

Steps Along the Path

by

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Preface

The little book you are now holding in your hand grew from the faith and conviction of a Westerner of Jewish extraction, named Dr. Philip, who came to study Buddhism in Thailand in 1963, when I was staying on Phuket Island. He practiced meditation with me for a full six months and seemed to develop not only peace of mind but also a great appreciation for Buddhism's worth.

Before returning to Hawaii, he asked me to jot down a few short, simple points for him to take and continue practicing, so I wrote down ten points. Afterwards, I learned that he had had them printed abroad in a periodical whose name slips my mind at the moment.

The thought has occurred to me that this little book might be of use to those who are interested in practicing meditation, as it is small, easy to carry and read through quickly without taxing the brain.

So I have edited it, polishing the style and adding more points — in particular, [point 11](#) and onwards (i.e., how to deal with visions and signs in meditation) — in order to make the book more complete, fit to be a guide to the practice of meditation: showing the worth of meditation, the way to meditate, which ways of meditation are right,

which are wrong, and in detail how to correct those things that should be corrected in the practice. I hope this little book will be of use to those who are interested.

If anything written here deviates from the truth, I ask for all the responsibility to be placed on me alone, as I still lack experience in terms of education, practice, writing skills, and knowledge of many fields. If knowledgeable people should come across this book, I would be very grateful if they would correct and enlighten me.

1.

A basic tenet of the Buddha's teachings is that the mind and body work together, but that the body lies under the control of the mind. The mind is what orders the body to do this or that activity, but when the body wears down, the mind is of necessity put to some hardship as well. It doesn't lie under the control of the nervous system, although the brain can be regarded as a central office. When the body dies, disintegrating in line with the nature of its various elements, the mind — if the necessary conditions of unawareness, craving, attachment, and kamma are still present — will have to reappear in this or that plane of existence and to continue experiencing suffering and stress.

2.

In order to do away with unawareness, craving, attachment, and kamma — which are the chief instigators — we must first of all practice abandoning the elementary evils of word and deed by observing the principles of morality corresponding to our station in life. In other words, lay people should observe the five precepts and,

periodically, the eight precepts; novices should observe the ten or the twenty precepts; and monks, all 227 precepts of the basic monastic code, together with the principles of pure livelihood, restraint of the senses, and proper use of the requisites of life as formulated by the Buddha.

As long as your precepts aren't being kept pure, your mind isn't yet ready for training. Even if it is trained, its training won't lead to progress and development in the Dhamma, for its foundations aren't yet firm enough to advance along the Noble Path — and we can say that it hasn't yet reached the refuge of the Triple Gem (*ti-ratana*). A true Buddhist must before all else be firmly based in the Triple Gem and the principles of morality.

The Noble Eightfold Path and the three teachings at the heart of Buddhism — the avoidance of all evil, the perfection of skillfulness, and the purification the heart — have to be established first on the principles of morality. This is why, for the Buddha's teachings, morality forms the beginning of the religious life.

The next step is to train the mind to develop concentration (*samadhi*) and absorption (*jhana*) through the practice of tranquillity meditation. Once the mind is adept at maintaining a steady focus, we can then develop clear insight (*vipassana*) based on an understanding of the Three Characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. This will lead us to pure knowledge and vision of things as they actually are, and thus to release from all things detrimental and defiling.

3.

For Buddhism, the true aim in developing concentration and absorption is to gather one's mental energies and make them steady and strong in a single point. This then forms the basis for the

knowledge and discernment capable of gaining true insight into all conditions of nature and eliminating all that is detrimental and defiling from the heart. Thus, stillness of mind is developed not simply for other, external purposes, such as the various fields of science. Instead, it's meant specifically for use in cleansing the heart of such defilements as the five Hindrances (*nivarana*). But when you have practiced to the point of proficiency, you can use your stillness of mind in any way you like, as long as that use isn't detrimental to yourself or to others.

4.

In training the mind — which is a mental phenomenon — material objects such as chains and leashes are of no use. The mind has to be trained by tutoring it, first by listening to the explanations of those who are already skilled, and then by being determined to practice in line with those explanations, basing your initial efforts on a sense of trust and conviction if your own independent explorations into cause and effect don't succeed.

