

# **Acharn Maha Boowa:**

## **Translations of Dhamma Talks**

Acharn Maha Boowa is the foremost living meditation master, in Thailand, representing the teachings of the legendary Acharn Mun. The vigor and uncompromising determination of Acharn Maha Boowa's own Dhamma practice drew other and younger forest tradition monks also dedicated to the tradition of Acharn Mun's lineage to follow Acharn Maha Boowa's example, and this eventually resulted in the founding of Wat Pa Bahn Tahd, in some forest near the village where he was born in Udorn-thani, Thailand.

[This text contains 696 pages, so please practice patience in giving it time to download.]

# **To the Last Breath**

## **Dhamma Talks on Living and Dying**

**By**

**Venerable Acharn Maha Boowa Ñanasampanno**

edited by  
**Bhikkhu Ariyesako**

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## Part One

See also **Part Two: *Directions for Insight through <accesstoinsight>***

*"... the Buddha said that it wasn't important which day we die.  
Whenever the breath runs out, that is the day.  
The only criterion is our last breath..."*

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## *Editor's Preface*

*As Acharn Panyavaddho explained in the introduction he wrote for the 1980 Amata Dhamma: "(six) of these (seven) talks were given for the benefit of Mrs. Pow-panga Vathanakul, who had been staying in Wat Pa Bahn Tahd, Udorn-thani, Thailand, since the beginning of November 1975. The other talk, The Middle Way (of Practice), was actually given to the assembly of bhikkhus*

*at the Wat in 1962, and was one which Mrs. Pow-panga found useful... She stayed at Wat Pa Bahn Tahd for almost four months and Ven. Acharn Maha Boowa gave about 130 talks during that period."*<sup>1</sup>

*The first translation of To the Last Breath (or Amata Dhamma as it was then) was mainly the work of Ven. Bhikkhu A-j-. The present editor, who also assisted at that time, has now completely revised the whole translation and so must bear responsibility for the errors.*

*Any merit arising from my work on this book, may it be dedicated to my mother. May she find peace and happiness.*

*A. Bhikkhu*

*Anyone who has visited the forest monasteries of Thailand will need no introduction. They will have seen Acharns<sup>1</sup> who teach in a spontaneous and direct way, and who live as they teach. This is Forest Dhamma, vigorous but without pretension, inspiring one to live and practice the Way rather than reading about it. Yet here is a book that can only attempt to offer a partial view of certain aspects of that Teaching.*

*This is especially so with the first part of this collection of Dhamma talks, To the Last Breath. For these were given under quite special circumstances: A person, quite knowledgeable about Buddhism, is dying of cancer. The emphasis is, therefore, very much on dealing with pain,*

*suffering and, finally, death, and pointing towards that which is beyond suffering and death.*

*These circumstances mean that the beginning fundamentals of Dhamma practice are generally assumed to be already understood. (Khun Pow and the other listeners were already well practiced in developing Dhamma in their actions and speech.)<sup>2</sup>*

*For those new to Dhamma, however, it is important to remember the special context and to take into account the other Dhamma qualities that make an essential foundation that will need to be cultivated. The Lord Buddha gave an important example of this when he would begin his Dhamma Teaching (to those newly interested) with the Progressive or Graduated Sermon:<sup>3</sup>*

*"Then the Lord delivered a graduated discourse to 'Kutadanta,' on generosity, on morality and on heaven, showing the danger, degradation and corruption of sense-desires, and the profit of renunciation. And when the Lord knew that Kutadanta's mind was ready, pliable, free from the hindrances, joyful and calm, then he preached a sermon on Dhamma in brief: on suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path..."<sup>4</sup>*

*It is this 'joyful, calm, pliable, ready mind' — already settled firmly upon foundations of generosity and morality — that is receptive to the powerful Truths about pain, suffering and death. It is at this point that the emphasis changes to energetic striving, to overcoming the obstacles*

*that prevent insight and pin us blindly to the wheel of birth and death.*

*"Then the Lord said to the monks: 'Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay — strive on untiringly.' These were the Tathagata's last words." 5*

*In this book you will find both these aspects. There are constant references to 'gradually'... 'steadily'... 'step by step'... 'level by level' (of the Graduated Teaching). These lead into a growing emphasis on earnestness and diligence in practice.*

*Any translation is the impossible search for just the right word. The expression that conveys both the sense and accuracy in a pleasing way; and that also brings with it the spirit of the original. This translation is much more of a blind groping. First, there is the wide language and cultural gap between Thai and English. Then there is the change of medium from the living word to the printed page, which must always lose the dynamism of the original experience.<sup>6</sup> Finally, and perhaps the most important point, there is the great profundity of Dhamma, which is really beyond the translators' level of understanding. The reader will therefore need to make due allowance for the deficiencies in this translation effort. The only way truly to understand is to translate it back into your own life, your own experience and practice.*

*Even with its errors and inadequacies this book is the result of a great effort by many people. It will have all been worthwhile if a single person finds some truth in it that can help him or her face up to their situation, their illness and pain. Insight into that suffering may they go beyond a mere book's description to true liberation.*

## *Notes*

*1. Meditation Teachers.*

*2. See Epilogue.*

*3. Anupubbikatha. Also see the Appendix.*

*4. Thus Have I Heard. Page 141/29. (D.i.148) (Maurice Walshe, trans.; London: Wisdom Publications, 1987.)*

*5. ibid., p. 270/67. (D.ii.156).*

*6. To help with these points, Pali terms have been kept to a minimum or put in the Glossary. Repetitions — which spoken Thai delights in with its musical variations of words and phrases; and which also serve to reinforce the Dhamma themes — have sometimes been deleted.*

## **1. Ready to Go: Ready to Die**

This heart of ours is much like a child. The child is unable to take care of itself and so has to depend on mother and father, on guardians and nursemaids, holding on to various people. But the child at least has parents and guardians to look after it, to make sure it seldom meets with harm, whereas although

the heart is always grasping and clinging to various things it doesn't find any such safety and security.

The heart can't rely on itself and, therefore, always likes to cling onto things. For the most part, it tends to reach for wrong things, for things that do it harm.

The reason it likes to search for and hold on to things, is so that it can find safety, security and comfort for itself.

The things it clings to, however, are not dependable and so they pose a constant danger for the heart. Whether we are children or already grown up, this is the way our minds tend to be.

Instead of trying to rely on ourselves, we always put our hopes in other things, other people. *We can't stand on our own two feet.* This is because the heart isn't wise enough to check whether the objects it grasps hold of are right or wrong, good or bad. It doesn't know how to care for itself, how to help itself, because there's no one to teach it.

There's nobody to advise on how to know which things are dangerous and which are beneficial, which things should be held on to and which things shouldn't. The heart, therefore, continues indiscriminately to grasp hold of anything, whether good or bad, as long as it likes the look of it. Even if it isn't gratifying, the heart's characteristic trait is still to keep on grasping and clinging. Why should it be like this?

Normally, one wouldn't think that a mood or a thing that's displeasing is worth clinging to. Yet the heart continues to grasp hold of such things. It clings to anger, to delusion and lust, hatred and disgust, because it becomes involved and caught up in them. We can never say that the heart simply knows an object, for it always gets caught up in it and clings to it. For the most part, those things have nothing good in them.

Why does the heart have to go and grasp at things? It's because it is attracted without realizing the repercussions of its attachment. Even though you may wish to break away from it, you can't, because there's something else which is powerful enough to

force the heart to grasp and hang on. The object then becomes caught up in emotions, which continually over-cloud and obscure your mind. Here we're talking about emotional objects<sup>1</sup> and moods.

Now I'll speak about material objects. The heart will grasp at and cling to whatever object is present. It doesn't matter how trifling or significant, how valuable or worthless it might be; the heart can and will attach itself. We wouldn't be wrong if we were to call the heart an expert 'hanger-on'. This is because it's still unable to rely on itself, and so must depend on outside things, until the end of the body that has led one through the changing situations. It may even forget itself by surrendering to the power of external objects, even though their control is baseless and leads the wrong way.

The Lord Buddha taught that, "*self is the protector of self*".<sup>2</sup> Try to cure the heart of its dependency, of the tendency it has of always hoping to rely on other things. Disengage yourself from such objects and turn inward to rely more on your own resources and abilities. Don't depend on your parents, friends and others, so much that you forget yourself. Our human

trait of continually seeking support in other people develops eventually into a personal habit. It's like this all over the world, and in this regard we can hardly even measure up to some kinds of animals. This, then, is why the Lord Buddha taught about self-reliance.

In our commonplace and coarse affairs, like work and other such responsibilities, we should try to be more self-reliant. Coming in towards Dhamma — the practice of meditation in the heart — we need to have had sufficient training under a Teacher to know the right direction in which to proceed. The actual practice though, is the duty of each one of us, to find assurance in our self-reliance following the principles of Dhamma. The Lord Buddha taught, for example, about cultivating goodness and virtue through generosity, *precepts*<sup>3</sup> and meditation. This is so that we can develop self-reliance, which is the heart firmly holding to good and wholesome objects.

There is then peace and happiness in both the present and future lives, because they are beneficial things and originate from wholesome actions. They

make up fine objects or superior quality food for the heart.

We are taught to meditate, which is a step higher in refinement. This effort to train ourselves in meditation is a way of self-reliance that is steadily taken onto a firmer and more dependable level. We use a *meditation-word*<sup>4</sup> as the means to direct and control the heart. For, as the mind is not yet able to sustain itself, we have to rely on the meditation-word as the object to soothe and bring peace and calm.

The settling of the mind in "*buddho buddho buddho...*" is one example of this. It is an object for the heart to occupy itself with, which is correct and right and appropriate to finding refuge in Dhamma.

In the beginning of the practice, the heart is still restless and distracted, still unable to settle itself on Dhamma principles and become self-reliant. It has to depend on a meditation-word to direct it, until it merges in with that meditation-word and gathers into stillness. When it enters calm, even the meditation-word itself ceases to be an issue.

This is one step towards self-reliance for the meditation-word can be released at this stage, as the heart is well settled in calm. This is a foundation and refuge for the heart that can be clearly seen. Even with just this much, there's calm and ease in the heart that used to be restless and distracted, unable to find any peace.

This is because the heart normally does not know peace but only trouble and unrest, hunger and thirst, worries and concerns over affairs that are of no use to it at all. For the most part these affairs are the heart's own thoughts and imaginings, which poison and burn oneself — without anyone else being involved.

The Lord Buddha discovered the correct way to practice and achieved results to his heart's contentment. He was, therefore, able to explain about the causes, or the way to practice, together with their fulfillment and fruits. He taught us that the way to depend on oneself is through meditation and that this is the direct route to a firmly established self-reliance.

Basing the heart in calm, to whatever degree, brings increasingly self-assurance and confidence — without having to ask anyone else about it. You will know from within yourself. This is termed *paccata.m* or *sandi.t.thiko*. The knowledge of good or bad, what needs remedying, removing or developing, will then arise in the heart. This will be understood by oneself and for oneself, as the heart is more and more firmly established.

The level of concentration, once reached, is already sufficient to form a foundation for the heart, a home where the heart can find shelter and peace. At the moment when we think so much that we feel faint-hearted and weary, we should turn inwards and meditate. The heart can, then, rest and be stilled from all its preoccupations, finding peace and calm.

This is called going inward for refuge, to find a resting place of comfort and ease. This is one level of refuge for the heart.

The next steps, even though they're still concerned with samadhi, are proceeding into more subtle and refined aspects of the heart. The levels of *momentary*

*concentration, access concentration and attainment concentration*<sup>5</sup> show the refining of samadhi. This culminates in *attainment concentration*, and beyond that samadhi can't advance.

Once the heart has some degree of calm, according to the level of samadhi achieved, it is stilled and refined. However, without developing mindfulness and wisdom<sup>6</sup> it will just remain at that level, lacking wisdom radically to uproot its defilements.<sup>7</sup> If we compare the defilements to a tree, although we may have pruned the branches the main trunk remains uncut and is still capable of sending out new branches.

This is why we're taught to investigate by way of wisdom. Wisdom is a keen intelligence and ingenuity. It is able to investigate and follow through without any limitation. The Lord Buddha described *wisdom-and-knowledge* — being even more refined than wisdom — in the *Discourse of Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion*. Listen to this:

*"Nyaa.na.m udapaadi, panyaa udapaadi, vijjaa udapaadi, aaloko udapaadi."*

"Knowledge arose, wisdom arose, higher-knowledge arose, light arose."

*Knowledge* or *vijjaa* refers basically to the *Threefold Knowledge*.<sup>8</sup> *Wisdom arose*, and, with greater refinement, *higher-knowledge arose* — arising right from this same heart. Wisdom is that which removes the defilements covering the heart, whereas *samadhi* is simply that which herds the defilements together in quietness within the heart. It is not yet capable of cutting off any defilements. The heart's attachment, which embroils it with various things, remains intact though it's weakening. Once the heart gains some calm and peace, wisdom can come into its own as the important weapon that strikes down and uproots all the different defilements in the heart, step by step.

*"Samaadhi-paribhaavitaā panyāā mahapphalāā hoti mahaanisa.msāā."*

There! "Wisdom once supported and nurtured in *samadhi*, is of great fruit and great advantage." Its examination becomes skilled, its scrutiny agile and bold, so that it is able to cut away the defilements one after another.

*"Panyaa-paribhaavita.m      citta.m      sammadeva  
aasavehi vimuccati."*

"The heart nurtured with wisdom gains proper release from the cankers."

Listen to that! It's wisdom alone that can uproot the defilements; it doesn't matter whether they are gross, intermediate or subtle, no defilement lies beyond the scope of wisdom.

This is a primary principle that secures the quality and value of our practice, which is the total elimination of the defilements from the heart. It's the same practice which the Lord Buddha and his Noble Disciples have already completed before us.

Thus samadhi and wisdom can't be separated from each other. Whatever our character and tendencies might be, samadhi is always needed as a quiet resting place for the heart. The heart rests from work, by stilling in samadhi its thoughts and preoccupations. Even work in the world requires a period of rest and recuperation — making do without is just not possible. This may certainly use up working-time but, just as eating uses up food and

the money needed to buy that food, it is necessary that the body has renewed vigor to continue its work. Resting and sleeping may waste some time but, again, they give the constitution new strength to fulfill its duties and tasks. Otherwise it won't be able to go on.

This use of time and material to provide for and re-strengthen the body is certainly not wasted. Rather, they act like fuel for a car, which won't go anywhere without it. Samadhi and wisdom have the same sort of relationship. The mind needs time to be still and calm in samadhi, and, after it has rested, it can then continue its investigation using mindfulness and wisdom in line with its abilities.

This word *wisdom* describes something very subtle and broad ranging, to accord with the character and tendencies of the person bringing it into use. Any approach we use to investigate for the sake of uprooting the defilements is termed *right wisdom*.

It's not necessary always to have to go and read the scriptures in order to know how to deal with the defilements; and in order for it to be 'Dhamma'. These texts were extracted from the heart that is

Dhamma, which had actually performed the uprooting of the defilements and clearly seen the fruits. Only then was it written down in the scriptures. So it's not the case that the texts originated before the Truth — which is the actual practice.

The Lord Buddha was the *first* to practice and so no scriptures had been made for him to use. When he taught his disciples the Noble Truths, he didn't write them down in palm leaf texts. He taught them by word of mouth, and then his disciples themselves carried on the Teaching through word of mouth. Where did they get their teachings? — From the reality in their hearts, which they had seen clearly as a result of their own practice.

It is for this reason that the techniques and strategies of mindfulness and wisdom depend primarily on the individual.

Each of us needs to think, examine, investigate and work out strategies using our own intelligence and abilities, according to each case. Therefore, there's no need always to go back to retrieve scriptural

authority with questions like: "*I've thought this up myself so it can't possibly deal with the defilements.*" This way of thinking is not in accord with the principles of Dhamma and can't be called *right wisdom*. When those things we remember from the scriptures can't be actualized in ridding our heart of any defilements then this too, for us, isn't *right wisdom*. It may be right wisdom in the scriptures but it's wrong in the way it's used.

The Dhamma is only explained to a limited extent in the scriptures. It's not really all that much. If we compare it to a medicine, it's a general nonspecific remedy rather than one aimed at a particular illness. Our integrating and formulating a specific approach, which is capable of dealing with each particular defilement, is termed *medicine*. It is a remedy aimed at steadily uprooting a certain defilement.

This is why those who are successfully practicing in the way of wisdom have Dhamma, have mindfulness and wisdom with them wherever they are.

Ven. Acharn Mun once said that he "*listened to Dhamma day and night*". Just think of that! Things

keep making contact with our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch at all times. If the knowledge of this contact doesn't arise at the heart, which is waiting with acknowledgment, where else is it going to occur? What is it that acknowledges?

The heart's acknowledging also stirs up mindfulness and wisdom, which must come in to examine the ongoing involvement with a well-founded scrutiny, which accords with cause and effect.

It checks out the contact and when it knows, it is able progressively to withdraw or let go. This is what is called, 'listening to Dhamma day and night', listening to Dhamma in the primal principles of nature. Defilements are natural principles together with the heart. Dhamma, with its virtue, samadhi and wisdom are natural principles within the heart. It all depends on how we bring them out to use in our investigating; utilizing them to full advantage according to the ability of mindfulness and wisdom, which is the ideal instrument to use.

The body. Listen! Elements, aggregates, body. The Lord Buddha had them and all his disciples have had

them. At one stage they seized hold and attached to those aggregates, just as we do now. Such defilements were the same for them as they are now for us. But by grasping and attaching to, we establish conditions and causes for the accumulation of defilement in our hearts.

The Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples formerly had defilements — just like us now — so why was it possible for them to uproot them? The body is the same, the five aggregates are the same, yet they could release their attachment, whereas we can't. Why? We don't seem able to understand, yet how was it that they were able to gain realization? Why can't we also comprehend? The heart is present, and mindfulness and wisdom can be built up in each aspect, according to whatever angle we wish to take up for examination.

This body, which exists right with us here now, is something that can be known and understood. When we say that the heart can't depend on itself, what it all comes down to is that it needs to depend on the body. Moreover, it not only relies on the aggregates but also holds to them as being *self*.

There! We depend on them and unashamedly uphold them as *self*. What about that then? Even with some measure of shame, they inevitably must be held onto, because comprehension is still lacking, and without it, so any possibility of letting-go. So, it is quite correct to say that we've been shameless and we need to admit to our stupidity. From here, we must endeavor to develop some cleverness that will see these things and let go of them through the strength of our own efforts.

So, for once, let's get down to the facts. These things follow the principles of nature and remain as *they are they*, whereas we exert ourselves to pull them in as *our-self*. Now *that is* going to make problems because it goes against the truth of things. To be in line with the facts you have to investigate to see according to the truth about them. Repeatedly examine and keep on investigating until you can understand. Once you understand, you won't have to order the mind to let go.

It will let go on its own because these things are poisonous and harmful to us, owing to our own attachment. There are certainly no benefits in this

attachment. If there were any merit or advantage, the Lord Buddha would have told us to grasp hold — but then, such advice would not be needed as the heart would have already involved itself. It is that attachment that is the truly poisonous and harmful thing.

Even though those things may be dangerous to us, we still seize and bring them close in. We hold them by making the assumptions that, *I'm like this, I'm like that; they are me; they are mine*. The trouble arises right there, with these assumptions and notions based in delusion.

None of these aggregates have any meaningfulness in themselves. They exist, in truth, in the same way as trees and mountains and such like. We are conscious of their various aspects, and this makes it the affair and concern of the heart. Once dead we can't be aware of them, which shows that it's all mixed-up with the heart. If we are here, there is no happiness; if we go, there's no contentment; if we grasp hold, there's no peace. And this goes on and on and on. How exasperating and vexing this can be.

This heart is totally filled with delusion. Whatever aspect it exposes, there is nothing but delusion and harmful attachments. We murmur that, '*the heart can't depend on itself*' and so has to go and hang onto this thing or that. Our investigation through wisdom is carried forth so that we can understand this whole situation. Then we can push away, press on out, disentangle and steadily attain to self-reliance.

We give other things a complete looking over and can manage to understand them. We look at buildings, homes, women, men, animals and material things. We can tell whether they're good or bad, valuable or not, worth keeping or not — yet why can't we realize this about our body? Not only do we fail to understand, but we also love and grasp hold of it in attachment.

We wouldn't dare love or hold on to outside things in the same way, especially if we know there's nothing good in them. We wouldn't have anything to do with them. Yet here, we will take it all — the good with the bad. What can one say? This is where we really show our stupidity. These eyes in our head see what the body is like, our heart knows, but it's all

on the superficial level of commonplace people. It therefore keeps on going, in a stubborn, unrelenting way without true knowledge, following the commonplace, mundane understanding.

This is really the commonplace way of ignorance, the ordinary type of delusion in the circle of knowledge. It's out of line with the truth, which is why we must find a way to introduce truth into the heart; for this is wisdom. Once wisdom is there, we will realize the truth — no longer concealed — about ourselves incorporated in this physical body.

Inspect it carefully. This body is not all that big: a fathom long, a cubit wide and just a hand's span thick. We ought to be able to look it all over — externally it should only take a moment. On the inside, look deeply with a heartfelt examination, following its present state and conditions to its final dissolution. It doesn't really go anywhere; it does nothing but advance towards its disintegration and a return to its original elements. And that's all. Using wisdom make a deep-reaching and heartfelt investigation of this truth. When the truth goes *straight to the heart* in a way beyond dispute, the

grasping and attachment will immediately withdraw. If the truth hasn't yet penetrated, then investigate with wisdom until it does.

This wisdom doesn't appear from anyone else. This profound insight into the body — which is right with us here — is something that arises from your own investigation, your own understanding. When that understanding is complete, you'll completely let go. You're the one who's been holding on, and no one else can let go for you so investigate and free yourself.

Just look on the body as something to lean upon and abide with. If, through your stupidity and lack of wisdom, you see it as your-self or as belonging to you, then it will cause you endless suffering. This is especially so at the final breakup of the aggregates.

Your worries and regrets, loves and attachments, will all go out of control. Even more than *'a kite with broken string on high'*, you'll spin along with the wind. No one will know where you'll come down, and all this in spite of the fact that the body is not

worth such affection and regret. It is wholly made up of things destined for dissolution.

Are you going to persist in resisting the truth? When the time comes, there's no denying that the aggregates must break apart. This is the truth. Are you going to set yourself against it by still loving and cherishing, not wanting them to fail and fall apart?

In this opposition to the truth you will only heap up suffering for yourself, until, finally, there will be no way out. Unless, of course, you grasp this present moment, quickly, so as to dispatch it through wisdom. If you succeed in this, then you will receive that *great gain* — the supreme happiness of Nibbaana: "*Nibbaana.m parama.m sukha.m!*". However, if you should go against Dhamma, then it's also quite possible that at that moment you'll lose your faculties and wits.

Wisdom is a state of the art weapon system that should penetrate through your investigation to the truth. Release and let go [all attachments] in accordance with the truth, both now while you're

still living here and at the time of disintegration. Wisdom will then have clearly appraised the present situation and the future — nothing can now pose a problem.

Pleasures and pains are still present because the aggregates are still functioning. These things arise in dependence on one another. And it's the heart that acknowledges and takes responsibility. It *knows* but doesn't grasp. You should understand that there are two possible ways in which it can *know* — either *knowing-in-line-with-the-truth* or by *knowing-and-seizing-hold*.

Feelings<sup>9</sup> of whatever type or level are present with the aggregates but not in the purified heart. The *arahant* does not have to bear with the feelings of both aggregate and heart, whereas 'us lot' take up the contract to build the *cycle-of-rebirth*.<sup>10</sup> When this condition of various aggregates tilts and skews, we follow; and when it topples and falls we're knocked sprawling with it. It's because of the reliance we put on them. They lead us to tilt and we tilt, to fall over and we fall too. When they lead us to stand in place, we might be able also to hold up to a certain extent

but they aren't willing to stand still. Even if they persist and haven't yet reached death, we are more upset about dying than they are.

It's, therefore, necessary for us to investigate, clearly to see with wisdom, that these things are solely something to abide with.

Days... minutes... time steadily consumes everything. If we see the way time and nature eat away, gnaw away at these things, we'll see that it's like a dog gnawing away on a meaty bone. There's no difference at all. It keeps gnawing away, biting and tearing until there's nothing left to get its teeth into. So, there is the eating away [of the aggregates] in just the same way. They keep disintegrating bit by bit, until they reach their final truth.

Whether we're sitting, standing, walking, lying down or sleeping soundly, time keeps on eating away, gnawing away: Disintegration, diminishing and decline: The continual gnawing and consuming. So you think that you can oppose and stop this? No, there's no halting this.

It is the [inevitable] course of nature — something of massive proportions. Our assumptions are wrong, and what's wrong is no match for what's right and true. Disintegration is quite the correct course; it is following their principle of nature. To resist their essential nature is the heart's error that must end in suffering.

Start right now with an all-round investigation of these things. When the time comes finally to go, there will then be no trembling because your investigation and understanding are complete and you'll know that this is the inevitable way of things. There's just no alternative.

So then, let each thing go its own separate way. Whatever happens, let it occur, without trying to resist the truth.

Painful feelings burn away at the body, and it gradually becomes brittle and 'overdone'. It steadily declines until it breaks apart and disintegrates. However, a heart circled with mindfulness and wisdom won't be broken, won't be extinguished and won't 'hang on'. It is its own self by itself, self-

reliant, without needing to depend on anything — and infinitely at ease.

Right here is where we see the importance of investigation, its value for the heart. This is why sages, beginning with the Lord Buddha, teach mindfulness and wisdom as their major point — so that we can take the mind, drag the mind, out of the bonfire and release it from danger.

The Teachings of every Buddha are taught in the same way. This is because the natural principles are the same, and the defilements are always the same. No Buddha will teach differently or diverge from this. The practice is always to remove the defilements — whether great or small — from the heart. This follows from the basic principles of Dhamma, which they all teach. If we deviate from these principles, we'll be the laughing stock of the defilements.

Therefore, investigate. No matter how broadly or how narrowly — take the whole universe and worldly elements. Is there anything there on which the heart can depend and which offers refuge? Take

note of this term '*refuge*'. Even those things that are intimately associated with our self are not safe. Farther out than the body, itself, there's no hope of finding refuge in anything.

Even those things closely connected with us aren't trustworthy. If we can't discern the threat they pose, then where else will we be able to see it? It's here where the danger must be seen and the heart withdrawn from its peril. The quality that then arises in full measure is called:

*'Attaa hi attano naatho'*: '*self is the protector of self.*' It doesn't depend on anything. '*Virtue*', '*samadhi*' or '*wisdom*' in the final stage of release, are also terms no longer needed. Why should a refuge be found in tools and instruments that have successfully done their job of clearing out the defilements?

The tools are laid down in accordance with their condition. A knife taken up to chop vegetables or to peel fruit is put aside when we take the food and eat it. It's obvious that we don't eat the knife as well.

Virtue, samadhi and wisdom are tools for dealing with the defilements. When the defilements are eliminated, all the problems for the heart also go. While life remains, these tools can be utilized, for the sake of the world, in line with conventional notions. However, they won't be needed to correct the defilements ever again.

In particular, at the final time when the passage from the elements and aggregates will take place, there's definitely no need for anything. Mindfulness and wisdom are no longer an issue and the body poses no problem, because all problems in the heart are already finished with. Nothing can possibly cause concern. So you should move forward to this ending of problems, for this is where all your worries will cease.

If you still have problems — then that is a problem. We hear of problems concerning suffering and hardship, concerning birth, aging, sickness and death. They follow on from what we call 'problems'.

With the ending of problems all issues cease. Investigate and understand. All the things I've

mentioned here lie in your own body or heart. Analyze them through the power of your mindfulness and wisdom. Examine day after day. Don't be complacent. It's not that mindfulness and wisdom are something that can be brought in to cook and eat, but they can be brought in to deal with the defilements. By utilizing them in this way, the removal can carry on all day long.

However, complacency will only lead you to sink — and there's certainly nothing to be gained by that. The final result will be that when you're stuck in a corner, you won't even know where your wisdom has disappeared to. You'll end up banging your head against the walls. That certainly won't do!

We're not disciples of a *Tathaagata*, the Lord Buddha, who [at first] banged his head against the wall. The Lord Buddha didn't do it, neither did the Noble Disciples whom we revere with, "*Sangha.m sara.na.m gacchaami*". How can we go and bang our heads in this way?

You must endeavor, using whatever means and strategies, to find the way that leads out. Try to the

best of your ability. Reaching the [present] limit of our capability, then that's all we can manage. Whatever state or level we reach, we accept it — because that's as much as we can do. But as long as it's not beyond our ability we can strive to go further, struggling, crawling and forcing our way through.

Sinking into the cycle of birth and death is similar to when a ship capsizes and everything on board goes down. The ship, the goods and cargo all sink together and the people die. We go down with the elements and aggregates through delusion and ignorance. The body goes down in accordance with its nature, but our heart sinks because of its own stupidity. Do you approve of that? There's nothing good about this fall. The heart goes straight down into the deep under the compulsion of delusion; and that surely isn't good. In fact, it's disastrously bad and unwished for. It's for this reason that we have to make sure that we steadily look for a way out.

Investigate to see the truth, and especially the truth of the painful and unpleasant feelings of the body and heart. This is of great importance. The heart goes in and seizes hold so much that it becomes a

mental disease on top of everything else. Realize that the five conditions are not '*me*': Body, feelings, memory or perception, mental formations, and consciousness are particular conditions interdependent within the elements and aggregates. The heart is something apart. By successfully analysing and dissecting, using your mindfulness and wisdom, you'll reach safety from all danger.

Death — just let it go along its way. All the things of this world die, they have death built-in. How can you expect them to be constant and enduring — when the time comes for them to die, they have to die. Nothing can constrain or contradict this. Even *arahants* have to die; for them, however, there is the difference that they pass away without concern and worry. As for us, we're worried even before we come to die — perturbed and possessive. On death, the worry and possessiveness intensify, so that they pile up into a threat bigger than a mountain. Be careful not to let that happen to you. Make sure you get beyond such anxieties.

As I'm always saying, prepare and establish yourself with sufficient qualities — '*kusalaa dhammaa*'11

(meaning) 'enough skill and intelligence'. This is our '*kusalaa*'. "*Kusalaa dhammaa akusalaa dhammaa...* " Wherever there's *akusalaa* — unskillfulness or stupidity — drive it out with *kusalaa* skillfulness, which is your own mindfulness and wisdom.

This is what is called 'chanting *kusalaa* for oneself', and it's something you have to do for yourself. Depending on others to track down monks to chant... "*kusalaa dhammaa*"... after your death causes so much fuss and bother. Something we don't want.

"*Kusalaa dhammaa:*" prepare yourself enough skillfulness, complete and all encompassing, and there will be no need for anything else. You'll die without turmoil and confusion like a '*sugato*'.

So then, that's all for now.

Notes

1.

*arom* (Thai). See Glossary.

2.

"*Atta hi attano natho, kohi natho paro siya?*" (Dhp. verse 160)

"Self is the protector of self, for who else could (one's) protector be?"

3.

precepts. See Glossary and Appendix.

4.

*pari-kamma.*

5.

*samadhi: khanika samadhi; upacara samadhi; appana samadhi.* See Glossary.

6.

*sati-panyaa.*

7.

*kilesa.*

8.

Remembrance of past lives, knowledge of the decease and rebirth of beings, and knowledge of the extinction of all the cankers.

9.

*vedanaa.*

10.

*va.t.ta cakka.*

11.

The prescribed chant at any Thai cremation ceremony.

## **2. The Undying**

Listening here to this Dhamma talk, please make sure that you don't allow the mind to wander away. Keep it within yourself rather than sending it out following after various moods and imaginings. Don't look back and pine after past thoughts and conceptions, for here and now they can't bring any benefit. At this time you should be trying to suffuse the heart with Dhamma, for it has become parched through its long deficiency.

It's similar to a drought-ridden jungle lacking in moisture, where the dried-out vegetation easily ignites. Both living and dead trees are then scorched and consumed. Forest fires during the rainy season are rare but the hot season, when the vegetation dries out, brings a danger of fire. This may happen even in a forest monastery when it is very dry. *Bahn Tahd* forest monastery has in fact caught on fire several times. This is due to its becoming dry and parched.

When the heart becomes parched through lack of Dhamma to cool and nourish it, the fire of the defilements can rapidly take hold. This will then scorch everything coming into experience. Fire

brings damage, so when the defilements blaze within the heart how can the heart itself escape harm? Regardless of its value, it will become tarnished and eventually worthless. Such is the way of the heart that has been constantly scorched and consumed by fire.

A fire will damage our possessions depending on its intensity and extent. Unless, of course, they happen to be stored in a *safe-place* like security vaults which banks use to protect their valuables. But do we have a safety vault or safe place within our hearts? Or are we continually exposing ourselves to danger, always leaving ourselves vulnerable without any concern for our deserving heart? We can use this approach when considering our situation and learning a lesson.

The heart cannot find any happiness because it's constantly being burnt. This fire is the blaze of greed, hatred and delusion that is described in the *Fire Sermon*.<sup>1</sup> There's nothing doubtful or uncertain about this. It's a timeless truth. We need to take these Dhamma questions onto a personal level, carefully comparing and considering the correctness and truth of them there, and then we'll at least be in a position

to escape the heat. We will have found a breathing space, a safe, cool place and will no longer be always caught up in the conflagration.

Each of you has made the effort to come here to practice. You may consider it as a *search for a safe-place for your riches* — which are the virtue and skillfulness<sup>2</sup> you have gathered, and their protection from the devastation of the three great fires.

Fighting ordinary outside fires is difficult enough; especially when the blaze has taken such a hold that even water can't contain it. The (village) hoses always seem to clog up, and if that can't be fixed then the house will soon become charred remains and ashes. Turning to extinguish the inner blaze, however, relies on the assiduous cultivation of virtue. The meditation on *loving kindness*<sup>3</sup> for instance: The heart is then calmed and concentrated, cooled and strengthened so that it can quench the harmful fires within.

*Fire*, almost by definition, must be hot. Even sparks burn and sting if we're in their way when they fly up. So if we go along allowing ourselves to be burnt,

day after day after day — what's going to be left? The heart will be burnt out. The body may remain but the heart will survive with a poor and *indifferent sort of knowing*, without wholesome aspect because it's totally given over to the all-consuming defilements. It is a knowingness invested with suffering, not with comfort and ease. It lacks lucidity and wisdom and is completely overwhelmed in suffering: So much so that the heart seems worthless.

It will need a sustained effort in cultivating meditation to extinguish the fire within the heart. This will steadily bring peace and happiness.

All the teachings of the Lord Buddha are within our reach and range. He never offered impossibilities or taught blindly and haphazardly. Those of us who practice should see these Dhamma teachings as being of vital importance and take them deeply to heart. Just as we all shy away from pain and suffering — which nobody wants — so we must incline towards the remedy and antidote. And that is Dhamma.

On analyzing the situation we will find that in doing the practice, the question of easiness or difficulty doesn't appear so important. We have already carefully reasoned it out and are satisfied and convinced of its effectiveness. It's this that has obliged us to take up the practice.

We can only do our best. For who isn't lazy when the defilements rule the roost? This is laziness, which loathes acting towards anything good or beneficial, is with us all. It always likes to hold the lead but is certainly not going to deliver us from suffering. We remain complacent and negligent, steadily being dragged down through the deceit and coercion of the defilements.

The Lord Buddha himself also went through and then overcame these oppressions of the heart. This is something we should use as a reflection on our own situation. Then, when laziness and discouragement overwhelm us, we can encourage and arouse ourselves with his ideal example. A way will appear of resistance and commitment without always having to yield and submit. It's difficult, yes, but just carry-on and do it.

The way to overcome and transcend suffering takes on a crucial importance if we acknowledge the truth of suffering. Otherwise, this predicament that we detest and dread will always confront us. But merely intellectualizing about ways of escape, without actually taking remedial action, isn't going to get us anywhere. It doesn't matter whether a technique is easy or difficult as long as it's effective in ridding the heart of its torments it must be applied.

We are all fellows and equal in suffering, in birth and death amid the various realms of existence. Even after so long, we are still *equal first*, with no one coming-in behind. Each of us has gone through repeated birth and death, matching each other in the suffering involved. There can be no competition or rivalry here for we all manage an *equal first* and are all in the same boat. Instead of achieving our top marks with the heart and Dhamma, they come from being foremost together in suffering; following the guidance and direction of the defilements. Without going against that lead there will never be an end to suffering.

Dhamma is concerned with resisting the influence of the defilements. It uses careful analysis and reason, perceiving that the source of suffering and danger must be remedied in such and such a way. The putting-to-right may be difficult or easy, but that is beside the point. When the craftsman works, he selects the appropriate tool for the job in hand. As he selects his tool he isn't concerned with its weight but only with steadily accomplishing his task.

The tools selected to be used against the defilements and for establishing the heart in genuine wholeness and integrity come from the Dhamma. These Dhamma tools are varied and need to be chosen to fit the circumstances. If the heart is only mildly disturbed by the defilements, we may apply a lighter control. The level of mindfulness and wisdom, the strength of application, the length of our sitting or walking (in meditation) or investigating, isn't yet of great significance because the work isn't at the critical stage. However, when the defilements rise up to disturb and obsess the heart, and it finds it can't unburden or release itself, we can no longer remain idle and indifferent.

Now is the time for action. Whatever is available is thrown in with a do-or-die attitude and without thought of surrender or defeat; unless death does indeed come first, then, beyond us. Our response must be to mobilize all our resources and willingly endure the painful predicament.

Our resistance might bring with it suffering but that's nothing compared with the aberrant effects of defilement-born suffering. It's this that sinks one so thoroughly that there's no telling when one might emerge.

We all know about the discomfort and pain of sitting or walking in meditation for long periods. We've experienced the difficulties involved in finding strategies and skillful means to oppose the defilements. We know this much. But when the fruits of our exertion arise, it will be experienced as something truly remarkable. The happiness and wonder that arises! This is the new insight with such ingenuity and resourcefulness. This is exactly what we have been hoping for.

Once the results arrive to join up with the cause we'll be able to cope with any obstacle or difficulty that may arise. If there were only hardship and struggle without the final rewarding peace and contentment, then no one in this world would be able to continue. I don't mean just us ordinary people, but even the Lord Buddha couldn't have awakened, nor his enlightened disciples — whom we celebrate with:

*"Buddha.m, Dhamma.m, Sangha.m sarana.m gacchaami."*

"I go for refuge to the Lord Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha."

The right time and opportunity will always eventually arrive, and we will then be able to manage the task. Perseverance is, therefore, crucial, as is a steady and systematic use of clear reasoning; but should this weaken, the defilements will immediately grow more threatening and incisive.

With strong effort, with mindfulness and wisdom sharp and keen, the defilements will gradually fall away. Defilements only fear Dhamma, for nothing else can contain and subdue them. Dhamma is *faith, diligent effort, mindfulness, samadhi* and *wisdom*.<sup>4</sup>

*Faith* is trust in the fruits of the Lord Buddha's Realization. That the Dhamma he offered to the world definitely leads out from suffering — it is the *Niyyaanika Dhamma*. That if we too practice following the Lord's teaching, we will steadily and surely come to those same fruits.

*Diligent effort* will always bring the right and proper result to any action. Whether the task be internal or external, it will be well accomplished, when supported by diligent effort. This will be evident in its outstanding and appropriate result.

*Mindfulness* is the vital factor that oversees each task, preventing any negligence or error.

*Samadhi* is the firm, undistracted commitment to the task in hand right up to its final completion. That is the *causal aspect* while the *samadhi of result* appears in the established, concentrated mind: The heart of peace and contentment. The *samadhi of cause* concentrates on the action without vacillation or bias and the resulting samadhi state is that of tranquillity. This leads up to *ekaggataa*, which the

Lord Buddha described as '*the mind having only one object*', without depending on anything else.

*Wisdom* is penetrative discernment, which is necessary in checking out each situation: will it be damaging or fulfilling and effective? We must rely on wisdom to investigate and analyze.

These are the factors of Dhamma that will steadily lead us out from suffering, accomplishing the work we set out to do. The Lord Buddha also described the *Four Ways to Success*<sup>5</sup> as being of equal importance. They are:

*Satisfaction*.<sup>6</sup> What is it that brings satisfaction to us? If we are content with defilements then that is what will spring up. Whatever has gratified us becomes the object of our search. We want *that* and so *that* is what arises. However, the *Four Ways to Success* are not concerned with such low level gratifications but are directed at fulfilling our high and virtuous aspirations. They are the four means to achieve those aims that lie within the reach of us human beings.

Together with *satisfaction* there is *diligent effort*,<sup>7</sup> *attentiveness and application*<sup>8</sup> to the work, and *all-around wisdom*.<sup>9</sup> These combine to form a single effective force in accomplishing the single objective. This is the Dhamma that builds the complete and whole human being. The heart becomes firmly based. Efforts to accomplish the work are consolidated with excellent principles, methods and suitable customs and traditions. All of this ensures that those who take up the practice do not go counter to the basic principles of Dhamma.

Once the heart is attuned to Dhamma in this way it is safeguarded with the *Dhamma-protection* and will steadily prosper. Harmful factors will fade, because regardless of how long the heart had previously fallen into misery, it was not ruined without any hope of renewal. For once the heart is purged through exertion, it will be left bright, serene and happy. This then is the key, the vital instrument in turning our aspiration into full reality. A mere passive *wishing* or easy discouragement will abort such accomplishments.

Whatever you are doing or thinking, never forget our great Teacher, the Lord Buddha. When discouragement presses down, recollect his example: His persistent exertion and his Awakening through using these Dhamma factors of *faith, effort, mindfulness, samadhi, and wisdom*. This is how he attained to Awakening.

What direction should one take to develop and nourish peace of mind, so that, at the very least, you can claim to be following the way, with a guide and teacher? The Lord Buddha explained his own fruitful practice in an orderly and methodical way, so there's really no alternative way to try.

*"Dhamma.m sarana.m gacchaami: I go to refuge in Dhamma"*

— this phrase finds its source in the five factors of *faith, diligent effort, mindfulness, samadhi and wisdom*. It's these five factors that arose with the Lord Buddha himself.

*"Sangha.m sarana.m gacchaami"* — going for refuge to the Sangha is just the same. None of the noble disciples, regardless of their (former) wealth or class, were weak-willed or easily discouraged. Once gone forth into Dhamma's Way, they were

characterized by their energy and diligent effort. This aspect of exertion is a vital factor in steadily uplifting the quality of one's heart. These *five factors* and *four ways* go together to raise the heart, releasing it from the oppressed condition of worldlings sunk in suffering.

Some of the disciples walked on their meditation path until their feet blistered. How's that for striving! Some didn't lie down for three months at a time. The Ven. Cakkhupala strove like that until his eyes ruptured and were broken and [he was] blinded. Is that enduring in one's endeavor or not?

As for us, there's no need to ruin our body but it would be good if we could at least make the defilements suffer a bit; so that they run away and hide. Don't let them swarm all over the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Once infested with defilements you'll never be able to find Dhamma or anything essential within the heart. How on earth are you going to find any peace?

We must rely on these Dhamma factors to overcome those defilements that remain dominant in the heart. These principles of Dhamma must be taken deeply

to heart — don't cherish anything else. They are the tools that will steadily deliver the heart to the perfect freedom that we all prize so highly. Your choice is between the heart of freedom and the heart under the domination of the defilements. So which is better, the slave totally deprived of liberty or the free person?

We have long been passively submissive under the mass of defilements and craving. It's only when we become weary of their domination and start to recognize their curse that we'll be able to resist, by whatever way we can. Ultimately, we'll have to rely on these five essential Dhamma tools to finish off and eliminate the defilements.

Where is the arena and battleground for anyone going into Dhamma practice? What do those who relentlessly walk their meditation path or sit cross-legged, day and night, take as their battlefield and zone of investigation? The Lord Buddha brought forward the *Four Noble Truths* from the principles of Dhamma. These Four Noble Truths are there within the body and mind of human beings. You are human, so when you walk or sit in meditation

searching for truth and Dhamma, it's obvious that you must look for the Noble Truths.

We are aware of the suffering that arises in the body and mind of human beings and animals. We, unlike the animals, know a way to remedy the situation. How can this suffering be so welcome and desirable? When it appears in the body it's plainly unwished for, yet even with bodily ease and comfort any suffering that comes up will bring anxiety and negative, unsightly behavior. And increasing distress manifests in an even more unattractive way.

The tormented heart will always expose itself in detrimental ways, for, instead of alleviating and ridding itself of suffering, it actually makes the situation worse. The idea that one can be rid of suffering — 'get it off one's chest' — with harsh words and offensiveness is completely mistaken. In reality, the perpetrator not only hurts others with outpourings from a soiled heart but also increases his own suffering. He spreads and multiplies his troubles rather than throwing them out.

One element of the Noble Truths concerns the searching into how suffering actually arises. We may be aware of suffering but to do anything about it [because] we need to know its root-cause. This is the originator, the producer of suffering or *samudaya*. The Lord Buddha usually explained this as, *sensual craving, craving for existence and craving for non-existence*.<sup>10</sup>

Desire for things that *I love* and aversion for what *I dislike* is the source of our suffering. Those thought fabrications based in defilements are producing suffering and so can be classed as a source. All these branches and ramifications spring from one main trunk — and that's in the heart. The heart is embedded with the roots of greed, hatred and delusion.

Examine your body and then turn your inspection inward to the heart. Check on its ongoing thoughts and fabrications. What do you find? The answer is endless proliferating of thoughts that contrive and process suffering for both yourself and others. The Lord Buddha taught about the application of mindfulness and wisdom to inspect what's going on.

The heart appears anxious and concerned for these aggregates. But what's the point in that? The aggregates have their space here, so surely there's room enough in a cemetery or crematorium ahead, just as there is for everyone else in the world.

What can all this concern and possessiveness achieve? Where's the advantage? Won't the result be that of *'unfulfilled desires that breed suffering'* for the heart? The Lord Buddha, therefore, advised against indulging such desires and to turn and examine the actual situation.

The bodily aggregate is fashioned and put together and is thus also destined for eventual breakup. Just that. This can be irrefutably seen once wisdom is brought to bear, and, then, any possessiveness seems altogether pointless. We can then let go our grasp and allow the body to follow its own nature; whether it's still holding together or has entered the inevitable final phase of dissolution.

This world is full of *cemeteries* awaiting each person and animal. Examining the truth, we can no longer doubt the reality of our reserved plot, or, indeed, the inevitability of our future death. Clearly,

acknowledging this mortality means we can then *let go of* our worries and concern. Death is a fundamental part of the law of nature which can neither be denied or defied. Let nature take its course, and the earth, water, air and fire will follow their own essential natures.

*That which knows* should genuinely know and not mistake water, fire and air as '*myself*'. This acts like a parasite hooking in and trapping the heart in turmoil. We *mis-take* them for self and thereby fall into suffering.

The aggregate of feeling is much the same. We have experienced *pleasure and pain*<sup>12</sup> from the day of our birth up to the present. Whether it was a feeling of body or heart, it's all about *impermanence, suffering and not-self*. It arises so as to pass away...

When this [world of] assumptions and *suppositions*<sup>13</sup> has come forward, nothing is able to keep steady and unchanging.

Where exactly is the suffering in feeling? Bodily pains are not too difficult to examine when wisdom penetrates through. But the painful feeling in the heart — *this* is important. When there is bodily pain,

there is also pain and suffering in the heart that arises because of the *source*<sup>14</sup> of suffering.

This is the way that the defilements trick all beings in the world with their beguilements. The deception of taking *this body as myself* must be cleared by a thorough analysis of the true nature of the body. The investigation of pleasant and unpleasant feeling is aimed at erasing from the heart the notion that *this feeling is myself*.

Let things be as they truly are: *feeling is feeling* while *this is me*[mind, which is that *knowingness*. Don't mix them up. But anyway, that's not possible as they are intrinsically different. How can they become merged together into one? Can two individuals be combined as only one? Having to bear the burden of one person is heavy enough — but to have the extra weight of two, three, four or five others... We don't just take up the body but also shoulder the other four aggregates, which press down with the weight of attachment. It's the heart that takes responsibility, and so the heart alone must bear the consequences. That is suffering — and there's no compensation to be found. And yet we

still persist with such hanging on. This needs looking at to see the true nature of pain.

There is then the aggregate of perception or memory,<sup>15</sup> that remembers something only to forget it again. When that memory is required we may recall it anew and then it will fade away again — "*sanyaa vaassa vim hati*": That's how the Lord Buddha described it and who can argue with that. Perception is impermanent, memory fades into forgetfulness — "*sanyaa anicca*". This *anicca* was explained by the Lord Buddha, and it's this that we now use when we chant for the dead:

*"Anicca vata sankhaaraa — impermanent are all conditioned things."*

But no chants or spells are able to conjure up a person or a self. You won't find any sign of self in all the five aggregates, for they are *impermanent, suffering and not-self*.

Investigate and analyze through to a more refined understanding. Don't be so afraid of dying, for death like that isn't found with the heart. By bringing in

such fears you'll only succeed in deceiving yourself and piling up suffering.

This goes counter to Dhamma, to the truth taught by the Lord Buddha. If you accept this Way then obviously you should follow it and see the truth for yourself rather than going against it. This is the true *going for refuge*. "*Buddha.m sarana.m gacchaami.*"

It's a discerning of the truth of the heart rather than a mere mouthing of words. The Lord Buddha offered this Teaching to all creatures of the world, and as that includes us why shouldn't we too be able to comprehend the Four Noble Truths. They're there within each one of us.

Now, what about thought-concocting formations.<sup>16</sup> Is this contriving and fabricating of thoughts trustworthy? We think up various forms from various things — for instance, take the form of a doll that is quickly broken. Our thought-fabrications are much the same. We think up good or bad (things), anything at all becomes a concoction to fool ourselves. This is why the heart is the chief of fools,

gullible and easily taken-in by any deception. It believes in anything and is endlessly played false.

However, when wisdom is also present, it will be able to keep in check and carefully screen such fabrications.

They may appear a hundred or thousand times a second, but wisdom is ready at every turn. What can fool wisdom? It realizes that formations are formations, and that *knowingness* is the heart. How can it be deceived by them? Why be startled and react to shadows arising from oneself — for this is what formations are.

It is the same with *consciousness*<sup>17</sup> that flicks on and off whenever anything contacts through the senses and is known by the heart. It is, then, concocted through formations and memory into self-contrived delusions. We repeatedly fall for our self-made fancies, and it's this wrong taking-up of objects which creates suffering. The damage is done here and this is where it must be seen.

You will learn about the Noble Truths right at this point. Follow and probe into it with greater precision and refinement, without concern over how many times you have to go over it. The importance lies in the eventual clear penetration of wisdom, which can pierce through any attachment even if it may seem as big as a mountain.

When wisdom is in close-pursuit, *craving* will have to retreat into the *big cave*,<sup>18</sup> into the heart: Driving forward with wisdom, using *impermanence, suffering and not-self* (to question and probe) exactly where the real substance of these shadows is found.

Penetrating further, you will see that it only exists there in the heart where they have gathered together.

Elsewhere, it's just disassociated shadows; excitement and deception over form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.

Once they have all converged, the heart must turn and investigate, right there, in the heart. At this point, we must be willing to follow them in and destroy them there, in their hiding place in the heart.

They are like brigands in ambush, waiting to shoot our heads off. When bandits take over a place, no matter how valuable the building might be, we must go in with explosives and blow them out; destroying it all, including the bandits. If all must be obliterated — so be it. We still have life and can build again, for we managed to avoid dying too.

This is how to deal with this most subtle sort of defilements hiding out in the heart. Hit them hard with the truth of impermanence, suffering and not-self, because these defilements are the essence of *sammuti* — all our suppositions about the world. They must be crushed and dispersed from the heart, and then we'll see whether the heart has also been annihilated. No, it is not destroyed. The heart has no cemetery. It is *undying*<sup>19</sup> by its very nature — even when it still has defilements.

The Lord Buddha called this the complete dissolution of the defilements: "*the end of danger, the quenching of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion*" by the pouring of the *Undying Dhamma*<sup>20</sup> elixir.

With the defilements gone, only spotless purity remains. It is here in this fully purified heart that perfect happiness is to be found. All work finishes here; all projects end here. The Lord said:

"Done is the task, fulfilled is the holy life, there is no further work to do."<sup>21</sup> All suffering ends with this right understanding.

The summit of Dhamma is found in this purified heart. The "*Buddha.m- Dhamma.m- Sangha.m sarana.m gacchaami*" that we repeat to reverently recollect the Lord Buddha, all gather and converge in this pure nature. *Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho* are exactly this pure nature. Concerns regarding our questions about the Lord Buddha's *final passing away*<sup>22</sup> in India — 'how many centuries ago is it now?' — will now end. The true nature of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha will now be evident in 'one's own' heart of purity. This is the heart's priceless treasure, where the true state of things is seen and all questions settled.

Where did the Lord Buddha go when he *finally passed away*? The bodily aggregate certainly

disintegrated following its nature — bodies being the same anywhere.

However, the purified nature, *Buddho*, was not destroyed or annihilated for it is not confined by time or position. It is this that we refer to in "*Buddha.m- Dhamma.m- Sangha.m sarana.m gacchaami*". When we can experience this for ourselves, we will be able to verify with complete certainty that this nature cannot be annihilated.

The *arahant* disciples understand this. Wherever they may be, they are together with Dhamma; with 'Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha', having constant audience with the Lord Buddha. Their minds are unshakable because the fires of desire are quenched with the waters of Dhamma. "*The quelling and cessation of all conditioning factors is supreme happiness.*"<sup>23</sup> These conditioning factors are really *samudaya*, the source of suffering, so, when this is ended, all that remains is supreme happiness.

The means and the results, the good and the bad, are within all of us who are aware and care. This *nature that knows* is uniquely suited to all levels of

Dhamma, up to and including the *state of purity*<sup>24</sup> and there's nothing apart from this knowledge.

Please try steadily to purify this *nature that knows*, ridding it of all obstructions and oppressive influences.

There will, then, be no need to make enquiries about *Nibbana*, for having experienced the purified heart all questions will be finally settled.

