

## *Don't Just Do It*

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Ajaan Suwat would often begin his meditation instructions by saying, *Yaa sak tae waa tham*. It's a Thai idiom. Literally it says, "Don't just do it." If we were to translate it idiomatically: "Don't just go through the motions."

It's easy enough to sit here with your eyes closed and tell yourself you're meditating, but there's a lot more involved. You can focus on the breath and not get very deep if you just go through the motions.

Think about what the Buddha said: If you want the Dhamma, there are two qualities you have to nurture. One is commitment, and the other's reflection. In both cases, you can't just go through the motions.

In the case of the commitment, think of the terms that are used in the description of mindfulness and the bases of success: "ardency," "intent." There's another Thai idiom that translates "intent": "Put your whole heart into it," which is right in line with the English idiom.

Give it your full attention. This is not a task you do while you're multi-tasking. This is a mono-task, because you're going to be observing your mind and the breath at the same time. The more you can have your whole mind and whole heart right here, at the whole breath, the more you're going to see.

After all, everything the Buddha discovered in the course of his awakening is right here. Our problem is that we don't see it. That's because our attention is scattered. So gather it together right here and put it all into the practice.

When Ajaan Lee says to try the different types of breath, ask yourself, "What does he mean? What, in my experience, corresponds to what he talks about when he says: 'the breath going through the spine,' or 'the breath going through the legs,' or 'taking the breath energy and letting it go through a pain'?" Really look into that, because there's a lot to be learned as you do.

You have to remember that we're here to gain insight by concentrating the mind. In other words, we're doing one thing that will lead to something else closely related—insight—but the insights come only if you're paying careful attention.

This is where the reflection comes in. We're reflecting on our actions. Think of the

Buddha's teaching to Rāhula: Before you do something, while you're doing it, after it's done, reflect on what you're doing. Reflection here is not an abstract or aimless reflection.

A while back I heard someone say that he enjoyed the process of reflection in his meditation because it gave rise to a sense of wonder. He would ask questions, he said, that had no answers. But that's not the Buddha's type of reflection. The reflection is there to see, "How am I doing? What can I do better?" Those are questions that deserve answers.

I was once at a Buddhist event sitting next to a Zen teacher. Seeing that I was a Theravada monk, he said to me, "I really like reading the Pali Canon. It's full of koans... lots of questions to which there is no answer, like: 'What is the cause of suffering?'"

Well, it just so happens there *is* an answer to that question. And that's the whole point of asking the question to begin with—to arrive at useful answers.

In this case, we're trying to arrive at an ultimate happiness, an ultimate well-being: *sukha* in Pali. And we want to reflect on how well we're doing. This is where you have to realize that there are gradations in levels of *sukha*. That's part of the reflection. How intense is the pleasure coming from this? How satisfying? How gratifying? And at the same time, how harmless is it?

You don't simply go by the fact that you intensely like something. You also have to reflect on its impact: "Does this harm anyone else? Does it harm me? Is there any harm in the action that I'm doing? Or is there any harm in the pleasure as I'm enjoying it?" If you ask those questions, you begin to find ways that you may have been relating to pleasure that really are unskillful.

The Buddha gives one example: the person who's practicing jhana and then exalts himself because he's got a higher jhana than his friends. That right there ruins it. You want to be circumspect.

This is a word that Ajaan Lee uses when he translates that fourth base for success, *vimāṃsā*, which we sometimes translate as "discrimination." It can also be translated as *ingenuity*: your active mental faculties that go into the reflection. But Ajaan Lee's favorite translation is, "Be circumspect, look all around."

Again, you give your whole heart to doing the practice, and you give your all-around vision to reflecting on it. You'll find that you do come to higher and higher levels of well-being that are more and more secure, because they're more and more harmless.

So you don't simply say, "Well, the results of all actions are stressful." It sounds like an insight, but you have to know when to use it. There was that case where a monk said that to the

Buddha. He had given that answer to someone else, and he reported his answer to the Buddha—and the Buddha called him a worthless man.

Another monk came to the first monk's defense. He said, "After all, aren't all feelings stressful? As the monk had said, 'All karma leads to stress.' Well, all karma leads to feelings, therefore all karma must lead to stress, because all feelings are stressful." The Buddha replied that this was a worthless explanation, too. When you're asked about karma, he said, you talk about the three kinds of feeling: pleasure, painful, neither pleasure nor painful.

So as you're committed to the practice, as you're doing it, you have to become more and more sensitive to levels of stress, levels of well-being. Ultimately, yes, you get to the point where you let go of all karma, and you let go of all feelings. You let go of all reflections.

But don't short-circuit the practice by dragging in insights that are not really appropriate. You want insights that come from the fact that you're doing something, you see your mind in action as you're doing it, and you're reflecting on it in an appropriate way. That way, the quality of the well-being is good, and the effect it has on you, the effect it has on other people, is as harmless as possible. When you reflect in that way, you further and further refine your commitment.

That's what's meant by not just going through the motions, not just doing it. You do it with your whole heart; you reflect with your whole mind. And any activity that's got your whole heart and whole mind together is bound to lead to something good.