By and large, people who start out by exploring cause and effect on their own don't reach their desired goal because they lack the proper approach. They miss the true path, tending instead to be biased in favor of their own opinions. To develop first a sense of trust in the individual giving the training and in the practices in which one is being trained until the mind is firm and unwavering, and *then* to begin exploring and figuring things out, in line with the way they really are: This is what will give satisfactory results.

This is because any beginning exploration of cause and effect is usually a matter of looking at things from the outside, following external influences — i.e., "This person says that... That person says this." But to investigate and explore cause and effect exclusively

within the bounds of the body — i.e., "What is this body of mine made of? How does it come about so that its parts are complete and able to perform their functions well? What is it to be used for? What keeps it going? Is its fate to develop or to deteriorate? Is it really mine?" — and then, going on to mental phenomena — "Do greed, anger, delusion, love, hatred, and so forth, arise at the body or at the mind? What do they come from? When they arise, are they pleasant or stressful?" — to reason and explore things strictly internally in this way is, in and of itself, training the mind.

But if your stillness of mind isn't yet strong enough, don't go reasoning in line with the books you may have read or the things you may have heard other people say, because even though you may think things through, it won't lead you to the truth. In other words, it won't lead you to a sense of dispassion and detachment. So instead, explore and investigate things in line with the causes and effects that actually arise from the mind in the present.

5.

The mind investigating and figuring things out in line with its own personal reasonings in this way will tend to focus exclusively on examining a single spot in a single object. This is called one-pointed concentration. This is a gathering of the mind's energies so that they have great strength, able to uproot attachments — mistaken assumptions — and to cleanse the mind so that it is, for the moment, bright and clear. At the very least, you will experience peace — an extreme sense of well-being in body and mind — and perhaps knowledge of one sort or another: knowledge of a strange and striking sort, for it arises, not from mental imaginings, but from the causes and effects of the truth acting in the present, in a way that has never happened before. Even if it is knowledge of something you

may have suspected all along, only now is it your own, making your mind bright, driving away all doubt and uncertainty about matters that may have been occupying your thoughts. You will say to yourself with a sense of deep satisfaction and relief, "So *that's* how it is!"

Those whose sensitivities are dull, though, won't be convinced and delighted with their knowledge until someone else confirms it or they see teachings of the Buddha in books bearing witness to what they have learned. This is in line with the fact that the Buddha's followers are of various sorts.

This type of knowledge — no matter how much or how wide-ranging it is — won't weigh on your nerves. On the contrary, it's a form of calm and true well-being that will greatly brighten and refresh your nerves. At the same time, it will refine your mind and manners in a way that will be very inspiring to others. Whatever you say or do, you will do mindfully, with hardly any careless lapses. Once this happens to you, you should then try to maintain all these traits and not grow careless or complacent.

These are all individual matters and won't occur in every case. But at any rate, when you have trained the mind as explained above, even if you don't gain the results in full measure, you will still experience a striking sense of peace and well-being in proportion to the extent of your own individual practice. You should then try to maintain this mental state. Don't let feelings of greed or desire, disappointment or dejection arise. Keep the mind neutral and continue practicing as I have explained from the beginning, with a sense of trust and conviction. Be mindful, careful, and observant at every stage of your practice, and you will then meet with the results you hope for.

6.

If training the mind in line with points [4](#) and [5](#) doesn't produce results, then gather your awareness and focus it firmly with a single object or mental image as its target. For example, focus on an aspect of the body — the bones or one of its internal organs — so as to see its objectionable nature. Or you may simply focus the mind on bare awareness itself — for the mind is something that can't be seen with the physical eyes. If it isn't focused on a single spot, you won't know whether or not it's present. The mind is like the wind: If the wind doesn't come into contact with anything, you won't know whether or not it's there.

So it is with the mind. If a new trainee doesn't have a target for the mind, he or she won't really be able to catch hold of the mind. But please don't choose anything outside of the body as your target. Make your target — i.e., the object of the mind — an aspect of the body, as already mentioned. And when you take aim, focus on a single object which seems right for you. Don't be greedy, first taking some of this and then a little of that.

In focusing, examine the object in line with the principles of the foundations of mindfulness (*satipatthana*). In other words, sort out the body's various aspects until you can see, "This isn't me. This isn't myself."