It's appropriate to stop this Dhamma talk here.

## Notes

1.  
*raaga, dosa and moha. AAdittapariyaaya Sutta*
2.  
*punya* (Pali) or boon (Thai)
3.  
*mettaa bhaavanaa*
4.  
*saddhaa, viriya, sati, samaadhi, panyaa*
5.  
*iddhi-paada*
6.  
*chanda*

7.

*virīya*

8.

*citta*

9.

*viima.msaa*

10.

*kaamata.nhaa, bhavata.nhaa and vibhavata.nhaa*

11.

*yampicca.m na labhati tampi dukkha.m*

12.

*sukha-, dukkha-vedanaa*

13.

*sammati*

14.

*samudaya*

15.

*sanyaa*

16.

*sa.nkhaara*

17.

*vinyaa.na*

18.

*guuhaaseyya.m*

19.

*amata.m*

20.

*amata-dhamma*

21.

*"Vusita.m brahmacariya.m kata.m karaniya.m  
naapara.m itthattaa yaati pajaanaati."*

22.

*parinibbaana*

23.

*"Tesa.m vuupasamo sukho."*

24.

*visuddhi dhamma*

### **3. The Highest Blessing**

Nibbaana Sacchikiriya Ca

The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha was revealed correctly and properly. It was neither hidden nor obscured but was clearly presented on every level according to the truth. For example, it states that virtue and wrongdoing,<sup>1</sup> heaven and hell, *Nibbaana*, all really do exist. It continues unequivocally to maintain that the defilements are also things present and extant. These truths can't be denied. Yet why do such things pose a problem for us?

The Dhamma was openly and forthrightly presented. There was nothing esoteric and mysterious about it, for it was expounded entirely in accordance with truth — the reality that's present now. It was offered from every aspect and level of truth, and, yet, we still can't understand it. It's as if the Lord Buddha is saying to the blind and the deaf, "Look here! Listen to this!"

Apparently we must be like those blind people who can only grope around but can't actually see. Even though we know that the Lord has already explained all about it, we still always seem to bump into suffering. We've been told that suffering isn't something to welcome and yet we are constantly caught up by it. This is because our motives — the causes we put into effect — become aimed entirely at amassing the fire of suffering to heap on ourselves.

One quality of Dhamma that the Lord has pointed out is that it is *visible here and now* — *sandi.t.thiko*. Happiness and suffering can both be seen and experienced within ourselves. Death is one example of this. The other qualities of *ehipassiko* and

*opanayiko* are also very important principles. *Ehipassiko* means 'calling one to come and see' the genuine Dhamma. This though does not mean that we should go out calling *other* people to come and see it. '*Ehi*' refers to teaching the one listening to Dhamma and practicing it, so turn your heart to look inwards to where the truth is found.

Using more worldly terms, we can say that the truth is constantly proclaiming itself, constantly inviting and challenging — because of its candour and honesty it challenges us to, "*look here!*" This '*ehi!*' invites *you* to look, rather than getting other people to come and see. How can others see, when they neither know the truth nor where to look for it? The truth is within themselves, but if they don't search for it there, then, they are certainly not going to find the truth inside themselves.

*Ehipassiko* — the Lord taught us to look at the truth, the truth about ourselves that is right here.

*Opanayiko* means to 'bring within'. Whatever we see or hear or touch needs leading inside so that we can make good use of it. Anything coming into contact

through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, or appearing in the heart, must always be *opanayiko* — brought inward. Whether it is concerned with goodness or wickedness, happiness or suffering, the internal or external, past or future, it must all — *opanayiko* — incline towards the heart. For this is the principle source of all internal affairs.

The heart is preeminent and nothing surpasses it in importance. The issue of the heart is, therefore, pressing and critical: "*All dhammas originate from the heart*".<sup>2</sup> This statement alone is enough to shake up the entire physical world. One's slightest movement must originate in the mind, and in fact, all *dhammas* must look to the heart as being foremost.

Only the heart is able to know about all the various things. What are these various kinds of *dhamma*? There are *wholesome dhammas* and *unwholesome dhammas*,<sup>3</sup> These are only found in the heart. *Wholesome dhammas* come from the resourcefulness and cleverness of the heart, which enables it to respond quickly and appropriately to the ongoing situation. In fact, the various issues and consequences of these ongoing events spring from

our own heart. When *unwholesome dhamma* arises in the heart, bring up the investigative wisdom of *wholesome dhamma* to examine and rectify our foolishness — which is that *unwholesome dhamma* — so that it can be disposed of.

*Opanayiko* is the *inclining, drawing inward* of any experience. Whether it be one of foolishness or cleverness, happiness or suffering, coming from anyone whatsoever, it all needs to be brought inside and made a lesson for the heart.

*Ehipassiko* is the viewing of the point source, the well-spring of all issues. And that is the heart. It's involved in never-ending activity, outperforming commonplace machinery that starts and stops according to its fixed schedule. The heart is never shut down but goes on and on until the last day of life.

It makes no difference how much we grumble and complain about the suffering involved in this state of affairs. Only by correcting it at its root cause will there be any practical value. Rectify the cause and the resultant suffering will diminish — in proportion

to the proficiency of our circumspection and wise judgment. The Lord Buddha never pointed away from these principles for that would be like teaching one to catch hold of distant shadows. "*There, over there!*" — whereby one overlooks the real perpetrator, the original cause. This is of paramount importance because that's where the defilements are born.

What are we going to do? How are we going to cope? What is the origin of the suffering and the hardship that all beings must endure? What is the source of birth, aging, sickness and death? The defilements are the source and the prime-mover and, yet, they themselves can only arise in the heart. They are right here.

That's why the Lord didn't teach about other places.

So when we get down seriously to investigate the structure, the cause and effect of all this, and gradually see the truth and steadily uproot the defilement — we must do it here. This is the spot where our ignorance and stupidity binds and confines us, allowing the defilements to accumulate and grow.

This is also the place where mindfulness and wisdom, as they increase in their range and discernment, must uproot the defilements. Mindfulness must be maintained there with care and vigilance. This place — which is the heart — needs to be closely protected and sustained, nourished with mindfulness and with meditation. Mindfulness protects the heart by not allowing it to stray outside, whereby it would involve itself in external affairs and finally return with fire.

From *protection* one moves to *eradication* by analyzing and probing into the reasons for this situation. We must then try to correct whatever is detrimental by examining its fundamental nature and rectifying it at its place of origin. The essential point at issue lies with the heart.

It is the heart that takes up birth and endlessly wanders through the repeated cycles of birth and death. The accumulated corpses of just one person would be enough to fill the whole world — yet ignorance so blinds the 'owner' that nothing is known about the true extent of the situation. What

remains is just deception and delusion, where no essence of truth can be found.

This is where you should try to advance your mindfulness, so that it can come to terms with the thoughts and imaginings bubbling-up in the heart. With awareness in attendance the slightest rippling of agitation in the heart will simultaneously arouse 'mindfulness and wisdom.' As we sit and watch right at the place where all developments originate — right at the heart — we will gradually start to notice the first flurries of activity.

This is where the deception of the heart begins and the heart will need wisdom to get to the truth of it.

We'll also have to investigate the nature of the body until insight is implanted in the heart, so that the truth of each bodily part is deeply felt by the heart. By repeatedly examining and going over each part, the heart will understand more and more, and the initial understanding will deepen to profound conviction.

*Form.4* Listen, what is this *form*? Hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin, flesh, sinews and bones: These are all *form*. This includes every internal bodily part and organ that is on the physical and material side. The Lord called this the *form aggregate* or simply, the body. All right then. Let's look at this. While exploring and probing, mindfulness we will need to follow each observation of a part or organ of the body. Let mindfulness direct the work of investigation, being constantly in attendance. Let wisdom screen and process the information for a more and more subtle understanding. This is our work and task.

Our previous occupation with thinking and imagining, with drifting and wandering, always lacking in mindfulness has been of enormous harm to the heart, whereas this other work is directly leading to the ending of the internal suffering and danger.

Mindfulness holds down each piece of work, while wisdom explores, and knowledge follows through each bodily part and provides a guideline for the heart to follow. Mindfulness and wisdom must

constantly follow along closely, as writing follows the ruled line. This is the '*Kammattana Tour*', the (*in-*)*sight-seeing meditation trip* around the cemetery found within ourselves.

You must not allow wishful over-eagerness for a speedy realization to interfere with the investigation. Keep your understanding, following what is currently being investigated. Continue the analysis and differentiate and penetrate into the nature of this bodily aggregate. It's covered with a mere membrane of skin — that still manages to deceive the eyes of us all. It's not even as thick as a palm-leaf manuscript. That's skin. Yet whichever way your investigations proceed, they must always be aimed at the overcoming of delusion. That won't be all, for they will soon start to become a quite fascinating and absorbing exercise too.

Alright! Let's take this body and look up to the top and down to the bottom. Let's see its outside and its inside. Let's immerse ourselves in this *tour*, not merely 'going along for the ride' but with mindfulness in full attendance together with wisdom

checking each experience. In this way wherever you look you'll find the true Dhamma.

This can be considered the work of purging and eliminating the poison of *attachment*<sup>5</sup> which infiltrates and infects every part of the body. It is primarily because of this attachment that suffering is spread everywhere. This 'universal suffering' refers to the suffering in the heart caused by attachment, rather than any other sort.

The bodily pain and suffering arising from illness — the aggregates must always fall under the law of impermanence, suffering and not-self — was experienced by the Lord Buddha and the *noble disciples*. But the heart that has transcended those conditions, or is in a position to do so, can observe — without negligence — these things so that it's no longer affected by them. This is because the envisioning of oneself is done so that you can investigate and get to the truth. This is the important factor in preventing anything from affecting the heart. In other words, suffering can no longer arise within, because the body is no longer imagined and credited as being '*me*' or '*mine*'.

Examine this body; probe right into it. Alright then, what is skin really like? How about those animal hides which are made into handbags and shoes?

Let's look at the whole lot: the flesh, sinews and bone. See here! Both animal flesh and human flesh are much the same. Delve into it — what's the nature of bone? What's the difference between animal and human bone? Look to see the full truth within yourself. Carry on in! Thus, penetrating this body that inherently poses such a challenge to us.

So why can't we fathom it out? Why isn't the heart bold and courageous? Once we begin to see the truth, it will be enough to start challenging the deception. The truth, realized with wisdom, is potent and able gradually to wipe out those false and treacherous views until they are entirely eliminated.

The truth that appears within the heart arises through mindfulness and wisdom. This *truth* is valid in two aspects or conditions: In one respect there's the *truth* of the aggregates whose very existence offers us a challenge. And then, when wisdom has fathomed

and realized the truth of those conditions, there will be the *truth* within the heart. Such is the way of uprooting the defilements. Once these two truths meet and connect, they are no longer harmful and will expel all the poison and danger out from the heart.

While on the '*Kammattana sightseeing tour*' of the body, we have examined and investigated its various organs, both large and small. Now we have to continue this *Kammattana* trip to see how this body ends in transformation and dissolution. We must fix our attention here to see in what way it will decay and rot, until it has disintegrated and dispersed. The body must definitely go this way, though which aspects we target can be adjusted according to inclination and preference. Suppose that we wish to fix our attention on one particular object, so as to clearly see it within the heart. Whatever object we take — skin for instance — must be firmly held and targeted so that it appears as an image in the heart. Should the image appear high or low, don't speculate about its position. The object under investigation must be taken as the target for our awareness, with mindfulness directing the way without distraction.

However much the object might appear to expand, just see it as it is in the present. Whether it's high or low, let there just be awareness of that without wondering if it's *too* high or *too* low, or has already left the body.

At first we might wonder why it is that although we set our investigation inside the body, the particular part now seems to be external to it. Don't allow such thoughts to intervene. By not permitting awareness to wander from its target — whatever position it may have assumed — the object will give us a sight of 'the extraordinary and wondrous'.

For example, if you concentrate on *flesh*, of whatever part of the body, see it clearly within yourself and then you'll observe that it will gradually transform itself. With mindfulness firmly established — which is when we have undivided attention firmly fixed in front of us — the heart will know that it is doing the work and that wisdom is doing the analysis. In a short while that object begins to transform itself. It starts to decay and decompose right then.

Let's get to see this clearly, without fear of death. Why should we be afraid, when we are looking at the truth of the matter and not our own mortality? Go ahead then, let it disintegrate. I did my own investigations in this way: Each of the different bodily-parts just broke-up. It was really fascinating doing this investigation, this exploration into one's own body. Yet while being absorbed in the investigation, it then seemed as if the body had completely disappeared. Awareness of the body was not apparent even though I was investigating the body.

So, the body disintegrates. The head falls off... and an arm breaks off right there, in front of one. Then the other arm goes, then a length of bone, and everything inside ruptures and bursts out. Keep on looking. Be absorbed in watching the body as it falls apart.

Some of the bodily fluids seep out into the ground and some evaporate into the air. That's the way it goes. Once all the liquids are lost into the ground and atmosphere, the bodily parts start to dry out and steadily dehydrate until they finally crumble into dust. Then the dust from the bones of the body and

the earth itself merge into one. This is seen so clearly.

Those more solid parts, like a bone for instance, could be taken up and seen as if it's burnt in a fire or as it slowly decomposes and crumbles away. Eventually, they all seem to have become one with the earth.

In this particular investigation, both the earth and water elements appeared the most vivid; but especially the earth element. The water element seemed to remain as water, while neither the air nor fire elements posed any problem. Unlike the courser, more solid parts, they didn't seem the weighty objects of this investigation and therefore didn't appear so vividly to the heart.

Once this stuff had completely dispersed into, and become one with, the earth, the heart was empty and bare. At that moment everything was void.

However, when *you* are doing the investigation, please don't speculate about such things. Just take the truth within yourself as your own, as your living

testimony. Don't bring in outside speculation for witness and mode of practice, because that's about other people and doesn't belong to you. What you have realized by yourself is your own, and whatever that might be, let it happen within yourself. Your own realization and experience are what matters. So remember this as you go further.

At other times the results of the practice were not always exactly the same, although they would still be following the natural course of things. On occasion the body would have dispersed into the earth, but some skeletal parts were left in a partial state of decomposition. Then a thought appeared in the heart predicting that, *'even though they haven't all gone yet, what's left is still doomed to return to the earth again'*. This when there was no awareness of one's body — yet the heart was still able to create such things.

A moment later and the ground suddenly seemed to swell up out of nowhere and the rest of the remains were swallowed up. And so they all were transformed into earth. When that was done, the heart turned around to another angle and...

everything disappeared. Even the ground that had so suddenly swallowed up the bone fragments was no longer there.

There was the knowledge and realization that: '*Aha! Every part of the body is made of earth and has returned to earth.*' Then the heart turned around and everything disappeared with only pure awareness remaining. An indescribable feeling of wonder and amazement arose, because my investigation had never ended like this before. But now it had actually happened and was vividly perceived and experienced. The heart was now one, without a single moment of duality, because it was steadfast and constant in a true state of oneness.

(Normally,) as soon as the heart begins to stir, it will form two with the thought process, but here, there was absolutely no thought process. All that remained was bare awareness, which was marvelous and amazing. At that moment there was no physical world — no trees, no mountains. Nothing was present. It was empty and void as if it was all space, however, there were also no conjectures using such ideas. Only *knowingness* was present.

The heart was stilled like this for hours and then, having emerged from that condition, any object focused upon appeared empty and void. Such an experience probably only happens once for each practitioner. For me it happened just that one time and has never occurred again. However, the investigative process can be repeated and will eventually be successful every time, depending on the skillfulness of the heart.

The transformation process into earth, water, air and fire will then be vividly seen every time one investigates it. This repeated experience strengthens the heart, familiarizes it with the truth of the *elements* and enables it steadily to uproot the view that they are '*me*' or '*mine*'. For that's how things really are — this body is made up of elements, when one talks in terms of elements, or it's the earth element. It is not '*me*' or '*mine*' as one's various opinions and imaginings like to impute and depict.

Repeated investigations will steadily deepen your insight until you are able clearly to comprehend and detach yourself from seeing the body as '*me*' and '*mine*'. Then, there will be merely *the body*, and we

can also say that even that's only a label. We could also call it a *conditioned phenomenon*, if we wanted to. Once this is sufficiently understood, nothing can pose a problem anymore. Whatever the heart may call it, it won't make any difficulties, because the problem has always lain solely within the heart.

Our problems have to be dealt with by disengaging from fantasy and delusion, and by entering into the *truth of Dhamma*. This is that 'bare awareness' of the 'bare elements'. We might designate *body* but that's just the *bare elements*. Turning in towards the heart is *bare awareness*. We then have the two as the *bare truth*. Alright then, if *feeling* springs up let it carry on, for it's 'elemental' or a *natural process*<sup>6</sup> similar to the body. This is how they are connected.

*Perception* or *notions*<sup>7</sup> are concerned with knowledge of the heart's engaging in thought concoctions. We know that it has gone out from the heart and is engaged in a particular thought fabrication or supposition. On becoming aware of this, the heart will withdraw and perception will stop straight away. But if we are not aware it will continue on, connecting up with this... and that... in

progression... like a chain... link to link. And it will only stop the moment that mindfulness catches up.

For it will then cease to concoct concepts and associations of ideas. This is what is meant by *mindfulness matching up* — and if it can't catch up with the train of thoughts, they will perpetually go on and on.

Investigating the body should become one of your major concerns. The Lord Buddha, therefore, taught the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness* that are all found within this body and mind. And this includes the Noble Truths. Yet what might be the purpose of all these investigations? They are aimed at enabling the heart to understand the truth of the situation and thereby let go of its deluded attachment. It will, then, come up against this *being-a-self*.

So then, when our confused misconceptions concerning the four elements and the five aggregates are resolved, we must then turn to investigate the delusion of the heart. See! There *is* a problem remaining.

This level of delusion is more insidious due to the subtle nature of its defilements. We need to move in

closer to examine and then decide what to use as the basis for this investigation. We are investigating the heart and the heart is *naama-dhamma*.<sup>8</sup> So are feelings, defilements and wisdom itself, so it doesn't just apply to the heart. *Naama-dhamma's* are able to coexist and interrelate and this means that the defilements and the heart can associate together.

It's wisdom, then, that must do the probing for it too is a *naama-dhamma*. We must investigate in the same way as we did with the aggregates, by differentiating and analyzing so as to see through to the true nature. Then, we must put the heart in the dock and hit hard at the accused, the offender.<sup>9</sup>

The heart has gathered its *offenses* into itself and is conceited, thinking itself all-wise and all-knowing. It thinks it knows everything about this physical world of sense impressions and aggregates. But it doesn't yet know about *itself*. This is where it gets stuck. This is where it is ignorant.

Wisdom must now be turned loose into the heart, dissecting and cutting away so as to penetrate it. We must thrust through to that *knowingness*, which is

the body of conceited awareness, which forms the real delusion of the heart.

A careful and thorough scrutiny and analysis of the condition that has infiltrated within the heart will show that it's just another natural process.<sup>10</sup> The heart, therefore, won't come to ruin by such a rigorous investigation.

Nevertheless, one's investigation cannot be eased-back for fear of harming it, because if the heart is able to stand up to the truth, it will prevail and won't be destroyed. It will be true to its nature, and so will not only survive but will go beyond all *offenses* to purity. Let's see whether the heart will be annihilated or not.

Delve and dig into it. Don't be hesitant or over-protective of anything, not even of the heart. Don't be afraid that the heart will be destroyed or ruined. Once wisdom has completely wiped-out the infiltrators, every kind of defilement will disappear, for it's this that makes up all the falsity existing within the heart.

When the investigation really gets moving properly, those things that are vulnerable to dispersion will not be able to resist and will be annihilated. But the nature that can't be annihilated will come through and stand.

Please notice, therefore, that it is the heart that is dominated by the defilements. And that once wisdom has totally shattered and cleared the defilements away, the heart will be transformed into the state of purity.

This is the genuine purity. How can it vanish? Were it to disappear, how could it be pure? That dies, that is ruined, but *this* is the genuine deathless, the *undying*.<sup>11</sup> It is undying through purity and doesn't turn<sup>12</sup> — unlike the *immortality* that spins with the revolving wheel of birth and death. This is the vital truth present in the midst of our aggregates.

So we come to the main culprit, the one that incites and agitates the heart; pressing it into falling for the world, for the elements, for the aggregates, for pain, illness, and confusion. In truth, these things don't have anything to say about the matter. The body is

how it is. Feeling arises as it should — it doesn't know that it's pain or pleasure or neutral feeling. It is this heart that goes and gives meaning to them and, afterwards, is duped by those self-made meanings. It gains nothing but harm and affliction for itself in the process.

We must therefore inquire into this. What can be lost by a vigorous examination into the true state of affairs? If the body should break, let it break. It comes, like all things in the world, under the law of impermanence, suffering and not-self — just as the Lord always said it did. How can we interfere?

Let go of it! If it can't endure, then let it go! Everything in this physical world is breaking and dissolving. Some sooner, others later, but surely our aggregates can't last for aeons and aeons, for they too fall under the same law and limit. So let's investigate to see our aggregates according to truth, before they break up. This is encompassing, all-around wisdom, ready clearly to see painful feeling coming on the scene.

Alright then. Today we climb into the (boxing) ring. That's it. Today, we are going into the ring to see and realize the truth in accordance with Dhamma. We're certainly not going in there to fall down or collapse. When painful-feeling arises, that's pain's business, but the investigation of it belongs to mindfulness and wisdom. We are searching for the truth so how can we be knocked down. We don't do it for our downfall, but for victory and for penetrative insight: For the all-embracing realization of truth — of every aspect of truth within our heart. Victory will bring us freedom, and it's this that is *'the highest blessing'*.<sup>13</sup>

The Lord said that:

*"The realization of Nibbaana is the highest blessing."*<sup>14</sup>

So you can see that this is the way to go. Nibbaana is concealed because the heart is covered and obscured by defilements, craving and ignorance. This has to be cleared and put right by investigation and an analysis to gain insight into the truth. It is the way to uncover and reveal all the things that have been hidden. It's called the way of realizing Nibbaana and seeing it clearly within the heart — here is *the highest blessing*. What can be any higher than this?

From here on it is:

*"Whatever comes into contact, this heart is no longer shaken or upset. Nothing can reach it or affect it." Asoka viraja khema etam mangalamuttama."*<sup>15</sup>

This is the secure and blissful heart — "*khema.m*" — and it is the highest blessing. These *two blessings* that I've mentioned are found in the heart, and nowhere else. It is the heart that is the blessing, yet it can also become a bane.

Right at this moment, we are turning the malediction that has infiltrated our hearts into the benediction '*Nibbaana sacchikiriya*'. So then, let's open and clear all of this:

*"Tapo ca brahmacariyanca Ariya sacca na dassanam."*

Here, '*tapo*' means the burning-up of defilements. They sear the heart with their own heat so we must turn on them the dhamma-torch,<sup>16</sup> which is mindfulness and wisdom. It's putting the heat on the defilements and burning them out.

'*Ariya Sacca*' and '*dassanam*' is the realization of the Four Noble Truths: *Suffering* is now fully understood by the heart; its *Cause* is completely relinquished; the *Path* is fully developed to its ultimate level of greater-mindfulness and wisdom.<sup>17</sup> All that's left to say is, the *Cessation* of suffering is now fully apparent.

This is what is meant by *seeing the Truth of Dhamma*, and the one who truly knows this is the one who reveals Nibbaana. This one is the heart that is no longer shaken and upset by all the *worldly dhammas*.<sup>18</sup>

So then, shouldn't we try to reach the essential, the heart of the matter? As far as the aggregates and body go, well, we already have gone into that. It's the heart that really counts.

If anything should break up and come apart, well, let it. That's the way the world goes along and it's been like that from time immemorial. We have followed that way for so long, dying and being born again and again... Continuing along the same old highway.

This so-called 'highway' is really the common course of things, the way the world gets along. No one can block this path and all must follow it. Yet surely by now, you are starting to have an inkling of the truth. What else can I say... I can't present anything more. Please take this up and examine it with care. Don't be careless and complacent.

*"Endeavoring for the realization of Nibbaana is the highest blessing*

*— Nibbaana sacchikiriya ca etammangalamuttamam."*

And one day it must definitely belong, to the followers of the Lord Buddha, to those who determinedly strive on.

May I close this Dhamma talk with that.

Notes

1.

*boon* and *bahp*. (Thai)

2.

*"Mano pubba.mgamaa dhammaa"*

3.

*kusalaa dhammaa; akusalaa dhammaa*

4.

*ruupa*

5.

*upaadaana*

6.

*sabhaava dhamma*

7.

*sanyaa*

8.

*naama-dhamma*; incorporeal.

9.

offender = *nak tote*, offences = *tote* (Thai)

10.

*sabhaava-dhamma*

11.

*amata.m*

12.

*vi-va.t.ta*; *va.t.ta-cakra*

13.

from the Mangala Sutta, on the 'highest blessing.'

14.

*"Nibbaanasacchikiriyaa ca etam  
ma.ngalamuttama.m"*

15.

*"Phu.t.thassa lokadhammehi citta.m yassa na  
kampati,  
Asoka.m viraja.m khema.m etam  
ma.ngalamuttama.m."*

16.

*tapa dhamma*

17.

*mahaa-sati; mahaa-panyaa*

18.

*loka-dhamma*

#### **4. The Internal and the External**

##### **— The True and the False**

Developing the Samana in the Heart

Whenever Ven. Acharn Mun touched on this particular topic in his Dhamma talks or conversation, he would always say... I think it's in the *Muttodaya collection*.<sup>1</sup> But there it's only couched in general terms, whereas I recorded it in more detail than the compiler of *Muttodaya*. The Ven. Acharn himself didn't always go into detailed analysis but what he said was enough for us to understand the implications. When he brought up the whole tree

trunk the finer points and branches would come along too.

What he said was this:

*"The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha is pure by nature, but when it comes to stay in an ordinary worldling<sup>2</sup> it becomes counterfeit and is corrupted. Only when it's placed in a Noble One<sup>3</sup> is it the real, genuine Dhamma."*

That was the general way in which he described it.

There are many levels of Noble Ones: *Stream-enterers* are the first level, followed by *once-returners*, *non-returners*<sup>4</sup> and then *arahants* as the fourth. When we analyze it in this way, we can then go on to say that in the hearts of stream-enterers, the *dhamma of stream-entry* is pure and true, but the *dhammas of once-returning, non-returning and arahantship* are still corrupted. The stream-enterer may commit all these *dhammas* to memory and fully know the way to reach them, yet even so, they remain falsified in his heart, in spite of his awareness.

The once-returner is still counterfeit on the levels of non-returning and arahantship while the non-returner remains false to the dhamma of arahantship. Only when arahantship is attained does every level of the Dhamma become fully complete in the heart, with no corruptions at all.

*Some may argue that, 'since the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha is real and pure, it must remain so wherever it might be. It can be compared with pure gold which though fallen in the mire is still pure gold. It can't turn into mud or muck.'*

If we fail to analyze this further, it does indeed seem that 'gold can't change into mud'. But who will deny that there isn't any mud around? The dirt is smeared over and contaminates the gold as they lie there together. Is there no difference between gold that has fallen in mud and that which hasn't? Of course there is. How can anyone assert that the pure, uncontaminated gold and slime covered gold are both equally pure? Surely, there must be a difference.

A second illustration could consider food, prepared and ready to eat. If the morsel was to drop from our fingers and land in some dirt, then what had been eminently eatable becomes unacceptable — and even offensively so. Alternatively, if the actual food container is soiled, then regardless of how succulent the food appears, once it's placed in the dirty vessel it too becomes contaminated. How can it remain pure when it's mixed with dirt?

The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha is much the same. In this case, the vessel equates to the heart, which alone is suitable for receiving Dhamma. However much the heart has been soiled will rub off on the Dhamma when it comes into contact and associates with it. It is this impurity that the Lord described as 'counterfeit and corrupted'.

Furthermore, although the palm-leaf scriptures are Dhamma, when we look them up and study them, we can only commit them to memory and retain them in mind. Yet that mind is already full with defilements so the Dhamma that comes into the heart is really more a '*rote-learned Dhamma*' than the genuine thing. If it is the authentic Dhamma, why

don't the defilements all disappear from our hearts since each of us has studied and engraved it in our memory? We've gone into every intellectual aspect of Dhamma — including the subject of Nibbana — and yet we can't go beyond the fact that our hearts remain brimful with defilements. This is why '*Dhamma*' can be false.

Take up the Lord Buddha's Dhamma, both the theory and the practice,<sup>5</sup> and open it up through practicing what was correctly taught there. Only then will the true Dhamma begin to emerge from what has been memorized. We committed it to memory as an outline and plan, ready to put into practice, rather than just storing it away. It's similar to the building plans for a house. Regardless of how many hundreds or thousands of designs might have been drawn up, they are still merely specifications and not a house. It can't be properly called a house until its construction — following the blue print — is completed.

Committing it to memory for practical use is one thing, but simply to store it away without any interest in its practical application is something else.

Whatever happens, that which has been studied must then be put into practice.

Having practiced you'll then undoubtedly experience the *results of practice*,<sup>6</sup> which are steady, penetrating discernment and realization. We Buddhists should take both the theory and the practice as being basic to the Teaching, being its fundamental Dhamma. By so doing the *Teaching*<sup>7</sup> and its followers will excel in Dhamma, in virtue and in the knowledge and understanding that brings calm and peace to both the individual and all the community.

The case then is that the Teaching is merely retained in memory, or it just remains inscribed on palm leaves. The person goes one way, that which has been memorized goes another way and the way of practice goes in yet another direction. They don't harmonize and are all in a constant state of conflict right there in the same individual. Furthermore, it also disturbs and annoys other people, making them wonder how the followers of the Lord Buddha can be in such a mess. Such criticism is well-founded

and irrefutable. Whatever is wrong must be accepted as such.

Once the theory is put into practice, the results will be in harmony and you'll truly be able to understand according to your present ability.

Whatever your practice has enabled you to experience in the heart can plainly be described. You'll be bold and confident when talking about it without fear of contradiction — for you've seen it for yourself.

How could there be any misgivings? There'll be no scruples or twinge of conscience because it isn't a matter of guessing or blind hypothesizing. You spoke from your own experience and insight and didn't plagiarize anybody else. How can it be wrong and how can one be intimidated or shaken? Every one of us is seeking for the truth. We know the truth as far as our ability allows and can talk about it so far as we know it. How then can there be any diffidence or misgivings? There are none, of course.

It was never said that the Lord Buddha took a '*Nibbana course*' at any institution. Nor did he go to

any school to study about the *Eightfold Path* or the *Middle Way of Practice*. On the contrary, this was something he taught himself through analysis and investigation leading up to Enlightenment. He realized and experienced Dhamma to his heart's contentment and, then, declared this Dhamma to the world. Who can be more accomplished than the Lord Buddha for he is a *Self-enlightened One*,<sup>8</sup> and the founder of the Way of Buddhism.

If we wish to match up to the Teaching, to find the way to growth and benefit, we must make ourselves worthy followers of that Noble Teaching. Then it wouldn't be a case of vainly carrying the stack of scriptures: At the same time, being unable to use them to make even a scratch on the defilements resident in the heart, or to gain any practical value.

This doesn't measure up to the reputation of the Lord Buddha nor to the purpose of his Teaching, which is the removal and elimination of the defilements. Instead, we shoulder the burden of the defilements by merely learning the Dhamma by rote. That's quite contrary to the purpose of the Teaching. And it

explains how Dhamma becomes worldly and mundane.

The way for Dhamma really to be Dhamma is by the practice that I've already mentioned. When the texts have been studied and one turns to practice, only then will the truth be learned. This is because the Lord Buddha's way of teaching was the *Well-proclaimed Dhamma*.<sup>9</sup> It doesn't go wrong or deviate from this principle, unless it's through the practitioner's own misunderstanding. If that happens, there isn't much that can be done because it runs contrary to the truth, which is Dhamma.

The Dhamma Teachings of the Lord Buddha are like merchandise that boldly challenge any test of validity or quality. This 'Dhamma merchandise', regardless of the market place, will put all the other products out of business because people are always on the lookout for a good and genuine product. Once they've seen it, how can they fail to recognize its worth — even small children can perceive that much.

However, Dhamma is no material commodity that can be advertised to compete with other products. It

can only be appreciated by those who have experienced it, and can only be individually realized. Yet this isn't aimed at the accumulation of defilements, whether boastfulness or conceit. Every stage of insight and realization is for the sake of uprooting defilements, for these are inimical to both oneself and others. How, then, could one show off and boast — for that's promoting and exhibiting the defilements. That's enough to make anyone sick and it certainly isn't the way to get rid of them.

It's because of this that those who practice and understand anything about Dhamma appear serene and at peace. Their speech is appropriate to the circumstances, and when there's no reason to say anything they remain silent.

They are neither grasping nor covetous but live like a *samana*,<sup>10</sup> responding serenely and appropriately with words or stillness. This is what the Lord referred to when he said:

*"To behold a samana who is free from corruption and perversion is the highest blessing."*<sup>11</sup>

The *samana* here can be considered in four stages: The first is stream-enterer, the second non-returner, the third once-returner and the arahant as the fourth. The standard viewpoint refers to those who have become a *samana* by virtue of their attainment to the various levels of Dhamma: stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning and *arahantship*. All of them are a blessing to those who look to them with respect. This is the *external samana*.

Turning within to the *internal samana*. We see the first, second and third *samana* in the heart by investigating the Dhamma-truth. It's this that uncovers the *Path* and the *Fruit* so that they can be clearly perceived within the heart. And it forms another of the *highest blessings*.

We must turn inward for our own benefit, or else we will be constantly searching for the *external samana*, always speculating as to who is at what stage. None of the stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners or arahants wear labels or insignia like military officers, so how can we pick them out? And if they are genuine how can we know from their behavior and deportment?

They would never flaunt their achievement in the gross way the world likes to indulge in. Those with impeccable virtue, who seek after and are imbued with the Truth and Dhamma, can't possibly behave in this way. Seeking out this kind of *samana* to pay our respects is far from easy. It's so difficult to know when we might come across them.

Instead, we should take up the Teaching that points towards those four levels of *samana*, and with application we'll be able to reach those same stages within ourselves. This is by far the most fitting way, and really gets us to the heart of the problem without wasting time in hunting for clues and chasing after shadows.

When we actually encounter a teacher imbued with truth and Dhamma, peaceful in body, speech and heart — or better still a first, second, third or fourth level *samana* — we mustn't let slip [the opportunity for] the first, second, third and fourth levels of *samana* that could appear within our own hearts. When the necessary conditions are fulfilled we would then definitely reap the fruits of our practice,

because the Lord Buddha did not reserve those fruits exclusively to himself.

*Sota* means 'stream'. It is the entry into the stream of Nibbana. However, we tend rather to indulge in speculation, using various theories and models to try to work out what it's really like. *'How wide or narrow, how deep or shallow, how coarse or subtle, is this stream?'* This merely grows into subjective, emotional ideas without practical value. In fact, 'the stream' refers to the sphere of certitude and assurance of definitely reaching release from suffering.

Nevertheless, whatever happens, stream or no stream, as one who practices you should try to have inner peace. It is the heart itself that, with constant attention and wholesome care, will become Nibbana. A home is a home, a house is a house, earth is earth, water is water, air is air, and fire is fire. Neither earth, sky nor space can become Nibbana nor lead one to Nibbana. Nor can they be developed into a stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner or an arahant. How then can it ever be possible to transform them into Nibbana?

It is only the heart through Dhamma practice that is able steadily to uncover the darkness that shrouds the vision of the heart. Peace and happiness will then naturally occur. It hasn't happened before because of those dark things that continually try to provoke agitation in us. Day and night they disturb us with worry and anxiety and confusion... and in every position, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down. These are the defilements that constantly agitate and disturb, choking out any peace and calm.

The defilements have been an endless source of trouble for all the creatures of the world — even though they may not have been recognized as such. In fact, people commonly hold them up as being something good, and never give a thought to letting them go. If they are really so wonderful, why is there all this grumbling we hear in the world? It's really the defilements that cause all our moaning because it's they that bring about suffering and hardship. So this is why the Lord taught that we have to develop the *samana dhamma*.

'Samana' here means calm and serenity. With calm, slowly but steadily, the first *samana* and the second and the third and the fourth, appear within our heart. Yet how do we practice to reach these four *samana*? The Lord explained this, in general terms, in the First Sermon, the *Turning of the Dhamma Wheel*.<sup>12</sup> Although there it wasn't presented in too great a detail so a beginner in the way of practice might find it quite difficult to understand.

The Lord spoke there about:

*"The Noble Truth of Suffering, that is, birth, old age and death are suffering, association with the unwanted is suffering, separation from the loved is suffering..."*<sup>13</sup>

This is the story of suffering. Now, how does this suffering come about? It arises from birth. Birth is the cause for the arising of suffering. The 'real agent of birth' has its root in '*ignorance conditions the arising of determinations*'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, other than *avijjaa paccaya sankhaaraa* what else can condition birth? The Lord started right here at the principal determinant.

Ven. Acharn Mun's way of analysing it was very interesting. He said: "*Thiti bh tam avijjaa paccaya sankhaaraa*".

How is it possible for ignorance to arise and persist if it has nothing to depend on, no father and mother for its origin? It must rely on *thiti bhutam avijjaa paccaya sankhaaraa* as the basis for birth, for life and existence. This can then be separated into three categories:

"Accompanied by enjoyment and lust, and enjoying this and that, in other words, *craving for sensual pleasure, craving for being, and craving for non-being.*"<sup>15</sup>

The Lord called these the *Source of Suffering*. This is the Noble Truth, but what can be used to remedy it? The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering<sup>16</sup> is all about the darkening of the heart, about a nature that agitates and sullies. Thinking in material terms, it's as if the heart is all messed-up with dirt and mud.

These *three cravings*<sup>17</sup> that are the source of suffering are the hankering and hunger, the inability to continue at ease, the loss of peace and the ability

to live alone with oneself. Craving is necessarily hungry and ravenous, with a driven restless struggling towards sensual pleasure, being and non-being. This is putting it simply and vividly, for that's how it continually hounds and oppresses the heart.

The heart is unable to sustain its natural poise because these agents continually come in to upset and disturb so that it can't find any peace. How can we remedy this? The Lord taught the *Noble Truth of the Path*<sup>18</sup> that begins with *right view* and *right thought*.

He described this as the Way to overcome that nature or condition that is responsible for creating, through the power of craving and discontent, all the upheaval and confusion. Once anyone is consumed by desire [for something] — and it's just the same for animals — they will openly or covertly take up the chase and, using fair means or foul, grasp hold of it. This is due to compulsive craving, ambition and insatiability; with the heart struggling after its desires through torment and suffering.

Why suffering? Because sufferinging because of *samudaya*. And it's this *cause* that oppresses the

hearts of all beings. By day and night, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, beings of all the realms of existence come under its yoke. As each train of thought goes out only to be taken under its sway, what can we do to save the situation?

The 'state of the art' instruments to use for the combating and the eradication of these three cravings from the heart are the *eight factors of the Path*.

These are right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right samadhi. Nothing else can match the *Middle Way of Practice*.

This *right view* is the seeing of *what* rightly? For us here now, everything is wrongly seen and goes to make up the wrong views of desire for sensual pleasure, being and non-being. This is the way that our body and heart unfailing take.

Why should we feel affection and love? What's the reason behind it? Use mindfulness and wisdom to examine the body, which forms the immediate object of affection. We first cherish this body before being

attracted to other bodies. This is where you'll find *sensual craving*.<sup>19</sup> You must get to the bottom of this and find out the reason for such love and affection. So, it's love for the skin, the flesh, the muscles, the bones, the hair of head and body — Is that it? But whether mine or whoever's', they're much the same. So what's with this fondness?

This analysis and dissection is called the *right view of the Path*. It's that discerning examination that searches out the object of attachment and the reason behind it. What value does this object of attachment bring? Really, instead of giving comfort, benefit and happiness, it brings a blazing fire to sear the heart with suffering and torment. It arises out of the false notion that such an object belongs to *me* and is *myself*. This is all nonsense. It's up to wisdom therefore to follow up and straighten out the wrong idea.

This was why the Lord taught about the investigation with *mindfulness of the body*.<sup>20</sup> Probe into it.

Examine both, inside and outside, above and below, internally and externally, and do it thoroughly and judiciously, over and over again until you come to discern it clearly. This is the way of wisdom that is able to quash the craving and thirst of the defilements. It's only right view and right thought [that] can overcome and cure us of our desires, for they are factors of the Eightfold Path. And that is the Noble Truth which tames every kind of defilement. This is the way we should go.

You must hit hard with mindfulness and wisdom, for this is the instrument that can counter any stratagem of the defilements. Without hesitating, carefully probe into anywhere that appears dark and obscure — for *that's* where the viper will be lurking.

Whenever wisdom fails to follow up quickly enough, that becomes the place for the arising of the views of 'self', of 'creature' or 'person', of 'me' or 'they', of 'mine' or 'theirs'.

Wisdom must therefore penetrate to see *according to the living scriptures* — which are this body and mind. The truth will then be revealed and there will

be no more notions about 'person', 'animal', 'I' and 'they'.

Once wisdom has fathomed the truth the conjurations and suppositions will be seen for the fraud they really are; having been designed by those masters of deception, the defilements. Wisdom then steadily follows through with its cleanup work until everything has been dealt with.

The heart, long crushed under the weight of attachment, will now be freed and uplifted through mindfulness and wisdom. The 'title deeds' of 'me' and 'mine', and the claims of territorial right, especially over the five aggregates, will be overturned.

These claims have stood since birth — the flesh, the sinews and the bones, the arms and the legs. Each bodily part has been taken as 'me'. They have been declared 'me' and 'mine', even though they know nothing about such claims.

We draw up the boundaries of our own domain, and as other things impinge or intrude they give rise to

unease and pain, to suffering within the heart. It's suffering of heart, not only of body, which arises because of attraction and possessiveness in the setting out of our domain.

The Lord described this examination into the true state of things as 'investigating the *Noble Truth*,<sup>21</sup> with wisdom and right view'. In essence, this refers to the correct view concerning the four Noble Truths — the right view about Suffering, for instance.

*Right thought* is reflection aimed at uprooting defilements. The Lord divided this into three:

First, is the non-holding of thoughts of malice or enmity against others.<sup>22</sup> This concerns all those defilements based in hostility and resentment.

Second, not thinking of being cruel to oneself or to others.<sup>23</sup>

Third, is the thought and resolution to be free from all entanglement<sup>24</sup> — free from delight in sense pleasures, for example:

There's a natural principle that insists that before anything can go out to disturb other people, it must affect oneself first. This is where *right view* comes in to rectify matters, for the problem arises due to defilement-enforced *wrong view*.

*Right thought* and *right view* coming together are like single strands spliced into a strengthened cord. They are the heart's activity, the thinking processes, and together they become wisdom — the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the heart become one with the heart. When all eight strands combine and splice together as one, this is called *the Middle Way*. Ever since the time of the Lord Buddha this had formed the most fitting way to deal with the defilements.

Your investigation needs to be aimed at those things that are currently entangling the heart. They will have to be disentangled using the *Path* — *right thought* for example — for only this can rid the heart of defilements. By using mindfulness and wisdom, we can investigate and challenge delusion in the arena of the body and aggregates. These will form our target so we must penetrate to their true nature.

Personally, I find that it goes against the grain to teach from other angles — but elucidating on these themes goes right to the heart because these things

are for real. The defilements and the Path are both found here. The Four Noble Truths exist right here.

As the Path steadily quells defilements, so the *Cessation* of suffering comes about, for it's dependent on the strength of the Path that is the factor moving things along. It is mindfulness and wisdom that subdue and eradicate defilements, systematically bringing about the cessation of suffering.

It's no good thinking anyone can aim at putting an end to suffering without treading the Path. The Lord said that Cessation had to be clearly realized, yet the only way to achieve that is through the Path. Concentrating all one's efforts on knowing Cessation without having the Path to clear the way can't succeed, because this Dhamma is the fruit of the Path.

The Lord taught about all these conditions. However, the important principle to remember is that mindfulness and wisdom have to be fixed on a particular point, and from there they will steadily resonate through to all four Noble Truths. They

simultaneously work together like the various parts of a single clockwork mechanism. Trying to distinguish each independent function would be as confusing as trying to follow individual ox tracks inside the stall. It's just not possible.

We, therefore, should investigate a single object within the *rupa* or *naama dhammas*, the body or mind. For example, by taking up one of the many different bodily parts.

Although (painful) feeling may arise during this investigation, there shouldn't be any upset or bother because while the body is *rupa*, feeling is mental phenomenon (*naama*). Where is 'this self', 'this creature', 'this person', 'this me' or 'them'?

All feeling, whether pleasant or painful, has similar characteristics — there's nothing there about self, creatures or people — and they're just mental phenomena arising in the heart.

The heart can be aware of an arising condition. That it has attributes of pain or pleasure and will disappear following those causes that lead to its

ceasing. Alright then! There *is* a way for wisdom to discern the situation because these things really are present. They manifest themselves openly without being mysterious or hidden, entirely dependent on their root causes.

The bodily aggregate: We are with this body day in day out — putting it to bed, lulling it to sleep, discharging its wastes, standing it up and taking it for walks. The aggregate of feeling is also constantly manifesting itself, even right at this very moment. If it isn't pleasant, it's painful, as feelings alternate and change. The important point is that the heart doesn't take on board that pain and suffering. When pain is present, be aware that it is part of the aggregates, with their (built-in) impermanence, suffering and not-self. If you don't allow the heart to involve itself with them it won't be suffering.

Feeling — I've talked about this each day, so listen carefully and get to understand it. The defilements tenaciously cling to these five aggregates and they've done it day after day, for countless ages. This is why it's inadequate to think of making an examination every now and again. The occasional Dhamma talk

is also insufficient, for the point needs repeatedly driving-home until it is definitely understood.

You must also repeatedly examine this until you comprehend and then the letting-go will happen of itself. There! Get to see it clearly. Where is feeling, where is painful feeling? If it's present, you can't deny its existence nor make it in to something else. It must always be true to its natural state.

*Perception* is recollection.<sup>25</sup> We've been looking back from the day of our birth right up to the present. In all of that, have we managed to find anything that's of fundamental significance? If amongst it all, there really were 'self, 'creature,' or 'person', then probably we wouldn't be able to find a chest big enough to store them all — because we're continually recalling more and more of them all the time. Yet, really, as soon as they are recalled, they pass away without remainder. Listen then, what sort of essence can be found in them?

The *thinking processing*<sup>26</sup> perpetually concocts from dawn till dusk, dusk to dawn. Sometimes, it thinks so much that it overheats and the heart is

becoming exhausted. This may continue to the point of a nervous breakdown, and one may even end up killing someone. For instance, take the person who pines away through some sorrow or disappointment. The defilements take over this aggregate as their concocting-device, as their tool to keep up the pressure of proliferating thoughts and imaginings. Only mindfulness and wisdom can effectively check this proliferation.

When the defilements take over this recollecting and thought processing, they can pierce right through to the heart. The results are torment and suffering in no small measure. When it's worse than this, it may end with insanity. We are tormented because of so much thinking, yet we don't ask ourselves whether it's all worthwhile.

*Consciousness*<sup>27</sup> is the plain awareness of an object present through contact, which then dies away together with it. Where in this is any core or substance to be found? It's here with these objects where we fall into delusion. Other than this it's merely the byproduct of the defilements.

These are the fundamental principles. This is the way to tread the Path of Practice, and it is here that we must investigate to achieve clear insight. In other words, this is the Truth of the Path and is the means of correcting and overcoming our delusion. Then, as the result of our letting go, the heart can be at peace and free from all worries.

Death is a basic principle beyond the world's challenge or objection. The laws of impermanence, suffering and not-self are like a *highway*, for they shape the way and course of nature. If tenure isn't yet up (the body) won't break apart, but when the time finally comes, there's no stopping it — however tenaciously we may cling and hold back. It will just go its own way, along the *highway*, the *way of nature*, which takes precedence and can't be blocked or stayed.

Nature must take its course, for this is an undeniable principle directing things throughout this world. We must investigate so that we can see according to their true nature — as they say, 'felling a tree from the windward side.'<sup>28</sup>

So don't go against the Lord Buddha's Dhamma that accords with the 'natural course', but rather achieve knowledge by following the truth. The heart will then be at peace. But when the heart coexists with the defilements, it dwells in confusion and consequently reaps suffering. We have already seen the harm of this and so must make sure the heart stays with Dhamma, with mindfulness and wisdom. The heart will, then, be safeguarded and at peace.

Strive to overcome these things known as 'defilements', wherever you find them. After dealing with the external ones, turn to those involved with the body, and, then, inside the heart itself. Deploy wisdom for a complete all-round penetration of them — these authors of the concepts of 'creature' and 'person'.

All notions of 'self', of 'creature' and 'person' will cease to be a problem the moment the defilements have been entirely dispersed. They will disappear by themselves and we will no longer pointlessly fantasize about them. While the truth remains as it actually is, bringing peace of mind and freedom from all anxiety.

Yet, this peace shouldn't be thought of as the Noble Truth itself — for that is concerned with suffering. It is the suffering of body and heart that is called the Truth of Suffering; the Truth of the Source of Suffering is the affair of all defilements and taints; the Truth of the Path, from *right view* through to *right samadhi*, is the instrument for the correction and eradication of defilements. The Truth of Cessation follows the steady extinguishing of suffering until the total penetrative realization of the nature of the Source is accomplished. The complete elimination of this Source — which though only existing within the heart makes up the principal culprit — together with that of the defilements is the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

The *one that knows* the ending of suffering through the Path's destruction of the defilements, is the *one that knows freedom*.<sup>29</sup> That was the Noble Truth and *this is Freedom*. This is the purified one and it is not the Four Noble Truths — for they are the means to an end, and when that end is reached they naturally lose their *raison d'etre*, without need of coercion or force.

It's a natural consequence; just as the stairs lose their significance once we have climbed to our final goal, so traveling the Path comes to an end. Mindfulness and wisdom have accomplished their task and the heart has gone beyond — so their instrumental work in dispelling the defilements is over.

This is our arrival at the summit. It's the *Samana Dhamma*, the supreme *samana*, the fourth class of recluse. The first *samana* we encountered in our practice was the stream-enterer, the second was the once-returner and the third the non-returner. The fourth *samana* is the arahant, the *Arahatta Dhamma*. This is the ultimate and final achievement realized through the Path of Practice, that most penetrating and luminous of ways.

The four *samanas* are now found within the heart — "*Etam mangalamuttamam*", the highest blessing arises there. There's no need to seek for it elsewhere because when the heart goes beyond all oppressive domination, to perfect purity, then that itself is the supreme blessing.

Whatever has been discussed here, about the four Noble Truths or the four *samanas*, is all found within the 'one that knows', and nowhere else. This is the one who can uphold the four *samanas* through the work of emancipation, and who arrives at freedom. In brief, 'that which knows' is the one 'with absolute certainty', in consistently being able to deal with anything that comes to awareness.

The defilements are capable of ruining many things but they can't destroy the heart. Although they may be up to bringing the heart to experience hardship and suffering, they can't possibly annihilate it. This nature is constant. It is upright and consistent, and only appears otherwise — taking on differing characteristics — because of the things it associates and involves itself with.

Once shaken-off and cleaned free of all stain, this nature is poised and wholly imperturbable. It's this that people call the 'perfect fourth samana', while in Dhamma terms it's the *Arahatta Dhamma* inside the heart.

This heart is now wholly Dhamma. The *citta*<sup>30</sup> is Dhamma; the Dhamma is *citta*. Whichever way you want to put it, this truth is beyond dispute. There can be no more contradictions because there are no more defilements left to agitate.

This is how all issues are resolved. They cease right here: Suffering ends here, birth and becoming finish at this point. It can't happen anywhere else. It was from here that birth and existence came into being — this one was the seed of birth and existence because it originates with the defilements, which were together with the heart.

This is the reason why there is the wandering through the various realms of existence. There has been endless suffering, affliction, upset and hardship arising from this *seed* that generates and perpetuates these experiences. Once the cankerous shell and fecund kernel can be completely cut out, every difficulty and problem will be removed.

Please take (what I've said) up, and make sure you examine it until you realize your situation and achieve the results. Whether woman or man,

ordained or lay, the hearts of those individuals who practice can attain to this insight and realization. All can succeed, because it doesn't depend on gender, or age, or anything else like that.

Therefore, may I, thus, conclude this Dhamma talk.

## Notes

1.

A small collection of Dhamma teachings recollected by Ven. Acharn Mun's disciples. It is now translated into English as *A Heart Released*.

2.

*puthujjana*

3.

*ariya*

4.

*sotaapanna, sakadaagaamii, anaagaamii*

5.

*pariyatti, pa.tipatti*

6.

*pa.tivedha*

7.

*Saasanaa*

8.

*Sabbanyuu*

9.

*Svaakkhaata Dhamma*

10.

recluse, holy one.

11.

*"Sama.naananyca dassana.m... etam  
ma.ngalamuttama.m."* (From the Mangala Sutta.)

12.

*Dhamma-cakka-pavattana Sutta*

13.

*"Dukkha.m Ariya Sacca.m... Jaatipi dukkhaa jaraapi  
dukkhaa mara.nampi dukkha.m, soka parideva  
dukkha domanassa upaayaasa..."*

14.

*avijjaa paccayaa sa.nkhaaraa*

15.

*"Nandi-raaga sahagata tatra tatra bhinandini  
seyyathida.m, kaamata.nhaa bhavata.nhaa  
vibhavata.nhaa."*

16.

*Samudaya Ariya Sacca.m*

17.

*ta.nhaa*

18.

*Magga Ariya Sacca.m*

19.

*kaama-ta.nhaa*

20.

*kaayagatasati*

21.

*Sacca Dhamma*

22.

*abyaapaada sa.nkappo*

23.

*avihi.msaa sa.nkappo*

24.

*nekkhamma sa.nkappo*

25.

*sanyaa*

26.

*sa.nkhaara*

27.

*vinyaa.na*

28.

A Thai idiom meaning, 'to let nature take its own course'.

29.

*vimutti*

30.

*citta*: See Glossary.

