

Borrowed Wealth

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Someone once came to see Ajaan Lee with a problem. He said that his friends had found out that he was meditating, and so they said, “So, you say that your body is not yours. Then why won’t you let us hit it?” He didn’t know how to respond to them. Ajaan Lee’s response was, “Tell them it’s borrowed goods and you have to return it in good condition.” He could also have said, “It’s like borrowed money. I borrowed it to invest and I haven’t gotten my profit yet.”

What we’re doing, as we practice, is trying to get a real profit out of the body, out of the movements of the mind, something of real value. Because your body, your feelings, your perceptions, and thought constructs, even your consciousness, acts of consciousness: They come and they go, and you have to leave them at some point. And the question is, in taking possession of these things and taking care of them, what do you have to show for your effort?

Most people go for a life of sensual pleasures: nice sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations. These can turn into nice memories, but then the memories, of course, are going to go, too. But sometimes the memory of the pleasures you once had and don’t have now can be painful. And as for the pleasures themselves, as Ajaan Suwat used to say, “Those sensual pleasures you had last week: Where are they now? They’re gone. There’s nothing.” What you may have left over is the karma you engaged in in order to get those things, which may sometimes be okay, and other times is not so okay. That’s called borrowing money, investing it, and then losing. It’s a double loss. So as you look around you, ask yourself: What really is there of solid value? You’ve got the mind, and you’ve got the qualities of the mind, and these qualities can be of solid value not only for you, but also for people around you. So you want to invest in those.

These are some things to keep in mind as you’re struggling with staying with the breath. It may seem like an awful lot of effort, but it’s effort that’s well spent. Because there is a dividend, there is a reward that comes from it. At the very least, you’re developing qualities of endurance, persistence, stick-to-it-tiveness. And it

gets even better when you begin to get a sense of well-being with the breath. Even if in the beginning it's just for short periods of time, the fact that you're able to settle down is enough to show yourself that there is a well-being that comes from staying right here, a sense of ease, a sense of fullness, and it causes no harm to anyone at all. And even though that sense of ease may pass, you're actually developing a skill as to how to bring it back again. This means that you've got access to a pleasure that's more under your control, and it's a pleasure that goes straight to the mind. It doesn't have to go through the eyes, the ears, or the tongue. It's purely a mental pleasure, so it doesn't have to be filtered through the other senses.

This will be something really good as you find that the senses begin to go their various ways. Your eyes get blurry, your hearing gets bad, your sense of taste goes flat. As your body gets older, it gets more sensitive to heat and cold and other things outside. So as the senses wear down, if you've got good qualities in the mind, you've got something good inside that doesn't have to depend on them: something you can rely on as the body falls away. If you don't get something good out of the body, the fact that it's falling away gets very sad. You had this opportunity and there it goes, there it goes. And if all you can think about is, "There go my sensual pleasures," there's a real sense of loss.

But if you can remind yourself, "I've taken good things out of the body, I've made good use of it, I've gotten my profit. I invested it and now I have to hand it back, and even though I'm handing it back aged, ill, dead, the original owners are not going to complain." That's because you have something good to share with them: You have the merit you've made, and this merit has an influence that goes beyond what you might ordinarily think. There's a goodness that you share with people around you, added to the fact that you need to feed on them less and less, and you're subjecting them less and less to your greed, aversion and delusion.

But there's also goodness for beings you can't see. Ajaan Funn one time was talking about how beings filled space the same way that rice would fill a sack stuffed full of rice, with no space for any extra grains. There are beings all over the place—high level, low level—and what they can sense from you is the quality of your heart. There are some low-level being that are really hungry for some

goodness to be spread their way. Well, when you meditate you've got something good to spread to them. There are high-level beings that are happy to be around meditators because you're not sending out the heat of passion, aversion, and delusion.

So the goodness that comes from meditation comes from getting the mind to settle down, and you can use that settled-down mind to understand why you're suffering and how you can stop. That way, the mind gets lighter and lighter as you begin to peel away all of its attachments. You've got a genuine profit there: something, as they say in Thai, that if it falls in the water it doesn't float away, if it falls into fire it doesn't burn. Something that doesn't have to depend on the senses at all. And as you know, the Buddha's definition of the world is the six senses. This profit doesn't have to depend on the world in any way. You've got your own independent goodness, something you can take with you, something you can share. So now that you've borrowed this body—you entered into your mother's womb, you saw it as an opportunity—make the most of that opportunity. It doesn't last forever, but you've got it right now.

Ajaan Mun would often encourage his students. They came from poor parts of Thailand, generally the bottom of the social ladder, but he kept reminding them, "You've got everything it takes, all the basic requisites for putting an end to the mind's suffering, for doing something of really solid value, much better than trying to go out and climb up the social ladder. Much better than anything else that you could do as a human being." So, we all have what it takes, but just make sure that you make the best use of it. You are dealing with borrowed goods here; you are going to have to pay back. If you can pay it back with merit, the people who lent it to you will be happy, and you yourself will have plenty of profit to take with you, something of really solid worth.