There are two ways of doing the focused examination that prompts this realization:

- a. When focused exclusively on the target, don't give any thought to what the target is or who is focusing. Let there simply be awareness and the act of focusing. Don't let there be any naming or labeling of anything at all. There will simply be the single sensation that makes you feel that you are sticking with the target, but don't think about what the target is.

b. When focused exclusively on the target, at the same time keep yourself aware that, "This is the target of the mind. This is the mind examining. This is mindfulness, i.e., the act of remembering to keep the target in mind. This is discernment, which sees into the truth of the object under consideration."

Both methods work, although method (a) is suited for beginners and those whose sensitivities are not yet developed, while method (b) is suited for those who are sensitive and experienced. Both methods, though, if you practice them diligently, give rise to the same results, namely concentration and discernment.

7.

In training the mind as explained above, no matter which method you choose, please don't let yourself wonder about whether or not you're going to attain concentration and discernment. And put aside all desires based on the various rumors and reports that get passed around by word of mouth. Just follow correctly the method mentioned in [point 6](#), and you'll be doing fine.

At the same time, observe the approach you've taken to see how you brought the mind to the object, how you maintained mindfulness, and what happened to the mind as a result. If acting in that particular manner made the mind open and bright, keep at it until you're adept and able to do it all the time. But if the results weren't like that, i.e., just the opposite, then without delay use your powers of observation, in the way already mentioned, to make adjustments and corrections.

In observing how the mind behaves under training, some people will be able to observe their state of mind while the mind is still in that state; others, only after the mind has withdrawn from that state and stopped still for a moment. Both ways work. They are simply a

matter of individual temperament. But if you don't use your powers of observation at all, progress in mental training will be hard to achieve and — even if you do happen to achieve it — hard to maintain.

8.

While you are training the mind, one thing — strange and striking — may occur without your intending it. That is, the mind will withdraw from its external objects and gather into a single whole, letting go of all labels and attachments dealing with past or future. There will be just bare awareness paired with its preoccupation in the present. This is something with no sense of "inside" or "outside" — a condition whose features are peculiar to the mind itself. It is as if everything has undergone a revolution.

This is the mind coming to its own level: the *bhavanga*. In this moment, everything has reference only to the mind. Even though life may still be going on, the mind when it reaches this level lets go of all attachments to the body, and goes inward to experience nothing but its own object, all by itself. This is termed *bhava-citta*, the mind on its own level. The mind on its own level still has a refined version of the five *khandhas* complete within it, and so can still experience birth and states of becoming, and give rise to continued births in the future.

Reaching this state is somewhat like dozing off and dreaming. The difference depends on how much alertness there is. Those who are collected and perceptive will — when the event first occurs — be aware of what is happening and what they are experiencing, and so won't get excited or upset. Those who are gullible and not very mindful, though, will be just like a person who dozes off and dreams. When they come to, they will tend to be startled or get

misled by the visions they may happen to see. But when they have trained themselves until they are skilled at giving rise to this state often, their sense of mindfulness will improve and their various visions will go away. Gradually they will gain insight until they see into natural conditions as they actually are.

9.

The phenomenon discussed in [point 8](#) — even though it doesn't give rise to discernment capable of exploring into the patterns of cause and effect in a wide-ranging way — is still a preliminary stage in training the mind. It can suppress the five Hindrances and at the same time give rise to a sense of peace and well-being in the present. If it is properly developed so that it doesn't deteriorate, it will lead to a good rebirth in the future, in line with one's karmic background.

Incidentally, when visions and signs of various sorts appear, it's usually in the mental moment we are discussing here. But this doesn't mean that when the mind reaches this stage there will have to be visions or signs in every case. With some people and at some times, they will occur. With others and at other times, they won't. This is another matter of individual temperament — and of other factors as well.

To be perfectly truthful, when it comes to the question of visions and signs that arise in the course of meditation, you can say that they're good only in the case of meditators who are quick-witted and astute enough to see through them; who — when they see visions — don't fall for them or latch onto them as being the self or as really belonging to themselves. They see the visions simply as visions, enough to use them as tools or a temporary dwelling place for the mind, and then let them go.