## **5. Letting Go (Magha Puja Day)**

Today is *Magha Puja* day. It's the day when the Lord Buddha declared his intention to let go of the conditioned state, bidding goodbye to the world and to the prison of the cycle of birth and death. He chose to relinquish and discard his body after having carried it for eighty years, and throughout that period it had always been an oppressive load to bear.

But then, such is the nature of this body. Other things, in contrast, have their times of heaviness and lightness, occasionally allowing us to catch a breath. Carrying food and water (for example) are heavy when we first shoulder them but become progressively lighter as we steadily use them up. Yet we have been bearing the load of our body since birth and it never seems to get any lighter. It's always heavy. In fact, as we advance in years and decline in strength, it seems increasingly heavy. That is why the Lord Buddha asserted that:

*"These five aggregates are an extremely heavy burden."*<sup>2</sup>

Apart from shouldering the heavy load of this *form* or body, there is also painful feeling and the rest of the aggregates. They are not only heavy and oppressive but also have razor sharp barbs that pierce through our body and heart.

The Lord Buddha put up with this until he was eighty years old. To put it simply, he must have said: "*Ah! This body is beyond bearing. It's time to leave it.*"

Thus, he declared that, in three months time he would relinquish his life and lay down the burden. He made the decision on the full moon day of the third lunar month.

On that very same day, twelve hundred and fifty *noble disciples*<sup>3</sup> assembled, spontaneously and without invitation, each one coming through his own initiative. The Lord Buddha, therefore, presented this teaching to the arahant disciples, delighting them with the bliss of the Buddha-dhamma. The gathering thus became the *Pure Assembly*.<sup>4</sup> Here is a brief outline of what was said on that day:

*"Sabbapaapassa akara.na.m,* The not-doing of all evils,  
*kusalass'uupasa.mpadaa,* The doing of what is good,  
*Sacitta pariyodapana.m,* The purifying of one's own heart:  
*eta.m Buddhaanasaasana.m.* This is the Teaching of the Buddhas.  
*Anuupavaado anuupaghaato* Not insulting, not harming,

*paa.timokkhe ca sa.mvaro* Restraint according to the Patimokkha,  
*Mattanyutaa ca bhattasmi.m* Moderation in taking food,  
*pantanyca sayanaasana.m* Having a secluded place,  
*Adhicitte ca aayogo,* Intent on the pure heart:  
*eta.m Buddhaanasaasana.m.* This is the Teaching of the Buddhas."

The Buddha gave this teaching<sup>5</sup> to the twelve hundred and fifty as a form of diversion on that afternoon, which accords with today. For those *arahants*, it was more of an enjoyment than an exhortation, because they were already pure, no longer needing instruction to cleanse the defilements from their hearts. That is why they were called the *Pure Assembly*. This was a unique event in the Buddha's teaching life, never again were 1250 arahant disciples to gather-and be offered such teaching.

We celebrate the Buddhas and arahants because of their prodigious and brilliant nature. They were figures of wonder among the majority of people because the worldly people's hearts remained corrupted by the staining defilements — not one of them could compare with the spotless arahants.

*"Sabbapaapassa akara.na.m"*: to refrain from unwholesome, down-casting actions that give rise to

all kinds of suffering. It's this base side of the heart that is so critically important. Depraved actions and speech have natural limitations but the depravity of the heart, which depresses and down-casts itself, is propelled by our own continuous thinking and imagining.

It's these agents that drive the heart into gloom and dark depression that are exactly the things in the heart that are already murky and defiled. The Lord Buddha named them 'defilements'. They are those factors that maneuver and instigate memory and thought processes into action. While another sort of defilement causes the heart to become gloomy and disconsolate.

Wrongdoing and base deeds don't just refer to robbery, looting and plundering. That's evil on a gross level, but we manage continually to generate similar depravities on the intermediate and more subtle level. This is equivalent to constantly depressing our own heart. This downcast heart will continue to be cast down wherever we may go because we are also generating depression for the heart.

Walking, standing, sitting, lying down — the heart is always concocting and contriving and, thus, becoming miserable in every posture. One aspect of the Lord Buddha's teaching, therefore, is his emphasizing that we shouldn't indulge in creating gloom and misery for ourselves.

What method can we find to avoid this depression?  
*"Kusalass' uupasampadaa"*: wisdom must be sufficiently developed to remedy this depression by cleaning out the gloom-makers and the base evils, we will then have:

*"Sacitta pariyodapana.m"*: a bright and cheerful heart. When our cleverness, which is mindfulness and wisdom, has cleaned out all the filth and gloom from the heart, it becomes bright and clear — *"sacitta pariyodapana.m"*.

The evil, whether great or small, will then start to wane as our heart becomes pure. The Teaching of all the Buddhas is like this. They all say: *"Do it this way. There's no alternative."*

Any alternative, easier way would have been known to the wisest of all, the Lord Buddha. He might have woven us all a hammock to lounge in, while we steadily swatted at and ridded ourselves of defilements. This might seem to accord with his fame as *a teacher full of love and compassion*, to a world full of frail and grumbling beings. In fact, the Lord Buddha had already used all his skill and ability in establishing *the shortest and most direct path*.

Each of the Buddhas had to cultivate the *perfections*<sup>6</sup> before realizing Buddhahood. They used the Dhamma in their hearts to drive out the defilements, and, then, taught this as the true and correct way. They tested and selected with the maximum power of their minds before discovering and teaching the Dhamma, which is most *suitable* for all living beings.

*Suitable* here does not mean that it fits in with people's own fancies, but rather that it points to a practice appropriate to overcoming their defilements.

This is Dhamma. Nothing else can surpass *the Middle Way* of practice as passed on from the Lord Buddha. The defilements fear no other means, methods or *dhammas*. Nothing else can eject them from the heart, or even scratch their skins.

*"Anuupavaado"*: Don't slander other people.

*"Anuupaghaato"*: Don't harm or kill human beings or animals.

*"Paa.timokkhe ca sa.mvaro"*: Keep your behavior within the bounds of Dhamma, for this is the means of uprooting the defilements.

*"Mattanyutaa ca bhattasmi.m"*: Know the right measure in using food, and live simply and frugally. Don't indulge and exceed what is reasonable for one who practices. Know the right amount in whatever you're involved with.

*"Pantanyca sayanaasana.m"*: Look for seclusion, and use this solitude to deal with the defilements.

*"Adhicitte ca aayogo"*: Develop the heart to excel in Dhamma, employing mindfulness and wisdom, step by step.

*("Eta.m Buddhaanasaasana.m":)* This is the essence of the Teaching of all the Buddhas.

This was the Dhamma with which the Lord Buddha delighted all the noble disciples. To those who were not yet arahants, he also taught "*sabbapaapassa akarana.m*". It is an essential practice, being the only way we can hope to use, gradually, to drive the defilements from our heart. Yet, do we truly take it to heart or is it rather that hammock hanging, over there, that takes our fancy?

The essence of the pure Dhamma, imparted by each Buddha, is directly drawn from each of their hearts. But do we receive it into ours? The Lord Buddha bequeathed it with his great compassion. But do we receive it with full devotion and trust; with total mind and heart?

If we merely feign acceptance of the Dhamma and, later, come to discard it, then it will all have been worthless. It would, in fact, have gone against the Lord Buddha's original intention.

The Lord Buddha decided to relinquish the body on the full moon of the sixth lunar month, and made the announcement to that effect on the third month's full moon — which is today. From that moment on, the

constraints and irritations of the elements and aggregates would vanish.

This is the *complete passing away without remainder*,<sup>7</sup> with no more concerns or obligations to any worldly condition. This is the *Dhamma transcending the world: The ultimate Dhamma*.

'World' is the whole gamut of suppositions and assumptions existing in this world — the *three worlds* are the worlds of *supposition*<sup>8</sup> and change, the worlds governed by impermanence, suffering and not-self. Whatever one's birth or state, these three marks spin that world with confusion, and no one can block their course. But once one has got beyond them, all concerns come to an end:

*"Nicchato parinibbuto"*: craving totally ends, mundane suppositions are gone. It is out of this Dhamma that all the truths taught by the Lord Buddha resound. If we take this Dhamma deeply to heart in our practice, then it will *'ring and roar'* in our heart.

At first, it will resonate in a cool, calm and peaceful condition of heart — which are the various levels of samadhi. Then, it will reverberate with wisdom in our thinking and analysis, so that we can steadily free ourselves. Finally, it will resound in the *pure* state of complete freedom. There!

*"Nicchato parinibutto"*: craving is totally extinguished. The source of those cravings was defilement of every sort, because it is never sated or satisfied.

*"Natthi ta.nhaa samaa nadii"*: the waters of river and ocean can't equal the defilement-inspired craving. They perpetually engulf the hearts of sentient beings and never run out.

How can we dry up these waters? We must bail them out using the energy of the one who practices until they eventually ebb and diminish. Draining and drawing out every day, examining every day, understanding and thereby relinquishing every day. The waters will then start to seem not quite so great. They are really only as large as our aggregates, that's all.

But for the heart that is attached to the aggregates, this is a weighty matter. The heart doesn't bother with any piece of land, instead it comes and seizes hold right *here*. This is the big issue, the hot and heavy concern. This is where the defilements scorch the heart as no other fire can, endlessly turning up the heat.

We have all heard about *floods*. When our lungs are flooded and congested, the doctor can drain them. But when the defilements, complete with craving, engulf the heart, what are we going to use to draw them off? We can only bring in *faith, energy, mindfulness and wisdom*. Thus, we must probe, examine and investigate to see things clearly, as they really are. What is being clung to? About what are false assumptions being made? And why is it that the voice of Dhamma, the aid in drawing-out, is never listened to?

The defilements usually try to play smart with the Buddha. They are his adversary and must always assert their cleverness against the Dhamma and contend with it. Grasping is the defilement's line while correcting and uprooting is the way of

Dhamma. Extracting defilements with wisdom is Dhamma, and transcending them and arriving at serene happiness is the *Nibbana Dhamma*, or the *Pure Dhamma*.<sup>10</sup> There is always this rivalry.

Keep on trying! Don't lose out to these things, for you now have entered the boxing ring and must determine to be the champion. Fight without backing down. You'll have to be dead before you'll allow yourself to be carried out of the ring. If you've been floored but still live and can return to the fight, then battle on. If you can't manage to fight on anymore, then you can always denounce and curse them right there in the ring. What harm can that do? We are fighters and if we can no longer fight the defilements, then curse every mother and father of them. This is our single remaining weapon. We are down and cannot punch back, yet we still have a mouth. We can still talk, scold and curse even though we are knocked down.

Of course, this is only an analogy. To be a warrior doesn't mean that we go round cursing or abusing anyone, but rather that we combat the defilements.

We must fight to the extent befitting a disciple of the *Tathagata*,<sup>11</sup> who was himself of the warrior class.

Have you ever noticed how our teachers and venerable *acharns* practiced? These meditation masters, whom we respect so deeply, were all warriors in this way. If that's how they themselves triumphed, why should they teach us to go in a different direction?

Alright then. Keep switching and varying your probe, using wisdom to stay on top of the events within. This wisdom is of such sharp discernment that it will be able to find a way to draw us out of the deep mire of elements and aggregates in which we've been stuck and buried for countless eons.

Ultimately, we end up with the heart, and even here we have to pull everything out. The '*I*' must be extracted from *form*, from the body and from the elements of earth, water, air, and fire. We must pull the heart out of the painful feeling that we have taken on as our self. The way to withdraw from *form* is simply to let go of the very *form* that we have grasped as self. We pull away from grasping each of the aggregates that we have taken as '*me*' and '*mine*'.

Use wisdom to try and root-out, right here, keeping pace with whatever's going on.

The heart is subtle and extraordinary. The body, in contrast, is nothing special — however much we uphold and cling to it in our delusion. It can only be our utter stupidity that leads us so readily to shoulder this gross thing, without ever wanting to put it down.

If we were really smart and considered what's behind it all, we would let it go. Why carry it? Probe and investigate these questions using mindfulness and wisdom that are available.

There's no need to go and be so afraid of dying, because fear itself is another defilement. Why build up defilements by being frightened? We must rather build up our courage because this is a quality that counters the defilements. Bring it out to fight the defilements and to find out what actually dies.

In fact, nothing dies. And the defilements are always lying to us about it. The moment we are unguarded, they instantly insinuate themselves and whisper: *"When will I die... today?... tomorrow?... here?... or over there?... I'm going to die very soon."* We upset

ourselves with such thinking, while the elements just exist, indifferently. In this way we complicate matters and confuse ourselves by thinking that we are responsible. What sort of responsibility is this? It's more a matter of self-confusion than self-responsibility.

If we are to be truly self-responsible and self-reliant, then our hearts will need full mindfulness and wisdom to use for investigation and rooting out. It must be able to probe and extract from the heart all the anxieties and confusions about living, about death and sickness — and whatever else is found there. There can be no easing-off or allowing the defilements in to fool us. One can then say that those who practice in this way are truly being responsible for themselves.

By investigating everything, both close in and all around, you will come to realize the true situation and be able to free the heart. Then there's contentment and relief. Contentment is found right here. Success and correctly assumed responsibility are also right here.

We hear news reports that so and so is an *arahant* — as in the case of those 1250 arahants — or that that person is a *stream-enterer*, *once-returner* or *non-returner*: But what about ourselves? Our news is only about weakness, discouragement, depression, stupidity, dejection and confusion. This is our whole story. Doesn't it run contrary to the reports about those others?

Our personal news is exactly the opposite of those who possess the *Ariyan Treasure*, the *Dhamma Wealth* in their hearts. If our news only measures up to this, then it can only be concerned with the thousand-and-one kinds of suffering. It's more like 'sinking in the mud'. The unwanted news makes up our account, and because we create this story we must also bear the result.

Who is Dhamma intended for? Who is it taught for? Who makes up the Buddhist Community — if we can't be counted as members? Surely the Dhamma was taught and intended for us. Then what are we taught to overcome?

Do we have the means for this purpose? Yes, they are right here — it's as if the Lord Buddha is right here before our very eyes, pointing them out to us. This isn't something about long ago or far away. It's fresh and vibrant right here. The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha exists here with us now, so why go elsewhere with all your worthless speculations?

*"The Buddha realized Nibbana in a distant time and place. He taught the Dhamma long ago and it has become stale and insipid. Its flavor can't last up until today."*

There! Listen to that! The defilements lie to us — can't we hear them? Beware of *Maara*<sup>12</sup> whose fabrications will destroy us with such ideas, mashing us to pulp. The Truth has no time or era and is there with everyone who is searching for it. How can Dhamma ever vanish with time? How can we kill the truth with these ideas, needlessly bringing utter ruin to ourselves?

Who in this world can know better than the Lord Buddha? The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha always

stand challenging the defilements in the arena of truth. This is something *timeless*.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, virtue, concentration and wisdom are never outmoded or behind the times. They're independent of period or place — and yet are within everyone. They can be produced at anytime, and whenever developed they grow and thrive. This is the way leading to the *Path, Fruit* and *Nibbaana*; which is timeless and independent of place. While the defilements, for their part, also manage to maintain a continued presence within the hearts of sentient beings.

We all now, as in the Buddha's time, have defilements. The overcoming of these defilements must still be done with the same old *virtue, concentration, wisdom, faith and effort*. How can this be kept far away and long ago from us? It cannot. We will all be able to go beyond suffering by rectifying the situation at the right spot and in the right way.

Expose whatever is cloaking the heart by focusing with wisdom and mindfulness on whatever is dark

and obscure, taking that spot as the target for investigation. Where exactly is this sadness and gloom? It's a condition of the heart that we can perceive, just as we know when darkness or light contacts our eyes. We notice that darkness is dark, but the one who knows is not also in the dark. Light is known; darkness is known; any amount of darkness can be known within our heart. And gloom and depression are also known together with brightness and cheerfulness.

The one who knows, knows in this way. We must make wisdom penetrate further, taking the heart or these things as its target. When sadness and gloom appear within the heart, don't be alarmed, or glad or regretful. Look on them as mental conditions that must be investigated, as things that arise and cease.

They're not of the heart but simply depend on it to appear and then hook into it. Persevere with the examination but don't get excited or unsettled with the objects themselves. Whatever arises and passes through — that we must know. Then, we can be counted as being one who takes up the study and practice. We have to *study* until we know through

wisdom and can understand those things that appear within ourselves. This true knowingness has no ups and downs. It is never like that. A condition arises and the one who practices recognizes it as such.

When all these conditions end, so does any concern about them. All that is left is the consummate state of purity. Our investigations depended on the continual encountering with such conditions in the heart. If they were around they would need to declare their existence, so that it's always possible to know the true state of affairs.

Therefore, if we want the truth, we must look for and investigate the feelings that arise, and similarly with any sadness or cheerfulness, any happiness or suffering that appear. Such is the way of one who knows with all-round wisdom, being aware of any condition that resides with the heart. There is only this one place where we can finish off our studies.

They talk of graduating with a Bachelor degree or a Masters' or Doctorate; or of passing the various exams of *Paali* language study, following the popular convention of the time. Throughout the ages

people with defilements have always had to rely on customs and observances and these are numerous beyond description. The ways of Dhamma though always remain current because their nature is constant and immutable.

You can have as many grades and degrees as you like — level fifteen or level thirty<sup>14</sup>... But I wonder if defilements bother with such things. They just have a great time, singing away there on top of people's hearts. Since when were they meeker and more humble than people? They wield greater power than people — stupid people, that is. Intelligent people are able to crush and destroy them and this is the way to gain our knowledge and qualification.

Our *Bachelor's degree* of virtue, samadhi and wisdom is all around us — better to take this *B.A.* Then on to the *Masters'* and the *premier 'Ek'* grade so that we have '*one heart, One Dhamma*'. But this isn't the *preeminence* of someone with only *one* eye, who is already nearly blind. Don't be *foremost* in that way.<sup>15</sup>

The true *preeminence* of the Lord Buddha is '*one heart One Dhamma*'. Study up to this *Ph.D.* by

having all-round knowledge to the *highest* degree, replacing our ignorance with knowledge about ourselves. Inspect, using wisdom to probe and clear-up, until reaching the *Highest Dhamma level*, or the *genuine Dhamma*, which are the same. 'The heart and Dhamma are one and the same!'

"*Buddha.m, Dhamma.m, Sangha.m sara.na.m gacchaami*" — finding refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha falls completely within this One Dhamma.

"*Dhammo padiipo*" — the radiance of Dhamma, always shining brightly. This is the genuine Dhamma. It is *timeless* and unconditioned... the true Dhamma.

Alright then — build the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha right here within the heart:

"*Buddha.m, Dhamma.m, Sangha.m sara.na.m gacchaami*. We go for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha."

More precisely, we arrive at the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha in the purity inside the heart, for this is the coming together of all *three refuges*. See them clearly within the heart and make yourself a refuge within. This is the complete "*attaahi attano naatho*":

'We are our own refuge, not needing to depend on anything else.'

As is the Buddha so is Dhamma and Sangha. Buddha Dhamma Sangha are the same. When one has reached this stage, there's no need to go out seeking to pay respects to the Lord Buddha, for we can now offer this purity of heart — the whole Dhamma of this purity — as our *puja*-offering to him. Nothing else intermeshes and fits together as well. As is the Buddha of the Lord Buddha so is the *Buddha* of us. As is that Dhamma, so this *Dhamma* here. Without doubt, they are all one and the same.

Did the Lord Buddha *finally pass away*<sup>16</sup> so long ago? We no longer ask, because this concerns the conditioned state of elements, the body and aggregates. The Lord merely let go of his aggregates, at a certain time, in a certain year and place. The Noble Disciples were just the same. Were they all completely annihilated after they passed away? Is it really like that? This is the view of empty, worthless men and women; the truth is otherwise. The real Dhamma is that of *supreme*

*happiness*,<sup>17</sup> which endorses and confirms the fruit of that purity.

What is *Sangho*? It is the one who upholds the state of purity. This is the true *sangho* and is found within ourselves: "*Attaahi attano naatho*" — 'oneself is one's own protector'. The vital point is to make this refuge sufficiently secure, for it's imperative that the heart frees itself from all dangers and attains to deliverance. Whatever is worth attaining is worth striving for. Go for it right here.

Don't upset yourself over anything at all. Nothing really matters in this world. It's just that our heart goes and gets involved. We actually go looking for affairs to indulge our-self in, and this needs cutting away with mindfulness and wisdom.

Wherever we are, we are always alone. We are born alone. When illness comes, it isn't the assembled relatives that are in pain. When we die, we die alone — nobody else can die in our place or deputize for our distress. Therefore, we must help ourselves — *Attaahi attano naatho* — using our own mindfulness

and wisdom. This is the right and most fitting response.

The Lord Buddha decided to let go of his life on this same full moon day. For us today, we should resolve to abandon craving and defilements. These are the essential things that one must be rid of.

As far as dying is concerned, the Lord Buddha said it wasn't important which day we die on. Whenever the breath runs out, that is the day we die. The only criterion is our last breath. If there's still breath, then we haven't yet died. So we keep on breathing... which in itself is no great problem. It's really just about a lot of wind.

The important point is the founding of a base and the putting ourselves on alert — all for the sake of our heart. "*Attaahi attano naatho*": 'oneself is one's own protector'.

When this is accomplished then there is contentment in living or dying, wherever and whenever it might take place. No more problems remain, for they were only concerned with mundane conditions.

That's it for this talk on Dhamma. I think it's suitable to stop here.

## Notes

1.

*Maagha Puuja* is the national holiday in Thailand dedicated to the Sangha Jewel. (*Visaakha Puuja* in May and *AAsaalha Puuja* in July are for the Buddha and Dhamma.)

2.

*"bhaaraa have panyca khandhaa"*

3.

*ariya saavakaa*

4.

*Visuddhi Uposatha*

5.

*Dhammapada, vv: 183 and 185*

6.

*paaramii*

7.

*anupaadisesa-nibbaana.*

8.

*sammuti*

9.

*visuddhi*

10.

*Visuddhi Dhamma*

11.

See Glossary.

12.

*Maara* usually personified as the Evil One, or tempter. And here referring to misleading, evil thoughts.

13.

*akaaliko*

14.

Pali language is examined in just nine grades.

15.

A play on the word *ek* or *eka*, which in Thai can mean: 'highest' or 'first' (as in Ph.D.); 'one' or 'singular' (as in 'one eye' and 'One Dhamma') so eka-grade, eka-eye, and Eka Dhamma.

16.

*parinibbaana*

17.

*parama.m sukha.m*

## **6. The Final Night — Fare Thee Well**

No one can surpass the Lord Buddha in wishing for people to be virtuous and good. His Teaching was offered so that people in the world might find goodness and happiness. He didn't want the world to be troubled and hurt through misdeeds arising from ignorance of the right way of conduct. The building up of the *perfections*<sup>1</sup> to become a Buddha, full of compassion for all sentient beings, was an exacting task — very different from all other forms of achievement. And his mastery went along with his compassion, hand in hand.

Anyone listening to the Lord Buddha's teachings — from his own lips or from the scriptures — and trusting those principles of truth would then try to correct and improve themselves, so as to be a virtuous person. One individual takes it up, and a second, and then each family member, however many there might be, all change themselves for the better.

*One* virtuous person — but when such people live together it becomes one virtuous family-circle, and then one virtuous village, and town and country. There's no need to ask about the whole country's

peace and stability for it must definitely follow from the goodness of all its individual citizens.

On the other hand, hardship and discontent only arise because of wrong doings and baseness. The number of corrupted individuals corresponds to the extent that the body of society is stuck with *'splinters and thorns'*.

The more there are, the more hellish the world becomes. It is then dark both in the night and daytime, and is in a constant state of disturbance. There is no need to go and search after hell for it is being forged right there in the hearts of people. From there, it spreads and extends everywhere, turning all to fire. This only happens because of those wrongdoings, not because of what is skillful and right.

When things are in harmony with the Buddha Dhamma such a situation can't arise.

There would then be no need for judges, courts of appeal or a supreme court. There would be no cases to settle because everyone would be intent on living

virtuously, all trying to follow a just and sensible way together. In discussions, there would be mutual understanding — it wouldn't matter, if it were between young and old, man and woman, ordained and householder. This springs from a deep understanding of the nature and reasons for goodness and baseness that is within one's heart.

There only would be the wish and intention to see in the way of reason, truth, and virtue. Everyone would listen sympathetically to one another, and always conduct themselves fairly and justly with no need for secrecy.

The world, however, doesn't seem to follow the heart's wish. Wherever one goes, there are only complaints about suffering and misfortune. The whole earth seems to be in a state of confusion and unrest, even though everyone studies and searches for knowledge. This knowledge, however, doesn't appear to be of much use — it might even end up burning one instead — because it isn't knowledge imbued with Dhamma. It doesn't have Dhamma to add a protective coat or to act as a support, a brake, an accelerator, or steering-wheel. It, therefore,

trundles forward in any old direction, without any limit or bounds.

When examined in this light, the value and importance of the Lord Buddha's Dhamma stands out clearly. The individual effort to change oneself for the better, even though one can't do the same for anyone else, will provide peace and contentment wherever one is. Such happiness will result from your right actions and way of living, and this will follow for anyone who practices in the same way.

This *right way* and *contentment* have a series of levels — everyone being able to step up to the general level with the right intention and effort. Don't allow yourself to miss out on this, for the world can be worth living in and can bring happiness, peace, and joy. Beyond this mundane joy lies the prospect of progress and happiness within the heart itself. However, it does need commitment and energy to achieve this subtle and more refined type of happiness.

Those who are especially interested in the way of meditation<sup>2</sup> really stand in the front line — if this is

considered in images of going to war and battle. Those who decide on this approach can't afford to be weak and faint-hearted. Whatever they attempt will require vigilance, and such exertion will then steadily develop in them a consistent and stable mindfulness. Any lack of this and they won't be considered tough enough to succeed in the war.

This toughness depends on an alert effort, together with mindfulness and wisdom checking on the behavior to see whether it is going in the right or wrong way.

As this becomes increasingly subtle and involved, it is more and more necessary to depend on the protection of mindfulness and wisdom. The *stream of the heart* and its various imaginings and concoctions will not then go and amass poisonous ideas and emotional objects with which to burn and torment itself.

Once the heart has received proper care and nurturing it will gradually come to peace, and be radiant and happy without any fading into downhearted dullness, as it did before.

All of you have been training here for quite a long time, so please draw into your heart the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha. Don't think that you'll be leaving<sup>3</sup> your teacher and monastery behind. Your departure is only an activity or physical movement. The important thing to remember are the Lord Buddha's words:

*"Anyone who practices Dhamma in accordance with the way of Dhamma, is truly one who offers reverence to the Tathagata."*

That practice is the way of *mindfulness, wisdom, faith and diligent effort*. It has to be there in every posture and at all times. This right conduct within the heart, together with continuous watchfulness is what is meant by *'practicing Dhamma following the Way and giving constant reverence to the Tathagata'*, the Lord Buddha.

The Lord Buddha continued:

*"Whoever sees Dhamma, sees the Tathagata."*

How does one see, know and practice so as to see this Dhamma? It's by practicing as we are doing now, and especially refers to meditation. This is the

way of practicing Dhamma. Seeing Dhamma is discerning those obstructions present within oneself that should be counted as 'the enemy'. These are the first two Noble Truths, that of *Suffering* and its *Cause*.

We investigate these things to penetrate to their true nature, which exists in every human being and animal — the only exception being the *arahant* who has gone beyond.

The rest of us must possess this *Cause* to some degree, and it's this that he called the *Noble Truth*.

By examining and seeing Dhamma in the true state of affairs, it's then possible to turn to letting go and uprooting. This results in coolness and peace within. This letting go and uprooting is also termed 'seeing Dhamma', for it is a gradual seeing, level by level, step by step, until one finally perceives the whole Tathagata.

We can speak about these levels of attainment in this way: Those who have practiced up to *stream-entry*<sup>4</sup> can be said to have seen the Lord Buddha at one level, having penetrated into the stream of Dhamma.

It is the beginning of seeing, as if you are standing in a field and can glimpse the Lord in the distance. The *once-returner*<sup>5</sup> stage seems to bring the Lord a little closer and the *non-returner*<sup>6</sup> sees him closer still. Until finally, with the *arahant*<sup>7</sup> stage, you see the Lord Buddha in full. The Dhamma that facilitates our reaching each of these stages resides with every one of us.

Holding to the practice is like following behind and sighting the *Tathagata*. One sees him by way of *cause*, which is our practice; and by way of *result*, which is the steadily attained fruit of that practice. The Lord Buddha went this way before, seeing and steadily realizing and passing beyond.

Therefore, the heart of the one who practices is never apart from the Lord Buddha, Dhamma, or the Sangha. By virtue of that practice, reverence is given to the *Tathagata*, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. This is true reverence and is the way — through diligent effort — of having continuous audience with the Lord Buddha.

Departing and going away is only *activity*. There is a departing right here when, for example, after sitting here you leave to sit over there; from there you return to sit here. There is a continual departing. You shouldn't be concerned with leaving this place for that, this town for that, this house for elsewhere. Leaving from here for far or near — there is continual departing in this world of impermanence where things are constantly changing.

By using the *three marks*<sup>8</sup> we can reflect upon these things so that it becomes a Dhamma lesson. Those who truly know and see will always depend on this principle as the way to move forward. While we are here we practice Dhamma and when we are there we practice Dhamma — because it is aimed at letting go, at eradicating defilements and ending all the suffering within the heart. We practice wherever we are so as to uproot and release, and for this purpose our present location isn't relevant.

The Lord Buddha therefore taught the Noble Disciples:

*"Go bhikkhus, and seek secluded places. Be steadfast and resolute there. This is the way to have*

*constant audience with the Tathagata. There is no need for all of you to come here to gather around the Tathagata. That is not the way. But rather, whoever has mindfulness and is diligent in all postures immediately gives reverence and has audience with the Tathagata. Nonchalantly sitting around here is not the way to meet, nor to see or have audience with the Tathagata. The Tathagata does not regard the coming here and the going away as having an audience with or taking leave of the Tathagata. The Tathagata considers that diligence in the practice to eradicate defilements from the heart, whether little or much, as steadily gaining audience with the Tathagata."*

This is the progressive seeing of the *Tathagata*. It is the major principle in the Teaching that allows a clear sight of the Tathagata, rather than peering with dim and blurry eyes, lacking in mindfulness. Just completely rid yourselves of the poisons in the heart, and then compare the resulting state that you have realized — is there any difference between that nature and the Tathagata? Plainly, without question, such a purified nature is identical with it. Listen! The

essence of the Lord Buddha's teaching is just like this.

Training your heart and developing yourself into a good person is the way to accumulate happiness. With increasing growth within the heart the result will, of course, be happiness. Not being able to find happiness or its being incomplete, arises because of obstructions in the heart, which are the defilements. Nothing else is able to obstruct and pierce the hearts of all sentient beings, preventing them from finding happiness and fulfillment.

Suffering and hardship, whether internal or external, are solely caused by defilements. For example, when the body is feverish or ill, the defilements will also get in the act by moaning about the pain here or the ache there. This disturbs and worries, which adds yet another load of suffering for the heart, to go with the bodily illness.

Common bodily upset or illness was experienced by both the Lord Buddha and the Noble Disciples. It's the nature of the aggregates to be ruled by the *this-worldly* law of the *three marks*.

Whoever has aggregates and elements cannot go beyond this worldly norm, with the inevitable consequences of change and impermanence. However, their hearts did not waver because there was already total understanding of the state of things.

But it's not like that for us. When we have bodily pain, whether much or little, it also shows in the heart that accumulates additional suffering. The amount can't be estimated but sometimes the suffering within the heart becomes greater than that of the body.

This is what is meant by 'an encompassing infiltration by the defilements', when we are absent-minded and careless. When there is no mindfulness and wisdom to know what the defilements are up to, they can penetrate in every possible way, regardless of time, place or posture. All that's necessary is for the heart to move and show itself without mindfulness, and *wisdom* becomes more like *perceiving-memory*.<sup>10</sup>

It's as if the heart becomes the defilement's unknowing helper. In such a situation, Dhamma can't possibly arise and it can only go the way of the defilements and their steady increase. It's, therefore, necessary to throw in the full force of your mindfulness and wisdom, faith and energy, to keep up with the events happening within the heart.

Research into these elements and aggregates will make you an outstanding person but graduation from any other kind of study will never be enough. There will still be the thirst for more, much like anything in this world. However, when your studies into the elements, aggregates and heart are completed that thirst will also be ended. You will find complete fulfillment.

At present you are deficient in the theory of *Aggregate-ology* and the application and practice of it. This is really about mindfulness and wisdom, and the penetrative insight into the true nature of the elements and aggregates. It is analysis by separating the true from the false. But when the study is not yet concluded or understood, endless confusion and

turmoil will remain with the elements, aggregates and heart.

There is no confusion and agitation worse than that found in the elements, the aggregates and heart. This is where all sorts of complications are constantly emerging, because we have yet to clear them up. This indictment can only be dismissed through the studying of the case right there, with mindfulness and wisdom disentangling the truth and giving judgment after careful deliberation.

Alright! Let's wind up these studies. What is there in these elements and aggregates — as I've always said, there's:

*Form aggregate*, which is everything in this body of ours.

*Feeling aggregate*, which comprises painful, pleasant and neutral feelings, that arise within the body and heart.

*Perception aggregate* is memory and assumed knowledge of various things.

*Thought processing* is the creative, concocting facility of the heart that thinks about virtue or wickedness, past or future, without any limitation.

A *consciousness aggregate* acknowledges forms, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile objects as they come into contact with the senses; and at that moment reports them to the heart to acknowledge, and once that contact ends the consciousness lapses as the object passes. This is called *consciousness of the five aggregates*.<sup>11</sup>

The *consciousness of the five aggregates* is different from the *re-linking consciousness*.<sup>12</sup> This refers to *mind*<sup>13</sup> and particularly to the heart. It is the heart that is about to enter into *re-linking consciousness*, taking birth in the various forms of existence.

The consciousness of the five aggregates arises and ceases with the things that come into contact with it. That is, the acknowledgement ceases along with the passing away of those things.

The *re-linking consciousness* however, refers to the heart that possesses the faculty of knowing, alone and by itself. Even if nothing makes contact with it, it doesn't end.

Study these five aggregates — and do it exhaustively. Keep on going over it, revising and

researching until you can understand. This is the field of work for anyone wanting to be rid of defilements and craving, by the demolishing of the *cycle of birth and death*.<sup>14</sup>

The heart spins through birth in various forms of existence, endlessly roving and reserving itself a place in cemeteries all over the place. The reservation is made even before death. This is all due to delusion — ignorance about the true nature of the aggregates. We grasp at more of them even though we already have a heap of them. There's never enough, so we fall and catch hold of them without limit — unless, of course, wisdom can be called in to investigate.

Analyze and investigate so that you come to true knowledge and can, therefore, cut free the attachment. Take up the study of the elements and aggregates — or take this body, for therein lies the 'substance' of the *Noble Truth* and the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. These are synonyms for the same thing and can (practically) replace each other in our investigations.

We will find that they are all essentially concerned with the *Noble Truths* and the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. Normally, without illness or disease, the body exists simply as the body, and *form* is still just *form*. However, when the body changes and becomes abnormal and disordered, it then follows its (new) natural course.

The painful feeling that arises due to this irregularity does not remain for long and you should just let the heart know it for what it is.

This is the way to study *Aggregate-ology*. Don't be alarmed or frightened, or depressed with them; for this is their normal, inevitable course in the world.<sup>15</sup> They have to follow a progressive transformation with both subtle, unnoticed changes and marked changes. They change in accordance with their nature — at every period, every second. But perhaps even a 'second' is too long a time, rather make it every instant, all the time. They just change, continually change. There is no pause, no taking time off for rest and sleep like animals and people do.

As for suffering, that also manifests itself constantly, without stopping for sleep or rest. People may take time off for leisure and recuperation but that doesn't apply to the Noble Truths and 'the three marks'.

They never stop, never ease off with anybody. They proceed along their course both day and night; with standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. The condition of these things is to turn through their changes. This body, too, revolves, as it changes its position and state. We sit for a little while and then an ache appears. Have things changed? Well, if they haven't what's this pain doing here?

This ache is called *painful feeling*. It is one sort of condition that arises in our awareness, one aspect of the Noble Truths. Examine it and see it as it really is, for in the last resort there's no alternative. To think that you can depend on some other person is a misreading of the situation. This is something that will drain your resolve, leaving you weak and disheartened in the task of saving yourself.

Such wrong understanding or misapprehension comes from the defilement's subversive insinuations,

constantly deceiving you. This happens both in normal times and in times of sickness and emergency, cutting the ground from under your feet by means of their trickery.

When the final time is really drawing near, it is like a boxer in the ring. Before climbing into the ring the trainer can teach and instruct, but once in the ring there is no way to teach anything more. Right or wrong, good or bad, alive or dead — you now have to rely and help yourself to the utmost. It's now too late to learn any new boxing techniques.

The time of going into battle is that of the final moment when the aggregates and the heart are going their separate ways. It is the time of breaking up. It is like when crows and vultures come down and sit together on the branches of a tree. When they alighted, the branches hardly shook at all but when they fly away they jolt the branches until the whole tree vibrates. Any dry, dead branches will break and fall in the process.

At the time when the body is departing, how hard will it shake us? How are we going to stand up to

this shaking — with mindfulness and wisdom, that's how.

Without them we definitely won't be able to bear it and will lose our balance and control. We must therefore fight to the fullest capacity of our mindfulness and wisdom. Don't even think about the possibility of collapsing in the fight. Our vigorous questioning of the truth about the nature of the body is aimed towards gaining release, not towards destruction. This is the chief way to help oneself in a critical situation, by using all one's strength, and is the right course recommended by the wise.

When the time of emergency arrives it will be all pain — clearly showing itself throughout every part of the body as if each piece is burning. Inside, the body will be like a blazing, red-hot furnace. So, what are we going to do now? Mindfulness and wisdom must be sighted on that heat, that suffering and pain.

Clearly discerning, we can then turn and observe our heart. Is the heart also red-hot? Or is it only the body and aggregates which are on fire? If you are already well-practiced in using mindfulness and wisdom,

you'll find that the heart is cool and unaffected even in the midst of such a conflagration. It is the body that is burning with the flames of suffering. This is how we who practice must see it.

This is the way of self-help, without leaning on anyone else, for you are already up in there in the fighting ring. Once you are determined to fight, then, fight using reason and your full strength. "*Come what may! Live or die! Who cares who might have to carry me out of the ring.*" It's a fight to the end — but fight cleverly, don't just close your eyes and allow yourself to be like a dummy accepting all the punishment without blocking or returning punches.

That's useless! Fight with energy putting your life on the line. If you have to die, then so be it. But there'll be no retreat. Use your mindfulness and wisdom that is tuned to be the most advanced weapon going.

Battling with *feeling* means penetrating into its true nature. Don't attempt to force it to disappear for that is trying to go against feeling's natural course. The only way is to examine it as it really is and then let it disappear of itself. If it still lingers then realize that

that's how things are, and don't go in and grasp hold of it.

*Form*<sup>16</sup> is *form* — don't bring in anything to contradict this or make it something else. Form is form; body is body, and it's just body, just form. *Feeling*<sup>17</sup> is *feeling* — whether it's painful, pleasant or neutral, it's really only feeling.

What is this that knows body, knows feeling? It's the heart, of course. The heart is not of that nature and must be separated and clearly seen with wisdom. This is truly seeing the Noble Truth, and there will now be no wavering even if the body can't endure.

Right then. Let's turn and face the battle, let's see what will go first and what will outlast. With our confidence riding with mindfulness and wisdom we'll know the truth that the heart is not the one that dies, but is that which is there to acknowledge whatever is present.

Alright then, whatever is impermanent — may it go its way. The body can't endure? Then let it break up. Feelings don't last, well, let them dissolve. If it's impermanent, then let it all disperse. However,

whatever endures will last and prevail. What is it that prevails? It is that which knows, which is the heart. There! It's the one who knows standing out distinctly all the time.

The results will definitely be like this once you have successfully trained yourself in the way of mindfulness and wisdom. But if your mindfulness and wisdom are deficient, then the heart will remain feeble and easily discouraged. All kinds of suffering will then converge into the heart because it is the heart itself that accumulates suffering through its own stupidity.

Weakness, therefore, is certainly not the path that leads away from harm and danger. It has to be accomplished through diligence and hard work, with a warrior spirit armed with mindfulness and wisdom. Nothing else can bring victory and preeminence, goodness and virtue, excellence and distinction; nothing else brings bravery and fearlessness to arise within the heart.

Please consider it in this way: Suppose that we return home without a teacher or instructor. Well,

what teaching have we already received and what are we really missing? The teacher is still present in his teaching, and it's there that we'll find the Tathagata and the Dhamma.

We are with the Dhamma, with the Lord Buddha, and with the Sangha at all times because of the Teaching that we train ourselves with. We do *not* lack a teacher or an instructor. We live with a refuge in having mindfulness, wisdom, faith, and energy out fighting to destroy those things that are our enemy.

How can we say we are without a teacher when we exist with our teacher! So we must strive to gain knowledge together with this teacher.

This is the way to practice, without loneliness or wavering but endowed with firmness and steadfastness in the truth of Dhamma. The teacher's instructions are constantly embraced as the internal guide within the heart. Wherever we may be, we can say that we are with a teacher, with an instructor, with the Lord Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha — because the real Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha

are within the heart. It is only the heart that can be with Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, or the whole essence of Dhamma.

The *body* doesn't know anything. How on earth can it ever know anything about the Lord Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha? *Feeling* also doesn't know; while *perception* just remembers and then it's gone; and *thought processing* imagines and then vanishes. How can there be any basis in them sufficient to accommodate the Lord Buddha? The one who can truly receive, is that which really understands the Lord Buddha: The real Buddho is just this heart.

So, investigate the heart to your utmost. Don't be weak or discouraged. In any case, all of us must eventually enter into this battle. It's unavoidable. All we can do is to help ourselves, and it's very certain that we will need to help ourselves. When the time of necessity is upon us, nobody else can help.

Whether father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, they can only stand by and watch with affection, sympathy, and yearning. They all long to help but when the time comes, they are powerless.

The only things that can help us transcend suffering and torment, and to be free from all bondage, are mindfulness, wisdom and our own effort. There is nothing else. We must, therefore, be strict with ourselves, be firm at heart, even if the body is nearing its end. From this moment on, this is something to keep close to your heart. Then you won't lose out later on.

However the aggregates might display themselves, the one certain thing is that they aren't above death. Whether they appear often or not, they will come to die. So the *one who knows* knows till death, at which time the body dissolves and that which knows is rid of all problems and obligations. Let's get down to the crux of the matter. Right to the essence of truth, of cause and effect. Then we will arrive at the real and genuine Dhamma within the heart.

This Dhamma presentation seems enough; so I'll finish here.

Notes

1.

*paaramii*

2.

*citta-bhaavanaa*

3.

The next day Khun Pow was due to return to home...  
and hospital.

4.

*sotaapatti-magga and -phala*

5.

*sakadaagaamii*

6.

*anaagaamii*

7.

*arahatta-phala*

8.

*ti-lakkha.na*

9.

*sammuti*

10.

*panyaa and sanyaa*

11.

*vinyaa.na khandha*

12.

*pa.tisandhi-vinyaana*

13.

*mano*

14.

*va.t.ta*

15.

*sammuti*

16.

*ruupa*

17.

*vedanaa*

## **7. The Middle Way**

Listening to a Dhamma talk,<sup>1</sup> keep your attention in the present. Don't send the mind outward but keep it focused within, you'll then be able to experience the true taste of Dhamma right in your heart.

It has been taught that one may gain five benefits while listening to a Dhamma talk. Then there are also those benefits that come to fruition in the future that are extra gains. This is the reason that so many followers became enlightened while listening to the Lord Buddha's Dhamma. They had correctly stationed their heart in the present, without concern for past or future; being wholly receptive and ready to experience the taste of Dhamma that the Lord was presenting.

The Lord first *went forth into homelessness* greatly aroused by Dhamma. Even prior to this, he had had a growing fascination and concern, originating with his successive encounters with the four *deva-dutas* — the sights of the old man, the sick man, the dead man, and the holy man.

From the first day of his going forth he labored with great effort and determination through the austere practices, always committed to his task up to the day of his Enlightenment. He thought neither to abandon his undertaking nor to slacken in his pursuit. The laziness, discouragement and weakness prevailing over the hearts of all other sentient beings could not overcome him.

The *noble disciples* also went forth with conscientiousness and the intention to find freedom from suffering, following the example of the Lord. They attended to each word of the Lord's Dhamma and put it into practice with devotion. Their staying, their coming or going, were always accompanied by mindfulness. Every facet of exertion went together with reflection and application of the principles of

truth. The results and the rewards of their concern and dedication seem to contrast with those of our time. This is due to the immense difference in the appreciation of Dhamma and the intensity of practice. It's then obvious that the results can't possibly be the same.

The Lord Buddha didn't relent or relax in his quest from the first day of his endeavor to the day of his Enlightenment. It was on finally reaching his goal that he became the *Great Teacher*<sup>2</sup> of the world. He then brought the Dhamma out to the Buddhist Community — teaching and urging them to follow the path of Dhamma by which he himself had succeeded. Those who received what was revealed by the Lord, delighted in the essence of Dhamma. By taking it up and applying it in their practice, in due course they had all variously come to Dhamma attainments; acquiring the *Dhamma Eye* like the Lord had before them.

The Lord Buddha became the model and ideal for the Buddhist Community right from the beginning. This is made plain from the way he practiced, by always spending his time living away in the forest.

When he renounced the home life, he went forth into the forest and no longer took any interest in people; including those in the realm he had once ruled over with peace and security. No longer being concerned with his princely status he courageously and unflinchingly stood up to the ordeal of his exertions. In this respect, no one can surpass the Lord, for every mode of his practice transcended the world.

His renunciation and going forth into homelessness differed from the usual way of the world, so when the results appeared they also differed. They were now of two disparate 'worlds', for his heart had been transformed into the purified heart of a Buddha. His accomplishments stood in distinct contrast to the rest of the world.

This was also true for the *noble disciples* who had gone forth following the Lord Buddha. They rejoiced and delighted on hearing the Lord present the basic, fundamental guidelines:

*"Rukkhamuulasenaasana.m nissaaya pabbajjaa  
tattthavo yaavajiva.m ussahokaraniyo."*

We could express this in our own words:

"Look, over there! There's a mountain and a deep jungle; mountainsides and gorges, brooks and streams, cliffs, peaks and mountain slopes. There are the water courses and banks of mountain rivers. These are places of ease and quietude, free from all forms of entanglement. Seek for such areas and strive there amongst such scenes."

"The *Tathagata* attained his Buddhahood from these settings and surroundings, not through socializing and mingling together. He didn't become enlightened by indulging in frivolity and merriment, by trailing in the flow of desire, self-seeking ambitions and obsessions, and allowing himself to be dragged away under the authority of defilements and desires.

On the contrary, the *Tathagata* strove for his Enlightenment in secluded and deserted places. Those were spots where he made his great effort, escaping from his palace and city and all their manner of peoples. The *Tathagata* went through hardship and adversity that was born and derived from his exertion in those secluded and remote places.

Enlightenment didn't come to him amidst the grandeur and magnificence of palaces, or amongst the crowds at crossroads or market places. It came to him in solitude and seclusion, totally retired from the world. The *Tathagata* accomplished and arrived at the state of purity of a Buddha in these outlying places."

"May all of you, therefore, turn towards these places that the *Tathagata* has described. The mountains, hillsides, caves, and shady trees; the deep forests and the distant open spaces where the air is light and clear. These spots are deserted and quiet, free from confusions and troubles, forsaken by people.

If you all aspire to the state free from suffering then you must follow the route of the *Tathagata* to those places. Then you too will definitely, one day, also reach the ending of lives and existences, the (quenching) of the glowing coals in the pit of repeated births and deaths."

What I've just explained was, in fact, the second of the basic guidelines. The first directive was:

*"Pa.msakuula ciivara.m... "*

"All of you who have gone forth should seek for discarded materials left in cemeteries or along the road sides. Stitch and sew them together to make your lower robe, upper robe and outer robe; so they may be used to cover and protect your body, sustaining the holy life from day to day. This will accord with your recluseship and spartan life following the way of Dhamma. Subsist frugally on the four requisites of living — food, shelter, clothing and medicine — and be content with little, satisfied with whatever requisites accrue without indulgence in excess and lavish wastefulness. You may however, accept the gift of robes presented by lay devotees as long as it is the way of simplicity and moderation. One causes oneself to be easily fed and cared for without causing problems and concerns for the faithful supporters."

The third of the guidelines was:

*"Pi.n.diyaalopabhojana... ."*

"Having gone forth in the *religion*<sup>3</sup> you can't afford to be lazy. Go on an *almsround*,<sup>4</sup> feeding yourself by your own effort and on your own two feet with a pure and honest heart. The faithful devotees willingly and happily offer the gift of food following the *samana's* tradition, avoiding the usual worldly

bargaining with money. The going for alms in order to support yourself is the pure and impeccable livelihood for one who has gone forth. You should try to maintain this practice for the rest of your life.

Any occasions of abundance and excess should be considered exceptional circumstances, when you need to oblige the laity. Any shower of gifts, however, must never be taken heedlessly, complacently thinking that they indicate your honor and dignity. They would then be transformed into *gifts and offerings that kill the unworthy*<sup>5</sup> [as the bait hooks the fish]."

The fourth instruction was: "*Gilaanabhesajja... .*" This refers to medicine for curing the sickness that can, depending on conditions, afflict both monks and lay people. The remedy needs to accommodate to and measure up with the particular situation, as if it were its shadow. However, know and exercise moderation in requesting assistance from relatives or those supporters who volunteer their service. You must keep it well within the bounds of propriety.

Knowing moderation is the necessary quality that all who have gone forth must bear in mind. He then becomes *sangha sobhana*, a graceful recluse who adorns the religion with refinement and beauty, being well received by fellow Buddhists and the public everywhere. The important point for a monk to remember is to be always prudent and wary of immoderation in soliciting anything at all. (The *going for alms* is special in this regard because it's a suitable daily observance for monks and novices.)

Never make a habit of visiting and seeking aid from lay people, but rather exercise moderation in response to the given situation.

After hearing and accepting these fundamental Dhamma guidelines from the Lord Buddha, the noble disciples all gladly practiced them with zealous dedication. Each went their separate ways into the seclusion and solitude of the forests and mountains, unhindered by concern for life and well being. Whatever their family backgrounds — some were even kings and princes — none asserted their status and position.

That would have only activated pride and snobbery, and contempt for (the quality of) those requisites of living that the ordinary lay supporters were able to provide. The noble disciples welcomed any kind of food — save that set aside under the *vinaya* code — for the sake of sustaining their life processes and supporting a steady Dhamma practice. They were mindful of their exertion, their practical duties and observances. They were attracted to quiet and secluded surroundings, far away from noise, confusion and all disturbing influences.

They continued with steady endeavor by both day and night and in all postures. For them nothing was more worthwhile and rewarding than the practice that would rid them of suffering.

All the noble disciples considered freedom from suffering as the priceless Dhamma. It went beyond any gains that repeated births and deaths could show, for those all originated in the deceit of *ignorance*,<sup>6</sup> which is the root source of the constant suffering of all sentient beings.

The total dedication of the noble disciples meant that neither pride of royal blood and wealthy family, nor pride of scholarship and erudition, could infiltrate their hearts. For this reason all of them, from the first to the last *arahant* disciple, were able to gain Enlightenment following the Lord Buddha.

May all you who practice, therefore, turn your attention to the reports describing the Lord Buddha and his *arahant* disciples. Consider how their practicing came to success, how they achieved renown and were revered by all sections of the world — including those of the heavenly *deva* realms.

The Lord Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha cannot be surpassed for wisdom, discernment and accomplishment. They reign supreme, so let us all carefully consider this.

Being easily discouraged and obsessed with food and sleep are not ways to nobility and freedom from suffering. They can't make the supreme Dhamma manifest within the field of our awareness, which is our heart.

In every movement and posture, always give heed to reason and be constantly observant of your actions. Make sure that these actions don't cause delay or 'stain' your body, speech and heart. Delight in seclusion and solitude, and totally commit your efforts of both body and heart to the Dhamma work.

Let a dogged determination be your guide through every thought and movement, always pointing to the goal — *freedom from suffering*. The outcome is then assuredly equivalent to that found by the Lord Buddha and the noble disciples, since it follows the same path.

The Lord Buddha did not present the Dhamma teaching — about right view and right thought, for instance — to just anyone. It was aimed specifically at all those who practice the way of *moral precepts, samadhi and wisdom*. Having once stepped out along the Path that the Lord pointed out by living and practicing in accord with the fundamental guidelines that we've already discussed — *rukhamuula senaasana.m* or living at the foot of trees is another example — there can only be one result. It is freedom from suffering and reaching to

the natural prominence of a noble disciple of the Lord Buddha, which is the state of purity within the heart.

Whatever your posture, whatever you're doing, always be mindful — the only exception being during sleep when it's beyond one's means. Incline yourself towards applying mindfulness and wisdom with strenuous effort. The reality of deliverance will then appear within the heart.

During the Lord Buddha's time people listened to Dhamma with earnest interest, securing the Dhamma they heard within their mind. They didn't allow the Dhamma to slip away and disperse; nor did they listen merely for courtesy's sake, treating it more as a ritual.

Whatever people do nowadays — and that includes all you monks here — seems to become mere ritual. Without true dedication and firm determination everything you attempt will insensibly turn into ritual.

For instance, to walk along your meditation path just to keep up with a set schedule becomes ritualistic. The question is whether the heart and mindfulness are in harmony with your exertion. Consequently, the end results may very well be different from what was expected. Why should it be so?

It's because, even though we may be doing 'walking meditation', the heart is elsewhere, occupied with every other thing except the Dhamma-theme. What is this principle of Dhamma? It is *always to be mindful* while striving in one's practice.

The heart together with mindfulness may drift and wander; drawn away by the allure and fascination of other places and objects rather than being focused in the object taken-up. This indicates that the *flow of the heart* is already going astray. Whether your practice is one of samadhi or investigation, the ensuing results must be contrary to Dhamma — being something else altogether.

