

## *Occupy Your Space*

*October 25, 2016*

During the last years of his life, Ajaan Fuang very rarely accepted invitations to go to people's houses for meals. That was a responsibility he passed off to the younger monks. There was one time, though, when he was invited by one of his students on the condition that he wouldn't have to chant. She just wanted him to have a meal at her house. So the two of us went. And instead of chanting, Ajaan Fuang asked the people who had come to the meal: "Any questions about the practice?"

The woman's sister had been practicing with another ajaan—not in the forest tradition—and she said, "I have been meditating and it's all about making your mind empty, right?"

He said, "No. The mind needs work to do. It needs to occupy itself, because otherwise, if the mind is empty, it's like leaving the door to your house open. Anybody can walk in."

So occupy yourself with the breath. Occupy your body. Make this your space by dealing with your breath and with the thoughts in your mind.

First, with the breath: Think of the breath as a whole-body process. The Buddha talks about different aspects of the wind element in the body. One is the in-and-out breath. Then there are lots of other breaths in the body, too: the breath energy that goes up, the breath energy that goes down.

You can notice this as you breathe in. Sometimes when you breathe in it feels like the energy is being pulled up. Other times it feels like it's settling down. You may notice that if you sit here, pulling, pulling, pulling up for a whole hour, you're going to get a headache. If you do nothing but down, down, down for the whole hour, you get sluggish. So think of varying the direction of where the energy is going so that things can be balanced.

One way to do that is to think of another aspect of the breath energy that the Buddha says goes through all the limbs of the body. Think of the body as having openings in every direction, like a sponge. As you breathe in, the breath energy is coming in from all directions. You're not pulling it in from in front of you. You're allowing it to seep in from all sides, all around: top, bottom, front, back, left, right.

Imagine a line in the middle of the body running from the middle of the head down to the base of the spine. The breath energy comes into that line, goes out of that line. This way, you sweep out the space of the body. Any patterns of tension

you may feel in any part of the body: Allow them to be dissolved by the breath. And any patterns of tension that you associate with the in-breath: Allow them to be dissolved by the breath as well. Think of yourself floating in breath here, saturated with breath energy. See if you can maintain that perception.

Other thoughts will come in, sounds will come past, but you don't have to pay them any mind. If a sense of light appears or a vision of your own body, don't pay these things any mind. If there's a vision of white light, you can bring it into the body, because it's soothing, refreshing.

But the main principle is that you don't want to leave the body unoccupied, because otherwise you don't know what kind of energies will come in.

You don't have to think about spirits or anything, just think about being around other people. If you're not occupying the energetic space of your body, other people's energy will invade, and you may pick up some strange things from them. So make sure that your breath energy fills the body. Try to keep your awareness filling the body, too.

Then you can start cleaning out the mind.

When thoughts come into the mind, learn how to not get attached to them, especially the negative ones. You want the positive ones right now: the ones that are encouraging you: "Keep at it... keep at it... you can do it."

The thought that says, "I've been doing this for how many years now and don't have much to show for it": Just let that go past. That's a small-minded thought going through your mind. You're working on establishing something solid and enlarged, so you don't want these little things to come in and destroy it. Learn how not to believe everything you think. Just because an idea comes in doesn't mean that it is necessarily *your* idea.

Remember Ajaan Lee's image of all the different consciousnesses in your body or around your body, coming in, permeating your blood vessels and getting into your brain. Just because a thought comes through the mind doesn't mean that it's your thought. He says that any thought that's not in your best interest, you can say, "That's not me, that's not mine." Let it go. It doesn't matter where you picked it up. You may have picked it up years back when something somebody said somehow got lodged in your mind. Well, here's a good chance to dislodge it. See it come up, see it go away, and learn to recognize it as not something that you want. Don't let it occupy your space. This principle is good protection all around.

There was a woman who came to the monastery in Thailand one time. She was a friend of one of the cooks in the kitchen. The woman who was the cook told us beforehand that her friend had a problem: Every time she sat and meditated, she would start shaking. She was hoping that Ajaan Fuang would be able to cure it. So

the woman came and, sure enough, she started shaking as she meditated. Ajaan Fuang had a student who was quite psychic, so he said to her, “Check her out. See what’s happening with her.”

The student looked in her meditation and saw two very vicious beings standing behind the woman, shaking her. She tried to stop them but they turned on her. It scared her so much that she ran out of the chedi where we were meditating and threw up. Then she came back and told Ajaan Fuang what had happened. He said, “You fool, you didn’t protect yourself first. Before you deal with anything like that, one, fill your body with breath energy and if you have a sense of light, fill the body with light. And then two, spread goodwill. No matter how much you like or dislike the other being, just spread lots and lots of goodwill. And then ask them questions: ‘Why are they doing this? What do they want?’”

So the student did that in her meditation and she got the message that the woman who was shaking had been the child of these two beings in a previous lifetime. She’d killed her parents, and now the parents were after her. They were afraid that if she meditated, she would get away.

The student asked what the other woman could do to make them stop doing this. And they said, “Build a Buddha image and dedicate the merit to us.” Well, it so happened we were building a Buddha image at the monastery at the time. So the student reported this to Ajaan Fuang, and he said “Don’t say a word to her. It’ll sound like we’re trying to make money out of your psychic powers.” So we had to leave the woman to her karma. We found out several years later that someone did invite her to make a Buddha image and the shaking did stop.

But the take-away from that is this: If you’re dealing with any kind of outside energy, fill your body first with your energy. Don’t let anybody else inhabit you. If you’re dealing with something dangerous or something you feel is uncanny, fill your body with your energy and spread lots of goodwill.

Ajaan Fuang had to deal with spirit possessions a couple of times and, as he told me, he hadn’t learned any techniques for driving spirits out. His technique was always lots of goodwill. But again, you have to have your protection first along with the goodwill.

There was a case of a woman I knew who was suddenly possessed by a really nasty spirit. Another one of the ajaans I knew had tried to chase the spirit out and the spirit just laughed at him, saying, “I’ve seen you break this precept and that precept. I am not afraid.” Nothing this ajaan or any of his students could do was able to get rid of the spirit. They asked if Ajaan Fuang would come to check out the situation. He did and, as he told me later, he just sat there and spread goodwill for a minute and the spirit was gone.

So goodwill has its power if you're firm enough in your concentration and firm enough in your ability to protect yourself through your own occupation of the body.

And this may all sound strange. After all, we're supposed to think that the body is not us. We're supposed to not have any sense of "me" in here. But that's a mistake. You need a good solid sense of yourself to protect yourself from other energies. It helps you peel away all your unhealthy senses of self. It's not as if you have only one self. We all have lots and lots of selves. It's as if we have a whole stable inside—different horses that we've been riding for different occasions and different purposes—but some of the horses are unruly, and we've got to clean out the stables. To do that, you have to have one really good horse and one really good worker, and send the other horses packing.

Because without that sense of a good, strong sense of a healthy, skillful identity, all these other identities are going to take over. They're going to maintain their old power. Here you are, trying to change the balance of power inside, so try to train your skillful intentions to be as solid as possible. And when they've done their work, then you can put them aside. You put them out to pasture. As long as the work isn't done, you need somebody to do the work. And that sense of the healthy self does get strengthened by having a place that it can occupy, by being able to occupy the whole body.

The sense of spaciousness, the sense of well-being, the sense of strength and solidity that come from that will enable you to do the work you need to do.