As for people who aren't especially mindful or alert — and who are

gullible to boot — when a vision arises they will get extremely excited and may even become so deluded as to lose touch with reality because they believe the vision to something real and true. (I will discuss how to deal with visions and signs in [point 11](#), below.)

In addition, people who have trained their minds to this stage are usually stubborn and bull-headed in their opinions, due to their strength of mind. When they think about something, they tend to see it from one side only. They won't easily give any heed to the opinions of others, because they believe that their own opinions are perfectly reasonable and trustworthy — even though their opinions are actually self-serving and very much lacking in reason, and can easily pervert the way they see things.

But at any rate, whether or not visions and signs arise, they're not really what you want here, because aside from being defilements, clouding your discernment, they are also obstacles to the development of clear insight. The aim of training the mind is to let go of the five Hindrances and then to examine the *khandhas* so that they become clear, to see them as they actually are to the point where you grow disenchanted with them, loosen your passion and fascination with them, and let them go, never to enter into and take hold of them again.

10.

When you have trained the mind to be firmly enough established in absorption and concentration to suppress the five Hindrances, then you should work at developing clear insight. Actually, clear insight may arise at the same time you are working on tranquillity. In other words, discernment may brighten so as to know and see clearly the truth that all conditioned things (*sankhara*) that arise are bound to disintegrate and pass away. They can't last. They aren't "me" or

"myself," but are simply natural conditions acting on their own.

When this sort of knowledge arises, it will make the mind become disenchanted and dispassionate towards to all conditioned things. The mind will dwell entirely in a state of matured and chastened dispassion, no matter what it sees or hears, and no matter where. This is called clear insight occurring together with tranquillity.

If, however, insight doesn't arise in this way, then when you have practiced tranquillity meditation until the mind is firmly established, then you can select either a part of the body — such as the bones or the intestines — or else a topic that's occupying your thoughts at the moment, and examine it so as to see that all the things which the mind fastens onto as stable and real, as leading to true happiness, actually fall under the sway of the Three Characteristics. The way we assume things, saying, "This is this, and that is that," in line with our imaginings, is not in any way true. All conditioned things simply arise from their causes: unawareness, craving, attachment, and kamma. When their causes are exhausted, they disband of their own accord. No one forces them to disband. Even the body we are living in is able to survive only in dependence on causes, such as breath and food. When these things are exhausted, the body has no meaning at all.

When you examine things in this way, using the power of a fully concentrated mind, you will reach the goal of the mind's training. The light of discernment will arise, complete with the insight into cause and effect you have discovered totally on your own. This is something that arises not from appropriating labels or theories remembered from other people, but from realizing the causes and effects entirely within your own heart. The mind will never again be deluded into becoming attached, passionate, pleased, or displeased with any conditioned thing at all.

Incidentally, we can say that if the mind hasn't truly and clearly seen

into the object of its meditation, then it hasn't really yet gathered itself together and settled down. But the reason why the training of the mind isn't called insight meditation before this point is because discernment is still weak in terms of cause and effect, and lacks circumspection.

To summarize: The purification of our words and deeds has to begin with training in moral virtue. The purification of the mind has to begin with training in tranquillity — concentration and absorption — until the mind has enough strength to suppress the five Hindrances. When the mind is adept at concentration and absorption, able to enter, withdraw, and stay in place at will, then discernment — the light of knowledge seeing into the truth of all natural conditions (*sabhava dhamma*), together with the causes for their arising and passing away — will arise in a remarkable way.

This sort of knowledge may arise only to certain individuals in certain circumstances. But in any case, those who have trained their minds to this level should realize that a mind that has reached this point is fit to be trained to give rise to clear insight. They should thus take any aspect of the body or any mental phenomenon that occupies their thoughts, and examine it from the standpoint of the Three Characteristics, as explained above. Then they too will develop the light of insight, seeing clearly into all conditioned things — and be able to uproot attachments to physical and mental phenomena of every sort.

Even though the mind is intangible, it has influence over the body and all things in the world. It is capable of bringing everything in the world under its power. Still, it isn't so vicious or savage as to lack all sense of good and evil. When a person of good intentions trains the mind to enter correctly into the path of the Buddha's teachings as explained above, it will be tractable and quick to learn, developing the wisdom to bring the body, which may be behaving without any

principles, back into line. In addition, it can cleanse itself to be bright and clean, free from defilements, able to realize by itself truths that are subtle and profound, and to bring dazzling light into this world so dark with blindness.

