

A Wealthy Memory

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The Buddha's analysis of the causes of suffering makes the point that the question of whether we're going to suffer or not depends primarily on what we bring into the present moment. In other words, you don't necessarily suffer because there are painful feelings in the present. Sometimes you can suffer from pleasant feelings in the present, and vice versa: There can be a great deal of pain and difficulty in the present moment, but you don't have to suffer. It all depends on what you bring with you to the experience of the present.

So you want to ask yourself: Are you bringing wealth or are you bringing poverty to the present moment? In other words, is your mind filled with impoverished ideas, impoverished values, impoverished knowledge, or does it have wealth in these areas? Part of the wealth you want to bring, of course, is knowledge of the techniques and approaches you learn in the meditation: Knowing how to focus on the breath, keeping the breath comfortable in the midst of different circumstances, and reminding yourself that it's important to do that: These are all forms of wealth. So is the realization that your mind is a lot more likely to think of the right thing to do or say when it's inhabiting a comfortable body. When your body doesn't feel invaded by the effects of fear or anger or other unskillful emotions, when you can work through some of those effects by the way you breathe, that's an important skill to bring with you. It's an important kind of wealth.

But this wealth is not just a matter of techniques, it's also a matter of attitudes. This is why one of the members of the list of noble wealth is knowledge of truths, many truths. What this means is having memorized the teachings of the Buddha, having thought them through, and keeping them in your memory bank so that when a situation comes up, you can apply the right attitude.

This is why, in the past, people memorized a lot, memorized the Dhammapada and a lot of the basic chants. There's a story of a woman in the Pali Canon who every morning would get up before dawn and recite the last section of the Sutta Nipata, those sixteen poems of the brahmins coming to see the Buddha. In other words, she carried that knowledge around inside her. When you have things like that memorized, you'd be surprised at how they pop up in your mind at the right time when you really need them.

I experienced something like this during the year after Ajaan Fuang passed away. It was a very difficult year. There were a lot of strange political pressures in

the monastery. I found myself thrown into situations that Ajaan Fuang had always been the one to handle before, but now I had to make the decisions. I was confronted with some very difficult people, very difficult problems. It so happened that different bits and pieces and snatches of the conversations that I had with Ajaan Fuang would come into my mind at the right time to remind me what the proper attitude would be to any particular difficulty. That's why I started writing these things down, because I didn't want to forget them. That was the beginning of what is now the book, *Awareness Itself*.

But it was the experience of having good Dhamma teachings in the mind and seeing how valuable those were, as little reminders of what the right attitude is: That reminded me that we're working here in the practice not just on a technique of breath meditation, but also on our values. An important part of the meditation is sorting through what things you carry around with you, whose voices you're listening to. Are you listening to the voice of the Buddha, or the voice of somebody who didn't mean all that well to you, who just yelled at you when you were young, or any of the crazy and unskillful ideas you've picked up and tend to carry around all the time? You've got to ask yourself this.

Look at those attitudes you've picked up: Are they a form of wealth or are they a form of poverty? Do you really believe in those attitudes when you get to examine them calmly? If not, learn to replace them with some other attitudes. Read up on Ajaan Lee, Ajaan Maha Boowa, all the great ajaans. Look through the Dhammapada to find verses that are appropriate for your particular situation in life and memorize them.

This is why we have these chants in English every evening, to remind you of the proper attitudes to bring to your particular situation. You might say, "I can't embody those attitudes, because after all, those are the attitudes of noble disciples, but I'm not a noble disciple yet." You might tell yourself that, but that's the proper attitude at all. How are you going to learn to become a noble disciple? Where do the nobles disciples come from? They came from unawakened people, but they learn to adopt these attitudes. That was part of what made them noble.

So if you're in a particular situation, ask yourself: What would Ajaan Suwat say? What would Ajaan Fuang say? What would the Buddha say? Try to keep them in mind. If you forget them, it's as if you're cutting yourself off at the root. You're drifting, and you'll go back to the old voices in your mind, the people you knew when you were younger, the things that came through the mass media from people who really knew nothing of the noble path. How many of the songs going through your head are songs about wisdom, like the old folk songs that would teach wise attitudes? How many of them are commercial jingles? Rock 'n roll

songs with crazy messages? These are all a form of poverty. They impoverish our wisdom. They teach us unskillful attitudes to bring to the present moment. So you've got to replace them, not simply with the techniques of the meditation, but also with the attitude of someone who's really wise. Look at what the Buddha had to say, and his noble disciples, to give you a sense of what that wisdom is.

I was once reading a curriculum that a scholar had set up for study of the Pali Canon. The curriculum was based essentially on the Majjhima Nikaya, one of the big Nikayas, and was sprinkled here and there with some readings from the Dhammapada and other verses, not so much for real Dhamma it seems, but simply as inspiration, nice ideas to carry around. Well, those good ideas are where the real Dhamma is, in the values they convey. That's the context for the Dhamma. The more technical philosophical details that you find in the other texts lack that context, unless they're embedded within the lessons you can learn with something like the Dhammapada, or the Itivuttaka.

So it's good to read these things regularly—not just read them, try to memorize some of the verses that seem most appropriate for the difficulties you know you're facing in life. That way, they'll be there to remind you. They'll get built into the rhythm of the blood flowing through your veins, your ears, or your brain.

That way, as you approach the present moment, you bring wealth: the wealth of memorized wisdom. After a while, the memorized wisdom will sprout into your own wisdom, too. It's easy as meditators to look down on book knowledge, but that's not the proper attitude. Obviously, you can't listen to the people who claim that book knowledge is everything, but there's a lot of good wisdom available for you to borrow in the books, and it's a form of inner wealth to have that memorized. Then as you apply that together with the techniques of the meditation, you've got an abundance of wealth to bring to any situation.