

A Full Heart

October 1, 2009

One of the teachings that the forest ajaans hold in common is that *dukkha*, suffering or stress, comes from a sense of lack—and that the lack is something we create.

We don't normally think in those terms. A lack is often something given, in other words, it's what we start out with. We want to find something to fill the lack. We rarely ever think that we're the ones who are creating the lack to begin with.

That puts a different perspective on things. If the lack is a given that we willy-nilly have to fill up, we do have a tendency to just fill it up with anything. It's like a person who's hungry. If you can't get good food, you take other kinds of food. Or like the coyotes: You look at their scat and it's amazing to see what they put in their mouths, plastic rope sometimes. Just to fill up the lack. But if you can turn around and see how you create the lack, then you don't have to worry about filling it up.

So this is a good question to ask yourself: Where are you creating a sense of lack? Often you'll find that it has to do with your identity. The things that you identify as you or yours tend to have a big a hole in them. As the Buddha said, our identity as a being comes from attachment, and beings have to subsist on food. So the attachment is the lack. And we hold onto things thinking that they'll fill the lack, but it's interesting to note that the things we're holding onto are the things that are actually creating the lack to begin with. So how do you create a sense of fullness instead?

There is a Thai idiom, *tem chai*, which literally means "full heart." And you can interpret it in two ways. The idiomatic meaning is actually being fully willing to do something. If you're *tem chai* about something, it means you gladly do it. You give your whole heart.

There was one time I was translating a passage from Ajaan Lee, and it was giving me trouble because it didn't seem to make sense. It included the term *tem chai*, but the idiomatic sense didn't seem to fit. I took it to Ajaan Fuang and asked him what it might mean. That ended up being one of the longest Dhamma talks I ever got out of Ajaan Fuang. He talked for a long time about the different meanings of *tem chai* in that passage. And from his point of view it had lots of different meanings. First there was the idiomatic meaning of being fully willing to do something, fully giving yourself to the practice. When you have a wholehearted

attitude to what you're doing, you find that you can fill up a lot of what may be lacking in your practice. If you don't have a wholehearted attitude, that's where you're going to find the lacks: This is missing. That's missing. The pieces don't fit together. They're not coming together because you're holding back an important piece: the fullness of your heart, your wholehearted attitude.

But Ajaan Fuang also interpreted the *ter*, as meaning having a broad heart, a broad awareness. This, of course, relates to the way Ajaan Lee teaches meditation—and to the way the Buddha taught meditation, too: being fully aware of the body, having what he called an enlarged mind or a heightened mind, in other words, an awareness that spreads its range all around. That's another way in which we create a lack: We don't allow our awareness to be all-around. We make it very narrow, very confined, focused on a few things, a few issues that we worry over. But we often worry about things that really can't give us any fullness. Like that image from Ajaan Lee of the dog chewing on a bone. Whatever meat was ever on the bone is not there anymore, but the dog keeps chewing on it, and all it gets is the taste of its own saliva. And no wonder it's hungry: It's chewing on something that gives it no satisfaction at all. We narrow our awareness to things that give no fullness to the mind, no fullness to our awareness, no satisfaction. So of course we're going to be hungry. Of course we're going to have a sense of lack.

This is why an important step in the meditation is to learn how to expand your awareness so that it fills the whole body. And a good way to do that is to expand your sense of the breath, to think of the breath not just as the air coming in and out the lungs, but also as the energy flow throughout the body. This gives you something all around the body to be sensitive to. As you work with the breath energies in the different parts of the body, you finally get a sense that they begin to connect up and they aren't fighting with one another. So when you breathe in through the entire range of your nerves, the entire range of your body, even in the area around the body, the energy field around the body, it's all connected. It's all in harmony. That creates a sense of fullness in the body. As you may have noticed, when you do have that sense of fullness in the breath, the question of being hungry, the question of being thirsty just goes away. At the same time, your awareness is full. It's not being confined to one little area. That in and of itself simply feels good.

It's also very useful. Because if you look carefully, you begin to notice that when a distracting thought comes up, the simple fact of keeping that thought in your range of awareness requires that you create a little marker to remind yourself of the thought from moment to moment. And that marker is usually a little bit of

tension someplace in the body. If you can locate that little bit of tension and just breathe right through it, the thought will go away.

This way, your understanding of what's going on becomes much more all-around. You begin to realize that what's going on in the mind is not just in some mental realm without any effect on the body. It's connected to what's going on in the body as well. The area of physical sensations and the area of mental sensations: These two areas actually overlap. And by having an all-around awareness like this, you begin to see the connections between the two. Sometimes something comes up in the body and has an effect on the mind. Something comes up in the mind and has an effect on the body. Sometimes a little stirring will appear and it's not really clear at the very beginning whether it's going to be a physical or a mental event. Then you place a perception on it and it goes one way or the other. But it's actually potentially both. But you can't see this, though, unless you have this larger awareness, this awareness that's really full.

So those are two of the meanings of *tem chai* that are really useful when you think about this way you're creating a lack—and about how you can learn how to stop creating that sense of lack, and create a sense of fullness instead: fullness of heart, fullness of mind. Because remember, in the Buddha's teachings the word *citta* means both heart and mind. He uses the word in contexts some places where we would use the word heart in English, like a heart of metta, *metta-citta*. And sometimes it refers to the thinking side, the thoughts you have: That's also the *citta*. And it's important to see there's no real distinction between the two. Your thoughts have desires that go along with them, and your desires have their thoughts, they have their reasons. It's not that your desires or your emotions are primary and your thoughts are secondary. They come together. And if you learn to look at them from both sides, you begin to see how they take over, how they take hold, how they can create a sense of lack, or how they can be used to create a sense of fullness.

It's only when you see them from all sides that you can actually use them skillfully. And it's only when you bring a wholehearted attitude to the practice that you get a whole-mind understanding of what's going on.

So it's a good question to ask yourself every day: "Where am I creating a sense of lack? And what can I do to not create that sense of lack? How can I create a sense of fullness instead?" Not in the ordinary way of keeping the lack and then trying to fill it up with whatever comes to hand, but seeing where you have that sense of lack and undoing it. Often the sense of lack is simply that you're not giving yourself fully to the practice. Or the times that you've allowed your

awareness to get very narrow, very confined. And of course it's going to feel like something is missing.

So try to give your whole heart to this practice of creating a whole body awareness. It gives you a new perspective on the contents of your mind and the contents of your heart, and the events going on in the body. They're all connected, and the more you maintain this larger awareness, the more clearly you'll be able to see that and take advantage of it.