This is because the true substance of the mind has been, from the very beginning, something bright and clear. But because of the preoccupations that have seeped into it and clouded it, the brightness of the mind has been temporarily darkened, making the world dark as well. If the mind were originally dark, there probably wouldn't be anyone able to cleanse it to the point where it could give rise to the light of discernment at all.

So whether the world is to be dark or bright, whether it is to experience well-being or suffering, depends on the mind of each individual. We as individuals should thus first train our own minds well, and then train the minds of others. The world will then be free from turmoil.

11.

The visions and signs that arise from the practice of meditation are a strange and uncanny affair. They may delude a gullible person of weak judgment into being so convinced of their truth as to lose touch with reality. For this reason, those who practice meditation should be cautious, examining and reflecting on them carefully, as I will now explain.

The signs arising from meditation are of two sorts: visions and signs.

- a.** Visions: Sometimes, when the mind gathers itself into its own level while we are considering our own body to see its unattractiveness, we will see the body as completely foul and decomposing, or as nothing more than a skeleton or a pile of

ashes, etc. There are cases where this has caused people to become so repelled that they commit suicide.

In other cases, visions of divine beings or of hell and hungry shades may sometimes appear.

b. As for signs: When the mind gathers, as already mentioned, a whispering voice may appear. It may be the voice of a person we respect, telling us to examine a particular truth, or to beware of a coming event; or else it may be the voice of an enemy who means to harm us, appearing to us just before he/she will come to do us harm — which shows how the mental currents of different individuals impinge on one another. On the other hand, the same sort of thing may occur involving a person who means us well. Sometimes an unidentified voice may come to tell a truth that's thought-provoking and worthy of consideration, which meditators in general call the teachings and warnings of the Dhamma, or *abhiñña*.

It's not the case that visions and signs will occur to all meditators. With some people, no matter how refined a level their minds attain, visions and signs won't appear. With others, the mind may gather in a flash for a brief moment, and all sorts of visions and signs will appear. (Be careful not to concoct too many, though.) This depends on the individual's temperament. With people who are gullible and don't give much thought to what is reasonable, visions and signs tend to occur quickly and grow all out of bounds, to the point where they can lose their bearings. So treat them with caution.

Question: Are visions and signs true?

Answer: Sometimes yes and sometimes no, because they arise exclusively from *jhana*, and *jhana* is a mundane phenomenon — and thus undependable. That is to say, they arise to a person practicing

meditation whose mind gathers into the *bhavanga* without knowing what level it has reached or how it focused on, examined, and put down its object. Visions and signs, whether or not they arise intentionally, are composed of a great deal of mental concocting and attachment, and are therefore unreliable — because the visions and signs arising when the mind is in the *bhavanga* are like the dreams of a person who lies down to sleep or simply dozes off. By and large, when they first occur, there tends to be some truth to them, but not much.

Question: Is *jhana* mundane or transcendent?

Answer: *Jhana* has only twelve or thirteen component factors, and they are entirely mundane. But if the person entering *jhana* is a Noble One using it as a tool or a dwelling place for the mind, then he or she will be able to use this mundane *jhana* at will, and dependably as well — like an expert sharpshooter as opposed to a person just learning how to shoot; or like a king, whose sword is part of his regalia, as opposed to a commoner, whose sword is just a sword.

Question: Are visions and signs a good thing?

Answer: Only for a person who knows how to make use of them in the proper way, without being taken in by them or attached to them. They aren't good for a person who doesn't know how to use them properly, who gets taken in by them, believing them to be true. Once attachment latches on, the act of mental concoction can make these visions and signs proliferate to the point where a meditator may lose control over his or her sense of reality. So they should be treated with caution and care, as I will now explain.

Visions and signs arise from the power of mundane *jhana* and are sustained by attachment and mental concocting. They thus fall under the Three Characteristics: They're inconstant — they can't last; they're stressful; and they're not-self — i.e., they aren't yours or anyone else's. They are conditions that do nothing but constantly

arise and fall away in their own way at all times. Examine them to see their true nature in this way and then let them go. Don't be deluded into latching onto visions and signs, which are the results. Instead, work at the cause, *jhana*, so that you become more and more adept to the point where you can attain it at will. The visions and signs will then take care of themselves.