Such is the way when we are not observant of our actions, and strive in the practice more for *practice's sake* or from a sense of obligation. We might then fall into wrong view and criticize the religion,

disparaging the Lord Buddha's Dhamma Teaching as not being the true *Niyyanika Dhamma*, unable to lead us away from suffering. And that it's unequal to its claim of being the *Well-taught Dhamma*.

The reality is that the flow of our heart is constantly, by both day and night, pulling toward the world. So please bear in mind that the world, whether the inner or the external world, is different from Dhamma. The endeavor of the Lord Buddha and all the noble disciples is aimed at the Dhamma principle as the deliverance from suffering. Consequently, every turn of their exertion was for the erasing of 'stains' until they were totally removed and came to *Buddho* — to which the world pays homage and respect. They had attained to the summit of Dhamma because their practices accorded with Dhamma. This has to be the outcome when the means and ends come together in complete harmony.

For us though, we may be walking on our meditation path or sitting in samadhi practice but our samadhi is merely a *stump-like samadhi*. This is when we actually fall asleep right in that samadhi practice. We may do this many times — and it may even

become routine for some people, although I personally can't confirm it. Yet it does seem quite probable going by the results people manage to get. If the *cause* accords with Dhamma, then the *result* can't be otherwise. Both the means and ends must correspond.

It must be because we don't practice following the principles of Dhamma. Instead of walking or sitting in meditation — with mindfulness, in tune with our exertion and the Dhamma theme or *processes*<sup>7</sup> under investigation — the heart turns aside.

The *flow of the heart* goes chasing after forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. Furthermore, the mental *objects*<sup>8</sup> conceived in the heart are also about forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects, whether they be past or future.

The heart never stays with the present for even a single moment. If this is the case, the results must always be mundane and commonplace, since the flow of the heart is constantly involved with worldly affairs. The heart, for its part, will also remain mundane, acting as the *source* of suffering that afflicts us with trouble and hardship.

We consequently find fault with that which results: "*Why should there be anxiety and worry? Why am I miserable today?*" We never consider that it's we ourselves who are perpetually instigating this unpleasantness by running at cross-purposes with Dhamma. That's why the outcome has to be as it is.

For this reason, all of us who practice must constantly secure within our minds the resolution to be free from suffering. We must never allow our actions done through body, speech and mind to deviate from the teaching of the Lord Buddha.

He taught us to seek for seclusion and solitude in the deep forests that are appropriate and conducive to our exertion. There were no exhortations to go live and practice in the market, at the crossroads, or in crowded places packed with people. As if such places would instantly enable us to arrive at the safe haven free from suffering. We must consider what this *living at the root of a tree*<sup>9</sup> really means.

Every facet of the Dhamma Teaching expounded by all the Buddhas has behind it sound and justifiable

reason. It is the basis for truth, bringing benefit to those who observe and practice it. This is why the story of the Lord Buddha and the noble disciples — how they cultivated the Way and came to the ultimate accomplishment, becoming great teachers for the whole world — is a story of great wonder and marvel.

Yet, however great a Teacher they may be, the teaching can't always hit home. For us, the vital point is to take the Dhamma — the principle of truth and reason that is the essence of the Great Teacher — as that which will give us constant instruction. Every action will then be made known to our teacher, which is our own heart. This must, without neglect or absent-mindedness, always be borne in mind. Otherwise, we will never manage to keep to our course and survive, but will squander time worthlessly.

Don't allow the idea that one particular day or night, whether past, present or future, is somehow exceptional or unusual. It's still that regular sort of day or night. The defilements don't depend on time but are concerned with the heart and all related states

and conditions. This is the crucial fact. Please investigate it.

Wherever you go, always make sure the great Teacher leads as the guide. Whether sitting, lying down, standing or walking, mindfulness must be there with each posture. Without a basis in mindfulness and wisdom, calm of heart and clear discernment cannot arise.

This is because mindfulness, wisdom and diligent effort form the surrounding protective barrier and are the elements that substantiate them. As we tread the path through our strenuous effort, we keep within the guidelines of *precepts, samadhi and wisdom*. This is all that is required.

We will then experience the realm free from suffering right within our own heart — without having to ask anyone else about it. Regardless of time, if the *Well-taught Dhamma* is still extant in the world, and if the one listening to it takes it up for study by dedicatedly practicing following its instruction, the result can only be freedom from suffering. This will be clearly perceived in their

heart. Please keep this in mind, and correct the problem there; otherwise, you'll steadily regress and will fail to accomplish anything.

With mindfulness and a continual probing with wisdom into the *natural things and processes*<sup>10</sup> — the body for example — you'll constantly come across extraordinary (new) understanding. On the other hand, if your effort is unsettled and spasmodic, the forthcoming results will similarly be deficient. Therefore, really try to cultivate and develop mindfulness and wisdom up to a steady awareness and discernment.

This will definitely contribute to samadhi, the firmness and stability of heart, and to a genuine wisdom that follows from investigating the four *Foundations of Mindfulness* and the four *Noble Truths*. Please also understand that both the *Foundations of Mindfulness* and the *Noble Truths* are *dhammas of the present*, which are constantly manifesting here and now, within our body and heart.

In the *Middle Way of Practice* (which is the *Noble Eightfold Path*) the Lord detailed *right view*.<sup>11</sup> There are *right views* concerning things in general, more specific things, and the really subtle aspects of Dhamma.

The *right views* of ordinary Buddhists deal especially with the conviction that virtuous deeds and wrongdoing, good and evil, really do exist. And that those performing such actions must reap the corresponding results, either of good or evil. This is one level of *right view*.

The more specific (*right*) *view* is of those who take up the practice and, using wisdom, investigate the four *Foundations of Mindfulness* and the four *Noble Truths*. Here, one examines the body, feeling, *citta* and *dhamma* in terms of the *three marks*<sup>12</sup> — that they are all intrinsically bound up with impermanence, suffering and not-self.

Build up your faith and firm conviction in Truth and Dhamma through investigating the *three marks* inherent within *all things*<sup>13</sup> and by making this the course for wisdom to follow. Moreover, explore the

Noble Truths to realize that suffering — that which arises in body and heart, in both oneself and all other beings — is something that one can't afford to remain complacent about.

Recognize the harm caused by the *Source*<sup>14</sup> that generates the immeasurable suffering that all creatures must endlessly endure. Then you'll be ready to dismantle and undo that *Source*, using wisdom to arrive at *Cessation*<sup>15</sup> which is the sphere of the total ending of suffering.

The level of *right view* on these subtler aspects of Dhamma deals with correctly seeing the *Truth of Suffering*, its *Source*, its *Cessation* and the *Way*, which are *precepts, samadhi and wisdom*. This is *right view* void of judgmental opinions concerning the Noble Truths and the *natural processes*<sup>16</sup> everywhere. This is another level of *right view*.

The levels of *right view* vary according to the Dhamma accomplishments of the one practicing. If there was only a single level of *right view* then wisdom would be limited too. Since there are many grades of defilements, many layers of

downheartedness and depression, wisdom must have the equivalent levels. It's for this reason that I've been explaining about the varied aspects of *sammaa ditthi* or *right view*.

The second path factor is *right thought*.<sup>17</sup> There are three categories: the *thought of non-oppression*; the *thought of friendliness*, free from enmity and ill-will; and the *thought that extricates* one from entanglement and bonds.

The *thought of non-oppression* refers to a regard for the welfare of one's fellow creatures, both human and animal alike. However, you will also need to take care of your own well-being by not straining or overburdening yourself. One neither gives thought on how to inflict troubles and hardships on others, nor on how one can indulge in self-destructive habits — like consuming drugs, alcohol or opium and heroin.

These thoughts that go in the direction of non-vindictiveness are really the *not* thinking in malicious and violent terms, whether towards people or animals. One doesn't wish to hurt anyone; or that

anyone should be sick, or that they might drop dead. Nor does one think of suicide — killing oneself in the various ways they regularly report in the newspapers. These things happen because they are the fruit of the seed of the original wrong reflection.

One once having valued oneself; one having thought of oneself as one's most precious resource. Then, because of *wrong thought*, it all turns sour and one now appears as the enemy, one's antagonist.

This seems to happen all the time, and it does so because of wrong thoughts and reasoning. Those who genuinely take care of themselves will immediately act to stop the train of wrong, dangerous thought. As soon as the heart becomes aware of the beginning of such disquiet, it will abandon and *let go* those thought concoctions. How could one allow these wrong reflections to get out of hand to the point of committing suicide? It's hardly an example of caring for oneself.

The commonplace ideas of finding a way to cast-off the bonds of poverty and want, in order to find abundance and wealth, is also a *thought of*

*renunciation*. So is the thought of involving oneself in actions of *generosity, morality and meditation*.<sup>19</sup>

One might think about contributing to the construction of roads, wells or *pagodas*<sup>20</sup>; about maintaining and renovating old and crumbling shrines; about building dwellings and halls for monks, or other structures. This impulsion towards good works in order to extricate oneself from the mass of suffering also comes under *thought of renunciation*.

Another kind of renunciation is the contemplating and the seeing of the peril contained in birth, decay, sickness and death. This being inherent within every form of sentient existence — without exception — one sees the life of *one gone forth* as fulfilling one's own aspiration to develop precepts, samadhi and wisdom. So one resolves to *go forth* as 'white robed' nun, monk or novice.

One who practices, contemplates and investigates his subject of meditation to release the heart from all mental hindrances. He utilizes all the various methods, developed by continuing analysis and

reflection, to remove defilements. He steadily eradicates defilements through the various levels right up to the automatic stage of *right thought*.

With a constant probing and examining, he will ultimately eliminate all defilements. This is the final category of *right thought* which completes the explanation of this second path factor.

The third path factor was stated as being *right speech*.<sup>21</sup> This includes general speech and specifically that concerned with Dhamma. Passing on aphorisms of the wise that are not detrimental to those who listen; speaking from sound principles that are impressive and eloquent; speaking politely and modestly; and expressing gratitude and appreciation to anyone of whatever rank who has shown kindness and support. These can all be classed as one level of *right speech*.

The primary form of *right speech* within the sphere of Dhamma is the *sallekha dhammas*, which are fitted to scour out the defilements. These include: *Appicchakathaa* — talk favorable to wanting little of the monk's requisites.

*Santu.t.thiikathaa* — talk of contentment with whatever requisites become available and are properly offered according to Dhamma.

*Asa.msaggakathaa* — talk favorable to not mingling together or socializing.

*Pavivekathaa* — talk favorable to seclusion and detachment of body and heart.

*Viriyaarambhakathaa* — talk favorable to strenuous exertion.

*Siilakathaa* — talk favorable to upholding the purity of moral precepts; and to the development of *samadhi* and *wisdom*.<sup>22</sup>

*Vimuttikathaa* — talk favorable to deliverance; and to the clear, penetrative *realization of deliverance*.<sup>23</sup>

These are the subtler aspects of *right speech*. There's no vain talk or gossip here but only serious speech, dedicated to exertion and the utilization of these purifying dhammas.

The fourth path factor was stated as being right action or *right undertaking*.<sup>24</sup> There are those *right actions* that deal with commonplace work and those concerned with the task of Dhamma. Occupations that are not against the law, like farming or trading for example, fall within the bounds of *right undertaking*, and likewise, with the building of

temples and monasteries, or the practice of generosity, morality and the development of the meditation on *loving kindness*.<sup>25</sup> These form another kind of right action.

Walking meditation and sitting in samadhi are also there as *right action*. Every movement of the body, speech and heart is *kamma*, which is action. The body acts, speech verbalizes and the mind deliberates, and it's all action or *kamma*. Actions done by body, speech and heart are called *kamma*. Those correct and proper bodily actions, speech and thoughts are called *right actions*.

*Right action* covers a wide and extensive range and it's up to each individual to work it out and apply it for himself. This is because the world and Dhamma have always been paired together, like the left and right hands of the same person. The world and Dhamma can't be separated — the world has its work, as has Dhamma.

Since the situation and make-up of each person vary, their undertakings cannot all be identical. It's because of this, that lay people and those who have

*gone forth* following the way of Dhamma, have to undertake work that is appropriate to their position.

Don't allow opinions to interfere and conflict with anyone's undertaking; each person will then be able to undertake his or her 'right action'. Each day will then see the world and Dhamma steadily flourishing together because of everyone's mutual contribution and support.

The fifth path factor was stated as being *right livelihood*.<sup>26</sup> One aspect of this is the eating and consuming that is an everyday form of making a living, whether by humans or animals. Catering to feed the heart with emotional objects born of *contact* is another kind of livelihood. The step by step nourishing of the heart with the various levels of Dhamma is another.

Making one's living in a scrupulous manner that accords with Dhamma, without violating the law by actions like robbery and theft, is one form of *right livelihood*. One lives within one's means from day to day. But if things accrue in abundance and through

honest means, then that can also be reckoned as *right livelihood*.

Contact will arise with external objects such as the form, the sound, smell, taste, or touch of man or women. If it suits one's disposition and provides nutriment for the heart with mental and emotional objects that delight and relieve the heart's sadness, then it serves as an elixir of life. However, by pursuing them in the wrong way it becomes poison and devours the heart. This type of *right livelihood* is appropriate for the person in the world who knows the right measure of things, and their suitability and limits.

Sustaining the heart with Dhamma is done by declining to admit entrance to the world's poison to disturb the heart through contact between the sense organs and external objects. Every contact made with forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile and mental objects should always be contemplated in the light of Dhamma. Neither a warm welcome nor a hostile rejection should be allowed, for that would bring hardship for the heart.

A Dhamma-imbued investigation will provide and sustain the heart with the essence of Dhamma; and it will be gladdened and delighted through both the heart's serenity and its wisdom and discernment. There will then be no seeking after poisonous objects that are ruinous for the heart, rather it will be constantly nourished with Dhamma.

In the light of Dhamma, always try to push the investigation of every contact made between the sense organs and the sense objects towards true understanding and emancipation. Never contemplate in a worldly-minded way, for that will be the taking in of fire to burn oneself with, and it can only cause the heart to overheat. Constantly screen and feed the heart only with objects of Dhamma, and this Dhamma essence will nourish the heart, steadily sustaining and protecting it. What I've been talking about here is one more kind of *right livelihood*.

The sixth path factor was stated as being *right exertion*.<sup>27</sup> There are four ways of exertion:

The effort involved in preventing the accumulation of unwholesomeness within one's character and

make up; in getting rid of anything unwholesome that has arisen; in developing and bringing up wholesomeness; and the effort in maintaining that wholesomeness that has already arisen.

These must be *drawn inwards*<sup>28</sup> by applying them to the level of Dhamma that you are actually practicing in, where they will be ready to add to whatever basis of samadhi and wisdom is necessary.

First: Devote yourself to caring for the heart that is so liable to become obsessed and infatuated with the flow of craving. This is based in ignorance and will drag the heart away.

Second: Try to develop precepts, samadhi and wisdom, for these are the *dhammas* capable of rectifying every type of defilement. If you aspire for Nibbana, totally extinguish your burning anxiety.

Third: Don't allow your standard of precepts, samadhi and wisdom to fall back and slip away through negligence. You will need to develop and nourish them to full maturity and to their transmutation into the *supramundane knowledge of the Path*,<sup>29</sup> which erases all defilements, including

those lying latent. The sphere of *Freedom*<sup>30</sup> and *Nibbana*, previously perceived as beyond one's capacity, will arise within the heart the instant all the defilements are cleared out.

The seventh path factor was stated as being *right mindfulness*.<sup>31</sup> This is setting up mindfulness to attend to your exertion. Whatever you fix on as the heart's meditation object — "*Buddho*" or mindfulness of breathing for instance — should be the place where mindfulness is established. If you settle on the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness* — whether as a basis for samadhi or in the development of wisdom — you must constantly have awareness minding and attending to every round of practice. This is one section of right mindfulness.

The eighth path factor was stated as being *right samadhi*, which is the heart rightly and firmly established in calm. This refers to the samadhi that is imbued with wisdom and not that *stump-like samadhi*. Also, it isn't the addictive sort of samadhi that sticks both day and night and is loath to investigate by way of wisdom. That sort of samadhi may seem, in itself, to be an adequately exalted

*dhamma* but wisdom will end up being dismissed as phoney. Samadhi, in this case, is called incorrect or *wrong samadhi*<sup>32</sup> and can't truly deliver one from suffering.

To practice the samadhi that *will* free one from suffering, attention has to be focused on one's selected Dhamma principle or theme, with mindfulness guarding and directing until the heart converges. It doesn't matter too much which class of samadhi this may be — it's the *right or correct samadhi* as long as you feel that the heart has calmed down. It has ceased from concocting amongst the various thought processes, and abides, for a time, singular and distinct from all surrounding conditions, before withdrawing from that state.

This is not the same as that type of samadhi where, once the heart has converged, one loses track of day and night, not knowing if one is alive — and it's as if one is dead.

It is only after the heart has emerged that one starts to wonder about what had happened: "*Was it that the heart converged? Wherever did my mind go?*" This is 'stump-like samadhi' because it resembles a stump

without any consciousness. Try to avoid and quit this type of samadhi, and if you've already fallen for it then you must immediately extricate yourself.

This *stump-like samadhi* is certainly found among those of us who practice. The remedy is to hold back and break the habitual way the heart tends to converge. If one indulges it, then it will always stick with that propensity, so you will have to compel it to break away and 'take a tour' of the body.

Mindfulness needs to be firmly in control, traveling up and around and down and around, over and over again until wisdom, *Path and Fruit* are realized.

The kind of samadhi that is *right* samadhi is that which has mindfulness attending to the state of calm, when the heart has converged into samadhi.

After the heart has emerged again (out of samadhi), the various *natural conditions*<sup>33</sup> found within the body and mind should be investigated with wisdom. Therefore, with the right occasion and appropriate conditions start up the investigation. Samadhi and wisdom are *dhammas* that should always interrelate

and collaborate. Don't allow your samadhi development to drift without giving it the necessary attention.

So, to summarize, one can say that these three *dhammas* — *mindfulness, samadhi and wisdom* — are interrelated and inseparable. They can't move forward alone, for samadhi and wisdom have to take their turns in taking a step, with mindfulness minding and watching over them.

I've discussed these eight path factors partly according to the principles of Dhamma and partly from practical experience. Please note that *right view*, through to *right samadhi*, are formed from *dhammas* of many different levels. It's up to each of you listening here to take them up and apply them in your own practice. How far you can go depends on your Dhamma understanding and ability.

Regardless of whether you're a lay person or have *gone forth*, with commitment you'll be able to practice for the full development of these eight path factors. The fruits of *Freedom*<sup>34</sup> and *knowledge and insight of Freedom*<sup>35</sup> will then become your most valuable possession. This is because precepts,

samadhi and wisdom are integral to this *Path* and they function as the key that clearly reveals these two *Freedom*s to the heart.

Moreover, all of you who practice shouldn't misunderstand and think that *Freedom* and *knowledge of Freedom* are separate from each other or that they perform two different functions. Truly, that's not so.

When a man uses an axe to chop up wood, as soon as the wood is cut through he both sees it with his eyes and at the same instant realizes it in his heart. In the same way, *Freedom and knowledge of Freedom* simultaneously allow the seeing and the knowing that the defilements have been excised from the heart, through using precepts, samadhi and wisdom. Thereafter, there can be no more fussing with problems because all bothersome concerns derive from the conflict between the heart and the defilements.

This is the truly great issue of the three realms of existence. By letting go of the heart, which is the

cardinal problem, the defilements that are lodged there will spontaneously detach themselves.

Furthermore, *sila, samadhi and wisdom, Freedom, and knowledge of Freedom* all remain as they really are. Each side comes to truth, and consequently all the contentious issues come to an end.

Today, I have presented a talk on Dhamma to all of you who practice by highlighting the example of the Lord Buddha and the Noble Disciples. May it serve you as a guide, pointing out the Way so that you can set your compass — your programme of practice — and relentlessly strive to follow the Lord Buddha. Once you have fully developed *sila, samadhi and wisdom*, then *Freedom and knowledge of Freedom*, which is the essence of Nibbana, will undoubtedly be yours.

Therefore, may all of you listening here realize that all these matters are found right here in your body and heart. Please draw Dhamma inwards as your own. Then, both the cultivation of the means and the fruits of *Freedom and Nibbana*, which I have elucidated, will all belong to you, either today or sometime in the future.

May this talk on Dhamma now reach its conclusion.  
*Evam.* Such is the way.

## Notes

1.

This is from an earlier (1962) Dhamma talk given to the monks at Wat Pa Barn Tard. It was a favorite of Khun Pow.

2.

*Saasadaa*

3.

*Saasanaa*

4.

*pi.n.dapaata*

5.

*sakkaro purisan hanti.*

6.

*avijjaa*

7.

*sabhaava dhamma*

8.

*dhammaaramma.na*

9.

*rukhamuula senaasanam*

10.

*sabhaava dhammas*

11.

*sammaa di.t.thi*

12.

*ti-lakkha.na*

13.

*sabhaava dhammas*

14.

*samudaya*

15.

*nirodha*

16.

*sabhaava dhammas*

17.

*sammaa sa.nkappo*

18.

*nekkhamma*

19.

*daana, siila and bhaavanaa*

20.

*cetiyas*

21.

*sammaa vaacaa*

22.

*samaadhikathaa and panyaakathaa*

23.

*vimutti-nyaa.nadassanakathaa*

24.

*sammaa kammanto*

25.

*mettaa*

26.

*sammaa aajiivo*

27.

*sammaa vaayaamo*

28.

*opanayiko*

29.

*magga nyaa.na*

30.

*Vimutti*

31.

*sammaa sati*

32.

*micchaa samaadhi*

33.

*sabhaava dhammas*

34.

*Vimutti*

35.

*Vimutti Nyaa.nadassana*

## **Epilogue**

Mrs. Pow-panga Vathanakul died on September 11th, 1976. She had asked her husband, Mr. Vai Vathanakul, to keep her funeral rites simple and to cremate the body within a few days. (This is the ideal for those who practice Dhamma.) But when the time came her own family insisted on the customary Thai funeral.

Khun Vai, for his part, put together a book to give to family and friends at the funeral. Memorial books are customary on such occasions but Khun Pow had rather preempted this by already distributing, when she was ill, some Dhamma books that she had had printed. Khun Vai, however, produced his book with the idea of it being a 'case study'. Four of the Dhamma talks translated above came from this book, and it seems worthwhile here to mention some of the other points that Khun Vai brought together. In many ways they are also highly relevant to Buddhists outside Thailand, living under modern conditions.

Relatives and friends contributed a section about Khun Pow's life and career:

She was born in 1925 in Bangkok and studied there, entering the Accountancy Department of Chulalongkorn University. However, poor health (resulting from a thyroid condition) forced her to cut short her course after only two years. She went out to work for an insurance company in 1946, and was one of the first staff of the newly established firm. Business conditions were difficult in those early days but Khun Pow worked her way up so that in 1948 she was made Secretary to the Board.

The company sent her (and Khun Vai) on study tours abroad to other insurance companies, in India and Europe, and for six months in the U.S.A. The American insurance managers were highly impressed with her "excellent judgment... in underwriting problems..." and considered her "... an unusually capable woman and apt scholar..." (There is even a photograph of her in the men-only executive dining-room of a very large German insurance company, being the second woman to have broken that barrier.)

In 1958, she was made General Manager of the company. Nine years later she stepped down from

that post — although staying on as Secretary to the Board — so that she would have more time for Dhamma practice. At that time the company had more than 400 employees with another 400 insurance agents. When, in 1975, she fully retired she had been with the company for almost thirty years, having overseen a large part of the company's growth. She now turned more to concentrate on Dhamma.

In the company she had been renowned for her hard work and discipline, and had expected the same from her workers. She was also known for her care and helpfulness. This is perhaps made evident by the gathering of over a thousand former colleagues and co-workers who came to pay their final respects at her funeral rites. (It had been formally announced in the newspaper as per custom, although no invitations had been sent out to all those individuals.)

Another section concerns Khun Pow's Dhamma practice:

In 1957 Khun Pow started to visit Bangkok monasteries to listen to sermons and join in the meditation. When, for health reasons, she retired from being General Manager she had more time for her Dhamma studies, and a scholar monk at a major

Bangkok monastery was designated by the abbot to teach her the third, and then second grade General Dhamma studies. (And she was the only person who managed to pass the second grade examination, at the monastery that year.)

In 1970 a friend gave Khun Pow a Dhamma book about the meditation masters in the North east of Thailand. She was deeply impressed and when one of them, the Ven. Acharn Maha Boowa, visited Bangkok she went to pay her respects and asked permission to go and stay at Wat Pa Bahn Tahd. On first going to a jungle monastery she found herself too frightened to come out of her room at night, but after listening to the Dhamma teaching she became determined to return every few months to practice. She also decided not to go for her grade one General Dhamma (book) studies, but to concentrate on putting those studies into practice.

Khun Pow, with Khun Vai's agreement, started to keep the Eight Precepts on the Observance Days. When business pressures — guests from abroad for instance — made this difficult, she would simply keep them on another day. To help make such days more suitable for meditation practice at home, one upstairs room was set aside and dubbed '*Ekasatarn*'.

(Meaning 'a place to be alone', and also sounding as if it is the name of a monastery.) Any disturbing telephone calls could then be deflected with the news that, 'Khun Pow had gone to *'Ekasatarn'*. Khun Pow's friends would then assume that she had gone to the monastery, and there would be no need to lie about Khun Pow 'not being at home'.

In 1971, Khun Pow thought back upon the help given to her by her teacher in Dhamma studies, the scholar monk in the central Bangkok monastery, and offered to sponsor his further (M.A.) studies at the Banares University in India. (Since that time, this monk has become one of the most well known scholars in Thailand.)

By 1974 Khun Pow was spending much more time away in the north eastern meditation monasteries, and decided that the following year she would spend the whole of the three month Rains Retreat period up there. Back home, a small hut had been made in the garden, beneath a tree and with a view of the nearby pond. That was where she retired to, for she was now regularly keeping the Eight Precepts. She and Khun Vai decided that it was also time for her to fully retire from the company, which she did in

1975, and she was then ready to go on the three month's retreat that year.

Khun Pow had always been bedeviled with health problems that resulted in many stays in hospital. These included operations on the womb, the gall bladder and the breast. This last treatment concluded with radiation therapy that seemed to clear things up in 1975. However, that July, when she was already settled in the monastery for the Rains Retreat, she met a fellow devotee who was also a doctor. The doctor noticed that Khun Pow's eyes were yellow (with jaundice?) and so advised her quickly to go to Bangkok for treatment.

Eventually, after many tests and a final bone biopsy, it was confirmed that this time the cancer had penetrated to the bone marrow, and that no further treatment was possible. When Khun Pow knew that the cancer was terminal, she asked permission to go and practice Dhamma at Wat Pa Bahn Tahd. She arrived there in October and Ven. Acharn Maha Boowa gave her a Dhamma talk virtually every evening, for over 130 days. Other devotees were also staying there with her, one being a lady doctor, and when her condition made it necessary to be nearer the hospital she returned to Bangkok.

When Khun Pow was home again, she and Khun Vai decided that they would be fellow Dhamma farers, rather than husband and wife. She asked him to help remind her about Dhamma, to awaken her mindfulness, in the coming days. Khun Vai therefore prepared some appropriate Dhamma verses and set himself the task of giving as much spiritual support as he could. He was able to sit with her and prayed and meditated. When Khun Pow could not read anymore, he would read aloud and tape some of the important Dhamma teachings for her to listen and meditate on.

Khun Pow went into a semi-coma, but when she became more conscious, Khun Vai was there to repeat some words of Dhamma. He then thought a better way would be to use the original voices, by using a tape machine. So he arranged tapes of the morning and evening chanting (that Khun Pow had always recited and found so inspiring); and a tape of the final Dhamma talk — the farewell night — that Khun Pow had listened to at Wat Pa Bahn Tahd. There were also tapes of Dhamma chants and verses that Khun Pow particularly liked: such as *The First Sermon* of the Lord Buddha, the *Turning of the Dhamma Wheel*, with its explanation about the Four

Noble Truths. And the *Discourse on the Highest Blessing*.

By the time that Khun Vai had arranged the tapes, Khun Pow's condition was obviously deteriorating. The oxygen tubes that she had resolutely refused and pushed away, wanting to be left unencumbered in her final moments, had now been reinserted by the nurses. This showed for certain that she had to be unconscious. Khun Vai started a cycle of tapes and within a few moments Khun Pow's hands were lifted together in *anyjali*, the traditional gesture of respect and veneration. The hands fell back... and were then raised again, palms together, over the heart. Khun Vai was delighted with this sign that the Dhamma was penetrating, even though Khun Pow was in a coma. He, therefore, arranged for the tapes to be continually interchanged using two machines. The *Turning of the Dhamma Wheel* sounded, with words about the heart of one who practices, how knowledge and light arise, and how by going beyond all attachment there is the Undying Dhamma.

Khun Pow appeared calm but her breathing became irregular. Khun Vai sat close by and quietly meditated; and as her breathing faltered he asked everyone in the room to stay still and not to cry, and

for nobody else to come in. As they meditated, the sound of the breathing gradually diminished. And was still.

Khun Vai collected all the above to be a 'case study' about an ordinary person taking up the practice of Dhamma. (And it should not be too difficult for westerners to relate to someone like Khun Pow.) Khun Vai himself is something of a 'case study' too. He was Khun Pow's business colleague throughout, successfully overcame a major cancer operation and, more to the point, is a devout Christian.

It's said that Khun Vai would accompany Khun Pow to the Buddhist monastery and everyone who didn't know would think he was a Buddhist too. It was much the same when Khun Pow (occasionally) went with Khun Vai to church. Religion for him is not just Christianity, for he sees much value in Dhamma and fully supported his wife in her practice. With his wife's death he was keenly aware that both faiths are concerned with suffering — death and separation from the person one loves — and how to deal with that truth.

Khun Vai has been a leading member of the YMCA — he's now President Emeritus of the YMCA in Bangkok — and has addressed various international

meetings, often concerning his understanding of religion. He has spoken about how he sees a similarity between Christianity and Buddhism. On the basic level, he compares the Buddhist *generosity* and *moral precepts*, with the Christian *Commandments* and *love*. Or "*Love in action for all faiths and beliefs.*" Then he says, "Whereas for spiritual higher attainment, we have to leave to each person depending on his or her belief to pursue."

It is now fifteen years since Khun Pow's death, yet the Dhamma Teachings she received and practiced are still available to those who want to develop their own 'case study'.

## **Glossary**

The language used in these talks is that of Forest Dhamma. This means that apart from some *Paali* quotations — usually taken from the chants that many of the listeners would be familiar with, and most of the monks would have learned by heart — it is usually ordinary Thai. Many Thai words are rooted in *Paali* and this can be seen in their spelling. However, both the present pronunciation and the meaning of the word have often been transformed. Forest Dhamma, therefore, should not be treated as

if it was classical *Paali*, and scholars should beware of trying to track definitions through the text. It's important to remember that this is an oral teaching, which afterwards was warmed-up between pages.

Acharn (Thai); aacariya (Pali):  
(meditation) teacher.

Akaaliko:

not delayed; timeless. A quality of Dhamma.

Akusala:

In Pali it means unwholesome, demeritorious. It is part of a piece ritually chanted at funerals and therefore is given another Forest Dhamma meaning: un-clever, unskilled. See *kusala*.

Amata:

the deathless state; the Undying; *Nibbaana*;  
immortal; ambrosia.

Anaagaamii:

a never-returner; non-returner. See *Ariya*.

Appanaa:

See *Samaadhi*.

Arahant:

worthy one; one who has attained *Nibbaana*. See *Ariya*.

Ariya:

Noble One. It has four stages, with Path (*magga*) and Fruit (*phala*) for each stage: *Sotaapanna*; *Sakadaagami*; *Anaagami*; *Arahant*.

Arom (Thai); aaramma.na:

(Pali): The original Pali means: sense-objects; an object of consciousness. Modern Thai: mood, temper, spirits, disposition. In this work it is an important term and is translated as: preoccupation, mood, emotional object, object.

Attaa:

self; soul; ego; personal entity. (contrast *anattaa*.)

Mind; the whole personality, as in the phrase from the *Dhammapada*: "*Attaa hi attano naatho, kohi naatho paro siyaa?*". This is concerned with *attaadhipateyya*, which is self-dependence and self-reliance, and a central theme of these Dhamma talks.

Avijjaa:

ignorance; nescience; lack of knowledge; delusion.

Bahn:

(Thai): village.

Bahp (Thai); paapa:

(Pali): evil, wrong action; demerit; bad; base; wicked. (contrast *boon*.)

Bhaavanaa:

heart/mind development; meditation.

Boon (Thai); punya:

(Pali): merit; meritorious (-action); virtue; righteousness; good works; good. (contrast *bahp.*)

Brahmacariya:

the Holy life; religious life; strict chastity.

Buddha:

the Awakened One; Enlightened One.

Buddho:

often used as a meditation word ('mantra')

"*Buddho...* ", being the recollection of Buddha. (See *kamma.t.thaana.*)

Citta:

(Pali); *Chit, chit-chai* (Thai): heart; mind. A central term. In *To the Last Breath* it is usually translated as 'heart', while in *Directions for Insight* it is more often 'mind'. (In fact it is more like 'heart-mind'.) For similar usage in the *Suttas* see: *Mano, Citta, Vinyaa.na; R. Johansson; University of Ceylon Review. Peredeniya. Vol. 23. 1965.*

Daana:

giving; alms-giving; charity; generosity; benevolence. See Appendix.

Dhamma:

the Teachings (of the Buddha); the Truth; the Supramundane; virtue. dhamma: thing; phenomenon; nature; condition.

Dhaatu:

an element; natural condition; earth, water, fire and air.

Di.t.thi:

view; opinion; (often) wrong view.

Dosa:

hatred; anger; ill-will; aversion.

Dukkha:

suffering. See *Noble Truths*.

Ehipassiko:

inviting to come and see; inviting inspection. An attribute of Dhamma.

Kamma.t.thaana:

subjects of meditation; the act of meditation. The subjects often mentioned in this book are:

*Buddhaanussati* — recollection of the Buddha; contemplation on the virtues of the Buddha.

*Kaayagataasati* — mindfulness occupied with the body; contemplation on the 32 impure parts of the body.

*Anaapaanasati* — mindfulness on breathing.

(For more see *A. I. 30,41; Vism. 197.*) It is also

sometimes used as a general term describing the way of practice of meditation monks in N.E. Thailand.

Khandha:

aggregate; category. Usually the Five Aggregates: *ruupa; vedanaa; sanyaa; sa.nkhaara; vinyaa.na.*

Khun:

(Thai): The equivalent of Mr., Mrs., or Ms.

Kilesa:

defilements; impurities; impairments. These include: greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, wrong view, doubt or uncertainty, sloth, restlessness, shamelessness, lack of moral concern.

Kusala:

wholesome; meritorious; moral; skillful. It is part of a piece ritually chanted at funerals and therefore is given another Forest Dhamma meaning: clever, skilled. See *akusala*.

Magga:

the Path; the Way. See *Noble Truths*.

Maagha-puuja:

Worship on the Full-Moon Day of the third lunar month in commemoration of the Great Assembly of Disciples.

Ma.ngala (Sutta):

auspicious; (the thirty-eight) blessings.

Maara:

the Evil One; Death; the Tempter; Defilements personified.

Mettaa:

loving-kindness, friendliness, goodwill.

Moha:

delusion; ignorance; dullness.

Naama:

mind; name; mental factors; mentality. See *ruupa*.

Nyaa.na:

knowledge; wisdom; insight.

Nyaa.nadassana:

knowing and seeing, perfect knowledge; vision through wisdom.

Nekkhamma:

renunciation; letting go; giving up the world; self-denial.

Nibbaana:

the extinction of the fires of greed, of hatred and of ignorance; the extinction of all defilements and suffering; the Unconditioned.

Nirodha:

cessation. See Noble Truths.

Niivara.na:

the (five) hindrances; obstacles.

Noble Truths:

*Dukkha*: suffering; misery; woe; discontent; anguish; anxiety; pain. *Samudaya*: the Cause, Origin or Source of Suffering; *Nirodha*: the Cessation or Extinction of Suffering. *Magga*: the Path; the Way; the Noble Eightfold Path.

Opanayiko:

worthy of inducing in and by one's own mind; worthy of realizing; to be tried by practice; leading onward. An attribute of Dhamma.

Paali:

the language of the texts of the Theravada Canon.

Panyaa:

(Pali/Thai): wisdom. Often coupled with mindfulness. See sati.

Paaramii:

(the ten) Perfections; stages of spiritual perfection on the path to Awakening.

Parikamma:

(Pali: preliminary action, preparation.) Thai: preparatory meditation, such as the (silent) repetition of "Buddho".

Parinibbaana:

the Final Passing Away of the Lord Buddha; final release.

Pariyatti:

the Scriptures; study of them; the Teachings to be studied.

Patipatti:

putting into practice.

Pativedha:

penetration; realization; insight.

Pa.tisandhi-vinyaa.na:

relinking; rebirth; reunion; conception.

Phala:

fruit; result; consequence; effect. See *magga*.

Pi.n.dapaata:

food received in the alms-bowl (of a Bhikkhu); alms- gathering; to go on an almsround.

Puujaa:

worship (external and mental); honor; veneration; devotional offering.

Puthujjana:

a worldling; worldly person; ordinary person. As opposed to *ariya*.

Ruupa:

matter; form; material; body; shape; corporeality.

See *naama*.

Sabhaava dhamma:

principle of nature; natural condition; natural phenomenon.

Sacca (-Dhamma):

truth, truthfulness; Truth.

Saddhaa:

faith; confidence.

Sakadaagaamii:

a once-returner. See *ariya*.

Sakkaaya-di.t.thi:

(the delusion of) self-view; belief in a personal self.

Samaadhi:

concentration; one-pointedness of mind; the condition of mind when focused, centered and still.

Sama.na:

recluse; holy one; a Buddhist monk.

Sammati; Sammuti:

(Thai/Pali): conventional; mundane; supposed; assumed; generally accepted.

Samudaya:

Cause. See *Noble Truth*.

Sa.myojana:

(the ten) Fetters (that bind to the round of rebirth).

Sa.ngha (Saavaka Sa.ngha):

(the noble) community, one of the Three Jewels; the Order.

Sa.nkappo:

thought.

Sankhaara:

determinations; compounded things; mental formations (see Khandha). In Forest Dhamma this is the processing, concocting and fabricating of thoughts.

Sanyaa:

perception; idea; ideation; (see Khandha). In Forest Dhamma this is the aspect of remembering (past perceptions).

Sara.na:

refuge; help; protection; guide; remembrance.

Saranagamana:

taking refuge (in the Three Jewels); going for refuge.

Saasada:

(Thai), *Satthu* (Pali): the Master; the Great Teacher (the Lord Buddha).

Saasana:

teaching; message; doctrine; a religion.

Sati:

mindfulness; awareness; attentiveness. In Forest Dhamma it is often coupled with wisdom (*panyaa*).

(In Thai common usage sati-panya means: intelligence; intellect.)

Saavaka:

a (noble) disciple; hearer; follower.

Siila:

virtue; morality; moral conduct; a precept; training rule. See Appendix.

Sotaapanna:

a stream-enterer; one who has attained the first stage of *Ariya*.

Sugato:

Well-gone; Well-farer; sublime. An epithet of Buddha.

Sukha:

happiness; ease; joy; comfort; pleasure; physical or bodily happiness or ease. As opposed to *dukkha*.

Sutta:

a discourse from the Pali canon.

Svaakkhaata:

well-taught; well proclaimed. An attribute of Dhamma.

Ta.nhaa:

craving; desire; thirst.

Tapa:

exertion; ascetic practice; (burning out).

Tathaagata:

the Accomplished One; the Thus-come; the Thus-gone. An epithet of the Lord Buddha. Sometimes used as a pronoun when the Lord Buddha is quoted as saying something himself.

Ti-lakkha.na:

The Three Characteristics, Marks or Signs; also called the Common Characteristics, viz., impermanence, suffering and not-self.

Upaadaana:

attachment; clinging; grasping; holding.

Uposatha:

Observance Day (for the monks).

Va.t.ta (-cakka):

the round of rebirth, of existences; (the cycle or wheel of rebirth).

Vedanaa:

feeling. See *Khandha*.

Vimutti (-nyaanadassana):

deliverance; release; liberation; freedom; (knowledge of that deliverance).

Vinyaa.na:

consciousness. See *Khandha*.

Viriya:

effort; energy; vigour; endeavor; exertion.

Visuddhi:

purity; purification.

Wat:

(Thai): a monastery.

## **Appendix: The Gradual Teaching**

As this book is mainly concerned with meditation, here are some *Sutta* passages with descriptions of generosity (*daana*) and moral precepts (*siila*).

*Daana*: Generosity

In contrast to the modern emphasis on consuming and possessing, the Lord Buddha spoke of the virtue of giving and being content with whatever one has. There are always circumstances where one can give. For instance, one can offer one's time, help and sympathy. And one can forgive.

If one has wealth, he explained the use of possessions; the benefits which one should get from wealth; reasons for earning and having wealth:

- i) to make oneself, one's parents, children, wife, servants and workmen happy and live in comfort.
- ii) to share this happiness and comfort with one's friends.

iii) to make oneself secure against all misfortunes.

iv) to make the fivefold offering:

to relatives, by giving help to them.

to guests, by receiving them.

to the departed, by dedicating merit to them.

to the king, (i.e., to the government) by paying taxes and duties and so on.

to the deities, i.e., those beings who are worshipped according to one's faith.

v) to support those monks and spiritual teachers who lead a pure and diligent life.

(A.III.45)

*Sappurisa Daana*: Gifts of a good man

i) to give clean things.

ii) to give choice things.

iii) to give at fitting times.

iv) to give suitable things.

v) to give with discretion.

vi) to give repeatedly or regularly.

vii) to calm one's mind on giving.

viii) to be glad after giving.

(A.IV.243)

*Siila*: Precepts

The basic guidelines for the actions and speech of any Buddhist can be appreciated by anyone, of any religion or none. There is no dogma involved; it is a plain and simple way of living without harming or hurting any creature.

The other feature to bear in mind is that it is accepted voluntarily by the individual. This is not something that one is commanded to receive. It is the individual's volition that changes a list of precepts into a way of living. With that change, the appreciation and mindfulness of one's actions and speech become more subtle and which automatically leads on to meditation.

There are the basic Five Precepts and these become more refined with the Eight Precepts. Everyone who listened to the original Dhamma talks (in this book) would be keeping (at least temporarily) the Eight Precepts.

These Precepts can be received by simply saying:

"I undertake the training rule/precept..."

i) to abstain from taking life.

ii) to abstain from taking what is not given.

- \*iii) to abstain from sexual misconduct.
- iv) to abstain from false speech.
- v) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness."
- \*iii) "to abstain from unchastity.
- vi) to abstain from untimely eating.
- vii) to abstain from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows, from wearing garlands, smartening with scents, and embellishment with unguents.
- viii) to abstain from the use of high and large luxurious couches."

*[Taken from the Dictionary of Buddhism, compiled by Ven. Phra Debvedi (Prayudh Payutto), Bangkok, B.E. 2528 (1985)]*

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▲Note: Some editorial changes have been made, in the above text by inserting some punctuation marks and missing words in the syntax to standardize the grammar, while at the same time, being careful to avoid changing any intended meanings.

This same editorial policy has been used in the texts which follow.

Let's, now, see how the Venerable Acharn Maha Boowa's talks read in the hands of a different translator.

# **Straight from the Heart**

**Thirteen Talks on the Practice of Meditation  
by**

**Venerable Acariya Maha Boowa Ñanasampanno**

Translated from the Thai by Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
© 1994–2009

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## **Introduction**

These talks — except for the two marked otherwise — were originally given for the benefit of Mrs. Pow Panga Vathanakul, a follower of Venerable Acariya Maha Boowa who had contracted cancer of the bone marrow and had come to practice meditation at Wat Pa Baan Taad in order to contend with the pain of the disease and the fact of her approaching death. All in all, she stayed at Wat Pa Baan Taad for 102 days, from November 9, 1975 to February 19, 1976; during that period Venerable Acariya Maha Boowa gave 84 impromptu talks for her benefit, all of which were tape recorded.

After her death in September, 1976, one of her friends, M.R. Sermsri Kasemsri, asked permission of the Venerable Acariya to transcribe the talks and print them in book form. Seventy-seven of the talks, plus an additional eight talks given on other occasions, were thus printed in two massive volumes together totaling more than 1,000 pages. Six talks from these two volumes have already been translated into English and published in a book entitled *Amata Dhamma*.

The talks in the present collection all deal with the practice of meditation, and particularly with the development of discernment. Because their style of presentation is personal and impromptu, they will probably be best understood if read in conjunction with a more systematic introduction to the techniques of meditation, such as the Venerable Acariya's own book,

*Wisdom Develops Samadhi*, which is available separately [on the Internet] or as part of the volume, *Forest Dhamma*.

The title of the present book is taken from a request, frequently made by the Venerable Acariya to his listeners, that his teachings be taken to heart, because they come straight from the heart.

*Thanissaro Bhikkhu*  
*Rayong*  
*June, 1987*

In these talks, as in Thai usage in general, the words 'heart' and 'mind' are used interchangeably.

## **The Language of the Heart**

The Venerable Acariya Mun taught that all hearts have the same language. No matter what one's language or nationality, the heart has nothing but simple awareness, which is why he said that all hearts have the same language. When a thought arises, we understand it, but when we put it into words, it has to become this or that language, so that we don't really understand one another.

The feelings within the heart, though, are the same for everyone. This is why the Dhamma fits the heart perfectly, because the Dhamma isn't any particular language. The Dhamma is the language of the heart. The Dhamma resides with the heart.

Pleasure and pain reside with the heart. The acts that create pleasure and pain are thought-up by the heart. The heart is what knows the results that appear as pleasure and pain; and the heart is burdened with the outcome of its own thoughts.

This is why the heart and the Dhamma fit perfectly. No matter what our language or nationality, we can all understand the Dhamma because the heart and the Dhamma are a natural pair.

The heart forms the core within the body. It's the core, the substance, the primary essence within the body. It's the basic foundation. The conditions that arise from the mind, such as thought-formations, appear and vanish, again and again. Here I'm referring to the rippling of the mind. When the mind ripples, that's the formation of a thought. Labels, which deal with conjecturing, memorizing, and

recognizing, are termed *sañña*. 'Long' thoughts are *sañña*; short thoughts are *sankhara*. In other words, when a thought forms — 'blip' — that's a *sankhara*. *Sañña* refers to labeling and recognizing. *Viññana* refers to the act of taking note when anything external comes and makes contact with the senses, as when visible forms make contact with the eye and cognition results. All of these things are constantly arising and vanishing of their own accord, and so the Buddha called them *khandhas*.

Each 'heap' or 'group' is called a *khandha*. These five heaps of *khandhas* are constantly arising and vanishing all the time.

Even arahants have these same conditions — just like ordinary people everywhere — the only difference being that the arahants' *khandhas* are *khandhas* pure and simple, without any defilements giving them orders, making them do this or think that. Instead, their *khandhas* think out of their own free nature, with nothing forcing them to think this or that, unlike the minds of ordinary people in general.

To make a comparison, the *khandhas* of ordinary people are like prisoners, constantly being ordered about. Their various thoughts, labels, assumptions, and interpretations have something that orders and forces them to appear, making them think, assume, and interpret in this way or that. In other words, they have defilements as their boss, their leader, ordering them to appear.

Arahants, however, don't. When a thought forms, it simply forms. Once it forms, it simply disappears. There's no seed to continue it, no seed to weigh the mind down, because there's nothing to force it, unlike the *khandhas* governed by defilements or under the leadership of defilements. This is where the difference lies.

But their basic nature is the same: All the *khandhas* we have mentioned are inconstant (*aniccam*). In other words, instability and changeability are a regular part of their nature, beginning with the *rupa khandha*, our body, and the *vedana khandha*, feelings of pleasure, pain, and indifference. These things appear and vanish, again and again. *Sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* are also always in a state of

appearing and vanishing as a normal part of their nature.

But as for actual awareness — which forms the basis of our knowledge of the various things that arise and vanish — *that doesn't vanish*. We can say that the mind can't vanish. We can say that the mind can't arise. A mind that has been purified thus has no more problems concerning the birth and death of the body and the *khandhas*; and thus there is no more birth here and there, appearing in crude forms such as individuals or as living beings, for those whose minds have been purified.

But those whose minds are not purified: They are the ones who take birth and die, setting their sights on cemeteries without end, all because of this undying mind.

This is why the Lord Buddha taught the world, and in particular the world of human beings, who know right and wrong, good and evil; who know how to foster the one and remedy the other; who understand the language of the Dhamma he taught.

This is why he taught the human world above and beyond the other worlds: so that we could try to remedy the things that are harmful and detrimental, removing them from our thoughts, words, and deeds; try to nourish and foster whatever goodness we might already have, and give rise to whatever goodness we don't yet have.

He taught us to foster and develop the goodness we already have, so as to nourish the heart, giving it refreshment and well-being, giving it a standard of quality, or goodness, so that when it leaves its present body to head for whatever place or level of being, this mind that has been constantly nourished with goodness will be a good mind.

Wherever it fares, it will fare well. Wherever it takes birth, it will be born well. Wherever it lives, it will live well. It will keep on experiencing well-being and happiness until it gains the capacity, the potential, the accumulation of merit it has developed progressively from the past into the present — in other words, yesterday is today's past, today is tomorrow's past, all of which are days in which we have fostered and developed goodness step by step

— to the point where the mind has the firm strength and ability, from the supporting power of this goodness, that enables it to pass over and gain release.

Such a mind has no more birth, not even in the most quiet or refined levels of being that contain any latent traces of conventional reality (*sammatti*) — namely, birth and death as we currently experience it. Such a mind goes completely beyond all such things. Here I'm referring to the minds of the Buddhas and of the arahants.

There's a story about Ven. Vangisa that has a bearing on this. Ven. Vangisa, when he was a layman, was very talented in divining the level of being in which the mind of a dead person was reborn — no matter who the person was. You couldn't quite say he was a fortuneteller. Actually, he was more a master of psychic skills. When anyone died, he would take that person's skull and knock on it — knock! knock! knock! — focus his mind, and then know that this person was reborn there, that person was reborn here. If the person was reborn in hell or in heaven, as a common animal or a hungry ghost,

he could tell in every case, without any hesitation. All he needed was to knock on the skull.

When he heard his friends say that the Buddha was many times more talented than this, he wanted to expand on his knowledge. So he went to the Buddha's presence to ask for further training in this science. When he reached the Buddha, the Buddha gave him the skull of an arahant to knock on.

'All right, see if you can tell where he was reborn.'

Ven. Vangisa knocked on the skull and listened.

Silence.

He knocked again and listened.

Silence.

He thought for a moment.

Silence.

He focused his mind.

Silence.

He couldn't see where the owner of the skull was reborn. At his wit's end, he confessed frankly that he didn't know where the arahant was reborn.

At first, Ven. Vangisa had thought himself talented and smart, and had planned to challenge the Buddha

before asking for further training. But when he reached the Buddha, the Buddha gave him the skull of an arahant to knock on — and right there he was stymied. So now he genuinely wanted further training. Once he had further training, he'd really be something special.

This being the way things stood, he asked to study with the Buddha. So the Buddha taught him the science, taught him the method — in other words, the science of the Dhamma. Ven. Vangisa practiced and practiced until finally he attained arahantship. From then on he was no longer interested in knocking on anyone's skull except for his own. Once he had known clearly, that was the end of the matter. This is called 'knocking on the right skull.'

Once the Buddha had brought up the topic of the mind that doesn't experience rebirth — the skull of one whose mind was purified — no matter how many times Ven. Vangisa knocked on it, he couldn't know where the mind was reborn, even though he had been very talented before, *for the place of a pure mind's rebirth cannot be found.*

The same was true in the case of Ven. Godhika: This story should serve as quite some food for thought. Ven. Godhika went to practice meditation, made progress step by step, but then regressed. They say this happened six times. After the seventh time, he took a razor to slash his throat — he was so depressed — but then came to his senses, contemplated the Dhamma, and became an arahant at the last minute. That's the story in brief. When he died, Mara's hordes searched for his spirit. To put it simply, they stirred up a storm, but couldn't tell where he had been reborn.

So the Lord Buddha said, 'No matter how much you dig or search or investigate to find the spirit of our son, Godhika, who has completely finished his task, you won't be able to find it — even if you turn the world upside down — because such a task lies beyond the scope of conventional reality.' How could they possibly find it? *It's beyond the capacity of people with defilements to know the power of an arahant's mind.*

In the realm of convention, there is no one who can trace the path of an arahant's mind, because an

arahant lies beyond convention, even though his is a mind just the same. Think about it: Even our stumbling and crawling mind, when it is continually cleansed without stop, without ceasing, without letting perseverance lag, will gradually become more and more refined until it reaches the limit of refinement.

Then the refinement will disappear — because refinement is a matter of conventional reality — leaving a nature of solid gold, or solid Dhamma, called a pure mind. We too will then have no more problems, just like the arahants, because our mind will have become a superlative mind, just like the minds of those who have already gained release.

All minds of this sort are the same, with no distinction between women and men, which is simply a matter of sex or convention. With the mind, there is no distinction between women and men, and, thus, both women and men have the same capacity in the area of the Dhamma. Both are capable of attaining the various levels of Dhamma all the way to release.

There are no restrictions that can be imposed in this area. All that is needed is that we develop enough ability and potential, and then we can all go beyond.

For this reason, we should all make an effort to train our hearts and minds. At the very least, we should get the mind to attain stillness and peace with any of the meditation themes that can lull it into a state of calm, giving rise to peace and well-being within it. For example, mindfulness of breathing, which is one of the primary themes in meditation circles, seems to suit the temperaments of more people than any other theme. But whatever the theme, take it as a governing principle, a refuge, a mainstay for the mind, putting it into practice within your own mind so as to attain rest and peace.

