of robe, he'd say, or almsfood or lodging. In other words, look at your surroundings, look at the things you're using in your daily life, and look at the effect of your actions in response to these things. If they tend to lead to the increase in unskillful qualities and decrease in skillful ones, then they're not to be used. And vice versa: If they lead to the increase of skillful qualities and the decrease of unskillful ones, then it's okay to use them.

The same goes for the location: what kind of city or town you're staying in and what kind of countryside, what kind of people you're hanging around with. In other words, you have to learn how to observe for yourself how things are going: what's helpful to your practice and what's not.

There are the rules he laid down in the precepts and in the rules of the Vinaya to give you some guidelines. But there's an awful lot that you have to learn how to observe on your own.

And the same applies to your breath. When you focus on different parts of the body, you'll find that you get different results. When you work with the breath, sometimes you want to work with the breath in a way that's relaxing and soothing, and other times you want to work in a way that's more energizing.

I've personally found that, with the low pressure system going through right now, if I don't breathe heavily I'm going to get headaches. So this is a case where you really do need to energize things through the way you breathe. But this is an

area that depends on each individual. There are no hard and fast rules here.

And similarly with pains in the body: Sometimes if you focus directly on the pain, insight arises. You understand: “Okay, this is how the mind creates problems around pain.” And other times when you focus directly on the pain, it makes things worse. That’s a case when you have to learn how to work around the pain.

Again, use the breath for whatever parts of the body are comfortable as your foundation, as your main focus. And then think of that comfortable, effervescent breathing just bubbling right through the pain—or seeping through the pain. Do whatever you find works to help deal with that particular pain, to the point where you’re able to sit with the pain and watch it, learn how to comprehend it. Because it’s only when you comprehend not only the pain but your reaction around the pain that you can be unburdened of the pain.

The other quality you need to use in addition to being observant is your own ingenuity. Again, this is Ajaan Fuang. I’ve been trying to trace the different uses of the word for ingenuity in Pali, *patibbana*. The Buddha often recommends it as a good quality but he never really defines it, doesn’t give examples. He simply says it’s something you really want to develop.

So here again, when you’re dealing with an issue with the breath or dealing with pain or dealing with distractions—and you find that you take all the old techniques you’ve learned from other people, you’ve read about, and for some reason they don’t seem to work—that’s when you have to use your ingenuity. What might work now?

Think about alternative approaches. Think of different ways of taking the basic principles that you’ve learned from others, tweak them here and tweak them there until you get something that does work for you. And again, what works for you today may not work tomorrow. So tomorrow you need to use more ingenuity.

What’s sobering about all this is that it does depend on your own powers of observation. It depends on your self-honesty, when you honestly do want to develop skillful qualities.

For instance, dealing with the hindrances: sensual desire comes in, ill will comes in, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, uncertainty come in. And often you tend to side with them. You delight in them. Sensual desire comes in and the thing you’re thinking about really is desirable. Ill will comes in: The person that you’re feeling ill will for really is horrible. Sloth and sleepiness come in and, yeah, you think about how much your body’s been working today and how much you haven’t had a chance to rest and, yeah, you want to give in to it. And so on down the line.

If that's your attitude, then no matter how good the techniques are, they're not going to work. You have to learn how to develop a sense of delight in letting go of the hindrances.

The Buddha has you think about them as slavery, going through a desolate area, an illness, a debt. In other words, learn how to see the hindrances as things you really do want to get past, so that you develop a sense of delight in abandoning and delight in developing mindfulness and concentration in their place.

So when things aren't going well, stop and ask yourself, "Okay, am I really delighting in what I'm supposed to be doing here? Or does my delight lie someplace else?" You don't have to accept that sense of delight as a given. If you find you're delighting in encouraging unskillful qualities, you can remind yourself, "Hey, wait a minute. This is not in our best interest here"—using the word "our" in the sense of the whole committee in the mind.

Just because there's a particular emotion coming up, a particular feeling coming up in the mind, that doesn't mean that that's the one you have to take on right now. Remember that there's a whole field of potentials and you're watering the wrong seed. You're watering the thistles, you're watering all the brambles and burrs. You want to water the good plants, the ones that provide fruit and flowers and shade. They're there in the field, too.

So look for the good potentials inside and learn how to delight in watering them. That's when the meditation will develop results that are really worthwhile.

And that's the best use of your time here.