

Ingenuity

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Living with Ajaan Fuang and being with him as he taught a lot of people meditation, I learned that there are some things in meditation that are true across the board for everybody: things that everybody should do, things that everybody should avoid. And then there's a large area where each person has to explore for him or herself.

Some of the things to avoid: If you find yourself leaving your body, try not to. It's dangerous out there. You may have a sense that you're slipping out of your body, and some people do have this, and sometimes they're not aware of until it's actually happened. They're floating up and next to the ceiling as they look down at their body below. If that happens, think of the four elements—earth, water, wind, fire—and that'll get you back in the body, where you're safe.

If lights appear in your meditation, basically don't pay them any attention, unless there's a white light, and you can control it. In other words, you can make it appear, make it disappear, make it go far away, bring it close, make it large, make it small, so that you know that you're totally in control of it. Then you can bring it into the body. Either it'll light up the whole body or it'll form a little kernel someplace in the body and give you some energy. As for other lights, other colors, just leave them alone.

As for energies that come up in the body: Any energy that comes up into your head, you have to be very careful about it, because often it can get stuck up there. This is one of the reasons why we talk about opening up all the energy channels, especially the ones that allow energies to go out: out the palms of the hands, out the soles of the feet, out the eyes, down in the front of the throat. There tends to be a big blockage for a lot of people right at the throat. See if you can open it up. That way, any energy that comes up into the head has places to go.

Or any excess energy. Some people find an energy coming up the spine that can get blocked here or there. When it gets blocked, it gets you into a state of imbalance. This is one of the reasons why Ajaan Lee would focus on getting the spine cleared up as the first order of business. If energy does come up the spine, it doesn't get blocked, it doesn't get diverted off to one side or another.

At the same time, you've got to keep that sense of the energy coming down through the throat down into the chest. So if too much energy comes up the spine and gets into the head, you don't want it to get stuck there. Think of it going

down the front of the body, or up out of the top of the head. These are just a few of the *don'ts* that are true across the board.

As for the things you have to explore for yourself, those have to do with your sense of energy in the body. Different people relate to their bodies, especially the energy body, in different ways. People who have been emotionally repressed a lot have to be very careful. The energies can start moving around, get very strong, and then get lodged in one place or another. So again, it's good to be able to open up all the channels you can, so that these things can go out when they appear.

But there are a lot of cases where you have to explore on your own. Just try to be careful not to force things too much. The operative word here is *allowing* the energies to flow. You don't push them. You can read about energy going down the spine and you can subconsciously think of pushing it down the spine, but that creates problems. Or you can think of it coming up, and that creates even more problems if you're not careful and you push it up. Just think of opening up the blockages. It's like taking road blocks away from a road. Then if the traffic flows, let it flow on its own. You don't have to push the cars around. All this comes under the heading of ingenuity.

If you go through the Canon, memorizing different lists that the Buddha gives, there's one really interesting list where he talks about having a sense of yourself: your ability to look after yourself as you meditate, to gauge your strengths and weaknesses, so that you can use your strengths to compensate for the weaknesses or to get rid of them altogether. The list says that you should read yourself in terms of six qualities. It's one of those lists that takes a list someplace else and adds a quality here, adds a quality there. And it's interesting to trace the additions.

If you've ever tried to memorize the lists, you'll have noticed that certain lists contain other lists. In this case, the list of qualities that make you good at being able to judge yourself starts out with the list of the four qualities that you look for in an admirable friend. In other words, you try to internalize those qualities to become a genuine friend to yourself. The four are conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment. Conviction means conviction in the Buddha's awakening, and that translates into conviction in the power of your actions. You want to pay careful attention to what you're doing because your actions really do make a difference.

You really do have choices in the present moment. The Buddha is very clear on this. You have choices that you can make, and they will have an impact—which is why he would actually seek out those who taught otherwise and argue with them, because this principle is so important. Those who taught that everything you experience right now is shaped by what was done in the past, he would argue with

them, saying that that means people become killers and stealers and adulterers because of what was done in the past. In other words, they're not responsible for their actions now. Or those teachers would say that everything is totally random, that there are no influences coming in from the past at all: That would mean that, again, people would do horrible things because it's just random. There would be no way to control it.

The Buddha's principle is that there is a certain amount of influence coming in from the past, but you have the ability to change it, redirect it. To be convinced of that principle is really important, because it means you're going to be looking very carefully at what you do.

From this, you learn to be virtuous. In other words, you make it a principle that you're not going to harm anybody. As you go through life in as harmless a way as possible, things open up in the mind. You don't have to hide from yourself the things you did, the things you said, or even the things you thought about other people. You may have thought them, but you don't focus on negative things. That makes it easier to be mindful and to observe yourself.

And if you're virtuous and generous, as I said this morning, it's a lot easier to watch your mind. You can see thoughts of irritation coming and going, and you don't come down hard on yourself for having those thoughts. You realize, "Well, I do have some goodness to me. So these thoughts are just something that come and they go, and they don't reflect on what kind of person I am. So I can watch them." You learn a lot about them, because there will be parts of the mind that go for them. But again, they're not the total mind. You know that because you have engaged in generosity and you have engaged in virtue.