When the mind begins to settle down, we will begin to see its essential nature and worth. We will begin to see what the heart is and how it is. In other words, when the mind gathers all of its currents into a single point, as simple awareness within itself, *this is what is called the 'mind' (citta)*.

The gathering in of the mind occurs on different levels, corresponding to the mind's ability and to the different stages of its refinement. Even if the mind is still on a crude level, we can nevertheless know it when it gathers inwardly. When the mind becomes more and more refined, we will know its refinement — 'This mind is refined... This mind is radiant... This mind is extremely still... This mind is something extremely amazing' — more and more, step by step, this very same mind!

In cleansing and training the mind for the sake of stillness; in investigating, probing, and solving the problems of the mind with discernment (*pañña*) — which is the way of making the mind progress, or of enabling us to reach the truth of the mind, step by step, through the means already mentioned — no matter how crude the mind may be, don't worry about it.

If we get down to making the effort and persevere continually with what diligence and persistence we have, that crudeness will gradually fade away and vanish. Refinement will gradually appear through our own actions or our own striving until we are able

to go beyond and gain release by slashing the defilements to bits. This holds true for all of us, men and women alike.

But while we aren't yet able to do so, we shouldn't be anxious. All that is asked is that we make the mind principled so that it can be a refuge and a mainstay for itself.

As for this body, we've been relying on it ever since the day we were born. This is something we all can know. We've made it live, lie down, urinate, defecate, work, make a living. We've used it, and it has used us. We order it around, and it orders us around. For instance, we've made it work, and it has made us suffer with aches here and pains there, so that we have to search for medicine to treat it. It's the one that hurts, and it's the one that searches for medicine. It's the one that provides the means. And so we keep supporting each other back and forth in this way.

It's hard to tell who is in charge, the body or us. We can order it around part of the time, but it orders us around all the time. Illness, hunger, thirst,

sleepiness: These are all nothing but a heap of suffering and stress in which the body orders us around, and orders us from every side.

We can order it around only a little bit, so when the time is right for us to give the orders, we should make it meditate.

So. Get to work. As long as the body is functioning normally, then no matter how much or how heavy the work may be, get right to it. But if the body isn't functioning normally, if you're ill, you need to be conscious of what it can take. As for the mind, though, keep up the effort within, unflaggingly, because it's your essential duty.

You've depended on the body for a long time. Now that it's wearing down, know that it's wearing down — which parts still work, which parts no longer work. You're the one in charge and you know it full well, so make whatever compromises you should.

But as for the heart, which isn't ill along with the body, it should step-up its efforts within, so that it won't lack the benefits it should gain. Make the mind have standards and be principled — principled in its

living, principled in its dying. Wherever it's born, make it have good principles and satisfactory standards.

What they call 'merit' (*puñña*) won't betray your hopes or expectations. It will provide you with satisfactory circumstances at all times, in keeping with the fact that you've accumulated the merit — the well-being — that all the world wants and of which no one has enough. In other words, what the world wants is well-being, whatever the sort, and in particular the well-being of the mind that will arise step by step from having done things, such as meditation, which are noble and good.

This is the well-being that forms a core or an important essence within the heart. We should strive, then, while the body is still functioning, for when life comes to an end, nothing more can be done. No matter how little or how much we have accomplished, we must stop at that point. We stop our work, put it aside, and then reap its rewards — there, in the next life. Whatever we should be capable of doing, we do. If we can go beyond or

gain release, that's the end of every problem. There will then be nothing to involve us in any turmoil.

Here I've been talking about the mind because the mind is the primary issue. That which will make us fare well or badly, meet with pleasure or pain, is nothing else but the mind.

As for what they call bad *kamma*, it lies within the mind that has made it. Whether or not you can remember, these seeds — which lie within the heart — can't be prevented from bearing fruit, because they are rooted in the mind. You have to accept your *kamma*. Don't find fault with it. Once it's done, it's done, so how can you find fault with it?

The hand writes and so the hand must erase. You have to accept it like a good sport. This is the way it is with *kamma* until you can gain release — which will be the end of the problem.

### **The Marvel of the Dhamma**

Those who practice the Dhamma will begin to know the Dhamma or to gain a feel for the Dhamma in the area of meditation more markedly than in other

areas, and more extensively. For example, the gratification that comes from being generous is moving in one way; the gratification that comes from maintaining the precepts is moving in another way; the feelings of gratification that come from the different forms of goodness are moving in their own separate ways. This is called finding gratification in skillfulness.

But all of these feelings of gratification converge in the practice of meditation. We begin to feel moved from the moment the mind begins to grow still, when the heart gathers its currents together to stand solely on its own.

Even though we may not yet obtain a great deal of stillness from the inward gathering of the mind, we still find ourselves gratified within, in a way which we can clearly sense.

If the mind or the Dhamma were a material object, there wouldn't be anyone in the world who wouldn't respect the religion, because the goodness, the well-being, and the marvels that arise from the religion

and from the practicing in line with the teachings of the religion are things desired the world over.

Goodness, well-being, marvels: These are things the world has always desired from time immemorial — with a desire that has never lost its taste — and they are things that will always be desired until the world loses its meaning, or until people become extinct, having no more sense of good and evil. That's when the world will no longer aspire for these great blessings. The well-being that comes from the marvels — the Dhamma in the area of its results — is something to which all living beings aspire, simply that their abilities differ, so that some attain their aspirations, while others don't.

But the Dhamma can't be displayed for the world to perceive with its senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch in the way other things can. Even though there may be other immaterial phenomena similar to the Dhamma — such as smells — still they aren't like the true Dhamma that is touched by the hearts of those who have practiced it.

If the Dhamma could be displayed like material objects, there is no doubt but that the human world would have to respect the religion for the sake of that Dhamma. This is because the Dhamma is something more marvelous than anything else. In all the three levels of existence, there is no greater marvel than in the Dhamma.

The Dhamma can appear as a marvel, conspicuous and clear in the mind. The mind is what knows it — and only the mind. It can't be displayed in general like material objects, as when we take things out to admire or to show off to others. The Dhamma can't possibly be displayed like material objects. This is what makes the world lack interest — and lack the things that could be hoped from the Dhamma — in a way that is really a shame.

Even those who want the marvel of the Dhamma don't know what the marvel is, or what the profundity of the Dhamma is, because the mind has never had contact with that profundity. The eye has never had contact with the marvel. The ear has never obtained any marvel from the current of the

Dhamma, because the Dhamma can't be displayed as a current of sound as other things can.

This is one obstacle that prevents people from becoming moved by the Dhamma, that prevents them from fully believing and fully entrusting themselves to the Dhamma in a way consistent with the world's long-felt hunger for well-being and prosperity.

Each of the Buddhas who has gained Awakening and taught the Dhamma to the world has had to reflect to the full extent of his intelligence and ability on the myriad ways of teaching the Dhamma to the world so that the world could see it as a marvel, inasmuch as the Dhamma can't be put in shop windows or in public places. This is because the true Dhamma lies in the heart and reveals itself only in words and deeds, which doesn't excite a gratifying sense of absorption in the same way as touching the Dhamma directly with the heart.

Because there is no way to display the Dhamma directly, the Buddhas display it indirectly through teaching. They point out the causes — the Dhamma

of conduct and practices leading to the Dhamma of results at this or that point or this or that level; and at the same time they proclaim the results — the excellence, the marvels of the stages and levels of the Dhamma that can be touched with the heart, all the way to the highest marvel, *vimutti*, the mental release called *nibbana* within the heart.

Every Buddha has to devise strategies in teaching the Dhamma so as to bring that marvel out to the world by using various modes of speech and conduct — for example, describing the Dhamma and showing the conduct of the Dhamma as being like this and that — but the actual Dhamma can't be shown. It is something known exclusively in the heart, in the way in which each Buddha and each arahant possesses this marvel. None of the Buddhas, none of the arahants who possess this marvel are in any way deficient in this regard.

The marvel lies in their hearts — simply that they can't take the marvel that appears there and display it in the full measure of its wonder. Thus they devise strategies for displaying it in their actions, which are

simply attributes of the Dhamma, not the actual Dhamma itself.

For instance, the doctrine they teach in the texts is simply an attribute of the Dhamma. Their act of teaching is also just an attribute of the Dhamma. The actual Dhamma is when a meditator or a person who listens to their teachings about the Dhamma follows the Dhamma in practice and touches it stage by stage within his or her own heart. This is called beginning to make contact with the actual Dhamma, step by step. However much contact is made, it gives a sense of gratification felt exclusively within the heart of the person who has gained that contact through his or her own practice.

When it comes to ingenuity in teaching, no one excels the Buddhas. Even so, they reveal only what they see as appropriate for humanity. They can't reveal the actual Dhamma — for example, by taking out the true marvel in their hearts and unfolding it for the world to see, saying, 'This is the marvel of the Tathagata, of each Buddha. Do you see it?'

This can't be done, for here we're talking about the marvel of the purity of a heart that was previously swamped with defilement like a heap of assorted excrement, but, now, has become a pure, unsullied nature, or a pure, amazing nature because of the practice of constantly and relentlessly cleansing it.

They can't show that Dhamma to the world, saying, 'Do you see this? Look at it. Look at it. Feast your eyes till they're full and then strive to make this treasure your own!' So, instead, they teach by using various strategies for those who practice, describing the path in full detail, in terms both of causes and of results.

What they bring out to show is simply the current of their voices, the breath of their mouths. That's what they bring out to speak, simply the breath of their mouths. They can't bring out the real thing. For example, when they say, 'It's marvelous like this,' it's just sound. The marvelous nature itself can't be brought out. All they can bring out is the action of saying, 'That nature is marvelous,' so that we can speculate for ourselves as to what that marvel is like.

Even though this doesn't remove our doubts, it's better than if we had never heard about it at all.

But the basic principle in making us come to know and see the marvel of the Dhamma is that, first, we have to speculate, and, then, we follow with practice. This qualifies as following the principles of the Dhamma the Buddha taught, and this is fitting and proper. No matter what the difficulties and hardships encountered in following the path, we shouldn't let them form barriers to our progress, because this is where the path lies.

There are no other byways that can take us easily to the goal. If our practice is difficult, we have to stick with it. If it's painful, we have to bear it, because it's a duty we have to perform, a burden we have to carry while working so as to attain our aims.

The Dhamma of a pure mind is like this: The mind is the Dhamma, the Dhamma is the mind. We call it a mind only as long as it is still with the body and *khandhas*.

Only then can we call it a pure mind, the mind of a Buddha, or the mind of an arahant. After it passes

from the body and *khandhas*, there is no conventional reality to which it can be compared, and so we can't call it anything at all.

No matter how marvelous that nature, no matter how much it may be ours, there is no possible way we can use conventional realities to describe it or to make comparisons, because that Dhamma, that realm of release, has no conventions against which to measure things or make comparisons.

It's the same as if we were in outer space: Which way is north, which way is south, we don't know. If we're on Earth, we can say 'east,' 'west,' 'north,' and 'south' because there are things that we can observe and compare so as to tell which direction lies in which way. We take the Earth as our standard. 'High' and 'low' depend on the Earth as their frame of reference. How much higher than this, lower than this, north of this, south of this: These things we can say.

But if we're out in outer space, there is no standard by which we can measure things, and so we can't say. Or as when we go up in an airplane: We can't

tell how fast or how slow we're going. When we pass a cloud, we can tell that we're going fast, but if we depend simply on our eyesight, we're sure to think that the speed of the airplane is nowhere near the speed of a car.

We can clearly see how deceptive our eyesight is in just this way. When we ride in a car, the trees on both sides of the road look as if they were falling in together down on the road behind us. Actually, they stay their separate selves. It's simply that the car runs past them. Since there are things that we sense, that lie close enough for comparison, it seems as if the car were going really fast.

As for the airplane, there's nothing to make comparisons with, so it looks as if the plane were dawdling along, as if it were going slower than a car, even though it's actually many times faster.

This is how it is when we compare the mind of an ordinary run-of-the-mill person with the mind of the Buddha. *Whatever the Buddha says is good and excellent, we ordinary people tend to say that it's not.* Whatever we like, no matter how vile, we say

that it's good. We don't admit the truth, in the same way as thinking that a car goes faster than an airplane.

The practice of attending to the mind is something very important. Try to develop mindfulness (*sati*) and discernment so that they can keep up with the things that come and entangle the mind. By and large, the heart itself is the instigator, creating trouble continually, relentlessly. We then fall for the preoccupations the heart turns out — and this makes us agitated, upset, and saddened, all because of the thoughts formed by the heart.

These come from the heart itself, and the heart itself is what falls for them, saying that this is this, and that is that, even though the things it names 'this' and 'that' merely exist in line with their nature. They have no meaning in and of themselves, that they are like 'this' or 'that.'

The mind simply gives them meanings, and then falls for its own meanings, making itself glad or sad over those things without end. Thus the stress and suffering that result from thought-formations have

no end, no point of resolution, just as if we were floating adrift in the middle of the sea waiting to breathe our last breath.

The Buddhas all reached Awakening here in this human world because the human world is rich in the Noble Truths. It's where they are plain to see. The Noble Truth of stress (*dukkha*) lies in the human body. Human beings know about stress — because they're smarter than common animals.

The Noble Truth of the origin of stress: This lies in the human heart. The Noble Truth of the path — the path of practice to cure defilement (*kilesa*), craving (*tanha*), and mental effluents (*asava*), which are the things that produce stress: This, human beings also know. What is the path? To put it briefly: virtue, concentration, and discernment. These things human beings know and can put into practice.

The Noble Truth of the cessation of stress: This, human beings also know. No matter which of these truths, all human beings know them — although they may not know how to behave toward them or take interest in behaving in line with them, in which

case there is no way the Dhamma can help them at all.

The Buddhas thus taught the Dhamma in the human world, because the human world lies in the center of all the levels of existence. We have been born in the center of existence, in the midst of the religion. We should conform correctly to the central point of the religion, so as to comprehend the religion's teachings that lie in the center of our heart.

The superlative Dhamma lies right here. It doesn't lie anywhere else. The mind is what can reach the Dhamma. The mind is what knows all dhammas. The affairs of the Dhamma, then, do not lie beyond the mind, which is a fitting vessel for them. Good, evil, pleasure, pain: The mind knows these things before anything else knows them, so we should develop mindfulness and discernment to be resourceful, to keep up with the events that are always becoming involved with the mind in the course of each day.

If we're intent on investigating the origin of stress, which fans out from our various thought-formations,

we will find that it arises without stop. It arises right here in the mind. It's fashioned right here. Even though we try to make it quiet, it won't be still. Why? Because of the 'unquietness', the thoughts with which the mind disturbs itself, which it forms and sends out towards its preoccupations (*arammana*) all the time. Once the mind sends out its thoughts, it then gathers in stress for itself. It keeps at it, in and out like this. *What goes out is the origin of stress, and what comes back in is stress.* In other words, thoughts form and go out as the origin of stress, and when the results come back to the heart, they're stressful. These things are constantly being manufactured like this all the time.

When we want the mind to have even just a little bit of calm, we really have to force it; and, even then, these things still manage to drive the mind into forming thoughts whenever we let down our guard.

This is how it is with the origin of stress, which is constantly producing suffering. It lies in the heart and is always arising. For this reason, we must use mindfulness and discernment to diagnose and remedy the origin of stress, to keep an eye out for it,

and to snuff it out right there, without being negligent. Wherever we sit or stand — whatever our activity — we keep watch over this point, with mindfulness alert to it, and discernment unraveling it so as to know it constantly for what it truly is.

All those who practice to remove defilement practice in this way. In particular, those who are ordained practice by going into the forest to look for a place conducive to their striving in order to wipe out this very enemy. Even when they stay in inhabited areas, or wherever they go, wherever they stay, they keep their attention focused continually, step by step, on the persistent effort to remove and demolish the origin of stress, which is a splinter, a thorn in the heart. Such people are bound to develop more and more ease and well-being, step by step, in proportion to the persistence of their striving.

We can see clearly when the mind is still and settles down: Thought-formations are still, or don't exist. Turmoil and disturbances don't occur. The stress that would otherwise result doesn't appear. When the mind is quiet, stress is also quiet. When thought-formations are quiet, the origin of stress is also quiet.

Stress is also quiet. All that remains at that moment is a feeling of peace and ease.

*The war between the mind and the defilements causing stress is like this.* We have to keep fighting with persistence. We have to use mindfulness and discernment, conviction and persistence to contend with the war that disturbs and ravages the mind, making it stagger and reel within. The disturbances will then gradually be suppressed. Even when there is only a moment of quiet, we will come to see the harm of the thought-formations that are constantly disturbing us. At the same time, we will see the benefits of mental stillness — that it's a genuine pleasure. Whether there is a lot of stillness or a little, pleasure arises in proportion to the foundation of stillness or the strength of the stillness, which in the texts is called *samadhi*, or concentration.

A mind centered and still is called a mind in concentration, or a mind gathered in concentration. This is what genuine concentration is like inside the heart. The names of the various stages of concentration are everywhere, *but actual concentration is inside the heart.* The heart is what

gives rise to concentration. It produces it, makes it on its own. *When concentration is still, the mind experiences cool respite* and pleasure. It has its own foundation set firmly and solidly within.

It's as if we were under an eave or under the cooling shade of a tree. We're comfortable when it rains, we're comfortable when the sun is out, because we don't have to be exposed to the sun and rain. The same holds true with a mind that has an inner foundation of stillness: It's not affected by this preoccupation or that, which would otherwise disturb and entangle it repeatedly, without respite. This is because stillness is the heart's dwelling — 'concentration,' which is one level of home for the heart.

Discernment (*pañña*) is ingenuity, sound judgment, evaluating causes and effects within and without; above, below, and in between — inside the body — all the way to the currents of the mind that send out thoughts from various angles. Mindfulness and discernment keep track of these things, investigating and evaluating them so as to know causes and effects in terms of the heart's thought-formations, or

in terms of the nature of *sankhara* within us, until we see the truth of each of these things.

*Don't go investigating these things off target, by being clever with labels and interpretations that go against the truth* — because in the investigation of phenomena, we investigate in line with the truth. *We don't resist the truth, for that would simply enhance the defilements causing stress* at the very moment we think we're investigating phenomena so as to remove them.

Birth we have already experienced. As for old age, we've been growing old from the day of our birth, older and older, step by step. Whatever our age may be now, that's how long we've been growing older, towards reaching the end of life. When we're old to the 'nth' degree, we fall apart. In other words, we've been growing old from the moment of birth — older by the day, the month, the year — older and older continually. We call it 'growing up', but actually it's growing old.

See? Investigate it for what it really is. This is the great highway — the way of nature. *Don't resist it.*

For example, the body is growing old, but we don't want it to be old. We want it always to be young. This is called resisting the truth — which is stress. Even when we try to resist it, we don't get anywhere. What do we hope to gain by resisting it and creating stress for ourselves? *Actually, we gain nothing but the stress that comes from resisting the truth.*

Use discernment to investigate just like this. Whenever pain arises in any part of the body, if we have medicine to treat it, then we treat it. When the medicine can take care of it, the body recovers. When the medicine can't, it dies. It goes on its own. There's no need for us to force it not to die, or to stay alive for so-and-so many years, for that would be an absurdity. Even if we forced it, it wouldn't stay. We wouldn't get any results and would just be wearing ourselves out in vain. The body has to follow its own natural principles.

When we investigate in line with its truth this way, *we can be at our ease.* Wherever there's pain, keep aware of it, continually, in line with its truth. Whether it hurts a lot or a little, keep aware of its manifestations until it reaches the ultimate point of

pain — the death of the body — and that's as far as it goes.

Know it in line with its truth. Don't resist it. *Don't set up any desires*, because the setting up of desire is a deficiency, a hunger. And hunger, no matter when or what the sort, is pain: Hunger for sleep is pain, hunger for food is pain, hunger for water is pain.

When was pain ever a good thing?

The hunger, the desires that arise, wanting things to be like this, wanting them to be like that: These are all nothing but disturbances, issues that give rise to stress and pain. *This is why the Buddha doesn't have us resist the truth.*

Use your discernment to investigate, to contemplate in line with the natural principles of things *as they already are*. This is called discernment that doesn't fly in the face of truth — and the heart can then be at ease.

We study the four 'Noble Truths' here in our body. In other words, we study birth, aging, illness, and

death, all of which lie in this single heap of elements (*dhatu*) without ever leaving it. Birth is an affair of these elements. Growing up or growing old, it's old right here. When there's illness, it manages to be ill right here, in one part or another. When death comes, it dies right here.

So we have to study right here — where else would we study? We have to study and know the things that involve us directly before we study anything else. We have to study them comprehensively and to completion — studying our own birth, our aging, our illness and pain, *and completing our study of our own death*. That's when we'll be wise — wise to all the events around us.

People who know the Dhamma through practicing so that they are wise to the events that occur to themselves, *do not flinch in the face of any of the conventional realities of the world at all*. This is how it is when we study the Dhamma, when we know and see the Dhamma in the area of the heart — in other words, when we know rightly and well. 'Mindfulness and discernment that are wise all around themselves' are wise in this way, *not wise*

*simply from being able to remember.* They have to be wise in curing doubt, in curing the recalcitrance of the heart, as well as in curing their own attachments and false assumptions so as to leave only a nature that is pure and simple. That's when we'll be really at ease, really relieved.

Let the *khandhas* be *khandhas* pure and simple in their own way, without our messing with them, without our struggling with them for power, without our forcing or coercing them to be like this or like that.

The *khandhas* are then *khandhas*, the mind is then the mind, each with its own separate reality, each not infringing on the others as it used to. Each performs its own duties. This is called *khandhas* pure and simple, the mind pure and simple, without any conventional realities adulterating them. What knows is what knows, the elements are elements, the *khandhas* are *khandhas*.

Whatever things may break apart, let them break apart. We have already known them clearly with our discernment. We have no doubts. We've known them in advance, even before they die, so when

death comes, what doubts can we have? — especially now that they display the truth of their nature for us to see clearly? This is called studying the Dhamma, practicing the Dhamma. To study and practice this way is to follow the same way that sages have practiced and known before us.

All of these conditions are matters of conventional reality — matters of the elements, the *khandhas*, or the sense media (*ayatana*). The four *khandhas*, the five *khandhas*, whatever, are individual conditions, individual conditions that are separated in line with conventions. Discernment is also a condition; and mindfulness, another condition — conditions of the heart — but they're Dhamma, means of curing the mind that is clouded and obscured, means of washing away the things that cloud and obscure it, until radiance appears through the power of the discernment that cleanses the heart. *Once the heart is radiant, in the next step it becomes pure.*

Why is it pure? It is because all impurities have fallen away from it. The various misconstruings that are an affair of defilement are all gone from the heart, so the heart is pure. This pure heart means that

we have completed our study of ourselves, in line with the statement of the teaching:

**vusitam brahmacariyam katam karaniyam:**

'The task of the religion is done, the holy life is complete, there is no further task to be done.'

When the tasks we have had to do — abandoning and striving — are done to completion, we know right here, because delusion lay right here in the heart. We study and practice simply to cure our own delusion. Once we know right here, and delusion is gone, what else is there to know? — for beyond this there is nothing further to know. What else is there for us to be deluded about? We're no longer deluded, because we know fully all around.

This very state of mind: When at the beginning I referred to the superlative Dhamma, the marvelous Dhamma, I was referring to this very state of mind, this very Dhamma — but it's something known exclusively within itself, and exists only within itself. It's marvelous — this we know within our own mind. It's superlative — this we also know within our own mind. We can't take it out or unfurl it like other things for other people to see.

So if you want to have any Noble Treasures to show for yourself, practice. Remove all those dirty stains from the heart, and the superlative things I have mentioned will appear by their own nature — in other words, they will appear in the mind.

This is called completing your study of the Dhamma; and your study of the world is completed right here. The 'world' means the world of elements, the world of the *khandhas* that lie right here with each of us, which are more important than the worlds of elements and *khandhas* belonging to other people, because this world of elements and *khandhas* lies with us and has been weighing on the heart all along.

*When we have studied the Dhamma to the attainment of release, that's all there is to study. We've studied the world to completion and studied the Dhamma in full. Our doubts are gone, and there is nothing that will ever make us doubt again. As the Buddha exclaimed, 'When dhammas become apparent to the Brahman, earnest and absorbed, doubt comes to an end because the conditions, the*

factors for continued being and birth, come to an end.'

Once we have reached this level, we can live wherever we like. The war is ended — the war between the mind and defilement, or the war between Dhamma and defilement, is over.

This is where we dismantle being and birth. *This is where we dismantle the heap of suffering in the round of rebirth — right here in the heart.* Since the heart is the wanderer through the cycle of rebirth, we have to dismantle things right here, to know them right here. Once we know, that's the end of all problems right here.

In this whole wide world there are no problems. The only problem was the issue of the heart that was deluded about itself and about the things that became involved with it. Now that it has completely rectified the way it is involved with things, there is nothing left — and that's the end of the problem.

From this point on, there are no more problems to trouble the heart until the day of its total *nibbana*.

This is how the Dhamma is studied to completion. The world — the world of elements and *khandhas* — is studied to completion right here.

So keep striving in order to see the marvel described at the beginning, which was described in line with the truth with no aspect to invite any doubt.

The Buddha and the Noble Disciples have Dhamma filling their hearts to the brim. You are a disciple of the Tathagata, with a mind that can be made to show its marvelousness through the practice of making it pure, just like the Buddha and the Noble Disciples.

So try to make it still and radiant, because the heart has long lain buried in the mud. As soon as you can see the harm of the mud and grow tired of it, you should urgently wake up, take notice, and exert yourself till you can manage to make your way free. *Nibbana* is holding its hand out, waiting for you. Aren't you going to come out?

Rebelliousness is simply distraction. The end of rebelliousness is stillness. When the heart is still, it's at ease. If it's not still, it's as hot as fire. Wherever

you are, everything is hot and troubled. Once it is still, then it's cool and peaceful wherever you are — cool right here in the heart. So make the heart cool with the practice, because the heat and trouble lie with the heart. The heat of fire is one thing, but the heat of a troubled heart is hotter than fire. Try to put out the fires of defilement, craving, and mental effluents burning here in the heart, so that only the phenomenon of genuine Dhamma remains. Then, you will be cool and at peace, everywhere and always.

And so I'll ask to stop here.

### **The Prison World vs. the World Outside**

Our mind, if we were to make a comparison with the world, is a perpetual prisoner, like a person born in jail who lives in jail, behind bars, with no chance to get out to see the outside world — someone who has grown from childhood to adulthood entirely in a prison cell and so doesn't know what there is outside; someone who has seen pleasure and pain only in the prison and has never been out to see what kind of pleasure, comfort, and freedom they have in the outside world. We have no way of knowing what kind of happiness and enjoyment they have there in

the outside world, how they come and go, how they live, because we are kept in prison from the day we are born until the day we die. This is a comparison, an analogy.

We have only the pleasure and pain that the prison has to offer, with nothing special, nothing obtained from the outside world so that when it enters the prison we could see that, 'This is something different from the prison world — this is from the outside world, outside the prison;' so that we could make comparisons and know that, 'This is like this, that is like that; this is better than that, that is better than this.' There is nothing but the affairs of the prison. However much the pleasure and pain, however great the deprivations, the difficulties, the oppression and coercion, that's simply the way it's been all along from the very beginning — and so we don't know where to look for a way out or how to free ourselves.

We don't even know where the outside world is, because we have seen only the inside world: the prison where we have always been locked away, oppressed, starved, beaten, tortured, deprived. Even our bedding, food, belongings — everything of

every sort — is like that of a prisoner in jail. And yet people like this can still live this way because they have never seen enough of the outside world to be able to make comparisons as to which is better, which is more pleasant, in order to feel inclined to search for a way out to the outside world.

A mind controlled by the power of defilement and mental effluents is like this. It has been imprisoned by various kinds of defilement for aeons and aeons. For example, in our present lifetime, the defilements that hold sway over the hearts of living beings have been with us since the day of our birth. They have kept us in continual custody, never giving us any freedom within ourselves at all. For this reason, we have difficulty imagining what sort of pleasure there could be above and beyond the way things are, just like a person who was born and has always lived in a prison.

What sort of world is the world outside? Is it a good place to visit? Is it a good place to live? The Dhamma proclaims it loudly and clearly, but hardly anyone is interested.

Still, there are fortunately *some* places where *some* people are interested. In places where no one proclaims it, where no one speaks of what the outside world — a mind with Dhamma in charge — is like, no one knows what the teachings of the religion are like.

No one knows what the happiness that comes from the Dhamma is like. Such people are so surrounded by darkness, so completely drowned in attachment, that not even a single limb shows above the surface, because there is no religion to pull them out. It's as if the outside world didn't exist. They have nothing but the prison, the defilements, holding the heart in custody. Born in this world, they have only the prison as their place to live and to die.

A mind that has never known what could give it greater pleasure, comfort, and freedom than it has at present, if we were to make a different comparison, is like a duck playing in a mud puddle under a shanty. It keeps playing there: splat, splat, splat, splat, splat. No matter how dirty or filthy it is, it's content to play because it has never seen the water of the ocean, of a river, of a lake or a pond large

enough for it to swim and immerse its entire body with ease. It has known only the mud puddle that lies stagnant under the shanty, into which things in the shanty get washed down. And so it plays there, thinking it's fun, swimming happily in its way — why? Because it has never seen water wider or deeper than that, enough to give it more enjoyment in coming and going or swimming around than it can find in the mud puddle under the shanty.

As for ducks that live along broad, deep canals, they're very different from the duck under the shanty. They really enjoy themselves along rivers, lakes, canals, and ponds. Wherever their owner herds them, there they go — crossing back and forth over highways and byways, spreading in flocks of hundreds and thousands. Even ducks like these have their happiness.

What do they stand for?

They stand for the mind. A mind that has never seen the pleasure, the comfort, the enjoyment that comes from the Dhamma is like the duck playing in the

mud puddle under the shanty, or those that enjoy swimming in canals, rivers, or lakes.

We at present have our pleasure and happiness through the controlling power of the defilements, which is like the happiness of prisoners in jail. When the mind receives training from the outside world — meaning the Dhamma that comes from the transcendent (*lokuttara*) Dhammas, from the 'land' of *nibbana* on down, level by level to the human world, revealing every level, every realm — we find that *those of us who are inclined*, who are interested in the outside world, in happiness greater than that which exists at present, *still exist*.

When we hear the Dhamma, step by step, or read books about the outside world — about Dhamma, about releasing ourselves from the pain and suffering we are forced to undergo within our hearts — our minds feel pleasure and enjoyment, interest and a desire to listen, followed by a desire to practice so as to reap the results step by step. This is where we begin to see the influence of the outside world making itself felt. The heart begins to exert

itself, trying to free itself from the tyranny and oppression from within, like that of a prisoner in jail.

Even more so, when we practice in the area of the mind: The more peace we obtain, then the greater the effort, the greater the exertion we make. Mindfulness and discernment gradually appear. We see the harm of the tyranny and the oppression imposed by the defilements in the heart. We see the value of the Dhamma, which is a means of liberation. The more it frees us, the more ease we feel in the heart: Respite and Relief. This, then, is a means of increasing our conviction in ascending stages, and of increasing our effort and stamina in its wake.

The mindfulness and discernment that used to lie buried in the mud gradually revive and awaken, and begin to contemplate and investigate.

In the past, no matter what assaulted us by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, we were like dead people. We held these things to be ordinary and normal. They never provoked our mindfulness and discernment to investigate and explore,

searching for beginnings and ends, causes and effects. Even though these things had been our enemies for a long, long time, making their assaults both day and night, we were never interested.

Now, however, we develop an interest. When the heart begins to enter the current of the Dhamma in which it has been trained to the point of developing a basis for mindfulness and discernment, step by step, it is bound to see clearly both what is beneficial and what is harmful, because these things dwell together — benefits and harm — within this heart.

The mind develops agility in contemplating and investigating. The heart develops boldness in its explorations. Seeing harm, it tries to remedy it. Seeing benefits, it tries to open the way for them; it tries to foster them in ascending stages.

This is called the mind gradually gaining release from tyranny and oppression — the prison — within.

At the same time, it is gaining a view of the outside world, seeing what sort of world it is, seeing whether

it's like the prison that exists at present. Our eyes can see the outside world to some extent, can see how those in the outside world live, how they come and go — and what about us in the prison? What is it like to live overcome by defilements?

How does the mind feel as we gain gradual relief from the defilements? We can begin to make comparisons.

Now at last we have an outside world and an inside world to compare! The happiness and ease that come from removing however many of the defilements we can remove, appear. The stress that continues as long as the remaining defilements still exert their influence, we know clearly. We see their harm with our discernment on its various levels and we try continually to remedy the situation without letting our persistence lapse.

This is when mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence stir themselves out to the front lines: when we see both the *outside world* — however much we have been able to liberate the heart from

defilement — and the *inside world*, where the defilements keep up their oppression and coercion.

Before, we never knew what to use for comparisons, because we had never seen anything other than this. Because we were born buried in pain and suffering this way, no pleasure from the outside world — from the Dhamma — ever appeared to us.

*What did appear was the kind of happiness that had suffering behind the scenes, waiting to stomp in and obliterate that happiness without giving a moment's notice.*

Now, however, we are beginning to know and see. We see the happiness of the outside, that is, of the outside world, of those who have Dhamma reigning in their hearts; and we see the happiness inside the prison, the happiness that lies under the influence of defilement. We also see the suffering and stress that lie under the influence of defilement. We know this all clearly with our own mindfulness and discernment.

The happiness that comes from the outside world — in other words, from the current of the Dhamma seeping deep into the heart — we begin to see, step by step, enough to make comparisons. We see the outside world, the inside world, their benefits and drawbacks.

When we take them and compare them, we gain an ever greater understanding — plus greater persistence, greater stamina — to the point that when anything connected with defilement that used to tyrannize and oppress the mind passes our way, we immediately feel called upon to tackle it, remedy it, strip it away, and demolish it, step by step, through the power of mindfulness and discernment backed by persistent effort.

The mind will set itself spinning. When its awareness of harm is great, its appreciation of what is beneficial is also great. When the desire to know and see the Dhamma is great, when the desire to gain release is great, persistence will have to become greater in their wake.

Stamina and resilience will also come in their wake, because they all exist in the same heart. When we see harm, the entire heart is what sees it. When we see benefits, the entire heart is what sees. When we try to make our way with various methods in line with our abilities, it's an affair of the entire heart making the effort to free itself.

This is why these things, such as persistence, that are the mind's tools, the mind's support, come together. For example, *saddha*, conviction in the paths (*magga*) and their fruitions (*phala*), conviction in the realm beyond suffering and stress; *viriya*, persistence, perseverance in gaining release for oneself step by step; *khanti*, stamina, endurance in order to be unyielding in passing over and beyond: All of these things come together. Mindfulness and discernment, contemplating along the way, seeing what is right and what is wrong will come in their wake.

If we were to speak in terms of the principles of the formal Dhamma as expressed by the Buddha, this is called the path converging (*magga-samangi*), gradually gathering itself into this single heart.

Everything comes together: Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, all the way to Right Concentration, all come gathering into this single heart. They don't go anywhere else.

*Right Action:* Our only right undertakings are sitting and walking meditation, because we have reached the stage of precision work where the heart gathers together. The mind is in a state of the path converging — gathering itself into a single heart.

*Right View, Right Resolve:* These refer to the concerns of discernment, always exploring the affairs of the elements, the *khandhas*, whatever appears or makes contact, arises and vanishes, whether good or evil, past or future, appearing in the heart. Mindfulness and discernment slash these things to bits step by step without bothering to waste time.

*Right Action:* On the level of the body, this refers to doing sitting and walking meditation, making the effort to abandon the defilements no matter what our posture. On the level of the heart, this refers to persistence within the mind.

*Right Speech:* We speak only of the Dhamma. Our conversation deals only with the topics of effacement (*sallekha-dhamma*), topics of polishing away or washing away defilements and mental effluents from the heart, telling what methods we can use that will utterly end the defilements: This is Right Speech.

*Right Livelihood:* When the heart feeds on any object that's its enemy, this is called maintaining a wrong livelihood. Since the object is an enemy of the heart, the heart will have to be clouded. There's nothing good about it at all. It has to lead to greater or lesser amounts of suffering and stress within the heart in proportion to the heart's crudeness or refinement. This is called poison: Wrong livelihood. We have to correct it immediately, immediately.

Any mental object that's rightful, that leads to happiness, well-being, and ease, is a fitting preoccupation, a fitting food for the heart, providing it with peace and well-being. This is how Right Livelihood is maintained with Dhamma on the ascending levels of training the heart. As for Right Livelihood on the physical level, dealing with food

or alms, that applies universally for Buddhists in general to conduct themselves in line with their personal duties.

*Right Effort:* What sort of effort? This we know. The Buddha taught four kinds of effort: (1) Try to be careful not to let evil arise within yourself. (2) Try to abandon evil that has already arisen. In being careful not to let evil arise, we have to be careful by being mindful. Using mindfulness in trying not to let evil arise means being alert to the mind that thinks and wanders about, gathering suffering and stress into itself. This is because thought-formations of the wrong sort are the origin of stress, and so we should be careful to guard against them.

Don't be careless or complacent. (3) Try to develop what is skillful — intelligence — so as to increase it step by step. (4) Try to safeguard the skillful things that have arisen so as to develop them even further and not let them deteriorate. All of these right exertions apply right within us.

*Right Mindfulness* keeps watch over the heart. Mindfulness and self-awareness keep constant track

of its behavior and activities. Whatever makes contact by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, if it doesn't go into the heart, where does it go? The heart is an enormous place, always ready to be informed of various things, both good and evil. Discernment is what contemplates and deliberates. Mindfulness is what keeps vigilant, keeps inspecting whatever comes in to engage the heart.

Whatever the preoccupation, good or evil, mindfulness and discernment contemplate and are selective of what engages the heart. Whatever they see as improper, the mind will reject immediately - Immediately! Discernment is what makes the rejection.

*Right Concentration:* Our work for the sake of making the defilements quiet through concentration is steady and constant, to the point where the results appear as peace and calm in the heart, as a true place of rest without any distractions coming in to disturb the heart at that moment.

When entering concentration so as to relax the mind, in order to give strength to discernment in its continuing explorations, you should go ahead and

really rest — rest in concentration. Enter the calm. Completely stop all thoughts and explorations in the area of discernment. Let the mind settle in and relax.

It doesn't have to think or contrive anything at all related to its work. Let the mind rest comfortably by giving it a single preoccupation. If the mind happens to be extremely engrossed in its investigations so that you can't rein it in, use '*buddho*' as a means to drag it in. Make the mind stay with '*buddho, buddho, buddho.*' Even though the meditation word '*buddho*' may be a mental contrivance, it's a contrivance in a single focal idea. Contriving a single focal idea can cause the mind to settle down.

For example, if while we are repeating, '*buddho, buddho, buddho,*' the mind flashes back to its work because it is engrossed in its unfinished business, we should repeat the meditation word even faster so as not to let the mind go back to its work. In other words, when the mind is at the stage where it is engrossed in its work, we could say — to put it in worldly terms — that we can't let down our guard, although on this level it's hard to say that the mind lets down its guard.

To get nearer the truth, we should say that we can't loosen our grip. To put it simply, we can't loosen our grip. Otherwise, the mind will jump back out to work. So at this point we have to be firm with our meditation word. Force the mind to stay with its single preoccupation — '*buddho*' — as a means of reining the mind in. Repeat '*buddho, buddho, buddho*' in really close frequency; then '*buddho*' and the mind will become one. The heart will be firm and calm down, calm down, relaxing, relaxing, setting aside all its work. The mind will become cool and peaceful. This is Right Concentration.

When the time comes to rest, you have to rest like this for it to qualify as Right Concentration. When you've had enough, when you see that the mind has regained strength, then simply let go — that's all — and the mind will spring immediately back to work. It springs out of oneness, of having a single preoccupation, and returns to being two with its work. At this point, the heart gets back to work without worrying about concentration while it is working. In the same way, when centering the mind for the sake of stillness, you don't have to worry about your work at all.

When resting, you have to rest, in the same way that when eating you don't have to do any work at all except for the work of eating. When sleeping, sleep peacefully. You shouldn't be concerned with any work at all. But once you have begun work, you shouldn't concern yourself with eating and sleeping. Really set your mind on your work. This is called doing a solid piece of work: work in its proper phases, work at the proper time, in keeping with events, 'Right Action,' work that doesn't overstep its boundaries, appropriate work.

The practice of centering the mind is something you can't neglect. In practicing for the sake of the heart's happiness, the view that centering the mind, keeping still, serves no purpose *is wrong*. If someone is addicted to concentration, unwilling to come out and work, that's improper and should be criticized so that he or she will get down to work. But once the mind has become engrossed in its work, concentration is a necessity in certain areas, at certain times.

Ordinarily, if we work without resting or sleeping, we ultimately can't continue with our work. Even

though some of our money gets used up when we eat, let it be used up — because the result is that our body gains strength from eating and can return to its work in line with its duties. Even though money gets used up and the food we eat gets used up, still it's used up for a purpose: for energy in the body.

Whatever gets consumed, let it be consumed, because it doesn't hurt our purposes. If we don't eat, where are we going to get any strength? Whatever gets spent, let it be spent for the sake of strength, for the sake of giving rise to strength.

The same holds true with resting in concentration: When we're resting so as to give rise to stillness, the stillness is the strength of mind that can reinforce discernment and make it agile. We have to rest so as to have stillness. If there is no stillness, if there's nothing but discernment running, it's like a knife that hasn't been sharpened. We keep chopping away — chock, chock, chock — but it's hard to tell whether we're using the edge of the blade or the back. We simply have the desire to know, to see, to understand, to uproot defilement, whereas discernment hasn't been sharpened by resting in

stillness — the reinforcement that gives peace and strength in the heart — and so it's like a knife that hasn't been sharpened. Whatever gets chopped doesn't cut through easily. It's a simple waste of energy.

So for the sake of what's fitting while resting the mind in its 'home of concentration,' we have to let it rest. Resting is, thus, like using a whetstone to sharpen discernment. Resting the body strengthens the body, and in the same way resting the mind strengthens the mind.

When it comes out this time, now that it has strength, it's like a knife that has been sharpened. The object is the same old object, the discernment is the same old discernment, the person investigating is the same old person, but once we focus our examination, it cuts right through. This time it's like a person who has rested, slept, and eaten at his leisure, and whose knife is fully sharpened. He chops the same old piece of wood, he's the same old person, and it's the same old knife, but it cuts right through with no trouble at all — because the knife is sharp, and the person has strength.

In the same way, the object is the same old object, the discernment is the same old discernment, the person practicing is the same old person, but we've been sharpened. The mind has strength as a reinforcement for discernment and so things cut right through in no time at all — a big difference from when we hadn't rested in concentration!

Thus concentration and discernment are interrelated. They simply do their work at different times. When the time comes to center the mind, center it. When the time comes to investigate in the area of discernment, give it your all — your full alertness, your full strength. Get to the full Dhamma: the full causes and the full effects. In the same way, when resting, give it a full rest. Practice these things at separate times. Don't let them interfere with each other — being worried about concentration when examining with discernment, or being preoccupied with the affairs of discernment when entering concentration — for that would be wrong. Whichever work you're going to do, really make it a solid piece of work. This is the right way, the

appropriate way — the way Right Concentration really is.

Once discernment has begun uprooting defilements step by step, the heart develops brightness. The lightness of the mind is one of the benefits that come from removing the things that are hazardous, the things that are filthy. We see the value of this benefit and keep on investigating.

What defilement is, is a weight on the heart. Our mind is like a prisoner constantly overpowered — coerced and tormented — by defilements and mental effluents ever since we were born. When we come right down to it, where is defilement? Where is being and birth? Right here in this same heart.

When you investigate, these things gather in, gather in, and enter this single heart. The cycle of rebirth doesn't refer to anything else: It refers to this single heart that spins in circles. It's the only thing that leads us to birth and death. Why? It's because the seeds of these things are in the heart.

When we use mindfulness and discernment to investigate, we explore so as to see clearly, and we keep cutting in, step by step, until we reach the mind that is the culprit, harboring unawareness (*avijja*), which is the important seed of the cycle in the heart. We keep dissecting, keep investigating in, investigating in, so that there is nothing left of 'this is this' or 'that is that.' We focus our investigation on the mind in the same way as we have done with phenomena (*sabhava-dhamma*) in general.

No matter how much brightness there may be in the heart, we should know that it's simply a place for the heart to rest temporarily as long as we are still unable to investigate it to the point where we can disperse and destroy it. But don't forget that this shining star of a heart is actually unawareness.

*So investigate, taking that as the focal point of your investigation.*

So then. If this is going to be obliterated until there's no more awareness, leaving nothing at all — to the point where the 'knower' is destroyed along with it — then let's find out once and for all. We're

investigating to find the truth, to know the truth, so we have to get all the way down to causes and effects, to the truth of everything of every sort.

Whatever is going to be destroyed - let it be destroyed. Even if ultimately the 'knower' who is investigating will be destroyed as well, then let's find out with our mindfulness and discernment. We don't have to leave anything remaining as an island or a vantage point to deceive ourselves. Whatever is 'us,' whatever is 'ours,' don't leave it standing. Investigate down to the truth of all things together.

What's left, after the defilement of unawareness is absolutely destroyed, is something beyond the range to which convention can reach or destroy. This is called the pure mind, or purity. *The nature of this purity cannot be destroyed by anything at all.*

Defilements are conventional realities that can arise and vanish. Thus they can be cleansed, made to increase, made to decrease, made to disappear, because they are an affair of conventions. But the mind pure and simple — the phenomenon called a released mind — lies beyond the range to which any

defilements, which are all conventions, can reach and destroy.

If the mind isn't yet pure, it's a conventional reality just like other things, because conventional things have infiltrated it. Once they are entirely removed, the phenomenon of release is one that no defilement can any longer affect — because it lies beyond range. So what *is* destroyed?

Stress stops, because the cause of stress stops. *Nirodha* — the cessation of stress — also stops. The path, the tool that wipes out the cause of stress, also stops. The four Noble Truths all stop together. Stress stops, the cause of stress stops, the path stops, the cessation of stress stops.

But listen! *What knows that 'that stops' is not a Noble Truth. It lies above the Noble Truths.* The investigation of the Noble Truths is an investigation for the sake of this. Once we reach the real thing, the four Noble Truths have no more role to play, no need to be cleansed, remedied, or removed. For example, discernment: Now that we've worked to the full extent, we can let go of discernment, with no

need to set rules for it. Both mindfulness and discernment are tools in the battle. Once the war is over, the enemy is wiped out, so these qualities are no longer at issue.

*What's left? Purity.* The Buddha, in proclaiming the Dhamma to the world, took it from this pure nature. The doctrines of the religion came from this nature, and in the approach he used in teaching, he had to teach about stress because these conditions are directly related to this mind.

He taught us to know how to remedy, how to stop, how to strive — everything of every sort — all the way to the goal at the end of the path, after which nothing more need be said. This is purity. The mind has come out to the outside world. It has left the prison and come to the outside world — freedom — never to be imprisoned again.

But no one wants to go to this world, because they have never seen it.

This is an important world — *lokuttara*, the transcendent, a realm higher than other worlds — but we simply call it the outside world, *outside of all*

*conventions*. We call it a 'world' just as a figure of speech, because our world has its conventions, and so we simply talk about it that way.

Think about escaping from this prison. You've been born in prison, live in prison and die in prison. You've never once died outside of prison. So, for once, get your heart out of prison. You'll be really comfortable — really comfortable! — like the Buddha and his Noble Disciples: They were born in prison like you, but they died outside of the prison. They died outside of the world. They didn't die in this world that's so narrow and confining. I'll ask to stop here.

## **Birth & Death**

People come with questions — some of which I can remember — and everyone has the question that's waiting right at the barn door: Is there a next world after death? The next world - who goes on to the next world: These sorts of things aren't any one person's issue. They're an issue for all of us who are carrying a burden.

When people ask this sort of question, I ask them in return, 'Was there a yesterday? Was there a this morning? Is there a present at this moment?' They admit that there was and is. 'Then will there be a tomorrow? A day after tomorrow? A this month? A next month? A this year? A next year and years after that?'

Things in the past that we can remember, we can use to make guesses about the future. Even for things that haven't yet happened, we can make comparisons with things that have already occurred.

The future has to follow the way things have been in the past. For example, yesterday has already occurred, today is occurring. These things have followed one after the other. We know this, we remember, we haven't forgotten. This afternoon, this evening, tonight, tomorrow morning: We've already seen that things have been like this. This is the way things have happened, without being otherwise, and so we accept that this is the way they will continue to be.

Doubts about this world and the next, or about things concerning ourselves: This is delusion about ourselves. This is why these things become big issues, causing endless fuss all over the world of rebirth. 'Is there a next world? When people die, are they reborn?'

These questions go together, for who is it that takes birth and dies? We ourselves — always dying and taking birth. What comes to this world and goes to the next world is us. Who else would it be? If not for this being of the world, this wanderer, there wouldn't be anyone weighed down with these questions and burdens.

This is the harm of delusion, of being unable to remember. It shows within us, but we can't catch hold of its causes, of why it has come about. Things that have happened, we can't remember. Our own affairs spin us around in circles and get us so tangled up that we don't know which way to go.

This is why self-delusion is an endless complication. Being deluded about other things is not so bad, but being deluded about ourselves blocks all the exits.

We can't find any way out. The results come right back at us — they don't go anywhere else — bringing us suffering, because these sorts of doubts are questions with which we bind ourselves and not questions by which we set ourselves free. We can have no hope of resolving and understanding these doubts if we don't find confirmation of the Dhamma in the area of meditation.

This is why the Lord Buddha taught us to unravel and look at our own affairs.

But unraveling our own affairs is something very critical. If we do it by guessing or speculating or whatever, we won't succeed. The only way to succeed is to develop goodness step by step as a means of support and of drawing us in to mental development (*bhavana*), or meditation, so as to unravel and look at our own affairs, which lie gathered in the range of meditation. This is what will lead us to know clearly and to cut through our doubts, at the same time leading us to satisfactory results. We will be able to stop wondering about death and rebirth or death and annihilation.

What are our own affairs? *They are the affairs of the heart.* The heart is what acts, thus creating causes and results for itself all the time: pleasure, pain, complications, and turmoil. For the most part, it ties itself down more than helping itself. If we don't force it into good ways, the heart reaps trouble as a result, the suffering that comes from being agitated and anxious, thinking restlessly from various angles for no worthwhile reason.

The results we receive are an important factor in making us pained and unsettled. This is, thus, a difficult matter, a heavy matter for all those who are deluded about the world, deluded about themselves, agitated by the world, and agitated about themselves without being interested in confirming the truth about themselves using the principles of the Dhamma, principles that guarantee the truth.

For example, once we die, we must be reborn; as long as the seeds of rebirth are in the heart, we have to continue being reborn repeatedly. It can't be otherwise — for instance, such as being annihilated at death.

The Buddha teaches us to keep watch of the instigator. In other words, we should observe our own heart, which is what causes birth and death.

If we don't understand it, he tells us various angles from which to approach it, until we understand and can deal with it properly. In particular, he teaches us to meditate, using any of the meditation themes, repeating it so that the mind — (which has no footing to hold to, which is in such a turmoil of finding no refuge that it dwells in unlimited dreams and infatuations) — will gain enough of a footing to get on its feet, will gain quiet and calm, free from the distraction and unsteadiness that would destroy the peace of mind we want.

For example, he teaches us to repeat '*buddho, dhammo, sangho*' or '*atthi*' (bones), '*kesa*' (hair of the head), '*loma*' (hair of the body), or whatever phrase suits our temperament, while being mindful to keep watch over our meditation theme, so as not to become forgetful and send the mind elsewhere, away from it. This is so that the mind, which we used to send to various places, can latch onto or dwell with its Dhamma-theme: its meditation word.

Our awareness, which used to be scattered among various preoccupations, will now gather into that point — the mind — which is the *gathering place of awareness*. All the currents of our awareness will converge at the Dhamma-theme we are repeating or pursuing with interest.

This is because the meditation word — which is something for the mind to hold to, so that it can gain a footing — becomes more and more an object of clear and conspicuous awareness. Thus, at the beginning stages of meditation, the meditation word is very important.

*Once we have seen the intrinsic value of the peace that appears this way, we at the same time see clearly the harm that comes from the agitation and turmoil of the mind that has no footing to hold to, and that creates havoc for itself. We needn't ask anyone about the benefits of a peaceful mind and the harm of an agitated mind, we see within our own mind from having practiced meditation. This is a step, the first step, by which the Buddha teaches us to know the affairs of the mind.*

We then try to make the mind progressively more firmly settled and calm by repeating the meditation word, as already mentioned. We keep at it, again and again, until we become adept, until the mind can become still, the way we want it to.

The sense of well-being that arises from a calm heart becomes even more prominent and clear all the time. *As soon as the mind becomes still, giving rise to clear and prominent awareness, it is, at the same time, a gathering in of the defilements into a single spot so that we can see them more clearly and more easily observe their behavior — so that we can more easily cure them and remove them with the levels of discernment suited to dealing with crude, intermediate, and subtle defilements step by step.*

Now, concerning defilements, the things that force the mind to be agitated in countless, inconceivable ways: We can't catch sight of what defilement is, what the mind is, what the Dhamma is, until we first have a firm basis of mental stillness.

When the mind gathers in and is still, the defilements gather in and are still as well. When the mind draws into itself, to be itself or to become a point on which we can focus and understand, the affairs of defilement also enter a restricted range in that same point. They gather in at the heart and rarely ever run loose to stir-up trouble for the heart as they used to do before the mind was still.

Once the mind is still so that it can stand on its feet, we are, then, taught to use our discernment to investigate, unravel, and contemplate the various parts of the body in which the defilements hide out. What is the mind interested in? When it isn't quiet, with what does it like to involve itself? While the mind is quiet, it doesn't stir up trouble for itself, but a common habit with us human beings is that once we have gained peace and relaxation, we get lazy.

We simply want to lie down and rest. We don't want to unravel the body, the elements, or the *khandhas* with our mindfulness and discernment for the sake of seeing the truth and removing the various defilements from the heart.