Also, learn to see the drawbacks of visions and signs. Once they arise and we get fooled into latching onto them, they will cause our *jhana* to deteriorate, just as sound waves are an obstacle to a person trying to quiet the mind and explore phenomena that are subtle and deep, or as waves in clear water prevent us from seeing our reflection on the water's surface.

The visions and signs that appear to a meditator just beginning to attain *jhana* tend to be extraordinary and amazing. The acts of mental grasping and concocting will tend to fasten tightly to them, and they will be indelibly impressed on one's inner eye. If the above methods for curing and removing these visions and signs don't produce results, then try not to have the mind enter *jhana*. In other words, don't put your mind to it, don't let the mind be still, don't take a liking to the visions or signs. Sleep and eat as much as you like, perform heavy tasks until the body is very tired, think of objects that will give rise to defilements, such as beautiful sights or sounds that will give rise to desire — and once the mind withdraws from its absorption, the visions and signs will disappear of their own accord.

If the student meditator can't solve the problem with these methods, then the teacher should try to help by using the same sort of approach. The quickest and most effective way is to find an issue that will provoke the person attached to visions and signs to extreme anger. The visions and signs will immediately disappear.

The basis for giving rise to knowledge into the Dhamma is threshold concentration (*upacara samadhi*), which is of two sorts:

a. As a meditator is working with a particular object of meditation, the mind will gradually withdraw from external preoccupations and gather into one spot, right at the mind itself, but without being completely cut off from all objects. It is still sensing, thinking, and considering, trying to withdraw from its very refined object, but as yet unable to let go completely. This is threshold concentration before reaching fixed penetration (*appana samadhi*).

b. The mind becomes more and more refined until it is able to let go and withdraw from the object it is considering, so that the object disappears. This is called fixed penetration. There is full mindfulness and alertness to a sense of emptiness, not grasping after or fastening onto anything at all, simply partaking of its own exclusive object. When the mind comes out of this state and is again considering the Dhamma — objects, cause and effect — this is threshold concentration coming out of fixed penetration.

Both sorts of threshold concentration can form a good basis for insight into particular truths and various events, which is different from the knowledge arising from the visions and signs mentioned above, because visions and signs arise from mundane *jhana*, whereas the knowledge we are discussing here, even though it arises from mundane concentration, gives more dependable results. (Scientists use this level in doing their research.) And if your concentration becomes transcendent, it will do away, step by step, with all the effluents (*asava*) of the mind.

In short, the knowledge arising from visions and signs, and the knowledge arising from threshold concentration, differ in terms both of origin and of quality.

An item deserving a little more explanation here is the term fixed

penetration (*appana samadhi*). Fixed penetration is a superior human attainment. By and large, people who reach fixed penetration tend to focus on the in-and-out breath (*anapana*) as their object of meditation. As they focus on the breath and come to pay attention to its arising and falling away, or just to its falling away, the mind gradually becomes more and more refined until, step by step, it lets go of all its preoccupations and gathers together to become fixed, as explained above. The stilling of the in-and-out breath is what indicates fixed penetration. In some instances it is called fixed *jhana* because it comes from the act of becoming absorbed in the breath. It is called fixed concentration because even though there is no in-and-out breath when the mind reaches that point, mindfulness is still absolutely full.

When you're in this state you can't examine anything, because the mind is totally uninvolved with anything at all. Only when the mind comes out of this state and enters threshold concentration can you begin examining things again. You will then see clearly into all the truths that the Buddha said are to be known, and into other matters as well. There will be no visions and signs, as mentioned above, but the knowledge here will be based on cause and effect, complete with analogies and similes that will utterly erase all doubt.

In some cases, meditators will be considering objects of meditation other than the in-and-out breath, and yet will still be able to reach fixed penetration in the same way as those who practice mindfulness of breathing. When the mind gathers to a point where there is no more in-and-out breathing, that's fixed penetration.

