

## *Your Desire to Practice*

*July 15, 2018*

Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about his sense of frustration sometimes studying with Ajaan Mun. He'd ask Ajaan Mun a question and Ajaan Mun wouldn't answer it. He'd pull the discussion off to something else. I had the same sense of frustration with Ajaan Fuang. Sometimes I'd ask him a question and he'd change the topic. And I came to the same conclusion that, I learned later, Ajaan Maha Boowa had come to, which is that if the teacher answers all your questions, he's teaching you to be stupid. You have to want to figure things out on your own.

That's an important principle: the wanting. As the Buddha said, all things or all phenomena are rooted in desire. That includes not only suffering, which is caused by craving, but also the path. An important part of the path is right effort, and the formula for right effort says that you have to generate desire. You have to *want* to do this. You have to want to put an end to suffering for it to happen. Which is why a large part of the training is getting you to want that. And it also assumes that you want it, which is why the teachers don't explain everything.

I've told you in the past about Ajaan Fuang's comment when I went to ordain and study with him. He said, "You have to learn how to think like a thief." If you're going to steal something from somebody's house, you can't go up the front door, knock on the door, and say, "When are you going to be away? Where do you keep your valuables?—so I can come in conveniently take them away." They're going to do everything they can to keep you from knowing. So you've got to be very observant. You have to case the joint, as we say, and watch. And then you begin to get a sense of when they come, when they go, which part of the house seems to be the one they're most protective of. That gives you your clues.

When you stay with a teacher, you have to steal the Dhamma from him. You've got to observe what he does, what he wants, and try to figure out why he does those things or wants those things. It goes down to even little details about cleaning his hut. For a long time, Ajaan Fuang wouldn't let me into his room. I couldn't clean his room. I was in charge of cleaning his porch. It was only after he let me clean his porch that he finally decided that I knew what I was doing. Even

then, he wouldn't let me into the room easily. But occasionally he'd say, "Go get this out my room." He'd give me the key. And after the second or third time, I began to realize that this was my chance to see how he organized things in his room, so that if the time ever came for me to organize them, I could do it. If I hadn't wanted to do it, I would have just gone in, fetched what he had asked for, and gone out. And that was it.

So a large part of the training is that you have to *want* to practice. And the teacher is there to assume that you want to practice, to sometimes help motivate you and make sure that your desire to practice doesn't get weak or discouraged. But you have to work to provide the desire, too. This is something that you have to want to do for it to work.

After all, if Buddhas could take all living beings to nibbana, if they could save all living beings, we would have been saved a long time ago. But actually, the Buddha came to teach the people who wanted to put an end to suffering. It seems like a very reasonable assumption that everybody would want to put an end to suffering, but a lot of people don't want to do it themselves. They want someone else to do it for them. And to those people, the Buddha didn't have that much to teach.

His teachings were for people who realized that they were suffering and that the suffering was coming from their own actions—and that it was something they'd have to cure within themselves. Because, after all, where is suffering? Show me your suffering. I can't see it. You can't see mine. It's something that each of us feels in a very private spot. The cause is also in that private spot—the area where you sense your body, sense your mind, from within. That's where you experience craving. That's where you experience suffering. But also that's where you experience the factors of the path.

So it's all inside. The work has to be done inside, which is why meditation is not a matter of sitting here looking at the trees or looking at the world. It's looking inside to see what's going on, with the desire to straighten it out. And the Buddha is there and the teachers are there to encourage you: that there is an end to this suffering. The suffering you feel, the things that weigh you down inside, are optional. They're something you're doing that's weighing the mind down.

And it's in a blind spot—an area where you tend not to look. So you've got to look, look, look all around. Know all around. The practice of concentration is designed to give you this sort of all-around perspective. You're seeing the breath not only at the nose, but you're also beginning to learn how to sense the breath in the whole body. When there's a feeling of pleasure, you learn how to feel it not only in one or two spots but let it spread throughout the body. If there are feelings of pain, you learn how to cut through any lines of connection, so that you're not spreading pain through the body—which, all too often, we unconsciously do.

And then you're here to watch. You're not here just to settle down. The concentration feels good. It is a nice place to settle down. But you settle down and then there's work to be done. What you've done is put yourself in a really good position to see all around. Because you begin to realize that events in the mind and events in the body are very closely connected. When you have this all-around vision of the body, you begin to have an all-around vision of the mind.

A couple of weeks back, I was up in Canada, and somebody asked me about an experiment. He said that the experiment had proven that there is no such thing as free will. It showed that people would come to decisions or part of their brain would come to a decision—they could tell from fMRIs—but it wouldn't be until six seconds later when the person would actually claim, "This is when I made the decision." I replied that that doesn't prove lack of free will at all. What it does show is that a lot of people don't know what's going on in their own minds.

This is one of the purposes of the meditation—to see what's going on in the mind, to see that blind spot. And it's going to go against the grain. This is why you have to *want* to do this. There are large parts of your mind that you've been blocking out for various reasons, and there are other parts of the mind that don't want to open them up. But when you can be all-around aware of the body, you become all-around aware of the mind. Areas that used to be subconscious or buried under many layers of denial are suddenly open. And sometimes it is unpleasant to have them open. But if you have a comfortable spot in the body and a comfortable spot in the mind, it gives you at least a place to stand. And when you have conviction in the Buddha's awakening that it is possible to get past these things, you're not quite so overwhelmed.

All this is inside work. Or, as they say, it's an inside job. And you have to overcome some very strong tendencies that want to keep you coming back, coming back, coming back to the old pleasures that you'd known in the past, that you've lost and you want them again. This is why it's useful to think of the Buddha's perspective in that second knowledge: seeing beings in the world dying and being reborn in line with their karma again and again and again. And their world is not going anywhere. The universe just keeps going around and around and around, but it doesn't go anyplace. The sense of dismay that he felt, that's what induced him to want finally to get out of it. And you can use your conviction in his awakening to inspire yourself as well.

We're not just here to bliss out. We're here to get a sense of well-being so that we can work with that sense of well-being, so that it can put us in a position where we can do the work that needs to be done: to put an end to this endless cycling around. Because if we don't put an end to it, it's not going to end on its own. There is no guarantee that we'll all be awakened. You have to want it enough to try to figure out how to do it. The Buddha himself, that's how he learned: by wanting it enough to figure it out.

He shows that it's possible and he has given us clues. But there is a lot of the work that we have to do inside because this is dealing with areas of our awareness that are very private, in many cases, preverbal. And many verbal aspects of the mind's processes are often buried under many layers. You have to want to dig up those layers so that you can do this inside job, so at the very least you can save this one being from suffering. Of course, what that means is that you're less of a burden on others—you're not coming back to the feeding chain. You've found a happiness that doesn't need to feed.

Because that's the discovery of stream entry, the first stage of awakening: that there's this other dimension. And it's very close by. It's not some place far off; it's very close. But it's in a blind spot. And you have to really want to see it in order to find it.

When the Buddha gave Dhamma talks and people gained awakening, it wasn't that he tricked them into awakening. He found that they really wanted, some place down inside, to put an end to suffering. He was able to dig up that desire and show that it was something worthy of respect and something to be followed

through. But then it was up to them to follow through, given the guidance he provided.

So what you get out of the practice depends on what you put in. The Buddha and the noble disciples are all there to assure you that it is worth putting all the energy you've got. This is something really worth giving your life to. But it's up to you to make that gift.