We don't like to reflect on the fact that those who have abandoned and removed the various kinds of defilement that hide out in the body and the *khandhas* have done so by using mindfulness and discernment. *As for mental stillness or concentration, that's simply a gathering together of the defilements into a restricted range. It's not an abandoning or a removal of defilement.* Please remember this and take it to heart.

The heart, when it isn't still, tends to get entangled with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, and to take them as issues for stirring itself up. We can know with our mindfulness and discernment which of the various sights, sounds, etc., the mind tends to favor most strongly.

While we are investigating, we can know with our mindfulness and discernment the objects with which the mind is involving itself. We can observe the affairs of the mind because the mind has been still. As soon as it begins to head out toward its various preoccupations, we know. This is why we are taught to investigate and unravel things with our

discernment, so as to know what the mind goes to involve itself with.

Try to observe so as to know, so as to see clearly with mindfulness and discernment while you are investigating. Only when you are stilling the mind in concentration is there no need for you to investigate, because concentration and discernment take turns working at different times, as I have already explained.

When you are investigating visual objects, with which visual object is the mind most involved? What is the reason? Look at the object. Dissect it. Analyze it into its parts so as to see it clearly for what it truly is.

Once you have dissected the object — whatever it is — so as to see it with discernment in line with its truth, at the same time you will see the absurdity, the deceptiveness of the mind that grows attached and misconstrues things in all kinds of ways without any real reason, without any basis in fact.

Once you have investigated carefully, you'll see that the object has none of the worth construed and assigned to it by the mind. There are simply the assumptions of the mind which has fallen for the object, that's all. Once you have investigated, separating the various parts of 'their' body or 'your' body so as to see them in detail, you won't see anything of any worth or substance at all. The heart of its own accord will see the harmfulness of its assumptions, its labels and attachments.

The more it investigates, the more clearly it sees — not only the various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, but also the acts of the mind involved with those objects — until it fully knows and clearly sees with discernment, because it has been constantly unraveling things both within and without. You fully know and clearly see the acts inside the heart that become involved, knowing that they come about for this reason and that, all of which are thoroughly absurd.

Before, you didn't know why the mind was involved. But now you know clearly that it is involved for this

reason and that: namely, delusion and mistaken assumptions.

When you investigate in line with the truth and see the true nature of external things, you know clearly within yourself that the mind has construed phenomena to be like this and like that, which is why it has continually developed more and more attachment and clinging, more and more of the defilements of love and hatred. The heart then realizes its own absurdity.

When the heart realizes that it has been deluded and absurd, it withdraws inward, because, if it were to continue to think of becoming attached to those things, it would get cut right through by discernment — so what would it gain from becoming attached?

To investigate so as to know clearly that this is this, and that is that, in line with the truth of every individual thing of every sort: This is the way to unravel the great mass of problems that, taken together, are results — the mass of suffering inside the heart. This is how we are taught to unravel it.

As discernment constantly keeps unraveling things, without letup, until it understands clearly and distinctly, we don't have to tell it to let go. Once the mind knows, it lets go of its own accord. It is bound to let go of its own accord. The mind attached is the mind that does not yet know - doesn't yet understand with discernment.

Once the full heart knows, it fully lets go, with no concern or regrets. All the concerns that used to bother and disturb the mind vanish of their own accord because discernment sees right through them. Once it sees everything clearly and distinctly, what is there left to grope for? The problems of the heart that used to be broad and wide-ranging, now, become more and more restricted. Problems concerning outside affairs become less and less, as I have said in previous talks.

The next step is to unravel the mind, the gathering point of subtle defilements, so as to see what it is looking for when it 'blips' out. Where does it 'blip' from? What is there that pressures the mind into forming thoughts of various issues?

When mindfulness and discernment can keep up with the thoughts that come 'blipping' out, these thoughts vanish immediately without amounting to anything, without forming issues to entangle us as they did before. This is because mindfulness and discernment are wise to them, and always ready to herd them in and wipe them out as they keep following in on the tracks of the origin of defilement to see exactly where it is. Where do its children and grandchildren — the defilements — come from? Animals have their parents, what are the parents of these defilements? Where are they? Why do they keep forming again and again, thinking again and again? Why do they give rise to assumptions and interpretations, increasing suffering and stress without stop?

Actually, thought-formations are formed at the point of mind 'contact.' They don't come from anywhere else. So investigate, following them in, step by step, without losing the trail that will lead you to the truth, to the culprit. This is genuine exploring, observing the affairs of all the defilements, using the power of genuine mindfulness and discernment. Ultimately, we will know what the mind is lacking, what it is

still connected with, what it is interested in, what it wants to know and to see.

So we follow the connections, follow the seeds on in. Day by day, the defilements become more and more restricted, more and more restricted. This is because the bridges that connect them to sights, sound, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and the various things of the world in general have been cut away from the mind by using continual mindfulness and discernment to the point where we have no more doubts.

It's as if the outside world didn't exist. There remain only the preoccupations that form — blip, blip, blip — in the mind. This is where the rebellious monarch lies. The one who concocts and creates, the one who struggles and writhes restlessly in big and little ways, lies right here.

Before, we didn't know in what ways the mind was writhing. All we knew were the results that appeared, unsatisfactory every time, giving us nothing but suffering and stress, which no one in the world wants.

Our own heart was so burdened with stress that it couldn't find a way out, because it had no inkling of how to remedy things. But now that we know, these things gradually disappear so that we know and see more and more clearly at the mind, which is where unawareness is performing as an actor, as an issue-maker, here inside us.

It can't find anything to latch onto outside, so it simply acts inside. Why doesn't it latch on? Because mindfulness and discernment understand, and have it surrounded. So how could it latch onto anything? All it does is go 'blip, blip, blip' in the mind. We now see it more clearly and focus our investigation on it, scratch away at it, dig away at it with mindfulness and discernment until we have it surrounded every time the mind makes a move. There are no longer any lapses in alertness as there were in the first stages when mindfulness and discernment were still stumbling and crawling along.

*Our persistence at this level is no longer a matter of every activity. It becomes a matter of every mental moment in which the mind ripples. Mindfulness and*

discernment have to know both when the rippling comes out and when it vanishes — and so there are no issues that can arise in the moment the mind is fashioning a thought, an assumption, or an interpretation. This is because our rocket-fast mindfulness and discernment can keep up with things.

As soon as a rippling occurs, we know. When we know, it vanishes. No issues can arise or connect. They vanish the moment they appear. They can't branch out anywhere because the bridges to outside matters have been cut by mindfulness and discernment.

*When mindfulness and discernment are exploring earnestly, relentlessly, unflaggingly, they want to know, to see, and to destroy whatever is hazardous.*

'What causes us to take birth as individuals and beings? What leads us to wander in the round of rebirth? What are the causes, what are the conditions that connect things? Where are they right now?' This is called scratching away with mindfulness and

discernment, digging away at the mind of unawareness.

There is no way we can escape knowing, seeing, and severing the important cause and condition that creates suffering and stress for the beings of the world: namely, the defilement of unawareness that has infiltrated the mind in an insidious way. See?

*This is the power of mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence on this level, something that meditators never imagine will be possible to this extent.*

This is where defilements begin to reveal themselves, because they have no place to hide. They no longer have the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations in which they used to hole up, because the bridges have been cut. Their only hideout is in the mind: The mind is the hideout of unawareness.

When we go ransacking through the mind until everything [unwholesome] is smashed completely to smithereens with nothing left — in the same way

that we used discernment to investigate phenomena in general — then when the mind of unawareness is ransacked in this way, ultimately the supreme defilement — unawareness, the emperor of the round of rebirth — is completely obliterated from the mind. At this point, how can we help but know what it is that causes birth on this or that level?

As for where we will or won't be reborn, that's not important. What's important is seeing clearly that this is what has caused birth and death.

This is how we prove whether death is followed by rebirth or annihilation. We have to prove it at the mind by practicing in line with the principles of mental development, in the same way the Buddha and his Noble Disciples practiced and knew, so that it was clear to their hearts.

There is no other way to know. Don't go groping, guessing, scratching at fleas. You'll end up all mangy and dirty, without gaining anything at all. When we reach this point, it's called eliminating birth — whose primary seeds lie within — completely from the mind.

*From this moment onward, there is nothing that can ever again connect and branch out. Mindfulness and discernment on the level of Dhamma-realization know this completely.*

This is the culprit who asks, 'Is there a next world?' This is the one who reserves a place in the next world, the one who reserved our place in past worlds, the one who has been born and has died over and over and over again, unceasingly, relentlessly, to the point where it can't remember the births, the deaths, the pleasures, the pains, the sufferings large and small in its various lives. *This is the one.*

So please remember its face and take it to heart. Probe it and slash it away to smithereens. Don't show it any mercy: You'll simply be feeding and fattening it for it to come back and destroy you.

When we gather the defilements, they come into the one mind. They gather here, and we destroy them right here. Once we have finished destroying them so that nothing is left, the questions about birth, death, and the suffering and stress that result from

birth and death no longer exist. We can know this clearly and fully for ourselves in a way that is immediately apparent.

There is no more problem about whether or not there is a next world. Our past worlds, we have already abandoned. As for the next world, the bridges have all been sent flying. And as for the present, we're wise to it. *There are no conventions, no matter now refined, left in the mind. This is truly a mind with no more problems.* This is where we solve the mind's problems. Once they are all solved here, there will never be any problems again.

No matter how wide the world, no matter how many universes there are, they are all a matter of conventional reality, which has no limit. The heart that knows all around itself is no longer involved.

The affairs that have been constantly assaulting us up to the present, and that will do so on into the future, are the affairs of this mind that has hazards buried within itself. That's all there is. When these hazards have been entirely removed, there is nothing left to be dangerous or poisonous ever again.

The question of whether or not there is a next world no longer holds any interest, because the realization has gone straight to the heart *that it is done with the question of connecting up with any other world again*. So in studying and solving our own problem, we tackle it right here. This way there's hope that we can put an end to it — at the same time not causing any harm to ourselves or to others at all.

The Lord Buddha solved the problem right here. His arahant disciples solved it right here — knew it right here, severed it completely right here. The proclamation that the Teacher was completely free of suffering and stress, that he was the foremost teacher of the world, came from this knowledge and this freedom from issues. Our study of the world is completed right here at the mind. Our study of the Dhamma reaches full completion right here.

The 'world' means the world of living beings. 'Living beings' (*satta*) means those who are caught up, caught up right at the mind. This is where we cut through the problem. This is where we study and know. The arahant disciples studied and knew right

here with their full hearts — and that was the end of the problem. They solved the problem and it fell away, with nothing remaining.

But as for us, we take on the whole thing: the entire heap of suffering and stress. We take on all problems, but we aren't willing to solve any. We simply hoard them to weigh ourselves down all the time.

Our heart is thus filled with a heap of stress that nothing else can equal, because nothing else is as heavy as a heart heaped with stress. Carrying this heap of stress and problems is heavy on the heart because we haven't completed our studies. We carry nothing but this heap because of our delusion.

When *vijja* — true knowledge — has appeared and eradicated all the hazards from the heart, this is what it means to 'graduate' in line with natural principles, with none of the conferring of degrees or titles that would cause us to become even more deluded. To complete our study of the Dhamma in the heart, means that we have erased the heart completely of all delusions with no traces remaining.

At that moment, the three levels of existence — the levels of sensuality, form, and formlessness — become no more problem, because they all lie in the heart.

The level of sensuality is a mind composed of sensuality. The levels of form and formlessness are the conventions of the various things in those levels buried in the heart. When the heart removes them, that is the end of the problem. When we solve the problem, this is where we solve it. This world and the next world lie right here, because that which steps into any world lies right here. This mind is what steps out to receive stress in greater or lesser measure. The motor, the propeller, lies here in the heart and nowhere else.

The Lord Buddha thus taught at the right point, the most appropriate point: the heart, which is the primary culprit. The things I have mentioned here, with whom do they lie if not with each of us? And if we don't solve them right here, where will we solve them?

Living beings have to go to their various worlds through the power of the good and bad *kamma* within the heart. That which goes to the worlds — to the bonfires — is this very heart. If we don't solve the problem right here, there is no way of escaping the bonfires of stress and anxiety. If we solve the problem right here, there is no problem as to where the fires are, because we can keep ourselves protected. That's all there is to it!

All of these things are very heavy worlds for living beings in general. Whatever problems arise, they arise right here.

'Is death followed by rebirth? Or by annihilation? Is there a next world? Does hell exist? Does heaven? Does evil exist? Does merit?' Everywhere I go, there's the same question: 'Do heaven and hell exist?' I never feel like answering. I don't see any reason to answer, because that which is burdened with heaven and hell is the heart, which everyone already has. So why waste time answering? After all, I'm not a record-keeper for heaven and hell!

Straighten things out right here at the cause that will go to heaven and hell. Straighten out the bad causes and foster the good. There will, then, be no stress, if we straighten things out right on target. And how can we miss? The well-taught Dhamma (*svakkhata-dhamma*) teaches us to solve things right on target, not off-target.

The Dhamma that leads (*niyyanika-dhamma*), by means of the well-taught Dhamma, leads out those who are caught up in stress and anxiety through the power of delusion. Where will we solve things if we don't solve them at the heart?

The big problems lie solely at the heart, at this awareness. Crudeness is a matter of this awareness. Refinement is a matter of this awareness. That which makes people crude or refined is this awareness, with defilement as the reinforcement. If the mind becomes refined, it's because goodness is the reinforcement, making it refined until it goes beyond the final point of refinement, beyond the final point of conventions, and ends up gaining release from all stress, with no seeds for any further connections.

Another question that people are always asking is how to overcome laziness. If we were to tell them to use laziness to overcome laziness, it would be tantamount to telling them to become an enemy of beds, blankets, and pillows by sleeping without ever waking up. It would be as if they were already dead, because laziness makes you weak and listless like a person ready to die. How can you use laziness to cure laziness? Once you get a nice resting place as a means of lulling you to drown in sleep, it's as if you were already dead — dead right there on the pillow! Even when you wake up, you don't want to get up, because laziness stomps all over you and destroys you, forcing you not to get up. This is how it goes when you use laziness to cure laziness.

If you use energy and persistence to cure laziness, then you get right up, ready to fight. If there's a fight, you have hope of winning. But if you simply lie prostrate, all you can do is lose — although whether we should call it losing or something else is hard to say, because you don't even put up a fight at all, so how can you say that you lose? If there's a fight and you can't win, then you can say that this

person wins and that person loses. But here there's no fight at all! You simply lie there groveling.

If you don't call this being a servant in the house of defilements, what would you call it? Because that's what it is: being a servant in their house. If you use laziness — to the point of being its servant — to cure defilement, you end up piling on even more defilements. Or what would you say? As things stand, defilements already fill the heart, so if you foster them even more, where are you going to put them?

You've got only one heart! The only way is to remove defilements so that you can begin to breathe, and not let them sit on top of your nose so that you can never gasp a breath at all.

Remove them so that you can begin to see yourself: 'At last, after all the time I've been meditating, I've finally seen a piece of defilement's grandchild — laziness — fall off, just like a chip of bark off a tree. Today at last I can begin to see myself. Up to now there's only been defilement making use of my nose and mouth. It's really infuriating!'

Persistence. Diligence. Exertion in the way of reason that can accomplish our purposes: This is the path that sages have followed. Even though it may be difficult, we're up to the fight. It's like removing a thorn from your foot: Even though it hurts to remove it, you have to bear it. If you let it stay there, your whole foot will become infected and putrid. You won't be able to walk at all, and may even lose the foot. So there's only one reasonable course: Pull it out. No matter how much it hurts, you have to bear it, because you have to get the thing out! This is a line of reasoning you have to accept. Once the thorn is out, it holds no more poison. Put medicine on the wound, and the foot will heal without flaring up as it would if the thorn were still embedded there.

Defilement is just like a thorn. We let it lie buried forever in the heart. As long as it remains, the heart is infected and putrid, there in the midst of the round of rebirth — an endless monotony. Is this what you want? - To be a putrid person? Ask yourself. Don't ask the defilements. They'll simply do you more harm. If you don't want this, you have to fight them.

Once you fight them, you are sure somehow of finding a way to win. No matter how many times you lose, there will have to come a time when you win. Once you've won, then you can keep on winning, winning and winning until there is nothing left for you to fight because the defilements are completely mauled and mutilated.

When you win, whom do you defeat? You defeat laziness with diligence. You defeat defilement with energy and persistence. This way you gain release from all stress. This is how you solve the problem of birth and death, right at the heart.

There is only this spot that most needs solving. It's the most appropriate spot, the most correct spot to solve. To solve things, you solve them here. There is no way you can solve them anywhere else. Keep on making assumptions and interpretations for aeons and aeons, and you'll simply continue to be burdened with the problem as it leads you to birth, death, suffering, and stress. So you shouldn't be bold in speculating and guessing, or you'll waste your time and die in vain, because there is no way the problem will be solved with guesses and speculations.

'Does suffering exist, or not? Do merit (*puñña*) and evil exist, or not?' Actually, we are experiencing these things, all of us, with no possible exceptions. 'Evil' is mental darkness and stress. 'Merit' is well-being and ease. These things exist in the body and mind of every person, so how can you deny them?

'Merit' is a name for well-being. The Buddha calls it merit. Stress he calls evil. We are touched by good and evil all the time. Whether we live in this world or the next, we can't help but meet with good and evil.

Hell or not-hell, if there's pain filling the body and mind, who wants it? Who wants to meet with it? This is something we all know, so why ask about hell when it's already with us like this?

Wherever pain is burning us, it's as hot as being branded with fire. No matter where you're branded, it all has to be hot in the same way. You can call it hell or not-hell as you like, but nobody wants it, because pain is something we have all known for ourselves.

And where — to trouble your heart — are you going to go looking for heaven? When you meet with the well-being that comes from practicing the Dhamma — and especially with well-being in the heart, beginning with stillness and calm in ascending stages to the point where the mind develops a firm and solid footing within, so that it is sure of itself; and then further, to the point where you gain release — then where are you going to ask about heaven and *nibbana*? *There's no need to ask.*

You know them directly with your heart. You are the owner, in charge of the heart that is clearly the instigator, so where else are you going to look — for the names 'heaven' and 'hell'? What is there to grope for?

You've got the real thing within you. That's all there is to the matter. The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha doesn't delude people into groping for this or that. So take hold of the real thing right here.

Well then. That should be enough for now.

**A Taste for the Dhamma**

In the basic principles of the doctrine, we are taught that, 'A delight in the Dhamma surpasses all other delights. The flavor of the Dhamma surpasses all other flavors.'

This statement was made by a person who had felt delight in the true Dhamma, who had tasted the flavor of the true Dhamma: namely, our Lord Buddha.

For this reason, those who take an interest in listening to his teachings find that no matter what the statement, each word, each sentence goes straight to the heart — except, of course, for people who are simply going through the motions of listening without focusing the mind, letting it drift engrossed in various things in line with its original inclinations without gaining anything of any worth.

The teachings of the religion have no meaning in a mind of this sort until it turns to the Dhamma, develops an interest of its own accord, and puts the Dhamma into practice. Only then, will the flavor of the Dhamma seep deep into the heart, nurturing it and giving rise to conviction step by step. This is

because the heart now has a continuing basis for the Dhamma that supports it in ascending stages.

In particular, when listening to Dhamma dealing with the practice, if our mind doesn't have any experience with meditation, has never taken an interest in the Dhamma, has never taken an interest in practicing the Dhamma, then not even a single statement will arrest the attention.

When listening to a talk on the practice dealing with the stages of the mind, the progress of the mind, setting the mind aright in relationship to the defilements or to the path — mindfulness and discernment, or persistent effort — we won't understand.

When we don't understand, we become frustrated and turn our attention elsewhere. Perhaps we may become drowsy and want to go to sleep or something of the sort.

The talk seems long because it acts as a drag on our defilements, preventing them from roaming around as they please. This is because we have to keep control over the mind while we listen to the talk; and

the mind, when kept under control in this way, feels hemmed in, imprisoned within limits which it finds oppressive. Annoyed and bored, it doesn't want to listen, except for the purpose of creating useless issues for entangling itself.

But when we keep listening with interest, meditating even while we listen, the mind becomes focused and follows along with the stream of Dhamma being explained. The mind grows still because the awareness making contact with the Dhamma maintains that contact continuously, step by step, without break. The heart has no chance to slip away to any other preoccupations that are its enemies while listening, and so it's able to settle down and be still.

To be able to settle down in this way is to begin building a base, or to scrub our vessel — the heart — making it clean and fit to receive the Dhamma.

The heart will start growing more peaceful and calm, seeing the value of listening to the Dhamma as explained by the Buddha: 'Listening to the Dhamma has five rewards.' The fifth reward is the important

one: 'The mind of the listener becomes radiant and calm.' This one is very important, but it must build on the earlier ones. 'The listener hears things he or she has never heard' — this is the basis for the rest.

Suppose that we have never listened to anything in the way of the practice or whatever. When we come to listen, we gain an understanding of things we have never heard before. Things that we *have* heard before, but never understood clearly, we gradually come to understand more and more clearly. We can bring our views more correctly into line. And finally we reach the stage where 'the mind of the listener becomes radiant and calm.'

When results of this sort appear, a delight in the Dhamma will develop of its own accord. The flavor of the Dhamma will begin to appear while we listen and while the mind is stilling itself to listen. Even though this flavor may not yet surpass all others, it is nevertheless absorbing and arresting, and will remain long in the memory, not easily erased.

This is why meditators place great importance on listening to the Dhamma. If you were to call it being

attached to one's teacher, I wouldn't disagree. Meditating monks always like to listen to their teachers. If they have a teacher they venerate and revere in the area of meditation, in the area of the mind, then wherever he lives they will keep coming to be with him until there is hardly enough room for them to stay.

Venerable Acariya Mun is an example. Wherever he stayed, students would come continually from near and far to search him out. Even though they couldn't all stay in the same place with him, inasmuch as there wasn't enough room, they would still be willing to stay in nearby areas, two, three, four, or seven to eight kilometers away, so that they might conveniently come to hear his teachings on the *uposatha* days and 'Dhamma meeting' days.

On the *uposatha* days, after listening to the Patimokkha and to his instructions, anyone who had any doubts or questions about the Dhamma could ask him to resolve them. For this reason, the township where he stayed was filled with nothing but meditating monks and novices.

When *uposatha* day came, they would begin gathering together after the morning meal. At 1:00 p.m. they would hear the Patimokkha; and after the Patimokkha, Venerable Acariya Mun would give his talk — that's when he'd usually give his talk, after the Patimokkha. This would be an important part of the practice for those who lived with him.

During the Rains Retreat (*vassa*) we would meet like this every seven days. Outside of the Rains Retreat, the schedule wasn't too fixed, but this is how he would usually schedule things for those of us who stayed directly with him.

Each time we would listen to his talks we would gain in insight and understanding — without fail. This is why meditation monks are attached to their teachers.

Each time we would listen to him, he himself would be like a magnet drawing the interest of the monks and novices. In all things related to the Dhamma, he would be the major attracting force, inspiring fascination and delight in the Dhamma. There was a delight in seeing him and meeting him each time,

and even more so in hearing him speak — talking in general, giving instructions, conversing about ordinary things, joking — *because he himself was entirely Dhamma.*

Everything he would do or say in any way would keep revealing Dhamma and reasonability that could be taken as a lesson, so that those who were interested could gain a lesson each time they heard him.

This is why meditating monks find a great deal of enjoyment in the area of the Dhamma by living with a meditation master. They go to be with him of their own accord. When they are far from him, and their minds aren't yet to the stage where they can look after themselves, they are bound to feel lonesome.

Or if they come across a problem they can't solve, they are sure to miss him. If they can't work out a solution, they have to run to him for advice so as to save a great deal of the time it would take to figure out a solution on their own — because he has been through everything of every sort. If we would take a problem to him, then as soon as we had finished the

last sentence, he would immediately have the solution and we would understand right then and there.

This is why, when living with a master who has realized the truth, there's no delay, no waste of time in dealing with each problem as it arises. This is a great benefit for those who come to study with him. They're never disappointed. The fact that one who has seen the truth is giving the explanation makes all the difference.

A moment ago I began by mentioning a delight in the Dhamma. What I have just been talking about is the same sort of thing: finding pleasure in the Dhamma, continual pleasure, through listening to it constantly. In the same way, when we practice the Dhamma constantly, the results — the flavor and nourishment that come from the practice — increase continually, becoming more and more solid and substantial in the heart.

Especially in the practice of centering the mind: The mind is calm, tranquil, contented, and relaxed. Its thoughts don't go meddling with anything outside.

It's as if the world didn't exist, because our attention isn't involved with it. There's simply the Dhamma to be contemplated and practiced so as to give rise to more and more steadiness and strength.

And on the level of discernment, no matter how broad or narrow our investigation of the many phenomena in the world may be, it is exclusively for the sake of the Dhamma, for the sake of self-liberation.

We thus become thoroughly engrossed, day and night. The more strongly our heart is set on the Dhamma, the greater its stamina and courage. It has no concern for life itself - no worries about its living conditions or anything external. Its only support is the guiding compass of the Dhamma. Whether we are sitting, lying down, or whatever, the heart is engrossed in its persistent efforts in practicing the Dhamma.

On the level of concentration, it is engrossed in its stillness of mind. On the level of discernment, it is engrossed in its explorations of the Dhamma from

various angles for the sake of removing defilement, step by step, as it investigates.

Peace of heart is thus possible in each stage of persisting with the practice. The more quiet and secluded the place, the more conspicuously this awareness stands out. Even knowledge in the area of concentration stands out in our inner awareness.

It stands out for its stillness. In the area of discernment, our knowledge stands out for the shrewdness and ingenuity of the mind as it explores without ceasing — except when resting in the stillness of concentration — just as water from an artesian well flows without ceasing during both the wet season and the dry.

When phenomena make contact with the mind — or even when they don't — a mind already inclined to discernment is bound to investigate, peering into every nook and cranny, gaining understanding step by step. For example, when we are first taught mindfulness immersed in the body (*kayagata-sati*), it seems superficial — because the mind is superficial. It has no footing, no mindfulness, no discernment. It

hasn't any principles — any Dhamma — to hold to. Whatever it hears doesn't really go straight to the heart, because the mind is buried way down there, deep under the belly of defilement.

But once it develops principles and reasonability within itself, then — especially when we're sitting in meditation in a quiet place, investigating the body — the whole body seems clear all the way through.

That's how it really feels to a person meditating on this level. It's really enthralling. Whether we're contemplating the skin or the body's unattractiveness, it appears extremely clear, because that's the way its nature already is — simply that our mind hasn't fallen in step with the truth and so is constantly taking issue with it.

So. Now that the mind can develop stillness and investigate using its discernment, let's take it on a meditation tour, exploring the body: our five *khandhas*. We can travel up to the head, down to the feet, out to the skin, into the muscles, tendons, and bones to see how all the parts are related and connected by their nature.

As the mind contemplates in this way, step by step, as it gets engrossed in its investigation, the final result is that even though we're investigating the body, the body doesn't appear in our inner sense of feeling at all.

The mind feels airy and light. The physical body disappears, despite the fact that we continue investigating the mental image of the body as before. Even though we're using the mental image of the body as the focal point of our investigation, the physical aspect of the body no longer appears. It completely vanishes.

We investigate until there's a refinement in the mind's sense of awareness to the point where we can make the body in the image die and disintegrate, step by step. Our awareness is confined solely to the mental image that we are investigating by means of discernment. We see it distinctly because nothing else is coming in to interfere.

The mind feels no hunger or desire to go skipping outside. It's completely engrossed in its work of

investigation. Its understanding grows clearer and clearer. The clearer its understanding, the greater its fascination is. Ultimately, there is simply the mental image, or the idea, and the mind, or discernment. As for the actual body, it disappears. You don't know where it's gone. There's no sense of the body at that moment, even though you are investigating the body until you see its condition disintegrating clearly within the mind — disintegrating until it returns to its original condition as the elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. Once the body in the image returns to its original elements, the mind, then, withdraws inward, leaving nothing but simple awareness.

Feelings all disappear at this stage. *Sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* aren't involved. There's simply awareness, sufficient for the mind's state at that moment. It enters a really solid stillness, leaving only simple awareness. The body sitting here disappears entirely.

This is something that can occur in the course of investigating, *but please don't plan on it*. Simply listen now for the sake of becoming absorbed and gladdened while listening. This will give rise to the

benefits of listening that you will actually see for yourself.

What will happen when you investigate in line with your own personal traits is a completely individual matter that will appear in keeping with your temperament. As for what occurs with other people, you can't make yourself experience what they do, know the way they know, or see the way they see. This is something that depends on each person's individual traits. Let things follow your own inner nature in line with the way you are able to investigate and to know.

This is one point I want to explain.

A second point: When investigating the body in terms of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, then — whether or not you think, 'inconstancy, stress, and not-self' — when discernment makes clear contact with the bodily *khandha*, it will be able to know these things on its own, because things that are inconstant, stressful, and not-self are things that deserve to be relinquished, that inspire dispassion and disenchantment, step by step, until you let go. When the mind has investigated so that it fully

understands, it lets go of its own accord without being forced, because each part, each aspect of the body or of the *khandha* being investigated is simply an individual truth. When the mind investigates clearly in this way, it makes the break automatically, because a truth has encountered a truth: The mind is the mind, and each of these individual conditions is a separate condition that hasn't come to involve itself with the mind at all.

The mind will then turn around to see its own fault in being attached. 'Here I've really been deluded. Actually things are like this and this.' This is one stage: When the mind hasn't yet made a complete break — when it doesn't yet have adequate strength — it will start out by knowing at intervals in this way.

The next time you investigate, you know in this way again, and it keeps seeping in, seeping in, until your knowledge on this level becomes adequate and lets go. Like duckweed that keeps moving in, moving in to cover the water: After you spread it apart, the duckweed comes moving in again, and you spread it apart again. This is how it is when discernment

investigates these things, making forays into these things or unraveling them.

As soon as discernment retreats, subtle defilements come moving in again, but after you have investigated many, many times, the duckweed — the various types of defilement — begins to thin out. Your investigation of these phenomena becomes more and more effortless, more and more proficient, more and more subtle, step by step, until it reaches a point of sufficiency and the mind extricates itself automatically, as I have already explained.

The mind — when its mindfulness and discernment are sufficiently strong — can extricate itself once and for all. This knowledge is clear to it, without any need to ask anyone else ever again. The heart is sufficient, in and of itself and sees clearly as '*sanditthiko*' in the full sense of the term, as proclaimed by the Dhamma, without any issues to invite contradiction.

A third point: Sometimes, when investigating the body, the mind makes contact with a feeling of pain, and so turns to investigate it. This all depends on the

mind's temperament. In the same way, when we turn to investigate the feeling, the mind sends us back to the body. This is because the body and the feeling are interrelated and so must be investigated together at the same time, depending on what comes naturally to us at that particular time, that particular feeling, and that particular part of the body.

When the mind investigates a feeling of pain, the pain is nothing more than 'a pain.' The mind looks at it, fixes its attention on it, examines it, and then lets it go right there, turning to look at the body. The body is the body. The feeling is a feeling. Then, we turn to look at the mind: The mind is the mind.

We investigate and experiment to find the truth of the body, the feeling, and the mind — all three of which are the troublemakers — until we have a solid understanding of how each has its own separate reality.

*When the mind pulls back from the body and the feeling, neither the body nor the feeling appears. All that appears is simple awareness. When a mental current flashes out to know, the feeling then appears*

as a feeling. These currents are the means by which we know what phenomenon has appeared, because this knowledge gives a meaning or a label to the phenomenon as being like this or like that.

If we're going to think in a way that binds us to 'ourself' — in other words, in the way of the origin of stress — we have to make use of this act of labeling as what leads us to grasp, to become attached, to make various assumptions and interpretations. If we're going to think in the way of discernment, we have to make use of the discernment *that is this very same current of the mind* to investigate, contemplate, until we see clearly by means of discernment and can withdraw inwardly in a way that is full of reason — not in a way that is lazy or weak, or that is groveling in abject surrender with no gumption left to fight.

In investigating feeling, when a *sañña* flashes out, mindfulness is alert to it. If our investigation of feeling has become refined and precise, then when a *sañña* simply flashes out, we know. When *sankharas* form, they are just like fireflies: blip! If no *sañña* labels them or picks up where they leave

off, they simply form — blip! blip! — and then vanish, vanish. No matter what they form — good thoughts, bad thoughts, crude thoughts, subtle thoughts, neutral thoughts, whatever — they are simply a rippling of the mind. If they occur on their own, when nothing is making contact with the mind, they're called *sankhara*. If they occur when something is making contact, they're called *viññana*.

Here we're talking about the *sankharas* that form on their own, without anything else being involved. They form — blip — and then vanish immediately. Blip — and then vanish immediately. We can see this clearly when the mind converges snugly in the subtle levels of concentration and discernment.

The snugness of the mind's convergence won't have anything else involved with it at all. All that remains is simple awareness. When this simple awareness remains stable this way, we will see clearly that it isn't paired with anything else. When the mind begins to withdraw from this state to return to its awareness of phenomena — returning to its ordinary state of mind that can think and form thoughts — there will be a rippling — blip — that vanishes

immediately. It will then be empty as before. In a moment it will 'blip' again. The mind will form just a flash of a thought that doesn't yet amount to anything, just a rippling that vanishes immediately the instant it's known. As soon as there's a rippling, we are alert to it because of the power of mindfulness keeping watch at the moment — or because of the strength of concentration that hasn't yet dissipated. But after these ripples have formed two or three times, they come more and more frequently, and soon we return to ordinary consciousness, just as when a baby awakens from sleep: At first, it fidgets a bit, and then after this happens a number of times, it finally opens its eyes. The same is true of the mind. It has calm...

Here I'm talking about concentration when discernment is there with it. The various ways of investigating I have mentioned are all classed as discernment. When we have investigated enough, the mind enters stillness, free from mental formations and fashionings and from any sort of disturbance.

All that appears is awareness. Even just this has the full flavor of a centered mind, which should already be enough to surpass all other flavors. We never tire of delighting in this stillness. We feel a constant attraction to this stillness and calm in the heart. Wherever we go, wherever we stay, the mind has its own foundation. The heart is at ease, quiet and calm, so that, now, we must use discernment to investigate the elements and *khandhas*.

The important point to notice is the act of formation in the mind. Once something is formed, *sañña* immediately labels it — as if *sankhara* were forming things to hand on to *sañña*, which takes up where the *sankhara* leaves off. It then interprets these things from various angles — and this is where we get deluded. We fall for our own assumptions and interpretations, for our own shadows, which paint picture stories that have us engrossed or upset both day and night. Why are we engrossed? Why are we upset?

Engrossed or upset, it's because of the mind's shadows acting out stories and issues. This story. That story. Future issues. Things yet to come.

Things yet to exist — *nothing but the mind painting pictures to delude itself*. We live in our thought-formations, our picture-painting — engrossed and upset by nothing but our own thought-formations, our own picture-painting.

In a single day there's not a moment when we're free from painting imaginary pictures to agitate and fool ourselves.

*Wise people, though, can keep up with the tricks and deceits of the khandhas, which is why they aren't deluded.*

The moment when mindfulness and discernment really penetrate down is when we can know that this is actually the way the mind usually is. Like people who have never meditated: When they start meditating, they send their minds astray, without anything to hold on to. For example, they may have a meditation word, like '*buddho*,' and there they sit — their eyes vacant, looking at who-knows-what. But their minds are thinking and painting 108 pictures with endless captions. They then become engrossed with them or wander aimlessly in line

with the preoccupations they invent for themselves, falling for their preoccupations more than actually focusing on their meditation. They, thus, find it hard to settle their minds down because they don't have enough mindfulness supervising the work of meditation to make them settle down.

Once we have used our alertness and ingenuity in the areas of concentration and discernment, we will come to know clearly that these conditions come from the mind and then delude the mind whose mindfulness and discernment aren't quick enough to keep up with them. The heart causes us to follow after them deludedly, so that we can't find any peace of mind at all, even though our original aim was to meditate to find peace of mind. These deceptive thoughts engender love, hate, anger, irritation, without letup, no matter whether we are meditators or not — because as meditators we haven't set up mindfulness to supervise our hearts, and the result is that we're just as insane with our thoughts as anyone else. Old Grandfather Boowa has been insane this way himself, and that's no joke!

Sometimes, no matter how many years in the past a certain issue may lie, this aimless, drifting heart wanders until it meets up with it and revives it. If it was something that made us sad, we become sad about it again, all on our own. We keep it smoldering and think it back to life, even though we don't know where the issue lay hidden in the meantime. These are simply the mind's own shadows deceiving it until they seem to take on substance and shape. As what? As anger, greed, anxiety, pain, insanity, all coming from these shadows. What sort of 'path' or 'fruition' is this? Paths and fruitions like this are so heaped all over the world that we can't find any way out.

So in investigating the acts of the mind, the important point is that discernment be quick to keep up with their vagrant ways. When mindfulness and discernment are quick enough, then, whatever forms in the mind, we will see that it comes from the mind itself, which is about to paint pictures to deceive itself, about to label and interpret sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of various kinds. The heart is then wise to these preoccupations; and when it is not fooled by them, they vanish immediately, with no

chance of taking on substance or shape, of becoming issues or affairs. This is because mindfulness and discernment are wise to them, and so the issues are resolved.

*Ultimately, we come to see the harm of which the mind is the sole cause. We don't praise or blame sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations at all. The heart turns and sees the harm that arises in the mind that deceives itself, saying, 'That's worth praising... worth criticizing... worth getting glad about... worth getting sad about.'* It sees that the blame lies entirely with the mind. This mind is a cheat, a fraud, a deceiver. If we study it and keep watch of its ways through meditation, we will gain a thorough knowledge of its good and evil doings, until it lies within our grasp and can't escape us at all.

This is how we investigate when we investigate the mind.

Ultimately, other things will come to have no meaning or importance for us. The only important thing is this deceiving mind, so we must investigate

this deceiver with mindfulness and discernment so that we can be wise to its tricks and deceptions.

In fixing our attention on the mind, we have to act as if it were a culprit. Wherever it goes, we have to keep watch on it with mindfulness and discernment. Whatever thoughts it forms, mindfulness and discernment have to keep watch so as to be up on events. Each event — serious or not — keeps vanishing, vanishing. The heart knows clearly, 'This mind, and nothing else, is the real culprit.'

Visual objects aren't at fault. They don't give benefits or harm. Sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations don't give benefits or harm, because they themselves aren't benefits or harm.

Only the mind is what fashions them and dresses them up so as to deceive itself into being gladdened or saddened, pleased or pained through the power of the preoccupations that arise only from the heart.

Mindfulness and discernment see more and more clearly into these things, step by step, and then turn to see that the fault lies all with the mind. They no

longer praise or blame other things as they used to. Once they have focused solely on the mind, which at the moment is the culprit, the time won't be long before they can catch the culprit and put an end to all our concerns.

So then. Whatever thoughts that may be formed are all an affair of the mind. The 'tigers and elephants' it forms are simply *sankharas* it produces to deceive itself. Mindfulness and discernment are up on events every time. Now the current of the cycle (*vatta*) keeps spiraling in, day by day, until we can catch the culprit — but we can't yet sentence him. We are now in the stage of deliberation to determine his guilt.

Only when we can establish the evidence and the motive can we execute him in accordance with the procedures of 'Dhamma Penetration.' This is where we reach the crucial stage in mindfulness and discernment.

In the beginning, we used the elements and *khandhas* as our objects of investigation, cleansing the mind with elements, using them as a whetstone to sharpen mindfulness and discernment. We

cleansed the mind with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, using them as a whetstone to sharpen mindfulness and discernment; and we cleansed the mind itself with automatic mindfulness and discernment.

Now at this stage we circle exclusively in on the mind. We don't pay attention to matters of sights, sounds, smells, or tastes, because we have already understood and let go of them, knowing that they aren't the causal factors. They aren't as important as this mind, which is the primary instigator — the culprit renowned throughout the circles of the cycle, the agitator, the disturber of the peace, creating havoc for itself only right here inside.

Mindfulness and discernment probe inward and focus right here. Wherever this mind goes, it's the only thing causing harm. So we watch patiently over this culprit to see what he will do next — and aside from being alert to what he will do, we also have to use discernment to penetrate in and see who is inciting him. Who stands behind him, so that he must be constantly committing crimes? He keeps creating deceptive issues without pause — *why?*

Mindfulness and discernment dig in there, not simply to pounce on or lay siege to his behavior, but also to go right into his lair to see what motivating force lies within it. What is the real instigator? There has to be a cause. If there is no cause, no supporting condition, to spin the mind into action, then, the mind can't simply act on its own.

If it simply acts on its own, then it has to be a matter of *khandhas* pure and simple — but here it's not pure and simple. Whatever behavior the mind displays, whatever issues it forms, all give rise to gladness or sadness. This shows that these conditions aren't 'simply' coming out. There's a cause. There's an underlying condition that sends them out, making them give rise to real pleasure and pain when we fall for them.

While we are exploring inward at this point, we have already seen that the mind is the culprit, so we must consider letting go of all external things. Our burdens grow less and less. There remain only the issues of the mind and the issues of formation and interpretation that arise solely from the mind.

Mindfulness and discernment spin whizzing around in there and ultimately come to know what it is that causes the mind to form so many thoughts giving rise to love, anger, and hate. As soon as it appears, the heart knows it; and when the heart knows it, the 'Lord of Conventional Reality,' which is blended with the mind, dissolves away.

At this point the cycle has been destroyed through mindfulness and discernment. The mind is no longer guilty, and turns into a mind absolutely pure. Once the problem of the cycle is ended, there is no way that we can find fault with the mind. When we *could* find fault that was because the fault was still in the mind. It was hiding in the mind. Just as when criminals or enemies have taken up hiding in a cave: We have to destroy the cave as well, and can't conserve it out of affection for it.

*Avijja* — unawareness — is the lord of the three levels of existence that has infiltrated the mind, and thus we have to consider destroying the entire thing. If the mind isn't genuine, it will dissolve together with unawareness. If it's genuine in line with its

nature, it will become a pure mind — something peerless — because all things counterfeit have fallen away from it through the use of mindfulness and discernment.

When the counterfeit things which are like rust latching firmly onto the mind finally dissolve away through the power of mindfulness and discernment, the mind becomes genuine Dhamma. You can call it 'the genuine mind' or 'the genuine Dhamma': There's no contradiction, because there is no more reason for contradiction, which is an affair of defilement. You can say 100% that the flavor of the Dhamma has surpassed all other flavors.

When the mind is pure Dhamma, it has had enough of all other things. It is absolutely no longer involved with anything else at all. It's one mind, one Dhamma. There is only one. There is only one genuine Dhamma. The mind is Dhamma, the Dhamma is the mind. That's all that can be said.

I ask each of you to take this and contemplate it. This is the basis for the truth of the teachings that the Lord Buddha taught from the beginning until the

moment of his total *nibbana*. The purity of his mind was a deeply felt Dhamma that he experienced with his full heart. He then proclaimed that Dhamma, with the benevolence of his full heart, teaching the world up to the present.

To call his teachings, 'the benevolence of the Lord Buddha' shouldn't be wrong, because he taught the world with true benevolence.

When we take those teachings and put them into practice in a way that goes straight to the heart, we will come to see things we have never seen before, never known before, within this heart, step by step, until we reach the full level of practice, know the full level of knowledge, and gain release from suffering and stress with our full hearts, with nothing left latching on. This is called wiping out the cemeteries — the birth and death of the body and mind — for good. What a relief!

And now that we've reached this point, I don't know what more to say, because I'm at a loss for words. I ask that you as meditators practise, train yourselves and explore all Dhammas until you too are at a loss of words like this speaker at his wits' end.

Even though we may be stupid, infinitely stupid, I'll ask to express my admiration straight from the heart.  
*Evam.*

## **Feelings of Pain**

In the Discourse on Good Omens (*Mangala Sutta*), the Buddha teaches us to associate with sages, and not with fools. The first and foremost fool here is our own heart. *In other words, there are fools outside and fools inside*, and for the most part the fools inside are the ones who keep stirring up trouble all the time.

When we live with meditation masters, which is called associating with sages, we keep gaining lessons from sages, because that's what they are. They are wise in the various tactics they teach us. They have practiced and gained knowledge of everything from experience. Their teachings are thus correct, precise, and convincing to those who listen to them, with no room for any doubt.

In particular, Venerable Acariya Mun: There never was a time when he would teach saying, 'It seems to be like this. It seems to be like that.' There was

nothing but, 'This is the way it is for sure, for sure' — and *we* were sure, because he spoke only the absolute truth taken right from a heart that had already known and seen, and from his own well-conducted practice. Especially in the case of illness: If there were any weak-willed cases, he would tell them, 'Whoever is weak, whoever cries and moans, can take his moans as his medicine. There's no need to search out medicine anywhere, no need to have anyone to look after him. His moans are his medicine. If moaning serves any purpose, then why search for medicine to treat the disease?'

Then he would add, 'Keep moaning. Everyone can moan. Even children can moan — if it serves a purpose. But here it doesn't serve any purpose at all other than to annoy those good people who are unflinching in the practice. So you shouldn't moan out of weakness. You're a meditation monk. When you act like this, who can bear to see it? If you were a child or an ordinary person, there wouldn't be anything wrong with it, because they haven't received any training. They don't have any knowledge or understanding of the various ways to contend with the pain, such as contemplating it.'

'But you, you already know everything of every sort. Yet when trouble comes, such as illness, you can't find any methods or tactics to care for yourself. You just go all to pieces. This won't do at all. You're a shame to yourself and your fellow meditators.'

Venerable Acariya Mun was very talented in teaching the heart. When those of his disciples who were intent on studying with him would listen to anything he'd say, it would go straight to the heart.

Straight to the heart. The things we should put into practice, we would put into practice. The things we should understand right then, dealing with internal matters, we would understand — every time, step after step.

When we were ill, he would teach us how to contemplate. 'When you have a fever, where did you get it from?' He'd say this so as to serve a purpose, as food for thought for meditators. 'From where did you drag out the fever and chills? They arise in this body, don't they? When they disappear, where do they go, if not back to where they came from? Even if they don't disappear, they die together with each

of us: There are no exceptions at all in this body. Investigate it so as to know it.

'All stress, all pains are Noble Truths. If we don't investigate them, what are we going to investigate? The Buddha gained Awakening with the Noble Truths, his disciples gained Awakening with the Noble Truths — so are we going to gain Awakening with weakness? Would that be in keeping with the Dhamma of the Buddha? Then we've come to resist the Dhamma!

'Where does the pain arise? In which part? Ask so as to find out. When it hurts here and aches there, *who is it that hurts?* Who is it that aches? Probe on in to find what instigates it. Where does it come from? Where does it hurt? *What causes it to hurt? What perceives it as pain?* When the body dies and they cremate it, does it hurt? Who is it that deceives itself into thinking that this hurts or that aches? Investigate so as to find its initial causes.

'If you're a meditator who doesn't know initial causes and doesn't know their effects — this heap of suffering — then how are you going to cure

suffering? What is your discernment for? Why don't you think? Why don't you find it and put it to use?

*'Your mindfulness and discernment are for keeping things in mind and investigating them — things such as feelings of pain that exist in your body and mind.'* He would keep stressing his points, step by step. If the person listening was intent on listening — and especially if he had any fighting spirit — he'd find it easy to grasp the point, and it would appeal to him immediately. Immediately.

When we'd leave Venerable Acariya Mun to live in any spot suitable for the practice, his teachings would seem to reverberate through the heart. You could remember every facet of his teachings, every important point that should be used as a tool in the practice. For example, if you were staying in a challenging place, *it was if he were right there in the heart*. The heart would be really audacious and exultant in practicing, knowing the Dhamma, seeing it, understanding it. You would understand with audacity, and with a warrior's spirit — not by being discouraged, irresolute, or beating a retreat. That's not the way to make the defilements fear you and

disappear from the heart. That's not at all the way to cure defilement, to know the affairs of defilement or to be able to remove them.

This is the religion! There is nothing to compare with it in being so correct, so precise, so genuine, so true, so indisputable. If we all were to follow the principles of the religion, there would be no need for prisons or jails. What need would they serve? Nobody would be doing any wrong! People would see in line with reason and acknowledge their rightness and wrongness, their good and their evil, using the principles of reason as their standard. We human beings would then be able to live with one another.

The reason we need laws, prisons, and jails is because we don't admit our wrongs. When we're wrong, we don't admit that we're wrong. Even the moment after we see ourselves do something wrong, we won't admit to it. Even when we're put in jail and are asked, we still say, 'They accused me of stealing this and stealing that' — even though we ourselves actually stole it. This is simply an unwillingness to admit to things in line with reason, in line with the

truth. Even within the heart, with things that concern us exclusively, the same holds true: We don't admit to them, which is why we receive so much pain and suffering. If we admit to the principles of the truth, the things that appear in line with the truth can be resolved through the truth. For example, even when pain arises in the body, it won't disrupt the mind because our knowledge is wise to it.

As the principles of the Dhamma say, pains have been appearing in our body and mind ever since we first became aware of things. There is no reason for us to get excited, frightened, or upset by them to the point where they disease the mind.

This is why mental development, or meditation, is an excellent science for gaining knowledge on all fronts: Those who practice consistently are not upset when pain arises in the body. They can even focus on the spot where the pain arises so as to investigate and analyze it in line with its truth until gaining skillful and courageous tactics for dealing with it admirably.

The important point is to associate with sages, wise people, those who are sharp and astute. If we aren't yet able to depend on ourselves, we have to depend on our teachers to instruct us. If we listen often, their teachings gradually seep into us and blend with our temperament until our mind becomes a mind with Dhamma. Our mind becomes a sage, a wise person, and can eventually take care of itself, becoming '*atta hi attano natho*' — its own mainstay.

So in every activity where we aren't yet capable, we first have to depend on others. In living with those who are good, we are bound to find peace and happiness. Our traits come to mesh with theirs — this is important — until our own traits become good and admirable as well.

It's the same as if we were to associate with bad people: At first we aren't bad, but as we associate with them for a long time, our traits blend themselves with theirs until we become bad without being aware of it. When we are fully bad, this makes us even more blind. We feel that we've become even better. No one else can push us around. Otherwise our 'goodness' will jump into action — the

'goodness' of a bad person, an evil that wise people everywhere fear.

Bad people and good people. Evil and good. These things get turned around in this way. Bad people thus can't see the truth that they are bad, and so flatter themselves into thinking, 'I'm good. I'm smart. I'm clever. I'm one of the most renowned operators around.' That's how they twist things!

For this reason, associating with meditation masters, with sages, is important for anyone who is striving to become a good person, who is hoping to prosper and be happy, because sages will teach us often. Their manners and deportment that we see day after day will gradually seep into and nurture our minds. We can hold to them continually as good examples, for everything they do in every way is all Dhamma.

Especially if they're people devoid of defilement, then there is nothing to compare with them. Like Venerable Acariya Mun: I'm certain that he was devoid of defilement. After hearing the Dhamma from him, I had no doubts. He himself never said that he was devoid of defilement, you know. He

never said that he was an arahant or anything, *but he would say it in his ability to explain the true Dhamma on every level* in a way that would go straight to the heart and erase all doubt for all those who came to study with him.

This is why I can dare to say unabashedly that Venerable Acariya Mun Bhuridatta Thera is one of the important arahants of our day and age — an age in which arahants are exceedingly rare, because it's an age sadly lacking in people practicing the Dhamma for the sake of arahantship. Instead, we practice to eliminate arahantship by amassing all kinds of miscellaneous defilements. This holds for all of us, so no one is in a position to criticize anyone else.

Let's return to the subject of feelings: To investigate feelings of pain is very important. This is something I learned from Venerable Acariya Mun. He took this very seriously whenever any of the meditators in his monastery became ill. Sometimes he would go himself and ask, 'How are you contemplating your illness?' Then he'd really emphasize the Dhamma. 'Go probing right there. Wherever there's pain,

investigate so as to see the truth of the pain.' He'd teach how to investigate: 'Don't retreat. To retreat is to enhance the pain.

'To be a warrior, you have fight by using discernment. This is what will bring victory: the ability to keep up with the feeling of pain that you hold to be an important enemy. Actually, that feeling isn't anyone's enemy. It doesn't have any sense of consciousness at all. It's simply a truth — that's all. So investigate on in. You don't have to anticipate it or concern yourself with whether it's a big pain or a small pain. All that's asked is that you know its truth with your own discernment, so that the heart won't deceive you.' That's what he would say.

Actually, our heart is deceit incarnate, because that which deceives is within the heart and fools the heart into making assumptions and interpretations. Stupidity has an easy time believing lies. Clever people have an easy time deceiving stupid people. Deceit has an easy time fooling stupidity. The cleverness of the defilements gets along well with our own stupidity. *This is why the Dhamma teaches*

*us to ferret things out to investigate down to their truth* and then to believe in line with that truth.

This is our means of gaining victory step by step. Ferret out the pains that are always with you so as to see them. Don't run away from them. Whether they're big or small, investigate right there. Investigate right there. If you're going to concentrate, concentrate right there. When you are investigating its causes, no matter how great the pain, keep probing in.

The thing we call pain: What does it depend on as its foundation? It depends on the body as its foundation. It depends on our attention as its means of flaring-up — in other words, the attention that labels it in various ways: This is what makes pain flare up. We have to cure this kind of attention by investigating to know both the pain — what it's like — and the place where pain arises, in whatever part of the body. Try to know clearly whether or not that spot is really pain.

For example, if there's pain in the bone, in any part of the skin or flesh, the skin and the flesh are skin

and flesh. The pain is a pain. *Even though they dwell together, they are separate things, not one and the same.* The mind — the knower that is aware of these things — is a mind, *but it's a deluded mind*, so it assumes that this is pain, that's pain, and conflates these things into being its 'self,' saying, 'I hurt here. I hurt there. I don't want myself to be pained. I want the pain to vanish.' This desire is a defilement that encourages pain and suffering to arise. The heart is pained. The feeling of pain in the body is pain. The pain in the heart flares up with that pain, because it wants it to follow the heart's desires. These things keep feeding each other. This is our own stupidity, loading us down with suffering.