This, at any rate, is my opinion on the matter. Meditators shouldn't take my opinion as their criterion, because the thoughts and opinions of people in this world — even when we see the same things under the same conditions in the same place — can formulate different names for, and reach different understandings about, those same

things, and thus give rise to endless disputes and arguments. Simply let us all work with our own objects of meditation so as to reach fixed penetration as discussed above and then — with a fair mind free from bias — compare what we experience with what has been formulated in the various texts. Our knowledge will then be *paccattam* — arising exclusively from within ourselves. That is what I would like to see in this regard.

Parting Thoughts

All transcendent phenomena are rooted in mundane phenomena. The 37 Wings to Awakening (*bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma*), which are classified entirely as transcendent, have to begin first with mental and physical phenomena, i.e., this mundane body and mind.

Visions, signs, and the knowledge resulting from *jhana* are obstacles to the one-eyed — those who are simply developing *jhana* — but can provoke insight for those with two eyes, i.e., those who are developing discernment along with concentration.

Every sword and ax is made with both a sharp and a dull edge, each with its own different uses, but a person who confuses those uses, aside from getting nowhere with the sword or ax, may actually harm himself or the work he is doing. Insight and the defilements of insight come from one and the same basis. When people without discernment consider things wrongly, they will give rise to the defilements of insight; but when they consider things rightly, using the proper approach, the same things will become true insight.

Mundane phenomena — when we clearly see and know them and their causes for what they are, and when seeing their drawbacks we grow disenchanted with them, not being deluded into latching onto them — then turn into Dhamma. But when we get taken in by them and are unwilling to let them go... It's not the case that the world will

stay the way it is forever. The world of the Brahmas may degenerate into the world of the Devas; the world of the Devas, into the human world; the human world, into the lower realms. Just as liquids tend to seek out low-lying places, so it is easy for the minds of living beings to seek out what's low — namely, evil.

Even though the practice of meditation is a self-revolution, you must be willing to risk your life. At the very least, if you don't succeed, you should threaten yourself with self-exile. Those who don't make such a vow can look forward only to being a slave to others — the defilements — throughout time.

Glossary

- **Abhiñña:** Intuitive powers that come from the practice of concentration.
- **Asava:** Mental effluent; fermentation; defilement in its role of giving rise to the flood of the cycle of rebirth. There are four sorts: sensuality, becoming, views, and unawareness.
- **Bhavanga:** The mind's underlying preoccupation or resting state, which determines its state of being and to which it reverts in between its responses to stimuli.
- **Bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma:** "Wings to Awakening"; principles conducive to enlightenment. There are 37 in all, and they constitute the Buddha's own summary of the essential points of his teachings: four foundations of mindfulness, four right exertions, four bases for achievement, five strengths, five faculties, seven factors for Awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Path.
- **Brahma:** An inhabitant of the heavens of form and formlessness.
- **Deva:** An inhabitant of the heavens of sensual bliss.

- **Dhamma:** Phenomenon; event; things as they are in and of themselves; the right natural order of things. By extension, Dhamma is used also to refer to any doctrine that teaches such matters.
- **Jhana:** Meditative absorption in a single sensation or mental notion.
- **Kamma:** Intentional acts leading to states of becoming and birth.
- **Khandha:** Heap, aggregate, group; the component factors of the personality, and of sensory experience in general — physical phenomena, feelings, mental labels, thought-formations (see *sankhara*), and consciousness.
- **Nivarana:** Hindrance to concentration — sensual desire, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.
- **Sabhava dhamma:** Natural condition; phenomenon; qualities and events as they are directly experienced in and of themselves.
- **Samadhi:** Concentration; the act of centering the mind in a single object or topic.
- **Sankhara:** Conditioned phenomenon; fabrication; fashioning. This term covers all things, physical or mental, fashioned by causes or conditions, as well as the forces fashioning them and the processes by which they are fashioned.
- **Satipatthana:** Foundation of mindfulness; frame of reference. The contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and mental events as they are in and of themselves.
- **Ti-ratana:** The triple Gem — the Buddha, the Dhamma (his teachings, their practice and the realization of liberation at which they are aimed), and the Sangha (those of his followers who have gained at least a glimpse of that liberation). To take refuge in the Triple Gem means to take them as guide in one's pursuit of happiness and to give rise to their qualities in one's

life and heart.

- **Vipassana:** Clear insight into things as they actually are, seeing them in terms of the characteristics of inconstancy, stress and not-selfness.

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