

Looking for Happiness Inside

April 5, 2014

We chant that passage every morning, every night: “May you forever be well.” And the question is, “How are you going to be forever well when there’s aging, illness, and death all around, separation all around?”

The Buddha realized the only answer was that you have to look for something that doesn’t age, grow ill or die, something that’s not separated from things you depend on. That can be found only inside.

This is why we meditate: to find that thing.

Ajaan Suwat, the monk who founded our monastery: Shortly before he died—he’d been in a bad automobile accident and suffered brain damage—he was commenting that his mind was sending him a lot of strange perceptions, his brain wasn’t functioning properly. But at least he had the mindfulness to know that it was strange and not to fall for whatever the brain was sending him.

He stopped for a second and then said, “But that thing I got from the meditation, that hasn’t been touched.” Something can be found inside and we touch it but then nothing else can touch it. That’s what we’re looking for.

How are you going to find it? It requires a lot of discernment to see what you’re doing to cover it up. Because it’s something uncaused, it’s potentially always there. Which means we can’t see it, and that means we can’t see it because our discernment isn’t sharp enough. So we need to sharpen our discernment. How do you do that? You get the mind to be very still so that it can see slight movements of the mind, things that we do day-in, day-out, to the point where we hardly notice them. You’ve got to get back and refamiliarize yourself. Look at the present moment with new eyes.

Start with the breath: Look at the breath in a new way.

We usually think of the breath as the air coming in and out of the lungs. But the Buddha wants you to look at what it is in the body that makes the air come in and makes it go out: the energy flow. Look at that. Notice how the energy flow feels. There’s a healthy energy flow; there’s an unhealthy one. You want to promote a healthy one inside, because it makes it a lot easier to stay here in the present moment so that you can watch things carefully.

So you give rise to what’s called the state of becoming, the sense of you right here in the world of the body right here right now. You try to nurture that, you try to feed that, breathing in a way that feels good.

You can ask yourself, “What feels good, what’s good about it?” You can try

different ways of breathing and see what feels best.

This is one of the ways in which you develop your discernment, because discernment isn't just watching things, it's also learning how to judge things: Which is better than something else? Is long breathing better or short breathing better? You start out that way. Then those questions move deeper and deeper into the mind. But first you start with the breath.

This is a good place to make yourself sensitive to the present moment. We're sensitive to so many things outside and yet we miss a lot of what's happening right here, right now. The breath is obviously something happening right here, right now, so you work with that.

As you're working with the breath, you get a stronger and stronger sense of your mind here in the present moment, your awareness here in the present moment, until ultimately the breath gets so refined and the breath energy fills the body so full that the in-and-out breath gets shorter.

Don't try to *make* it shorter. Think instead of the breath energy connecting throughout the body: all the channels, all the nerves, all the different ways that the breath energy can flow in the body. Think of everything being connected.

Ajaan Lee's image is of cutting a network of roads through a wilderness. The better the roads are connected, the more you can get around. I remember when I first went to Thailand, there were basically two main roads leading north out of Bangkok. One went up to Chiang Mai and the other one up to Udon. Even though Chiang Mai was closer to Udon than it was to Bangkok, if you had to go to Udon, you had to go down to Bangkok and then back up again because there were just the two main roads. Now they've got roads all over the place, and it's very easy to get around.

You want to kind of promote that same sense of the flow of the breath energy in the body, moving around in the body, connecting everything. When everything's connected, there's no sense of lack. The breath grows naturally shorter on its own that way. As the breath gets more and more still, then you can see the movements of the mind that much more clearly. There's less interference.

It's like the shuffling noise here in the sala. When we're chanting, you don't hear it. Then when everyone's still, you can hear the shuffling.

It's the same in your mind. When the breath is very, very still, you see movements in the mind that you didn't notice before.

You see how the mind's perceptions, say, create a sense of where your body is right now and a sense of the shape of the body, and how those perceptions can be dropped.

Then what have you got? Just a cloud of little sensation points. If you want, you

can focus on the space between the points. That gets even more refined. You keep going deeper and deeper into your awareness of the present moment.

You begin to see how so much of it is constructed. You put it together by focusing on some feelings here or focusing on perceptions there or thinking about this, evaluating that, noticing this, noticing that. The things you notice, the things you pay attention to are going to shape your experience. What you try to do is to deconstruct these things so that you can see subtler and subtler layers of stillness inside, and then subtler and subtler layers of movement that you didn't detect before.

This is the process of meditation that goes deeper and deeper right here, right here, right here—not deeper in the sense that it's going to go down into the earth, but deeper inside. There's a sense that you're getting closer and closer and closer to the center of your awareness so that you can see even subtler movements right there. The part of the mind that wants to direct this and say, "focus here, focus there," gets thrown into sharp relief.

And you ask yourself: "Who's talking to whom in here?" You start questioning the very, very basic movements of the mind, until you see an opening where there are no movements of the mind at all. That may sound very abstract, but once you get there, you realize that it really is the end of all suffering, and there's nothing lacking there.

Some people are afraid that when you go to nibbana, you'll miss all your old friends or this or that thing on the human level. But the Buddha kept saying, "Don't think in those ways. There's nothing missing, there's nothing lacking there."

But we define ourselves around our families, our friends, our jobs, all these other things, and we're afraid we're going to lose them. But look at them very carefully. This is why the Buddha talks about aging, illness, and death so much. Because the happiness we're looking for from other people: No matter how much they want to provide it, they can't always be there. If your happiness is built on things like that, it's going to suffer. So you need something stronger inside that you really can depend on. That's why we're looking in here, to learn how to look really, really carefully.

Because there's no other safe place on Earth or in any world. As long as the mind is creating worlds, it's going to create worlds that are going to fall apart. But this is something you don't create. It's something you *find*, which is something very different.

So no matter what happens: In Ajaan Suwat's case it was a bad accident. But still he had this "thing" inside, as he said. No accident could touch it.

So until you find it, be confident that it's there, and when you find it, then you

don't have to believe in it anymore—because it's there.

There's that famous passage where the Buddha asks Ven. Sariputta, "Do you believe that by developing the five faculties of conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment that they lead to the Deathless?" And Sariputta says, "No, I don't believe that. I know." Try to get to the point where you can say that, too.