To be intelligent, we have to investigate, to watch the feeling of pain in the heart. What does it come from? What does it depend on? It depends on the body. Which part of the body? From what spot in the body does the pain arise? *Look at the body and the feeling: Are they one and the same thing?* What kind of shape and features do they have? The feeling doesn't have any shape or features or a posture of any kind. It simply appears as a feeling of pain, that's all.

As for the body, it has a shape, a color, and complexion — and it stays as it was before the pain arose. When the pain arises, it stays just as it was.

*Actually, the pain is something separate from this.* It simply depends on a malfunction of the body to arise. The mind is what takes notice of it. If the mind has any discernment, it should notice it in line with its truth. The mind then won't be affected by it. But if the mind is deluded, it latches onto the pain — in other words, it pulls that pain in to be its 'self' — and then wants that pain, which it says is its self, to disappear.

This is why we can't analyze it. Once the pain is our self, how can we separate it out? If it's simply a pain, a separate reality, then the body is a separate reality. They aren't one and the same. Each one exists separately. Each is a separate reality in line with its nature. Only when our awareness is like this can we analyze things.

But as long as we see the pain as our self, then we can analyze it all day long and not get anywhere,

because once we hold that, 'This is myself,' how can we analyze it? We haven't separated these things with discernment, so we have to keep holding onto them as our self.

When the *khandhas* and the mind blend into one, we can't analyze them. But when we try to use mindfulness and discernment to investigate in to see the truth of these things — that each exists separately, each has its separate reality, which holds true for us and for everyone else — and this realization goes deep into the heart, then the pain gradually fades away, fades away.

At the same time, we know what makes the connection from the pain into the heart, because the connection comes from the heart. When we investigate the pain, it comes retracting into the heart. All the affairs of pain come from the heart that labels or that experiences mental pain because of an insidious connection by way of attachment (*upadana*) that we don't yet know.

When we investigate so as to see clearly, we follow the feeling of pain inward. We come in knowing,

knowing. The pain keeps retracting and retracting, into the heart. Once we know that the heart is what created the attachment, making itself construe the pain to be itself, creating a great deal of suffering—once we know this, the pain disappears.

Or — alternatively — once we know this, the pain stays real, but the heart doesn't latch onto it. Even though the pain may not disappear, the mind is the mind. It doesn't make any connection through attachment. Each is its own separate reality. This is called the mind being its own self — cool, calm, and collected — in the midst of the pain of the *khandhas*. This is to know that the mind is a reality just as each *khandha* is a separate reality.

This is the path for those who are practicing so as to become wise to the five *khandhas*, with feelings of pain as their primary focus.

But for those who understand all the way, to the point of reaching 'the unshakable mind, the unshakable Dhamma' (*akuppa-citta, akuppa-dhamma*) that can't be provoked into being anything else, there is no problem at all. Whether pain is little

or great, they have absolutely no problem because their minds are always true. There is never a time when their minds, which are already pure, can become defiled, can become 'worlded.' There's no way it could happen. For this reason, whatever conditions the *khandhas* may display, such people know them in line with the principles of nature. The *khandhas* themselves appear in line with the principles of nature and disappear in line with nature. They remain naturally and then disappear naturally. The mind knows in line with its own nature, without having to be forced or coerced in any way. The minds of those who know totally all-around are like this.

As for those of us who are investigating the *khandhas* to know them and withdraw from them step by step, even though our minds are not yet like that while we are practicing, even though our hopes aren't yet fulfilled, still our investigation of pain is for the purpose of separating the mind from the pain so that it's not entangled in pain, so that whenever pain arises in greater or lesser measure, the mind doesn't cling to the pain as being itself. We do this so as not to gather up the pain as being our self —

which would be the same as taking fire to burn our self. When we can do this, we can be at our ease.

So pain is an excellent whetstone for discernment. However much pain arises, set your mindfulness and discernment focused right there. Turn to look at the mind, and then expand your awareness to encompass the feeling and the body, each of which is already a separate part. The body is one part, the feeling is another, and the mind another.

Keep going back and forth among them, investigating with discernment until you understand — and it really goes to the heart — that, 'Each *khandha* is simply... and that's all.' None of them appears to be any such thing as 'you' or 'yours.' *They are simply different realities that appear, and that's all.* When you understand clearly like this, *the heart becomes its own free and independent self* at that moment and it knows that the mind and the *khandhas* are separate realities, neither affecting the other.

*Even at the moment when you are about to die, the heart will be up on events in the immediate present.* It won't be shaken by pain and death because it is

sure that the mind is the mind: a stronghold of awareness. Each *khandha* is simply a condition. The mind thus doesn't fear death because it is sure of itself that it won't get destroyed anywhere.

*Even though it may not have yet reached the level where it's absolutely devoid of defilement,* the mind has still prepared itself using discernment with the *khandhas* so that it's supreme. In other words, it lives with the Noble Truths. It lives with its whetstone for discernment. Discernment will spread its power far and wide. The heart will grow more and more radiant, more and more courageous, because discernment is what cleanses it. Even if death comes at that moment, there's no problem.

For one thing, if you use mindfulness and discernment to investigate pain without retreating, to the point where you understand it, then even when you really are about to die, you'll know that the pain will disappear first.

The mind won't disappear. It will revert into itself, knowing exclusively within itself, and then pass on at that moment. The phrase, 'Mindfulness lapses,' doesn't exist for a person who has practiced the

Dhamma to this level. We can thus be sure that a person with mindfulness, even though he or she may not be devoid of defilement, will still be clearly aware at the moment when pain arises in full force to the point where the *khandhas* can no longer endure and will break apart — will die. The mind will withdraw itself from all that and revert to its 'mindness' — to being its own independent self — and then pass on. This is a very high, very refined level of Dhamma!

For this reason, meditators who are resolute and unflinching for the sake of knowing every level of the Dhamma tend to be earnest in investigating pain. When the time comes for them to know, the knowledge goes straight to the heart. They regard their pain as a Noble Truth in line with the Buddha's teaching that all living beings are fellows in pain, birth, aging, illness, and death.

So when investigating the *khandhas* so as to know them in line with their truth, you shouldn't try to thwart or resist the truth. For example, if the body can't endure, let it go. You shouldn't cherish it. As for the pain, it will go on its own. This is called *sugato* — faring well.

This is the way of investigating the mind and training the heart that gives clear results to those who meditate. They have meditated in the way I've described so that when the time of death is really upon them, they don't hope to depend on anyone at all — parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, anyone. *They have to withdraw the mind from all things that entangle and involve it so as to enter that crucial spot where they are engaged in hand-to-hand combat.*

At a time such as this, at the moment when you are about to die, take pain as the focal point for investigation. Don't be willing to retreat — come what may! All that's asked is that you know and understand this point. Don't go thinking that if you die while being embroiled in investigating pain like this — while the mind is in the midst of this commotion — you'll go to a bad bourn. Why should you go to a bad bourn? You're embroiled, but with a noble task. You're embroiled with knowledge, or for the sake of knowledge, *and not because of delusion.* The mind is focused on investigating and probing pain. When the time comes for it really to go, this

knowing mind — the mind with mindfulness knows — will withdraw instantly into itself. It will let go immediately of the work at hand and withdraw into itself, to be itself — the mind and nothing but — and then pass on like a '*sugato*' with the full capability of a meditator, even though we may not yet be devoid of defilement.

This is called having full strength to our full capacity, in line with our level of mind and Dhamma. Investigation and mental development are thus important matters, matters on which our life and death depend. We needn't hope to depend on anyone else at all — of this we are certain within ourselves. The heart knows within itself how strong mindfulness and discernment are, and needn't go asking anyone else.

If the heart is able to investigate to the point where it can pass on at that moment, all doubts vanish. There are no problems at all. If you think that because you're a woman or because you're a layperson, you can't realize nibbana, *that's your own misconception*, which is one kind of defilement deceiving you.

The Dhamma is a truth and everyone's common property. Whether we are men or women, lay or ordained, we can all have mindfulness and discernment. We can all cure our defilements. When we are willing, any man or woman, any monk or layperson can use any of the methods to cure defilement and gain release. We needn't create problems to plague our hearts and waste our time. 'Since when do I have the potential to do that?' Don't think that! You're developing the merit and potential right now! However much or little, you can see it right here in the mind.

We should examine ourselves. Wherever we are stupid, we should develop intelligence: mindfulness and discernment. Only then will we be doing what is genuinely right in terms of the principles of the Lord Buddha's Dhamma.

If we criticize ourselves, thinking, 'That person is on this level or that level while we don't have any level at all; wherever we go, this person gets ahead of us, that person gets ahead of us,' actually nobody is getting ahead of us except for the defilements that get ahead of us and deceive us into feeling inferior and depressed, into thinking that we have only a

little potential. That's simply a misconception aimed at making us discouraged and self-pitying, because defilement is looking for a way to kill us without our realizing it.

We shouldn't think in those ways. We are full of potential — all of us. And why shouldn't we be? We're meditators. We're all devoted to making merit. Potential isn't something we can set out on the market to compete with one another. Every person has potential within him or herself. We're taught not to belittle one another's potential. Even with animals, we're taught not to belittle them — think of that! — It's because potential lies in the heart of every person and every animal.

So when curing defilement, you needn't waste time thinking those things. They'll simply ruin your morale and your resolve. To think, 'I'm a worthless woman... a worthless man... a worthless monk... a worthless layperson. I don't have any paths or fruitions at all. Other people have them, but I don't. I'm ashamed to show them my face' — these are wrong thoughts that will spoil your resolve in developing the various forms of goodness.

The right way to think is this: 'Right now I'm making an effort, with mindfulness and discernment, to cure defilement and to develop what is good and meritorious step by step, which is the direct way to develop my perfections (*parami*). I have the potential. I was born in the midst of the Buddha's teachings and have developed the potential and the perfections to my full capacity all along up to the present.'

Women can have mindfulness and discernment just like men, because women and men both have defilements, and defilements are cured with mindfulness and discernment — backed by persistent effort — both by men and by women. And where do they have defilements? They both have defilements in the heart. When mindfulness and discernment are complete, women and men can both pass over and beyond — with no question of their having to be ordained.

This is the truth of the Noble Truths, which are not particular about status, nationality, or any of the human races, and which are not particular about the

male or the female sex. All that's asked is that we strive, because the Dhamma is common to us all. Women and men, lay and ordained, we can all listen to it, understand it, practice it, and cure defilement.

The defilements don't favor men or women. We all have defilements. Even monks have defilements: What do you say to that? Monks thus have to cure their own defilements. If they don't, they lie buried in defilement just like people in general who aren't interested in the Dhamma — or even worse than people in general.

The Dhamma, thus, doesn't stipulate that it's only for those who are ordained. What *is* stipulated is that we cure defilement with persistent effort. This is something very important. We have to be very interested in this point.

As for release from suffering and stress, where do we gain release? We gain it right here, right where there is suffering. If we can cure defilement, we gain release from suffering. If we can't, then no matter what our sex or status, we all have to suffer.

Here, this is where the religion lies, here in the heart. It doesn't lie anywhere else. If we want to be incapable of it, we can be incapable — right here in our heart. Whether lay or ordained, we can be incapable — if we make ourselves incapable. Or we can make the religion flourish in our heart — that we can also do. When the religion flourishes, where does it flourish? It flourishes in the heart, and nowhere else. *The important point is the heart.* The important point is our practice: the actions, the manners we display.

When the heart develops, the various aspects of our behavior develop beautifully and admirably. In particular, the heart flourishes within itself. It has mindfulness and discernment looking after it constantly. This is called a flourishing heart. The defilements can hardly ever come to damage it: That's when the religion flourishes.

We should make an effort to examine and straighten things out step by step. The defilements, you know, are no wider or greater than the limits of our ability to cure and remove them. They're only here in the heart, so investigate right here. Whether we're men

or women, lay or ordained, we all have defilements in our hearts. No matter how thick they may be, if we consider them we can know them. They're like darkness: Even though darkness may have existed for aeons, all we have to do is turn on a light, and the darkness disappears completely. The darkness doesn't have any way to brag, saying, 'I've been dark for aeons, so there's no way that this puny light can chase my darkness away.' When the causes are ready, the darkness has to disappear completely, and brightness appears in its place. *Even though the darkness may have existed for aeons, it all vanishes in that instant.*

Even though the defilements may be thick and may have been lording it over our heart for a long time, we should investigate them thoroughly with mindfulness and discernment. When mindfulness and discernment are capable, they immediately become all-around.

The defilements, even though they may have been in the heart for aeons, will immediately disintegrate, in the same way that the darkness that had existed vanishes as soon as a light is lit. Brightness arises

instead, through the power of mindfulness and discernment. Within the heart it is dazzlingly bright at that moment with '*dhammo padipo*' — the light of the Dhamma.

This is all there is. This is the important point we have to investigate. Be sure to see it. The religion is marvelous — where is it marvelous? The religion flourishes — where does it flourish? The Buddha says to gain release from stress — where is it gained? It exists only here in the heart. To analyze it, there are the four Noble Truths: stress, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

1. Stress (*dukkha*): We know it's stress because we aren't dead.
2. The origin of stress (*samudaya*): This is what fosters or produces stress. What forms does it take? We're taught, 'Craving... imbued with passion and delight, relishing now here and now there; i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for being, craving for not-being.' This we know. Whatever the mind may love or crave, we should try to straighten it out. It loves and craves the five *khandhas*, and

especially the five *khandhas* that it says are 'me.' So try to become wise to these things, step by step.

And then there's more love and craving: love and craving for the mind, attachment to the mind, cherishing the mind. So straighten out the mind. *Wherever it feels love, that's where defilement is.* Keep going in, straightening things out, until you've reached the truth. *Then the heart will have no love or hate, because they are all gone.* The defilements are all gone. The mind has no love, no hate, no anger. It's a pure principle of nature within itself. This is the nature we truly want.

3. Investigating for the sake of Dhamma: This is the path (*magga*), with mindfulness and discernment its important factors.

4. The cessation of stress (*nirodha*): Stress stops, step by step, until the path is fully capable and *nirodha* stops all stress in the heart without leaving a trace. When *nirodha* has finished stopping stress, that which knows that stress has stopped and defilement has stopped... that which knows is 'the pure one.' This pure one lies beyond the Noble Truths as a marvelous, extraordinary Dhamma.

The Noble Truths are activities, conditions, conventions. Even *nirodha* is a convention. It's the activity of stopping stress. It's a conventional reality. When stress is completely stopped, nothing remains. *All that remains is an entirely pure awareness.* This is not a Noble Truth. It's the purity of the mind. If you want, you can call it *nibbana*. There's nothing against calling it whatever you want. When we reach this level, there are no conflicts — no conflicts, no disagreements with anyone at all. We don't conflict with ourselves; we don't conflict with anything. Our knowledge is wise to everything, so we can say what we like. There are no problems at all. All I ask is that you know this marvelous, extraordinary Dhamma. Its excellence exists of its own accord, without our having to confer titles.

This, then, is the genuine religion, so probe right here. Probe on in. When in the practice of the religion, we come to know, we'll know right here. If the religion is to flourish, it will flourish right here. The Buddha, in teaching the beings of the world to gain release from suffering, taught right here — and release is gained right here, nowhere else. We qualify as beings of the world and lie within the net

of the Buddha's teachings. We're in the Buddha's following. Each of us has the right to practice and remove defilement so as to go beyond suffering and stress. All of us in the four groups of the Buddha's following (*parisa*) have the right to realize ourselves and reach *nibbana*.

So. I ask that you contemplate. Investigate. Be brave in fighting the things that should be fought within the heart. Develop courage. Develop mindfulness and discernment until they are sufficient. Search for various tactics for probing: These we should develop within ourselves. To probe on our own is the right way. It's our own wealth. Teachers lend us bits and pieces, which are merely fragments to serve as hints or as leads for us to contemplate so that they'll grow and branch out into our own wealth.

Any Dhamma that's a wealth coming from our own tactics: *That's truly our own wealth*. We'll never exhaust it. If we can think and probe cunningly in removing defilements until they fall away completely, using the tactics we develop on our own from the ideas our teachers lend us as starting capital, *that's our own Dhamma*. However much

may arise, it's all our own Dhamma. What we derive from the texts is the Buddha's — and we borrow it from him. What we get from our teachers, we borrow from them — except when we are listening to them teach and we understand the Dhamma and cure defilement at that moment: That's our wealth while we are listening. After that, we take their tactics to contemplate until they branch out through our own ingenuity. This is our own wealth, in terms both of the causes — our contemplation — and of the outcome, the satisfactory results we gain step by step all the way to release from suffering and stress — and that's entirely ours. It stays with us, and no one can come to divide up any of our share at all.

*This is where the excellence becomes excellent.* It doesn't become excellent anywhere else. So try to find the excellence, the peerlessness that lies within you, by striving and being energetic. Other than this awareness, there's no excellence at all.

But at present the heart is concealed by things that are filthy and worthless, and so it too has become something that lacks its proper worth. Right now we are washing it, peeling away the various kinds of defilement, step by step. When we have used our full

strength to peel them all away, until there aren't any left in the heart, then the heart is fully pure. Excellence appears here in this heart — and so the excellence is excellent right here. We don't have to search anywhere for anything more, for we have fully reached the 'land of enough.'

So then. I'll ask to stop here.

### **Investigating Pain**

We human beings are like trees: If we water a tree, fertilize it, and keep looking after it, it will be fresher and grow faster than it normally would if we let it fend for itself without our help.

Similarly, the mind, when we keep looking after it, will become more and more radiant and peaceful, step by step. If it isn't trained, it's like a tree that isn't looked after. Whenever it lacks training, it begins to act tarnished and defiled because the things that tarnish and defile it are already there inside it.

When we look after the mind continually with meditation, it will gradually become more and more calm. When it's calm, it will begin to develop

radiance along with its calm. And once it's calm, then, when we contemplate anything, we can penetrate into the workings of cause and effect so as to understand in line with the truths that appear both within us and without.

But if the mind is clouded and confused, its thoughts are all worthless. Right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes progressively even more wrong.

Thus we are taught to train the mind so that it will be quiet, calm, and radiant, able to see its shadows, just as when water is limpid and clear: We look down into the water and can see clearly whatever plants or animals there are. But if the water is muddy, we can't see anything when we look down into it. No matter what's there in the water — plants, animals, or whatever — we can't see them at all.

The same holds true with the mind. If it's clouded, then we can't see the harm of whatever — big or small — is hidden within it, even though that harm has been bad for the mind all along. This is because the mind isn't radiant. For this reason, a mind clouded with muddy preoccupations can't investigate

to the point of seeing anything, which is why we have to train the mind to make it radiant, and then it will see its shadows.

These shadows lie buried in the mind. In other words, they're the various conditions that come out of the mind. They're called shadows — and we're forever deluded into being attached to these shadows that come from the thoughts constantly forming and coming out of the mind at all times.

They catch us off guard, so that we think 'this' is us, 'that' is us, anything at all is us, *even though they are simply shadows and not the real thing*. Our belief or delusion, though, turns them into the 'real thing.' As a result, we end up troubled and anxious.

At present, the great respected meditation masters on whom we depend in the area of the practice and in the area of the mind are falling away one by one.

Those who are left can barely take care of themselves. Physically, they are wearing out step by step — like Venerable Acariya Khao. To see him is really heart-rending. When the body reaches its final

extremity, it's as if it had never been strong or in radiant health. To lie down is painful, to sit is painful — whatever the position, it's painful. When the time comes for pain to come thronging in, the *khandhas* are nothing but pain.

But for people like this, it's simply a matter of the body and the *khandhas*. *In the area of the mind, they have no more problems about the behavior of the body or the khandhas at all.*

But as for us, well, we're always there welcoming such problems. *No matter whether it's the body or the thoughts of the mind that are acting adversely, the mind begins to act adversely as well.* For example, if the body is malfunctioning, the mind begins to malfunction too, even though there is nothing really wrong with it. This is due to the mind's own fear, caused by the fact that mindfulness and discernment aren't up on the events surrounding the mind.

This is why we're taught to train our mindfulness and discernment to be capable and bold, alert to events arising within the mind and around it —

namely, in the various aspects of the *khandhas* when they behave in adverse ways. We have to be alert to these things.

All that's needed is for the mind not to be alert, or for it to be deluded by these things, and it will create stress and pain for itself without ceasing. Pain will have to come pouring in to overwhelm it. Even though the body may be pained simply in accordance with its own affairs, in accordance with the principles of nature, *the mind will still grab hold of it* to cause pain for itself, to burn itself, if it hasn't investigated to see through these things.

If the mind has mindfulness constantly governing and guarding it, then whatever damage arises will be minor, because it arises in a single spot — within the mind — and mindfulness is there at the same spot, alert to the fact that this is arising, that is arising, good or evil is arising within. Discernment is what unravels, contemplates, investigates, and remedies the different preoccupations arising in the mind. Things then begin to calm down. But if mindfulness is lacking, things begin to get drawn out.

Even though thought-formations may arise and vanish, one after another, countless times, *sañña* — labels and interpretations — don't vanish. They connect things into long stretches. Stress and pain will then have to connect into long stretches and gather into the heart.

The heart is what then reaps all this suffering by itself because of the acts (*kamma*) that *sañña* and *sankhara* fashion.

The heart is the primary vessel for receiving both pleasure and pain — and for the most part it receives pain. If it lacks mindfulness and discernment, it receives only fakes and scraps. Rubbish. Things that are toxic and dangerous. But if it's mindful and discerning, it can pick and choose.

Whatever isn't good, it picks out and throws away, leaving only the things of substance and worth within the heart. The heart is cooled, but not with water. It feels pleasure, but not because of external things. It's cool from the Dhamma. It feels pleasure in the Dhamma — and the reason is because mindfulness and discernment are looking after it.

To attend to other things is not as difficult as attending to the heart. All the burdens of the world converge at the heart, and so to remove the things that have long been buried within us is very difficult work. We may even become discouraged because we see almost no results when we first begin.

This is because the mind is still drifting while we work. It doesn't really focus on taking its work seriously, and so results don't appear as they should. This makes us discouraged, weak, and dejected. We give up, thinking, 'It'd be better to stop, because we're not getting anywhere' — even though once we have stopped it's not any better, except that the mind has a better chance of filling itself with evil after we've stopped striving toward the good.

*The assumption that says 'better' is the work of the defilements, which are all deceivers, tricking us into being discouraged and weak. Actually, even while we are striving, things aren't yet getting good, even though we are practically dying to make them good. Our heart is ready to burst because of the effort — so how can things become good once we stop? If, as*

we think, things were to get good once we stop, then no one should have to do work of any sort any more. Once we stop, everything of every sort would become good on its own! Both within and without, things would have to be good. We won't have to do much work. It's better to stop.

The Dhamma isn't like the defilements. The defilements [ironically] say, 'It's better to stop.' It's better, all right — better for the sake of defilement, not for the sake of the Dhamma.

The Dhamma is something with which we have to keep persevering until it's good, and then better, and then even better, continually, because we don't stop. This work is our work, which we do for the sake of Dhamma. It's not lazy work, which is the work of the defilements. The results of the work will then appear step by step because we do it without ceasing.

This is how it is with the work of meditation. When it's easy, we do it; when it's hard, we do it — because it's work that ought to be done, but if we don't do it, who will do it for us?

When the fires of pain and suffering are consuming the heart because of the thoughts we form and accumulate, why don't we complain that it's hard? When we accumulate defilement to cause stress and anxiety to the heart, why don't we feel that it's difficult? Why don't we complain about the stress? It's because we're content to do it.

We're not bothered with whether it's easy or hard.

It simply flows — like water flowing downhill. Whether it's hard or not, it simply flows on its own, so that we don't know whether it's hard or not. But when we force ourselves to do good, it's like rolling a log uphill. It's hard because it goes against the grain.

In relinquishing the sufferings, big and small, to which the mind submits in the course of the cycle of rebirth, some of the work just naturally has to be difficult. Everyone — (even those who have attained the paths, the fruitions, and *nibbana* easily) — has found it hard at first. When we reach the stage where it should be easy, it'll have to be easy. When we

reach the stage we call hard, it'll have to be hard, but it won't always be hard like this. When the time comes for it to be light or easy, it's easy.

And especially when we've come to see results appearing step by step, the difficulty disappears on its own, because we're completely ready for it, with no concern for pleasure or pain. We simply want to know, to see, to understand the things on which our sights are set.

Study. We should study the elements and *khandhas*. We should keep watch on the elements and *khandhas* coming into contact with us. This is an important principle for all meditators. We should keep watch on them all the time because they keep changing all the time.

They're '*aniccam*' all the time, '*dukkham*' all the time, without respite, without stop.

Investigate. We should keep trying to see their affairs as they occur within us, until we're adept at it. As we keep investigating again and again, the mind will gradually come to understand more and more

profoundly, straight to the heart. The heart will gradually let go, of its own accord. It's not the case that we investigate once and then stop, waiting to rake in the results even though the causes aren't sufficient. *That's not how it works.*

All forms of striving for the good — such as meditating — have to go against the grain of the defilements. All of the great meditation masters, before becoming famous and revered by the world, survived death through great efforts. If this were easy work, how could we say they survived death? It had to be heavy work that required that they exert themselves to the utmost.

Most of these masters have since passed away. Only a few are left. We hope to depend on them, but their bodies are '*aniccam.*' We can depend on them only for a period, only for a time, and then we are parted, as we have seen at present.

So we should try to take their teachings inward, as our masters, always teaching us inside. Whatever they have taught, we should take inward and put into practice. This way, we can be said to be staying with

our teachers at all times, just as if we were to be with the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha everywhere and always.

Our own practice is the primary mainstay on which we can rely with assurance. Depending on a teacher isn't certain or sure. We are bound to be parted. If he doesn't leave, we leave. If he doesn't go, we go — because he and we all live in the same world of inconstancy. There is no difference among us. What we can hold to, though, are the basic principles of his teaching. We hold to them and earnestly put them into practice so as to see the results, so as to seize victory within the heart.

*Victory of this sort is the supreme victory, which is unsurpassed in all the world. No other victory is its equal.*

We grapple to take victory over ourselves — over the defilements that we have believed to be 'ourselves,' 'us,' 'ours,' for aeons and aeons. This is an enormous undertaking. If you play at it, like children playing with dolls, the defilements will crush you to bits in no time, because you've been holding onto

them for so long. So don't delay. Investigate so as to know clearly and let go, so that the mind will be clear and free of suffering and stress, and not forever in disarray.

We've been accumulating the words 'us' and 'ours' for countless aeons. If the defilements were material objects, what in the world could we take for comparison that would be larger than the pile of defilement, craving, and mental effluents, the pile of 'us,' the pile of 'ours' we've been accumulating for so long? There's so much of it that it would be beyond our strength to drag it out for comparisons. If we were to drag it out just to pass the time between eating and sleeping — to chip at it, hack at it, poke at it, or slash at it once or twice, hoping to break through it — we wouldn't get anywhere at all. We'd simply be grabbing at handfuls of water, one after another. So we have to give it our all: This is where we will gain our victory.

We're meditators. We can't back away from the fight with the defilements lying within us. The word 'defilement' means simply this 'hunk of us.' The defilements are 'us,' 'ours.' Everything that's 'us' is

actually a heap or pile of defilements. There's no need to doubt this.

If we want to separate them out so as to see them piece by piece for what they actually are in line with their true nature, we have to separate them using persistent effort in the area of mindfulness and discernment as our means of investigating and evaluating them.

We separate the elements (*dhatu*), the four elements. Everyone in the world knows of the four elements, but if we want our knowledge to go straight to the heart, it has to come from the practice. If we investigate using discernment until we see distinctly, it will penetrate the heart of its own accord. Once it has reached the heart, you don't have to say anything: The heart will let go of its own accord.

Once the knowledge goes straight to the heart, relinquishment comes straight from the heart. For us to know straight to the heart and let go straight from the heart, we have to investigate over and over, again and again, until we understand.

Don't assume that, 'This we've already investigated, that we've already investigated,' by setting up expectations, counting the times without seeing deeply enough to the level of letting go. The work isn't done with. It really has to reach the level of 'done with,' felt deeply within the heart, which then lets go. If it's really done with, there's no need to investigate again, because the heart has understood and can let go completely.

The elements are already elements. Cognizance is an element. The things that make contact are also elements. Sights are elements, sounds are elements, all these things are already elements. As for the *khandhas* within us, the body (*rupa*) is a *khandha*, feelings (*vedana*) are a *khandha*, labels (*sañña*) are a *khandha*, thought-formations (*sankhara*) are a *khandha*, cognizance (*viññana*) is a *khandha*. They're groups, aggregates, heaps, bits, pieces, all by their very nature.

As for the mind, know that it's the 'knower' we have to test and comprehend in the same way as the elements and *khandhas* *so that we won't grab hold of it as the self or as belonging to the self, which would*

*simply be creating a heavier burden.* We must investigate it with discernment so as to see it for what it truly is, in just the same way. But as I've explained the investigation of the mind in a number of talks already, you should have a fair understanding of the matter by now.

In particular, when a pain arises in the body, we should know distinctly that, 'This is a feeling.' That's all. Don't go labeling or interpreting it, saying that the feeling is us, the feeling is ours, or that anything is ours, for that would simply foster more and more defilements and bring more and more pain in to smother the heart. Then, when the feeling doesn't vanish, that would cause even more pain in the heart, and what could we possibly find to bear it?

Pains arise in the body. They've been arising ever since the day we were born. The moment we came from our mother's womb, the pain was excruciating. Only by surviving this death did we become human beings. If you don't call that pain, what will you call it? Pains have existed ever since way back when. You can't force them to change their ways. The way

of pain in the body is that it continually has to show itself.

Once it arises, it remains and then vanishes. That's all there is to it — arises, remains, vanishes — regardless of whether it's an external feeling or an internal feeling, namely a feeling or mood in the mind.

In particular, feelings in the body: Investigate them so as to see them clearly. The body is the body. We've seen it clearly, known it clearly ever since the day we were born. We can conjure it into anything — us, ours, a prince, a king, nobility, whatever, however we want to conjure it — but its truth is simply a truth, fixed and unalterable. It doesn't change in line with what we conjure it up to be. The body is simply the physical *khandha*. It has four elements — earth, water, wind, and fire — gathered together and called a person, a woman, a man, classified in endless ways, given this name and that, but what stays the same is the body: the 'physical heap.'

All the parts taken together are called the physical heap, which is one reality. Take out any of the parts, and each of them also has its reality. When they're gathered together, the skin is skin, the flesh is flesh, and the same holds true for the tendons, bones, and so forth. Even though they have names, don't fall for their names. See them simply as individual realities, as a physical heap.

As for the heap of feelings, it's not the body. The body isn't a feeling, such as pain. Feeling is feeling. Whether pleasure appears, or pain or a neutral feeling appears, it's simply a separate feeling that you can see clearly. These two *khandhas* — the body and feeling — are more prominent than *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana*, which arise at intervals and immediately vanish.

Feelings, however, even though they vanish, have a period in which they remain. This you can clearly see in the practice. When pain arises, focus on it as your target, as the point to investigate. *Don't see the pain as being yourself, for that would be going against the true nature of feelings and the method of investigation*, and you won't be able to know the

truth of the feeling as you should with your discernment.

When you don't know the truth and persist in assuming the pain to be yourself, you'll increase the pain enormously within the mind, because you are going against the principles of nature, which are the principles of truth the Lord Buddha taught.

He taught us to investigate so as to see pain — in whichever part of the body it may arise — simply as a phenomenon that arises, remains, and then vanishes in its own due course. Don't get entangled in it. Don't fashion or conjure it into being this or that, if you don't want to be forever burdened with pain, with never a moment to put it down. See its truth the moment it arises, remains, and vanishes. That's all there is to feeling. Ferret it out so as to see it clearly with mindfulness and discernment.

When you have focused on a feeling, turn and look at the mind to see if the mind and the feeling are one and the same thing. Then look at the body and the mind: Are they one and the same? Look at them so as to see them clearly. While you are investigating,

don't send the mind out anywhere else. Keep it right at that one spot. For example, when investigating, focus on the pain so as to see it distinctly. Then turn to look at the mind so as to see this awareness distinctly.

Are they one and the same? Compare them. This awareness and that feeling: Are they the same? Can you make them one and the same? And is the body like the mind? Is it like the feeling? Is it similar enough to be one and the same?

There! This is the way we're taught to separate things, so as to see them clearly. The body is the body — how can it be like the mind? The mind is a mental phenomenon, a nature that knows, but the elements of the body are elements that don't know. The earth elements do not know, the water element doesn't know, the wind element doesn't know, the fire element doesn't know — but this mental element (*mano-dhatu*) knows. This being the case, how can they be one and the same?

Similarly with the pain: It's an element that doesn't know. It's a phenomenon. These two unknowing

elements are also different: The feeling and the body are different sorts of things. They aren't one and the same. How could you make them one and the same?

In making distinctions while investigating, look so as to see clearly the way things actually are. There's no need to fear death. *There is no death to the mind.* Don't create snares to catch yourself and hurt yourself. There is no death; i.e., no death to the mind. There is nothing but awareness, pure and simple. Death doesn't exist in the mind, which is something one hundred percent unalterable and sure.

Death is an assumption that has been conjured up for the mind through the power of the mind's own delusion. The mind has conjured it up to deceive itself. So once we've investigated in line with the truth — that *the mind is not something that dies* — *what reason will we have to fear death?*

What is 'death'? We know that the elements and *khandhas* fall apart. We human beings, when we've stopped breathing, are called 'dead people.' At that moment the 'knower' separates from the elements, so

that nothing is left but physical elements with no feelings: That's a 'dead person.'

But actually the knower doesn't die, so we have to investigate in order to see this clearly with discernment. We needn't create the issue of death to stab or snare the heart or to obstruct the path we are following for the sake of seeing and knowing the truth through investigation. No matter how great or how little the pain, keep your attention well fixed on the affairs of that pain.

Use the pain as a whetstone for sharpening discernment. Separate the pain from the mind. Separate the mind from the pain. Be able to compare their every aspect. Be careful not to let your attention wander while investigating, so that you'll be able to see and know the truth while in hand-to-hand combat with that particular *khandha*.

Now, if it should happen that the mind dies as the world supposes — if it should die while you're making your investigation — then make sure you know what dies first and what dies after. When does the feeling vanish? When does the mind vanish?

Where does it vanish to? Actually the mind by nature is not something that vanishes. How can anyone come and make it vanish?

Investigate carefully between the mind and the *khandha* until the truth is absolutely clear to the heart and your doubts vanish. This is called training discernment, developing discernment so as to see the truth.

No matter how great the pain arising at that moment, it won't have the power to affect the mind at all. Once we see the mind as the mind, the feeling as feeling — once discernment has seen clearly in this way that the *khandhas* and the mind are real in their own separate ways — they won't infringe on one another at all.

The body is simply the body and stays as it is. When the pain appears, the body is still there. When the pain vanishes, every part of the body remains, in accordance with its own nature. If the feeling arises, that is the feeling's business. If it remains, that's the feeling's business. If it vanishes, that is the feeling's business. The mind is the one who knows that the

pain arises, remains, and vanishes. The mind isn't the one who arises, remains, and vanishes like the body or the feeling.

Once you have investigated this way until you're adept, then, when the chips are down, investigate in the same way. You needn't fear death, because you're a warrior. Fear of death is not the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha.

The Dhamma is a matter of courage in the face of the truth. This is the basic principle of the *svakkhata dhamma*: the well-taught teaching. Follow in the path of this truth. If the time comes to die, be ready to die. There is no need to fear, because the mind doesn't die — *but be sure to know clearly what is appearing at that moment*. For example, the pain: What is it like? Look at it so as to know its truth. Once you have seen its truth, then the pain is simply a phenomenon. It doesn't have any meaning, good or bad, at all. *And it doesn't act as anyone's enemy*. It's simply its own full reality, displaying itself in line with natural principles.

The body is also its own reality, appearing in line with its own principles. The mind is a separate phenomenon that constantly knows and doesn't intermingle with anything else.

When you have investigated so as to know all-around, the mind extricates itself to be its own reality in full measure. The pain has its own fullness in line with its nature; the body has its own fullness in line with its nature, in that the mind doesn't create any turmoil, trying to lay claim to anything of theirs. This being the case, nothing disturbs anything else.

Pain, no matter how great, has no impact on the mind. You can smile even while great pain is arising — you can smile! — because the mind is something separate, not involving itself with the feeling. It doesn't intermingle with the pain so as to burn itself. This way, the heart is at ease.

This, then, is the investigation of pain so as to comprehend it, by taking pain as your battlefield, as a whetstone for discernment, as the place where you temper and sharpen discernment by investigating and dissecting the pains that arise. Single out the

body and single out the feeling. Which will vanish first, which will vanish after?

Try to know in accordance with their truth. Arising and vanishing have always been a part of their nature from time immemorial. Regardless of whether or not you've been aware of it, these have been their inherent characteristics. All you need to do is to investigate so as to see in line with their truth, so as not to resist the Dhamma, and you can live at ease.

So. If the time comes to die, let the body die — as the conventions of the world understand 'dying.' The body falls apart, so let it fall apart. Whatever is going to disintegrate, let it go — but that which doesn't disintegrate remains. *That which doesn't disintegrate is this mind.*

This mind, once it has developed discernment as a standard within itself, is really like this, with no flinching in the face of illness or death. The mind is courageous and capable.

There, then. This is how we investigate our affairs — the affairs of the mind. We needn't fear death. Why fear it? The Buddha taught us not to fear. The Dhamma doesn't teach us to fear.

The truth is nothing frightening, because it's the truth. What's frightening or emboldening about it? Courage? There's nothing that calls for courage. Fear? There's nothing that calls for fear. Here I'm talking about the level where we have reached pure truth. There's no trace of the words 'courage' or 'fear' left in the heart at all. There's only purity.

But while investigating so as to reach the truth, we need to have courage. If we are going to seize victory for ourselves, we can't *lack* courage.

Otherwise, we'll lose. This is because we're following the path. We need courage and daring, with no fear or intimidation in the face of anything at all. Whatever comes our way, we must investigate so as to know and understand it, without growing discouraged or weak, so as to be intent on knowing and seeing it in line with its truth — everything of

every sort that comes into the range of our awareness.

*This is called being a warrior in the combat between the mind and khandhas, or between the Dhamma and the defilements.*

Courage of this sort is proper and right. Once we've reached the goal, fear disappears and courage disappears, because we have gained full victory. Fear and courage are no longer an issue.

But, right now, fear and courage are a critical issue for those still on the way. Develop courage with discretion in the areas that call for courage. Be a fighter with the things that call for fight — such as feelings of pain — so as to see in line with their truth. Don't be afraid.

The Buddha taught us not to fear. Fear has the same value as death. When the time comes, things have to fall apart. That's what's called 'death.' But in any event, meditators have to come to know with discernment before these things undergo their transformation. Spread a net of discernment around

yourself on all sides. Whatever appears will be caught in the net of discernment, so what is there to fear? What is there to be anxious about? What is there to knock you off-balance? Everything simply follows its truth, which you have already investigated.

This is how 'warriors' investigate. Even though they're in the midst of *khandhas* that are a solid mass of flame, they're calm and at ease, with the normalcy of a mind that has completely comprehended, without being deluded by any phenomenon. This is what's meant by one who 'knows all around.'

Whatever the symptoms displayed by the body, if they are endurable, we endure them. We care for the body, look after it, nourish it, make it eat, make it sleep, make it drink, and take care of it in accordance with its nature. If its symptoms are unendurable and it's simply going to go, then, just let it go in accordance with the ways of nature. It's a truth, so how can you thwart it?

Let it go in line with the truth. This is called letting go with knowledge that accords with the truth. The

mind feels no attachment, no regrets. This is the basic principle of practice for one who has attained, or is about to attain, victory within the heart.

Previously, the mind has always lost out to defilement and craving. It has never, until now, defeated them. For aeons and aeons it has lived entirely under the sway of the defilements to the point where it has forgotten to realize that 'The defilements are the boss. We're their servant.'

But now we're going to turn over a new us, using the principles of the Dhamma as means to subjugate the defilements and mental effluents that have been subjugating us, or that have been the ruling-elite, the big bosses of the cycle of rebirth, forcing the mind to go here and there for so long.

Now we're going to set our hearts on contending with the defilements for victory so as to see the truth of everything of every sort, with nothing to obscure our discernment at all. At the same time, we will take victory for our own — after having been defeated for so long — using the power of

unflagging mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and perseverance.

Those who have reached the realm of excellence through perseverance have a dignity that outshines that of others. At the same time, they can take pride in their own perseverance. Those who have reached the realm of excellence through gaining victory over themselves, and no one else, are supreme within themselves, with no creation of animosity — unlike victory in war, with which the world creates endless animosities, like links in a chain. To gain victory over oneself, though, is to gain the foremost victory. As the Dhamma says,

**atta have jitam seyyo:**

'It is better to gain victory over oneself.'

The things that have created turmoil for the heart, causing it suffering and stress in the past, now come to an absolute stop.

In what I have been saying, don't forget that *perseverance is the important factor*, the factor that supports mindfulness and discernment as the trail-blazers for the sake of progress in our work.

Discernment is very important for investigating and exploring so as to see causes and effects. Mindfulness supervises the work, to keep our attention from straying.

When discernment has investigated so as to see the truth of such things as the five *khandhas*, the defilements will have no place to hide and so will come pouring together into one place — into the heart. They have no other place to hold onto, no other place to attach themselves, because all such places have been obliterated by discernment.

The next stage is to lay siege to the heart, where the enemies lie gathered, so as to disperse them from it until nothing is left. There! That's called the death of the defilements.

They die right there, *right there in the heart where they've always been*. They've lived there; and when they die, they die there through the power of the most *up-to-the-minute* 'super-mindfulness' and 'super-discernment.' This is called full victory. The supreme victory is won right here. The teachings of the religion all converge at this point.

The final stage in their practice comes to an end right here. We finish our task right here. When we reach the realm of release from suffering and stress, we reach it right here.

Aside from this, there is nothing: no time, no place, no future, no past. As for the present, we are wise to everything of every sort. We have no more issues, no more disputes. There are no more cases in court between defilement and the mind.

Super-mindfulness and super-discernment have sat on the bench and handed down a death sentence for defilement and all its tribe. There is nothing left to carry on the lineage of birth and being. At that moment, defilement and all its tribe sink out of sight. This is called reaching *nibbana*: a heart truly constant and sure.

All the various conditions that used to deceive the mind no longer exist. All that remains is pure awareness. Even though the *khandhas* — *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* — may form in accordance with their nature, they simply go their

own way, which has no meaning in terms of defilement at all.

The body behaves in its 'body way.' Feelings — pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain, which appear in the body — behave in the way of feelings. *Sañña* — labels, acts of recognition — behave in their own way. *Sankhara* — the various thought-formations — behave in line with their own nature. *Viññana* — acts of noticing when external objects come into contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind — notice and vanish, notice and vanish, in line with their nature, without being able to provoke the mind as before, *because the things that cause provocation have all been destroyed without leaving a trace.*

These are thus called '*khandhas* pure and simple.' The mind has reached *nibbana* in the midst of *khandhas* pure and simple. This is to reach living *nibbana*: the mind purified of defilement.

Those who have reached this point, you know, don't ask where *nibbana* is. And why should they? What is *nibbana*, actually? The word *nibbana* is a name.

The nature we call *nibbana* is the actual thing. When you reach the actual thing, why ask the name? Why ask for traces and signs? What is there left to grope for? Those who really know don't grope, aren't hungry, don't lack — because they have reached 'enough,' completely, of everything of every sort.

So. That should be enough explanation for now. I ask that we as meditators take this and contemplate it so as to see the truth I have mentioned. We will then be complete in our hearts, as I have described, without a doubt.

So I'll ask to stop here.

### **The Principle of the Present**

To practice is to search for principles leading to the truth. To study is like studying a plan — although people for the most part don't follow the plan — but outer plans and inner plans are worlds apart.

With outer plans — like blueprints of a house or a building, or maps that tell where roads and places are located — the builder examines the blueprint and

follows it; the traveler follows the routes that appear on the map, but if he gets a map that's out-of-date, there are bound to be things that have come into being or been torn down that don't show on the map. This can cause him to misunderstand and to follow the wrong route.

Inner plans, though — such as the 32 parts of the body, the elements, and the *khandhas*, which the Buddha taught us to study and to put into practice so as to derive benefits from them — are fixed truths, unchanged from the Buddha's time to the present. But with these plans within the mind, we can't act like a builder who follows the blueprint in his hands, *because that would go against the principle of the present, which is where the Dhamma arises*. For example, when we study and understand in line with the texts and then practice, it's hard not to speculate in reference to the texts; and so when we practice or try to develop concentration in the mind, we'll find that the mind has trouble growing still, because of the disturbance.

If, while practicing the Dhamma, we contemplate or reflect on whatever Dhamma we have studied, it's

bound to get all confused, because the mind's state is not such that these things can be contemplated, pondered, or compared with the mind at the moment it's gathering itself together to gain strength.

This is why we shouldn't bring anything in to disturb it at all. Let there simply be the 'Dhamma theme,' the meditation theme we bring in to supervise the mind, as if we were charging the mind so as to give it inner strength — in other words, so as to make it still.

When the mind is still, it gains inner strength. Regardless of how much or how little knowledge it has, no trouble or confusion results, because the mind has its footing. It's secure, calm and peaceful within itself — all because of the stillness, which is a gathering of energy. This isn't in the plan at all — because while we are practicing, we aren't concerned with the texts. We're intent solely on developing concentration in the present until we gain results — peace, well-being, and various other satisfactory states — there in that moment.

If this is in the plan, it's in the part that says, 'Try to make the mind stay with just a single Dhamma

theme — its meditation word.' Don't get involved with other topics at that moment. If you let it think of the texts while practicing concentration, it won't be willing to stick just with that practice. A great deal of extraneous knowledge will interfere, disrupting the mind until everything is a turmoil, and no stillness will result. This is called going against the plan taught by the Buddha.

Whatever plans we've been given, however many, however much Dhamma the Buddha taught, we gather it all to our own confusion. It's as if we were building a hut and, yet, went around to gather up plans for hundred-story buildings and spread them out for a look. They just don't go together. The plan for a building and the plan for a hut are as different as earth and sky, and yet here we are going to gather the mind into one point, which is like building a hut. Only after we have the strength can we then begin enlarging it into a building.

When we ultimately reach the level where we are ready to investigate, there are no limits as to how broad or restricted it should be.

*The mind can investigate everything throughout the cosmos.*

When we reach the level where we should investigate, that's the level where we'll gain a firm confirmation in the mind. We'll gain knowledge and all kinds of insights from our own investigation.

This is where the fun lies — sifting, choosing with our discernment what is right and what is wrong. We'll go back, exploring through the Dhamma we have already studied and compare it with the causes and results in our practice until they agree, and then we can set the matter to rest. Even though we may have already understood clearly, we still have to gain confirmation to give it further support, for the sake of full conviction and certainty.

This is what's meant by discernment. It's not the case that if we have no doubts, then, there's no reason to make comparisons.

*The Dhamma of the doctrine is one thing, and the Dhamma of the practice is another.*

We take the Buddha's wealth and compare it with our own wealth, gained from our practice. If they match, we can accept the matter and put it aside, with no more concern.

In particular, when we practice in line with the four Noble Truths or the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipatthana*), these are things that the Buddha described as being interconnected.

If we practice them one by one, in line with the texts — investigating the body, and then feeling, and then the mind, and then mental events — we'll be wrong the livelong day, because these things by their nature are interconnected at all times.

We can investigate whichever aspect we want. Whichever aspect feels most natural to us, we should start with that one first.

By and large, we start out by investigating the body. But when a pain appears, we have to let go of the body and focus on the pain. We then consider the pain in relation to the body, distinguishing between the two so that we understand them clearly. Then we distinguish between the pain in the body and the

pain in the mind, comparing them and distinguishing between them again. Body, feeling, mind, and mental events lie together in the same moment. So we separate out the body — in other words, investigate it — and then separate out the feeling so as to know whether or not the body and feeling are one and the same.

Then we separate the mind from the mental events within the mind, so as to see that each of these events is not the same thing as the mind. To say just this much covers all four of the foundations of mindfulness.

We can't divide these things and deal with them one at a time, one after another, the way we take one step after another while walking. To do so is wrong. This is the way it is with the practice: When we investigate one aspect or another of the four foundations of mindfulness or the four Noble Truths, they all become involved of their own accord — because they are interconnected phenomena. The Buddha says, for example,

**kaye kayanupassa viharati:**

'Investigate the body within the body.'

Now, the phrase, 'the body within the body' means to start out with any one of the many parts of the body. Once we have contemplated that part until we gain an understanding, our investigation, then, permeates further of its own accord, making us curious about this part and that. This keeps spreading and spreading, until it reaches everything in the body. In other words, it covers everything and understands everything.

'The body within the body' — for example, *kesa*, hair of the head: Even though we may contemplate only one hair on the head, it has an impact on our understanding of how many hairs on the head? And then connects up with how many parts of the body? It affects everything. It permeates everything, because everything is interrelated. No matter what we investigate, this is the way it goes, in line with the principles of investigation in the area of the practice that the Noble Ones have followed.

'Feeling': It arises in our body. Focus on whichever one point is very pronounced. Investigate it — whichever point is more painful than the rest. When we focus on that as a starting point, our investigation

will spread to all other feelings because no matter where they arise, they all become involved with the one mind.

As soon as we investigate a feeling, the mind and the feeling immediately fly toward each other, and then we separate them out, because the four foundations of mindfulness — contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and mental events — are interrelated in this way.

'External feelings' refer to physical feelings, feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain in the various parts of the body. 'Internal feelings' refer to the feelings of pain, pleasure, and neither pleasure nor pain in the heart. These are also counted as feelings that occur in the hearts of ordinary people everywhere.

These three kinds of feelings: Even when we're meditating and the mind enters into stillness, it still has a feeling of pleasure. But ordinarily, people usually have feelings of pain and discontent within the heart. If we don't investigate — for example, if we've never practiced the Dhamma — these three

feelings also exist, but they're worldly feelings, not the feelings connected with the Dhamma of those who practice meditation.

When we practice, and the mind is still and calm, there is a feeling of pleasure. If the mind doesn't settle down and grow still, as we want it to, feelings of bodily and mental pain or distress arise.

Sometimes the mind is vacant, drifting or indifferent, something of the sort. You can't call it pleasure or pain. It's simply vacant and drifting — something like that — in the mind of the meditator.

This doesn't mean vacant and drifting in the sense of someone completely oblivious. It's simply a state in the mind. This is called a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain.

At present, we aren't yet aware of these things — even now, when they're very pronounced. We aren't yet aware, because we don't yet have the discernment.

When the mind becomes more refined, then whatever appears, whatever state arises, we are bound to know, and to know increasingly, in line with the strength of our own mindfulness and discernment. Actually, these things are the bosses, lording it over the heart: Okay, for once let's call them what they are, because that's what they've actually been all along.

The heart is their vessel, their seat. That's where they sit. Or you could say it's their toilet, because that's where they defecate. Whichever one comes along, it gets right up there on the heart. Now pain jumps up there and defecates. Now pleasure gets up there and defecates. Now a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain gets up there and defecates. They keep defecating like this, and the heart is content to let them do this, because it doesn't have the mindfulness or discernment to shake them off and not let them defecate. This is why we have to develop a great deal of mindfulness and discernment so that we can fight them off.

Mindfulness is crucial. It has to keep track constantly, because it's the supervisor of the work.

No matter where discernment goes scrutinizing, no matter what it thinks about, mindfulness sticks right with it.

Discernment contemplates and mindfulness follows right along with it. This is why it doesn't turn into *sañña*. As soon as we let mindfulness lapse, discernment turns into *sañña*, in accordance with the weakness of the mind just learning how to explore. But once we become more proficient in the areas of both mindfulness and discernment, the two stick so close together that we can say that there's never a moment when the mind's attention lapses — except when we sleep, at which time mindfulness and discernment don't have to work, and even the defilements take a rest.

Once we reach this level, there is never a moment where the mind's attention lapses. This is thus called super-mindfulness and super-discernment. How could it lapse? It stays right with 'what knows' at all times. Mindfulness and discernment exist together in this one mind and they have become one and the same thing. So where could they lapse? Once

mindfulness and discernment are continuous, we can speak in this way.

Before, we were never able to know how much the mind scrambled, stumbled, and fell. But when we reach the level where these things become one and the same, then as soon as there's a rippling in the mind, we are right there up on it. Instantly. Instantly. Whatever gets thought, we are progressively more and more up on it. And especially if it's a matter of defilement, then mindfulness and discernment are extra quick.

But if the mind is an ordinary [conventional] mind, it doesn't know. Even if defilements climb up and defecate on our head from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn, and we can't be aware of them.

In the area of the practice, we practice on our own and know on our own. That's when things become clear. Let's see right and wrong clearly within ourselves. Let's know things clearly within ourselves. Only then, can we be certain. Once we have practiced and come to know, we can be courageous in what we say and courageous within

the heart, with no fear that we might be speaking wrongly or venturing guesses. We are sure of ourselves from having practiced.

To strip away the things that bind the heart has to be difficult. For those who are weak-willed, it's especially difficult. There is no way they can succeed, because they keep creating obstacles for themselves whenever they are about to develop goodness or break away the binding of unawareness and craving from around the heart.

To break open the binding of the wheel of rebirth depends mainly on our being earnest and intent: That's what will clear our way. This is why [conventional] living beings don't want to touch that binding, don't want to break it open.

Our earnest intent is what will lead us to know exactly how extraordinary the things taught by the Buddha really are. When we have this kind of earnest intent toward the Dhamma filling the heart, then, no matter how difficult things become, we won't let that difficulty bother us or become an obstacle.

We want solely to know, to see, to understand. We feel motivated solely to think, ponder, and investigate in line with the aspects of the Dhamma we want to know and see.

This has us engrossed day and night — engrossed in our desire to know and see, engrossed in the results we obtain step by step, engrossed in probing and cutting away the defilements and mental effluents.

These lie nowhere but in the heart — except when the heart grabs hold of external things that are harmful and toxic, and brings them inward to overpower itself to no purpose. The mind, thus, has to probe, investigate, remedy, and slash away inside itself because these are the things that bind the heart.