The fourth quality that makes you a good friend to yourself is to be discerning, seeing which actions lead to suffering, which actions lead away. The Buddha calls this "penetrative discernment of arising and passing away." It doesn't mean you just simply watch things coming and going. For the discernment to be penetrative, you have to see that when some things come, they're good. When other things come, they're not good. When some things go, it's a bad thing that they're going. With other things, it's a good thing they're going. You make these distinctions, and then you learn how to encourage the things that are good to stay and grow, and encourage the unskillful things to go away. That's when you're really discerning.

So those are the qualities that make you a good friend to yourself. As the Buddha also said, these are the qualities that will lead you to a good rebirth.

There's another place where he has that same list of four, and he adds one more: learning, learning the Dhamma. He says that when you've got these five

qualities, these are the qualities that will make you a deva. They lift the level of your mind.

It's interesting that learning the Dhamma would be the one that would lift it. It's good to keep that in mind, to stock your mind with Dhamma. Because things are going to come up in your meditation and you want something to measure them against. Think of Ajaan Mun out in the forest, with visions of devas and nagas coming and giving him advice on what he should and shouldn't be doing. As he told Ajaan Fuang, the fact that it was a deva or naga had to be put aside. You had to actually look at the advice itself, and then measure it against what you knew of the Dhamma. The more you know of the Dhamma, the better prepared you are to see if something fits in or doesn't. This doesn't mean you have to know the entire Tripitaka. There's a lot of repetition in those pages, but you need to know the basic principles.

And it's good to have some of them memorized. This is why in Buddhist countries they memorize these lists of dhammas and why they memorize chants and suttas. You can stock your mind with knowledge that can protect you, that can lift the level of your mind.

One of the reasons we memorize chants is so you can have it in the background. There was a woman up in Canada who complained that she had earworms all the time when she meditated. One of the ways of getting rid of bad earworms is to memorize a lot of chants. That way, if you have an earworm, it can be a chant earworm, which would be good to have as the background for whatever you're going to do. These things keep reminding you, especially if they're any of the chants that have translations. They keep reminding you of the Dhamma.

Because it's so easy when you're away from the monastery, or even away from listening to a Dhamma talk, for your mind to slip back into its old ways. Your identity as a meditator gets shunted aside as you get involved in your other activities of the day. So this is how we get that identity back so that it informs your actions, regardless of what you're doing. So that's five qualities.

The sixth quality, which is what makes you reliable, someone you can depend on yourself, not only to do the things that would lead to a human rebirth or a deva rebirth, but would actually take you beyond that: The sixth quality is ingenuity, the ability to look at things in ways that haven't been pointed out to you. This is the same thing as Aristotle's definition of intelligence: You see connections and similarities that haven't been pointed out to you. You need to learn to look at things from different angles. This is the independent part of your mind, the part that can look at the way you commit to the practice, and can think about different ways of doing it, and then look at the way you reflect on the practice.

That way, you get better at reflecting and learning how to judge things. One of the main problems of being a meditator is that your ability to judge your own mind really has to be developed. Some people are pretty poor at that. You have to work at it. Which means that you have to listen very carefully, look very carefully, try things out, and then consult with the teacher. And try things out again. After a while, you'll begin to learn, "Okay, this is how you think independently."

The Pali word for ingenuity, *patibhāna*, is also used to describe imagination—the ability to imagine different ways of doing things.

You look at Ajaan Lee, the way he talked about the breath. In some cases, it was because he actually watched other people do his meditation to see what they did with their breath energies. In some cases, it was a matter of experimenting on his own. He was able to take a teaching and turn it around. For example, there's a passage where Ajaan Mun talks about zero as a symbol for awakening. Zero doesn't mean there's nothing there at all. Actually, there's the symbol for zero and it can do things. You put it after one and it becomes ten. You put lots of zeros and you get millions.

Ajaan Lee took that image and turned it around. Try to get your mind, he said, so that the zeros come first. In his case, the meaning was that people can say things to you, and as long as your mind keeps the zeros first, they don't have any meaning. The mind stays one no matter how many zeros you put in front of it.

So he took an image and turned it around and got some good use of it. As he said, when you gain an insight, ask yourself, "To what extent is this insight true? And to what extent could it be false? Where would it be true? Where would it be false? Where is the opposite true? And what if the opposite were true? What would that mean?" That way, he says, you become a person with two eyes, and not just one.

Usually, whatever comes up in the course of your meditation, even if you don't have devas or nagas coming and talking to you, there is a tendency to believe whatever comes up in the mind in meditation and then to want to run with it. You have to have a part of the mind that steps back, questions it. That's when you become someone who can rely on yourself. It's the ingenuity of stepping back that saves you.

So look into yourself. To what extent do you have these qualities, and to what extent do you need to develop them? Work on them. And as you work on them, you find that you become more and more reliable as a judge of what you're doing. That way, you can be more and more independent, more self-reliant. And you can take charge of the training of your own mind.