The heart is what makes itself unruly and reckless, roaming about, collecting these things to burn itself, because it doesn't have the good sense to avoid them or remedy them. For this reason, we need to develop a great deal of mindfulness and discernment. The Buddha was always teaching mindfulness and discernment.

### **nisamma karanam seyyo:**

'Use discernment to consider before doing anything,' in order to guard against error. Both in inner and outer activities, mindfulness and discernment are always important. But, usually, when the mind thinks of doing anything, we don't consider it first. Even if we don't consider things while we think of doing them, we should at least consider them when the mind has made contact with one matter or another, and trouble arises as a result.

But usually we don't see the harm of our own recklessness, and this is why we never learn. So we keep thinking and acting in our old ways repeatedly, and the results are thus unceasing stress.

We shouldn't guess, we shouldn't anticipate what the practice will be like. Where is heaven? Don't guess about it. Where are the Brahma worlds? Don't waste your time anticipating. Where is stress? Its cause? Its cessation? The path? Don't anticipate their being anywhere outside the body and mind that are in contact with each other and with these various things at all times. Focus right here, so as to see the truth in line with the principles of the Dhamma.

You'll know what's outside; you'll know what's inside. Especially when you know what's inside, that's when you'll gain insight into everything that exists, in line with your temperament and abilities, without your anticipating it.

The mind will simply know of its own accord. Your basic problem is that you don't yet know yourself inside and simply want to know what's outside. This will only make you agitated and confused, without serving any purpose.

If you want to gather matters into yourself so as to see the truth, then: What is hell? And where is it? If you want to know hell, then go ahead. Where is it? Where is the suffering that the defilements dig up, the suffering they produce in ascending stages? If it doesn't lie in the body and mind, where does it lie? If, when you let yourself fall into hell and the fires of hell burn you day and night, you still don't know where hell is, then where else are you going to look for it?

*Instead, bring things inward in this way so as to know the truth: the Noble Truths that lie within you.*

Once you know the Noble Truths, you'll understand every pit in hell without having to ask anyone. Think of how much the Buddha and his Noble Disciples knew about hell — and yet who told them about it? How is it that they were able to know and see to the point of teaching us into the present?

'Heaven' is the enjoyment, the sense of exhilaration in the Dhamma, in the goodness and merit that lie within the heart, causing it to be calm and at peace. This is your 'heavenly treasure.' The Brahma worlds lie with the levels of the mind. No matter which level of the Brahma worlds you want to reach, they are all levels of the mind that indicate on their own that this mental state corresponds to this level or that and that have the characteristics of those levels. For this reason, you have to put 'this one' — the mind — into good shape, into proper shape. Don't go concerning yourself with anything other than this.

Every day, every night, we should probe into our own minds, together with the things that become

involved with them. The important factors are the body — this is very important — and the five *khandhas*. These things are always making contact because they have been together with us since way back when.

Things outside — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations — sometimes subside, but the five *khandhas* and the heart are always together and always at issue with one another. There is no one who can decide these issues and put an end to them, unless we use mindfulness and discernment as our judges to make a decision that will put the case to rest.

Normally, *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* lie right with us, with the heart. They are interconnected and interrelated to the point where no one can untangle the case and pass a verdict, because we don't have the discernment to deliberate and decide what verdict to pass. So we simply let issues arise all the time: 'That hurts. This aches. I'm afraid I'll faint. I'm afraid I'll die.' We really are afraid — as if by fearing to the utmost, straight to the heart, we could somehow escape death.

This fear of death: We really fear it and yet we don't know what death is, or who dies. As long as we haven't investigated down to the 'foundation of death,' we'll have to fear it all the livelong day. But once we have investigated down to the foundation of death, what is there to fear? — because nothing in the world dies.

There is simply the change, the exchange of the various elements, and that's all. Change is something we already know. The Dhamma has taught us: 'Inconstancy' — things are always changing. 'Stress' — where is there if not right here? 'Not-self' — this already tells us — what is there of any substance, that's 'us' or 'them'? The Dhamma tells us with every word, every phrase, and yet we prefer to fly in the face of the Dhamma. We want that to be us, we want this to be ours. This wanting is an affair of defilement: *That's* not us, it's simply defilement from head to toe — or isn't it?

If it were to become our self as we say it is, wouldn't it be a heap as big as a mountain? If every defilement of every sort were to be gathered

together, who knows how many millions of mountains they'd be? We wouldn't be able to carry them at all. What we already have is more than we can handle! So we should investigate these things to see them clearly and then cut them away, one mountain at a time. Otherwise, we'll be unable to walk, because we'll be full of the mountains of every person's every sort of defilement, and of every sort of suffering that defilement has created to be borne on top of the heart for such a long, long time.

*We should learn our lessons, in line with what the Dhamma has taught us, so that we will have some place to put down our burden of suffering.*

Feelings — these characters: These are our enemies. All they offer us are feelings of pain or distress arising in the mind — sometimes on their own, with no connection to the body. The body may be perfectly normal, but because of our preoccupations, feelings of pain can manage to arise in the mind. If we think of something that stabs at the heart, a feeling of pain or distress arises. If we think in a way that will extricate us, a feeling of pleasure arises.

When the mind rests and stays neutral within itself, that's a feeling of equanimity.

See? We can clearly see them like this — if we reflect so as to see them. If we aren't observant, if we don't investigate them, we won't see them to our dying day. We will simply die in vain. Don't go thinking that we can gain knowledge and insight, and free ourselves of suffering, without making an effort to strive and investigate. *Many, many living beings have died in failure because of their complacency.*

In investigating, don't set up any anticipations that you would like to have your different feelings disappear. That would only be increasing the cause of stress. Simply look inside the feeling itself when it arises. Use your mindfulness and discernment to contemplate without let-up. Investigate until you understand.

*Sañña*: This is very important. Normally, *sañña* is something very important. When pain arises, the pain is important, but pain doesn't arise all the time. As for *sañña*, it keeps right on labeling. This is very

important, very subtle, very delicate and refined. It's deceptive, which is why it has us deceived.

*Sankhara* is what hands things over to *sañña*, which elaborates on them to the point where they become endless and unstoppable unless we use mindfulness and discernment to act as a block.

*Viññana* is what takes note.

As for *sañña* — labeling and interpreting — it has a big job to do, running around stirring-up all kinds of trouble throughout the body. *Sañña* is what hoodwinks the heart, making it fall for labels until it can't see the harm they wreak in the five *khandhas*. *Sañña* is the primary culprit. Meditation circles are well aware of it, which is why they warn us.

When the mind has things like this burying it, obstructing it, and coercing it, it can't display even the least little bit of ingenious strategy, because they have it overpowered. For this reason, we have to force the mind to investigate and unravel its various preoccupations so that it can see its way clear. Its various labels and interpretations are gradually

peeled-off or removed, step by step. Mindfulness and discernment are, then, freed to think and develop more of their own strength. When we reach the stage where mindfulness and discernment come out to investigate, nothing can stay hidden.

Mindfulness and discernment will probe into everything, into every nook and cranny, understanding continually more and more — engrossed in their contemplations and explorations, engrossed in the results that keep appearing — because to probe with discernment is a direct way of cutting defilement away so that we see results, step by step, without pause.

Concentration is simply a tactic for herding the various defilements into one focal point so that we can rectify or destroy them more easily. To put it simply, concentration is strength for discernment.

When the mind gathers in the levels of concentration, it is content to work from various angles in the area of mindfulness and discernment. When it's working, the results of its work appear. The defilements fall away one after another. The

heart becomes engrossed in the results of its work and investigates even more, never having its fill, like spring water flowing continually throughout the rainy season.

So focus right here. Don't go anywhere else. The Noble Truths are right here in the body and heart. Ultimately, they come down solely to the heart. Probe down into the heart. How is it that we don't know? Where did the Buddha know? He knew right here in the area of these four Noble Truths. He knew in the area of these four foundations of mindfulness, which lie in the bodies and hearts of us all.

The Buddha knew right here and he taught right here. So investigate to see clearly right here. Defilement, the paths, the fruitions, and *nibbana* lie right here. Don't imagine them to be anywhere else. You'll simply be pouncing on shadows outside of yourself and grasping fistfuls of water, without ever meeting with the real Dhamma.

In focusing your investigation when a feeling arises in the mind — as for feelings in the body, we've discussed them at great length already — when a

feeling of stress or pain, such as a mood of distress, arises within the mind, focus on that feeling of distress.

Take that feeling of distress as the target of your watchfulness and investigation. Keep alert to it. Don't set up any desires for it to vanish once it has appeared in the mind. Make yourself aware that the feeling of distress arising in the mind has to have a cause. It can't just come floating in without a cause.

If you don't know its cause, focus on the result — the distress itself — as the heart's preoccupation. Keep aware right at the heart. Focus on contemplating and unraveling the feeling of distress right there. Don't let go of that feeling to go looking or investigating elsewhere. Otherwise you will make the mind waver, without ever being able to establish a foothold, and it will become shiftless and irresolute.

However long that distress lasts, we will have to last, and keep looking at it to see if it's really constant, solid, and lasting. Your mind is something more

lasting than the feeling, so why won't it be able to investigate it?

The feeling arises only for a period and then vanishes when its time is up, when it no longer has any supporting conditions. Since the mind by its nature is something that knows, then even though a feeling of distress arises, it still knows. Whether there is a little distress or a lot, it knows — so why won't it be able to investigate the distress? It has to endure the distress, because the mind is already a fighter and an endurer.

So, however great or little the distress may be, fix your attention on that spot. Don't set up any desires for it to disappear. Simply know the truth of the feeling as it arises and changes. Know right there and know its every phase, heavy or light, great or little, until it finally disappears.

And when the feeling of distress dissolves away from the heart through your focused investigation, know what feeling arises in its place. Keep knowing step by step. Only then can you be called an investigator.

Don't hold fast to any feelings — whether of pleasure or of equanimity. Know that they too are feelings and are individual conditions, separate from the mind — and so they can change. This one comes in, that one dissolves away, this one takes its place:

They keep at it like this, in line with the common nature of feelings, because the seeds are constantly in the heart, enabling these three kinds of feelings to appear. Once the mind has absolutely no more seeds of any sort, no feelings or moods of any sort will appear in the mind at all, aside from '*paramam sukham*' — the ultimate ease that's part of the nature of a pure heart. This doesn't count as a feeling.

When the Buddha says, '*nibbanam paramam sukham*' — *nibbana* is the ultimate ease — that's not a feeling of ease, stress, or equanimity, and so it's not subject to arising and disappearing.

When focusing your investigation on all three of these feelings, take the feelings themselves as your battleground. Focus on watching them carefully and in full detail. Keep watching each one as long as it

hasn't yet disappeared. Watch it again. Keep watching until you know its truth. Whether or not it disappears isn't important. What's important is that you know the truth of this feeling — the one appearing in the present.

This is called contemplating feeling as a foundation of mindfulness.

Usually, this refers to feelings of distress or pain, because these are the ones that are most striking and unsettling to the heart. As for feelings of pleasure, they're a way-station for the mind. You could say that they help us, or that they are the results that come from investigating feelings of distress until the distress disappears and pleasure appears. This is one of the results which come from investigating feelings of distress or pain.

As for whether or not we should do away with feelings of pleasure, as far as I've noticed I've never seen them being eliminated. Feelings of pain or distress are the important ones within the mind. They arise from the seeds of defilement. Once these seeds are lessened step by step, the feelings of

mental pain become more and more refined, more and more refined. They gradually fade away until they disappear without leaving a trace in the mind, because the seeds are gone.

When these seeds are gone, that type of pleasurable feeling also disappears. It disappears because it relies on those seeds to arise. Thus we can say that the feelings of pleasure that arise in the heart from practice, or from the basis of the mind — the stillness of the mind, the radiance of the mind — qualify as '*vihara-dhamma*,' dwelling places for the mind, way-stations for the mind on its journey.

Or we could say that they're the results that come from investigating feelings of pain. Whether or not we investigate this pleasure is not so important as investigating feelings of pain and their causes, which are very important, because they are, in a direct sense, the origin of stress. They give rise to stress as their direct result.

In the context of the four Noble Truths, the Buddha teaches us to diagnose stress, but why doesn't he teach us to diagnose pleasure? What does pleasure

come from? He doesn't say — because it arises from the path doing its duty until the cause of stress disintegrates and pleasure arises in its stead.

Now when the stress that's part and parcel of defilement disappears, this type of pleasure disappears as well, but another kind of pleasure or ease appears along with the heart that has been purified — and this doesn't disappear with anything at all.

Now as for concentration: When you're going to make the mind still, you really have to make it stay with its theme of tranquillity meditation. Don't go concerning yourself with the topics you've been investigating, because the mind has to rest. You can't *not* let it rest.

When the time comes to rest, it needs rest. No matter how great the results and accomplishments you get from your practice of investigation, the heart can still grow tired and weary. Your work, your thinking and pondering in the area of discernment or whatever, is all work for the mind. When the mind

has been thinking, pondering, and investigating for a long time, it can grow weary and so it has to rest.

*When the time comes to rest, you shouldn't involve yourself with any work at all. Set your mind solely on performing your duties for the sake of mental stillness.*

This is called working without overstepping your boundaries; without being worried about what went before or will come after; without overflowing your banks. The heart will then have the strength to continue its work with clear insight and discernment.

When you want stillness of mind so as to provide strength for discernment, you should set your mind on the theme that will make the mind still and then stick right with it until the mind is still, right then and there. Once the mind has been still long enough to gain strength, you can then withdraw from that stillness. Now, you start probing. You don't have to concern yourself with stillness. Your duty is to investigate step by step. This is called the correct way — the appropriate way, the uniform way — to

follow the path of tranquillity and insight all the way to the goal.

All of these are problems I've been through myself. When I would get engrossed in something, I'd be so stuck that I'd get addicted and heedless. I'd get addicted to the stillness, the sense of comfort and ease in concentration. When I'd get engrossed in investigating, I'd be so engrossed that I'd forget myself and wouldn't let the mind rest at all. Neither of these ways is correct. *In other words, neither is in keeping with what is just right.*

The right way is that when the mind feels tired and weary from its work, we have to let it rest in stillness. When the time comes to investigate, we have to investigate. We can't worry about anything else. We have to set our mind on our duties, step by step, in keeping with the job at hand. This is always the appropriate way to proceed with tranquillity and insight.

There is no job in the world bigger than the job of removing defilement, of removing oneself from the cycle of wheeling around from birth to death for

countless lifetimes. When we think about it, it's really dismaying — circling around from birth to death, carrying a load of nothing but suffering and stress. No matter what the level, the only difference is that the stress is less or more, because all levels have stress inasmuch as they contain the defilements that give rise to stress. So how can they not have stress? All living beings have to suffer stress.

The Buddha thus taught us to rid ourselves of all defilement until there is nothing left hidden in the mind. Let there simply be the 'pure meat.' Don't let there be any bones, or they'll be bad for your health.

Defilements, no matter what the sort, need to be cleansed away, peeled away until nothing is left. This is why it's called a very big job. There are times when we have to give it our all — all our skill, all our mindfulness and discernment, even our life — to an extent that we will never forget.

'So. If we're going to die, then let's die. If not, then let's know it.' That's all there is. There can be nothing else. This is when the mind is its own mainstay. *Atta hi attano natho*: It can take care of

itself. In other words, *we leave it to the mind's own strength*. When the mind is whirling in for the sake of the realm beyond suffering, as if *nibbana* were always just coming into reach; while what's behind us keeps pressing in, and we realize more and more its danger and harm, there's only one way to escape the Great Danger:

'If we're going to die, then let's die. If not, then let's know the Dhamma.' Wherever we are, we don't want to stay. Wherever we're stuck, we don't want to be stuck. It's a waste of our time in gaining release from suffering. *We've simply got to reach release from suffering.*

This is the only thing that can satisfy such a mind at such times. When the mind is this way, where is it going to find any weakness or laziness? If things get tough, we fight. If they're easy, we fight. If we're going to die, we still fight until we have no more breath to breathe — and that's when the mind finally stays put. It can't possibly be moved. *Once it knows and reaches the goal, it stays put on its own. No matter where you chase it, it won't go.*

Discernment — which has been spinning itself in circles even more than a wheel — when the time comes, stops on its own. It simply runs out of duties of its own accord, without our having to turn it off, the way we do with motors. This automatic mindfulness and discernment simply stops or turns off on its own — because it already knows, so what else is there to investigate?

It has already let go, so what else is there to let go? It already knows, so what else is there to know? It has had enough, so where else is it going to look for enough? It knows all of this within itself. It knows in an instant and is released. In other words, it knows for the last time. This is where the big job is finished. The job is big, and the results are enormous. Nothing in any of the three worlds can compare.

The results of this big job, this heavy job, you know, excel the world — and how could we say that ultimate ease doesn't excel the world?

When excellence stands out, filling the heart, it's far different from defilement standing out, filling the heart. Whoever wants to know has to practice for him or herself. No one else can do it for us.

*When we reach the level of excellence, we excel exclusively within, without disturbing anyone else.*

This Dhamma is always timeless (*akaliko*). It has been the guarantor of the paths, fruitions, and *nibbana* from the time of the Buddha to the present. No one will ever be able to erase it. The Buddha excelled the world because of this Dhamma. The arahant disciples whom we revere as our refuge all excelled because of this Dhamma of purity — and because of this heavy job.

When our Teacher has led us to proceed in this way, what business do we have shilly-shallying around? We can't act only in line with our preferences, because our Teacher didn't lead us in that way.

Our foremost Teacher was a genius, an utterly genuine person, unequaled by anyone. But we're a bunch of show-offs, doing only what our Teacher

criticized, and so we keep meeting only with things worth criticizing. Don't we ever think of changing, or do we feel we're being stylish and up-to-date?

Actually, the path to cure defilement has to be difficult. The path to accumulate defilement is easy — because our preferences fool us into thinking it's easy. (Notice: They fool us into thinking it's easy.) Actually, both paths are hard. Whatever the job, the important point is which job we prefer? We'll see that job as easy. Light. Comfortable.

At first, when we were starting out with the job of curing defilement, we weren't getting anywhere at all. Even though we were set on curing defilement, the work was heavy and we were weak and lazy. Everything bad and worthless was gathered right there. But now that we gradually come to comprehend causes and effects, and to understand the Dhamma, the results have begun to appear.

Where has our laziness gone? All that's left is diligence and persistence. We can contend with anything, heavy or light — we can contend with death — because we have begun seeing results.

Even though we have been curing defilement all along, the difference is that at one stage we don't see results, and at another we do — and persistence really arises.

So. If things get heavy, we fight. We're disciples of the Tathagata and so we have to follow in our Teacher's footsteps. Our Teacher met with difficulties, so his disciples will have to meet with difficulties. Our Teacher passed out two or three times. Is there anyone among us who has passed out from the effort of the practice? I don't see anyone who has. So why are we afraid of dying when we've never even passed out? How can we be so stubborn in our fear of death? The Lord Buddha lost consciousness three or four times. What do we have to say to that? When we lose consciousness, it's because we are falling asleep. Why aren't we afraid of dying then? So why are we afraid of dying when we practice meditation? *Exactly what dies?*

When we have explored and seen the truth, we won't fear death — because nothing in the world dies. All there is, is the mind making its assumptions. It deceives itself — 'I'm afraid of dying, I'm afraid of

dying' — but when it knows the truth of everything of every sort, it's not afraid. It's not afraid of death. It's not afraid of birth — because it has nothing left to be born. So what is there to fear? Why bother with these empty, hollow fears? *The mind is now released from birth*, so why be afraid of birth? There are no more seeds for the birth of a body, a man, or a woman. There is nothing to fear, nothing to be brave about. The mind is even with itself — uniform, unchanging — not 'even' in the ordinary sense of 'coming out even.' It's 'even' in the sense of a mind that has reached sufficiency: 'even' in its excellence.

Here I've been talking about a heavy task, but also about the results as a means of encouragement, as a means of giving the mind something to hold to. The results are superlative, in keeping with the difficulties and hardships of the practice. What do we want in our lives? We all want what is good. Even in external things we want what is good, so especially in the area of the Dhamma, why shouldn't we want what is good?

Then step up your efforts. What does it matter if the cemeteries cry because they miss you? You have

been crying over the cemeteries, so what's wrong with letting the cemeteries cry in turn? They have no more hopes now. You aren't coming back to be born or die. The cemeteries' being without hope is better than your being without hope, because there's nothing good about birth and death, circling around, back and forth, with nothing but suffering and stress every lifetime.

So work out solutions — and make them succeed. Whatever things are thorns in the heart, use mindfulness and discernment to explore, to probe on down and remove them completely so that they're all gone. Once they're all gone, that's the result of your work. We've talked about how hard the work is: What are the results like? Are they worth it? Find out for yourself — and then you are free to live wherever you like. The Buddha says,

**vusitam brahmacariyam:**

'The holy life is fulfilled, the task of the religion is done.' *This is now completely apparent in every way.* Whatever is stressful is a matter of defilement. When the cause — defilement — is ended, the result — stress — is ended as well. That's all there is. From then on there is nothing but ultimate ease,

which nothing will ever again come to disturb throughout eternity.

### **At the End of One's Rope**

Wherever there's the religion, it's cool and peaceful. Wherever a person practicing the religion is lacking, it's hot and troubled. If there's no religion, the heart is as hot as fire. Whenever there's the religion — mindfulness and discernment — investigating, looking after the heart, the heart is cool.

When we first begin suppressing the rebels in the heart, we suffer — because for the most part we're defeated by them — but at least we still have the strength to fight with them. Even though we may lose out to them sometimes, it's better than groveling before them in abject surrender with no way of putting up a fight at all.

*The practice in the area of the mind falls into stages*

— and there are bound to be stages where it's complicated and difficult. Especially at the beginning: It's difficult in that we can't see beginnings or ends, causes or effects. We don't

understand anything at all. When we take the rudiments of Dhamma we have gained from the texts or our teachers and put them into practice, sometimes right, sometimes wrong, this is when it's very difficult. The desire to know and see is very strong, but the heart isn't willing to comply.

This is one kind of anxiety I've been through myself. It overflowed the heart. To put it simply, it was as if the desire to see and know the Dhamma in the heart was ready to overflow its banks. But when practicing, the heart didn't comply with the desire to know and see — and that had upset and disappointed me.

Sometimes I'd be sitting and the tears would flow because of my self-recriminations: 'You don't have any potential to speak of. You've ordained simply to be a dead weight on the religion. Here you are sitting in meditation and can't find a way in or a way out. You're just sitting buried in a heap of suffering.' The mind would think in all sorts of ways out of self-pity — that I was a hopeless case, that I didn't have any potential to speak of, didn't have the potential for the

extraordinary levels of Dhamma, didn't have any potential at all — total confusion!

Actually, my practice wasn't yet right. I was aiming at the results — the outcome — without paying attention to whether I was doing the work right or wrong. The desire was strong, but when it wasn't fulfilled, it caused suffering. Had I paid some attention to whether my practice was right or wrong, I might have come to my senses enough to have evaluated things, to have abandoned some of my bullheaded attachments, or to have cut back on my desires so that the suffering would have become lighter.

But whenever I'd meditate, whatever I'd focus on, all I wanted was to know and see the paths, the fruitions, and *nibbana* in line with what I imagined them to be — heaven was like this, the Brahma worlds were like that, *nibbana* was like this. I'd imagine. Speculate.

The desire was fierce. I wanted to know, to see, to gain release from suffering, but my practice wasn't making any headway. All there was, was simple

desire: I would simply sit wanting, lie down wanting, walk wanting, stand wanting. I'd sit in meditation — wanting — but the mind wasn't working at its meditation. It just wanted. I'd be doing walking meditation, but the mind simply wanted — so much so that I'd forget what I was doing. I wasn't getting any results *because there weren't enough of the causes that would bring about the things I aimed for, so how could I have reached the goal I aimed for?* This is something I've been through. The work of meditation struck me as being more difficult than any other work.

I'd be meditating, '*buddho, buddho, buddho,*' but the desire would always be getting in the way — because I wanted to know, I wanted the mind to be like this or that, and so I'd get engrossed in my desires and forget my work of meditation until I didn't know where '*buddho*' had gone. As a result, I didn't get anywhere at all. I was constantly feeling dreary and disappointed. This is the way things always were in the heart.

*But even so, this wasn't anything compared to the stage at which the mind regressed.* When the mind regresses, it's really upsetting because you used to

see results. You used to gain a sense of ease, mental stillness, and peace appearing clearly as a solid foundation in the heart, but now it's deteriorated.

This makes the heart really agitated — so much so that there is nothing to hold it in check. Luckily, though, in spite of my agitation, I didn't retreat. I was simply determined to see things through. I wasn't willing to retreat or to slacken my efforts.

The reason why the mind regressed and couldn't make a comeback was the same sort of thing: desire, nothing mysterious. The mind wanted to know and see as it had before, but its work wasn't coordinated or continuous. All there was, was desire.

No matter how much you desire, it doesn't give any results, because that would go against the principle of causality. If you don't make the causes as complete as they should be, how can you expect to know as you want? You can't. Sitting, I'd be agitated. Lying down, I'd be agitated. I'd go into the forest, into the mountains, when the mind had regressed, and nothing was any good at all. I couldn't figure it out.

Of the anxieties I've felt in my life as a monk, the anxiety I felt during that period was the worst. I was agitated because of my desire to attain. I was upset because the mind had regressed and nothing I could do would bring it back. At first it had regressed just a little bit and then it kept regressing, regressing until it was all gone. Nothing was left, not one little bit. It was as if I had never meditated at all.

When I'd sit in this state, I was as agitated as if I were on fire — because of the desire. The disappointment that my attainments had floated away and disappeared, plus the desire to get them back: These two things came thronging in at the same time and so were really strong. Wherever I stayed was unsatisfactory and no help at all. Even though I was suffering, I would simply keep suffering. I didn't know any way out. Even though I wanted, I would simply keep wanting.

I didn't know how to get my concentration back. All there was, was desire — regret for the things that had once appeared to my surprise and amazement but now were gone. There was nothing but

disappointment filling the heart, nothing but simple desire, and it couldn't bring back the Dhamma that had disappeared. Finally, I came to feel despair — for everything. *This was when the mind gave up on its desire.*

As for the results I had wanted, well, I had wanted them for a long time. As for the suffering, I had suffered immensely because of the desires, but hadn't gained anything from them. So now I wouldn't have anything to do with them. I'd throw them all out. If I was going to know, I'd know. If not, so be it. All I was after was '*buddho.*' Whatever the mind was going to think, I wouldn't be willing to let mindfulness lapse. 'Get with it, then. Can it really be that I'm not going to know? Whatever's going to happen, I'm ready for it.'

As soon as I gave up on my desires, they were no longer so fierce, and so the suffering gradually lessened. I set my mind on my work. Wherever I was, I'd keep repeating, '*buddho, buddho, buddho.*' It had always been a trait with me to be earnest:

Whatever I'd do, I would really do it and wouldn't just play around. Now I got to see this trait in action. I didn't let up in my repetition of '*buddho*.' Whether walking or in doing my chores, I wouldn't be willing to let it lapse. I'd keep making the effort. While sweeping the monastery compound, I would try to keep up my guard — until the mind let its work lapse for a moment. I was alert to the fact, and the mind got right back to work. '*There. Now that's the way it should be.*'

After giving up its desires, the mind was no longer involved with the past. It stayed in the circle of the present and would do nothing but repeat or meditate on '*buddho*.' Whether or not it would get any results would depend on what '*buddho*' would grant.

Finally the mind became still, and '*buddho*' was no longer necessary, so I could let go of the meditation word at that moment — and at that point the mind was willing to settle down. Before, it hadn't been willing.

When the mind had settled down in stillness, there was no need to repeat the word '*buddho*.' All that

remained was simple awareness — clear and conspicuous — so the mind stayed with that simple awareness.

As soon as it withdrew, I would start pumping '*buddho*' back in. I had no hopes, because I had already hoped in the past. I had no hopes for what would happen, no hopes for what the results would be. *I had already hoped in the past, and it hadn't given me any decent results at all.* I had seen the harm of hopes — the sort of hollow, unreasonable hopes that won't do the work and look only for the results.

So, now I was going to do nothing but work, nothing but work: repeating '*buddho*' without letting up even for a moment. Once the mind had received proper nourishment and care, it became still — gradually more and more still, more and more steady until it reached the level it had been at before it had visibly regressed.

What was strange was that when it reached its old level, I still abandoned my hopes. 'If it's going to regress, let it regress. I've had enough of trying to

resist it by using desire, which hasn't served any purpose, not the least little bit. So, however the mind is going to regress, let it regress, but I won't abandon "*buddho*." I'm always going to keep at it.'

When it reached the day when it would normally regress, it didn't regress! That made me a lot more sure of the causes. So I stepped-up the causes — the repetition of '*buddho*' — even more, without stopping. *I would stop only when the mind gathered in stillness.*

The mind became progressively more and more firm. Wherever I'd sit, it would be bright. Light. Completely clear. I was sure of myself: 'Now it's not going to regress.' After one day, two days, one month, two months, it still didn't regress.

Before, the mind would regress after two or three days. After two or three days it would come down with a crash, with nothing left to show for itself. I'd have to keep trying to care for it for 14 or 15 days before it would reach its old level, and once it got there it would stay just a day or two and then

collapse in a flash, with nothing left at all. All that was left was dreariness and disappointment.

Now: 'If it's going to regress, let it regress. I've hoped in the past, and it hasn't served any purpose. All I'm after is this, just this one thing: "*buddho*."

(Speaking of the suffering when the mind regresses, you really feel a lot of anguish, so much so that you're ready to surrender. But I was lucky in one way: that the mind didn't retreat. It was determined to see things through, which was why I was able to bear with it, able to stay. Had I had the mind to become discouraged — 'It'd be better to stop' — that would have been the end of me. There would have been nothing more to tell.)

From then on, the mind kept progressing. Month after month, it became more and more stable, more and more firm. As for my meditation word, I wasn't willing to let up on it. This kept up until the mind was always prominent.

That was when I let the meditation word go. In other words, the awareness of the mind was pronounced, and that was enough for the mind to depend on, so

there was no need to rely on any meditation word for further support. The mind fully knew itself and could sustain itself. At this point I didn't have to repeat any meditation word because the mind was prominent at all times. I would focus right there. *Wherever I went, I focused right there.* I knew right there, just as I had focused on '*buddho.*' It could form a fine foundation for the mind. I was sure of myself that:

(1) This foundation had become progressively more and more stable until it was more stable than it had been the first time it had progressed and then regressed.

(2) As for focusing on awareness, when awareness was fully pronounced, I should focus on that without let-up, in the same way I had focused on repeating '*buddho*' until the mind became more and more refined. This was a foundation for the mind on which I could depend.

From that point on, I really stepped up my efforts. The time I started sitting in meditation all night until dawn came from this point. I started to sit one night, focusing on in, focusing on in, and at first the mind

had settled down because it was used to settling down. It settled down easily because it 'had a good foundation.' I kept focusing on in, and as long as no enormous pains arose, the meditation went quietly. But when I withdrew, a number of hours had passed, and a huge pain arose, to the point where I almost couldn't bear it. The mind that had been quiet was totally overturned. Its 'good foundation' had collapsed completely. All that was left was pain filling the body — but the mind wasn't agitated. Strange!

The body was so pained that it was quivering all over. *This was the beginning of the hand-to-hand combat in which I was to obtain an important approach* — when really severe pain arose unexpectedly that night. I hadn't yet made up my mind to sit until dawn, you know. I hadn't made any resolutions or anything at all. I was simply sitting in meditation as usual, as usual, but when the pain arose in full force: 'Eh? What's going on here? I'll have to tackle this feeling so as to see results tonight!' So I made a resolution in that very moment: 'Okay, if the time doesn't come to get up, I won't get up. I'll fight until the dawn of the new day. *Tonight*

*for once I'm going to investigate pain so as to understand it clearly and distinctly. If I don't understand it, then even if I die, let me die. Let me find out. So dig down!' This is when discernment really began to work in earnest.*

I had never known, never imagined, never dreamed that discernment would become so sharp when it was at the end of its rope, when it was really cornered with no way out. Discernment really started spinning away. It went out digging, exploring, fighting, and determined not to withdraw its troops in retreat.

*When I was at the end of my rope, discernment arose.* This made me realize, 'We human beings aren't fated to be stupid forever. When we're at the end of our rope, we're sure to manage to find a way to help ourselves.' So it was then: When I was cornered, overwhelmed by severe pain, mindfulness and discernment probed into the pain.

When pain arises in full force like this, it fills the entire body. At first it started in hot flashes along the backs of my hands and feet, which wasn't much to

speak of, but then when it really flared up into something big, the entire body was ablaze. All the bones, as they were connected, were fuel feeding the fire in every part of the body. It was as if the body were going to fall apart right then and there. The neck bones were going to come apart. Every bone was going to come apart from its connections. My head was going to fall off and hit the floor. When it's pained, everything is on a par throughout the body. You don't know where to hold it back enough so that you can breathe, because everywhere there's nothing but a mass of fire — pain in full force.

When I couldn't find a safe spot in which to place the mind, mindfulness and discernment dug down into the pain, searching for the spot where the pain was greatest. Wherever the pain was greatest, mindfulness and discernment would investigate and explore right there by ferreting out the pain so as to see clearly, 'Where does this feeling come from? Who is pained?' When they asked each part of the body, each of them remained in keeping with its nature. The skin was skin, the flesh was flesh, the tendons were tendons, and so forth. They had been that way from the day of birth, but they hadn't been

painful all along from the day of birth in the same way that they had been flesh and skin from the day of birth. 'The pain has been arising and vanishing at intervals. It hasn't been lasting like these parts of the body.'

I focused on down. 'Each part of the body that's a physical form is a reality. Whatever is a reality stays that way. Right now where is the feeling arising? If we say that all these things are painful, why is there one point where it's really severe?'

So I separated things out. At this point, mindfulness and discernment couldn't slip away anywhere else. They had to run along the areas that hurt, whirling around themselves, separating the feeling from the body, observing the body, observing the feeling, and observing the mind: These three are the important principles.

The mind seemed comfortable. No matter how much pain was arising, the mind wasn't writhing or suffering or anything. But the pain in the body was clearly very strong. The nature of pain and of whatever defilements we have is that they join

together. Otherwise the mind won't be troubled or affected by the physical pain that's really severe at that moment. So, discernment kept digging down until the body, the feeling, and the mind were all clear, each in line with its individual truth.

The mind was what labeled the feeling as being this or that: This I could see clearly. As soon as this was really clear in this way, the feeling disappeared in a flash. At that moment, the body was simply the body in line with its reality. The feeling was simply a feeling and it disappeared in a flash into the mind. It didn't go anywhere else. *As soon as the feeling disappeared into the mind, the mind knew that the pain had vanished.* The pain had vanished as if it had been snapped off and thrown away.

In addition, the body disappeared from my sense of awareness. At that moment, the body didn't exist in my awareness at all. All that was left was simple awareness, because there was only one thing — awareness — and it was simply aware. That's all. The mind was so refined that you could hardly describe it. It simply knew, because it was extremely delicate and refined within itself. The body had

completely disappeared. Feelings had disappeared. No physical feelings were left at all. The body sitting right there in meditation had disappeared from my awareness.

All that was left was 'simple knowingness,' without any thoughts being fashioned about this or that. At that point, the mind wasn't forming any thoughts at all. When it doesn't form thoughts, we say that nothing at all makes the slightest move. The mind is fixed — firmly fixed in its own solitude. It's a mind in its simple form, on the level of a mind centered in stillness — *but mind you, this doesn't mean that there was no unawareness.*

Unawareness had infiltrated right there, because the mind hadn't withdrawn from unawareness. The mind and unawareness were quiet together because unawareness didn't get out to work. When discernment has it surrounded, unawareness shrinks in and hides out, quiet in the heart, like the sediment in the bottom of a water jar.

At that point, I began to feel amazed. There was no pain left. The body had disappeared. Only one thing hadn't disappeared: it was an awareness so refined I

couldn't describe it. It simply appeared there. You couldn't say anything else about it. The thing that simply appeared there: That was the great marvel at that moment. There was no motion in the heart, no rippling, nothing of anything at all. It stayed fixed and still like that until enough time had elapsed and then it moved. The mind began to withdraw and rippled — blip — and then was quiet.

This rippling happens on its own, you know. We can't intend it. If we intend it, the mind withdraws. What happens is that the mind has had enough, of its own accord. When it ripples in a 'blip' like this, it's aware of the fact. As soon as the 'blip' appears, it vanishes. After a moment it ripples — blip — again, and disappears in the same instant. Then the rippling gradually becomes more and more frequent.

When the mind withdraws after having fully settled down to its foundation, it doesn't withdraw all at once. I could clearly see this at that moment. The mind rippled slightly: A *sankhara* formed in a 'blip' and then disappeared before it had amounted to anything at all. It rippled — blip — and disappeared

right then and there. After a moment it rippled — blip — again.

Gradually it became more and more frequent until finally I came back to ordinary consciousness, to the ordinary level of the mind. I was aware of the body, but the pain was still gone. When the mind came back out, there was still no pain. It was still quiet until time came for the pain to reappear.

This is where I got my standard and my certainty. I realized that I had arrived at a basic principle in contending with pain: 'So this is how it is. *Pain is actually something separate.* The body is separate. The mind is separate, *but because of one thing — delusion — all three converge into one,* and the whole mind becomes delusion, the whole mind is the one deluded. Even though pain may simply arise in line with its own nature, if we grab hold of it to burn ourselves, it's hot — because our labeling makes it hot.'

After a fair while, the pain returned, so I had to tackle it again, without retreating. I had to dig on down, exploring again as I had explored before, *but*

*this time I couldn't use the tactics I had used in investigating and remedying the pain the last time around.* I needed fresh tactics, newly devised by mindfulness and discernment so as to keep up with events. It was pain just the same, but the tactics simply had to be pertinent to the moment. I couldn't remedy matters by holding to the old tactics I had used to investigate and know in the past. They had to be fresh, hot tactics devised in the present to cure the present. The mind then settled down firmly in stillness as it had done before.

In that first night, the mind settled down three times, but I had to go through three bouts of hand-to-hand combat. After the third time, dawn came — the end of the final showdown using reason with real mindfulness and discernment. The mind was audacious, exultant, and had no fear of death. 'However great the pain may be that is its own ordinary business. As long as we don't enter in and load ourselves down with it, pain has no significance in the heart.' The mind knew clearly that the body has no significance in terms of itself, in terms of the feeling, or in terms of us, unless the mind *gives* it a significance and then gathers in the suffering to burn

itself. There's nothing else that can come in and make the mind suffer.

Getting up that morning, I felt audacious in an extraordinary way. I wanted to tell Venerable Acariya Mun of my knowledge and capabilities. This was because I felt daring in a way hard to describe. *How was it that things could be so marvelous like this* in a way I had never encountered before? Ever since I had begun meditating, nothing like this had ever happened. *The mind had completely cut off all connection with any objects and had gathered within itself with real courage.* It had gathered by investigating all around itself, which was why it had calmed itself inwardly like a thoroughbred. When it withdrew, it was still full of courage, with no fear of death at all, owing to its conviction that, 'I investigated like this and this when pain arose. The next time it comes, I won't fear it because it's the same old pain. It's pain with the same old face. The body is the same old body. Discernment is the same old discernment we've used before.' For this reason, the heart felt no fear of death — so much so that it felt all sorts of things hard to describe. To put it in worldly terms, it was

like defying someone right to his face, with no fear of pain or death.

See? When the mind is bold, it's bold all the way. It's daring all the way. It fights without retreating. 'Okay, I'll take you on.' To put it simply and frankly, that's just how it feels. When the time comes to die, 'Okay, I'll take you on.' The mind doesn't retreat.

'When the time comes to die, where will death find any pain for us greater than this? There's no such thing. The only pain is the pain in the *khandhas*. It can be great or small, but we know it here in the *khandhas*. No matter how much or how heavy the pain may be, it can't outstrip our knowledge and capabilities. It can't outstrip our mindfulness and discernment. Mindfulness and discernment are capable of keeping track of it all, as they have already known and removed it in the past.' This is what made me feel really bold.

When the time would come to die, I didn't see that there would be any problem, with mindfulness and discernment all around me like this. If the time came to die, then let me die. Birth and death come in a

pair. You can't separate death from birth so as not to die, because they are equal truths.

The next time around, I took on the pain again and knew in the same way. I kept on knowing in the same way and winning every time. Once I had given it all my strength in that way, there was never a day in which I'd say, 'Last night I stayed up in meditation all night until dawn and didn't get anything out of it.' But any night in which the mind had difficulty investigating and settling down, I would come out feeling battered all over my body. I'd be all stiff and sore.

But as for getting tactics and strength of mind, I'd get them every time, until I no longer had any fear of death at all — and where would I get any fear? Death was something ordinary. In other words, discernment had analyzed down to 'What dies?' Hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, bones: They're simply their original element — solidity, the earth element. Since when did the earth element ever die? When they disintegrate, what do they become?

If we focus on down, we see that they return to their original properties. The water element returns to its original property. The wind and fire elements simply return to their own original properties. Nothing is annihilated. The elements have simply come together in a lump, and the mind comes in and animates it — this super-deluded one comes in and animates it, that's all — and then carries the entire burden: 'This is my self.' It lays its claims: 'This is me. This is mine.' And so it rakes in every kind of suffering as if contracting for the whole mass, using those assumptions simply to burn itself, and nothing else.

The mind itself is the culprit. The five *khandhas* aren't the culprits. They aren't our enemies or anything. They simply have their own reality, but we make assumptions and carry them as a burden.

This is why there's suffering and stress. We manufacture it ourselves. These things don't manufacture it for us. 'There is nothing that comes and gives us suffering': This is how the mind came to understand things. *We* are the ones who misconstrue things. We are the ones who suffer

because we misconstrue things. This produces suffering to burn and trouble the heart. I could clearly see that *nothing dies*.

The mind doesn't die. It becomes more pronounced. When we fully investigate the four elements — earth, water, wind, and fire — down to their original properties, the mind becomes even more pronounced and clear. So where is there any death? What dies? None of these conditions die. The four elements — earth, water, wind, and fire: They don't die. And as for the mind, how can it die? It becomes more aware, more pronounced, more conspicuous. This doesn't die, so why does it fear death? We've been fooled all along, we've been fooled for aeons and aeons, for actually *nothing dies*.

Now, the word 'fooled' doesn't mean that anyone intended to fool us. We've been fooled simply because of our own delusion — fooled into fearing death. Now we see: This is how the world fears death — from not having explored down to its truth, from not knowing what dies. Because look: Nothing dies. Each thing simply has its separate reality. I saw

this clearly. The mind proclaimed itself by its very nature. I saw its marvelousness clearly, every time.

Even when the pain was as hot as fire in the body and seemed ready to reach the clouds, it would vanish clear away, with nothing left, due to the power of mindfulness and discernment; even the body would vanish from my sense of consciousness and wouldn't appear at all.

When everything disbanded completely as the result of my investigation, *all that remained was simple awareness*, as if floating in mid-space (although I didn't make the comparison at the moment). It was completely empty, but the awareness knew clearly. There was only one thing. There was only one strange thing in the world: the heart.

Earth, water, wind, and fire made no contact with the heart. The heart thus had no sense of earth, water, wind, fire or any part of the body. All that remained was a solitary awareness, an awareness not involved with anything at all — an amazing awareness, coming from having investigated things with

circumspection and then having withdrawn from them. Clear. Outstanding. Astounding.

Once the mind can be settled down like this — for no matter how many days or nights it may last — it has no sense of pain, that the body will fall apart, that it hurts here or aches there: no sense of any of this at all. And what would give it any sense of this? Time and place don't exist in that mental state. This called to mind how the Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and arahant disciples could enter the cessation of feeling and perception for seven days at a time. They could enter for as many days as they liked. If their minds settled down like this to the extent of not being involved with anything at all, leaving just plain awareness without any involvement with time or place, then they could sit for aeons if they liked. Even if the body couldn't endure, if it were to break apart, it would simply do so, without having any impact on this nature at all.

This was when my mind accepted — really believed in — the ability of those extraordinary people who enter the cessation of feeling and perception for so-and-so many days. If their minds reached this level

without withdrawing back out to anything outside, then for days or months they wouldn't have any perception of anything at all. Where would there be pain and pleasure in their bodies? There wouldn't be any at all. They wouldn't have any sense of the body. They wouldn't have any awareness of feelings. All that would remain would be plain awareness. They could sit for aeons, if they liked, as long as the mind was like this.

This made me believe in the stories of the Pacceka Buddhas who entered the cessation of feeling and perception. So I took this as a confirmation in my mind. Whoever says I'm crazy can go ahead and say so. They have mouths; we have ears. If we want to listen, we can. If we don't, we can keep still. We are all free to have our opinions on this matter and that. No one has a monopoly on knowing and seeing!

Even though I didn't sit for a long time, the state of mind that had grown still to that extent for a spell of time was enough to serve as confirmation of those who entered the cessation of feeling and perception for long periods of time, because it had the same characteristics: not involved with anything at all.

The body would simply be a body. If it were to fall apart, if it couldn't last — after all, the body is inconstant, stressful, and not-self — then it would simply fall apart without the mind's being aware.

This is a level attained through mindfulness and discernment. It's a level where discernment fosters concentration. The mind reaches the full extent of concentration like this because discernment has fully investigated down to causes and effects. It then gathers with courage and great refinement.

Ordinarily, when the mind filled with just the power of concentration focuses and settles down, it is simply unmoving and nothing else. It isn't as profound and refined as this. But the mind stilled through the power of discernment is refined each time. Once we have gone through hand-to-hand combat in this way to the point where we get results, the mind has to be absolutely quiet, just like this.

This was the basis, or the starting capital, for my courage; the primary seed for my firm conviction in the affairs of the mind. No matter how much anything else might be annihilated, this knowing

nature would *not* be annihilated. I could see this clearly. I saw it clearly at the point when nothing else was involved in my sense of awareness. There was simply that single awareness, and so it was very pronounced. I couldn't really say whether this was on the level of concentration or of discernment. When the mind actually was that way, that's how it was.

From that point on I kept at it. I kept investigating out in the area of discernment, ranging out widely, then, circling back in again. As soon as I would understand, step by step, the mind would let go and circle inward in an ever-narrowing sphere, investigating the *khandhas* and elements, separating the *khandhas* and elements.

This is where it began to be '*samuccheda-pahana*' — absolute relinquishment, arising from the investigation in the period that followed. As long as the investigation hadn't been absolute, it would win out for only a period of time, just enough to serve as evidence and proof. It still wasn't absolute relinquishment. But when discernment came to a really clear understanding while investigating, then

it pulled out and severed all ties, step by step — severed things so that there were no connections left; severed them step by step, leaving just plain awareness.

The body (*rupa*) was severed from attachment. *Vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* were severed from attachment. Or you could say that the 'heart' was severed from 'them.' Things kept being severed until only awareness was left — in other words, the mind with unawareness buried inside it. So I probed on in, smashed things to bits, slashed them to smithereens with up-to-the-minute mindfulness and discernment. The mind of unawareness broke apart, and when the mind of unawareness broke apart, that was all!

That was when I came to know that all of the marvels I have mentioned here were simply an affair of unawareness. They had simply been a support, a way-station, a seed that had produced conviction step by step, but after that — if you were to say they were good, they were good; but if you're aiming at the subtle Dhamma, this goodness is the goodness of unawareness. It's not genuine goodness, not pure

goodness. It's goodness mixed with evil, with suffering and stress, because stress still has a chance to arise. We have to keep slashing in, slashing in until everything into smithereens in the heart. Whatever is a seed of anything counterfeit in the heart, wash it away, scrub it away, until nothing is left, and that's all. The entire mind that is assumed to be 'this' or 'that' is *all gone*.

This is where the mind reaches absolute purity, where it reaches complete freedom from all conventional realities. That's really 'all'! It's astounding. If it weren't astounding, it wouldn't be release from stress. *This is a Dhamma apart — a Dhamma beyond conventions.*

Whether what I've described here is difficult or not, consider it for yourselves. Sometimes I'd feel ready to pass out. Sometimes I'd feel as if the entire body were on fire. When the pain was really fierce, it seemed to fill the entire body. But ultimately I was able to pass through these things, to resolve them using mindfulness and discernment.

So if we put them to use, mindfulness and discernment are never at the end of their rope. We human beings aren't fated always to be stupid, you know. When we come to the end of our rope, we're sure to be able to save ourselves. Who should be willing to go under when we have the mindfulness and discernment to remedy things, or when there's an opening through which we can escape, through which we can force our way out? Who would willingly be buried to death? We can't help but manage to find a way out.

When the pain is so piled-on that we can't see any way to cure it other than using mindfulness and discernment to explore and find a way out, *discernment doesn't depend on this person or that.* When the time comes for the mind to investigate when it's cornered, *it gathers its forces and manages to save itself.*

The Buddha thus taught us to live in 'crucial' places — places where we're cornered, at the end of our rope — where we live simply, so that mindfulness and discernment can work full steam ahead and see their own capabilities, rather than simply waiting for help from others.

Time and place can help give rise to mindfulness and discernment. If we live in a scary place, mindfulness is strong. Discernment is sharp. Whatever we investigate, they are adroit and audacious. If we live in a comfortable place, we get lazy. We eat a lot and sleep a lot. This is the way it is with the mind. If we live in ordinary circumstances, we're very lazy, very inert, very apathetic and listless. If we live in places that aren't scary, we become heedless and revert to being complacent, to sleeping like pigs.

If we live in a scary place, we're always alert. When we're alert, we're always self-aware, *because alertness is what it means to be mindful*. Mindfulness appears within us, always self-aware, always engaged in persistent effort. Whatever makes contact, we understand because we're not complacent, because we're always alert. This is why we're taught to live in whatever places are appropriate, because they can give good encouragement or support to our persistent effort.

If we have comfortable huts in which to live — as we have here — everything cares for our every need. Food overflows our bowls. We're flooded day and night with fruit juice, soft drinks, cocoa, and coffee. Main course dishes and desserts come pouring in from every direction. If we lack mindfulness and discernment, we lie clutching our food, like a pig lying next to its hay and then climbing up to lie on the chopping block. As for the Dhamma, we have no hope of winning it. Any meditation monk who is 'clever' in this way is bound to go under in this way without a doubt.

To have mindfulness and discernment, we have to think. However much of the necessities of life we may have, we must find tactics for keeping the mind in shape, to keep wary and uncomplacent like a deer wary of danger.

In places where you don't have to be wary of food like this, the mind goes about thinking in another way to reform itself. There, where will you get an excess of anything? Everything is lacking. Insufficient. Some days you get enough alms to eat, some days you don't. 'This way there's nothing to be

concerned about, because you've been full and been hungry before. Even if you go without food for one or two days, you won't die.'

This is how the heart deals with the problem, and so it isn't concerned about food or anything else. If there's nothing but rice, you eat rice — and you don't see that you're concerned about it. 'After all, you've come to a place like this, so what's wrong with eating whatever's available? Where are you going to find anything to go with the rice? You've been fed rice ever since the day you were born, so what's wrong with eating just rice? Can you eat other things without rice? If eating other things is really special, you've already eaten a lot of them, so why aren't you ever full?

You've come looking for the Dhamma, not for food. Why are you so worked up about your stomach? You've already eaten a lot, and yet nothing special has ever come of it. You're looking for the extraordinary Dhamma, so what business do you have getting worked-up about food? An expert in Dhamma isn't an expert in eating.' The mind deals

with the situation in the flash of an eye, and the end result is that it isn't concerned.

This is how a meditation monk subdues himself — or in other words, subdues his greed for the necessities of life.

And as a result of correcting itself in the matter of eating or not eating, the mind keeps spinning. You sit in meditation without getting tired. With no food in your stomach, what is there to get drowsy about? If you don't eat at all, you're not drowsy at all and can meditate with ease.

This is a tactic in teaching monks to practice the Dhamma '*rukkhamula-senasanam*' — under the shade of trees, in the mountains, in the forest, in lonely places where it's scary — *ahara-sappaya*, where the food is amenable. 'Amenable' here means that it doesn't disrupt the body, that it isn't harmful or toxic to the body; and that it doesn't disrupt the mind as well. 'Amenable food' means nothing but rice sometimes, or just a little food, so that our meditation goes well. It's amenable for those intent on the Dhamma.

But those of us who are intent on nourishing the stomach for the sake of the body can't do this at all. Otherwise we'll die — don't say I didn't warn you. Normally, if we eat a lot, with nothing but good dishes to eat, then we sleep like pigs. How can this be amenable? It's amenable for the defilements, not for winning the Dhamma. It's amenable for the affairs of defilements and the affairs of pigs. The term 'amenable food' has to refer to eating in a way that serves a purpose.

To eat just a little serves a purpose: Wherever we sit in meditation, the mind is really solid. If we're involved with concentration, the mind is solid. If we're involved with discernment, it keeps spinning with much more agility than normal.

*The Dhamma tends to arise in places where things are lacking, in difficult places where we're cornered, at the end of our rope. It doesn't arise where things are overflowing, where our needs are met. It doesn't arise in comfortable places because we just get complacent. This is the way we tend to be.*

The Lord Buddha lived in a royal palace — for how long? — and then left it to take up the homeless life. Whoever suffered more than he? 'Buddha' — Awakening — tends to arise in situations like that. His disciples came from all sorts of families — the families of kings, financiers, landowners — listen to this — wealthy people. When they went out to become 'sons of the Sakyan, sons of the victorious Buddha,' how did they live? 'If we're going to die, then we die. We're not going to worry or be bothered with anything at all except for the Dhamma.' There! They gained the Dhamma in difficult places, just like the Buddha.

So which way are we going to take? The Buddha has already shown us the way. The Dhamma arises in that sort of place — in tight spots where things are difficult. The Dhamma arises from a heap of suffering. If there's no heap of suffering, then mindfulness and discernment don't arise. If we don't think, we don't gain mindfulness and discernment. The Dhamma doesn't appear. If there's a lot of stress, it's a whetstone for discernment, which probes for clear insight into the affairs of stress. This way we can live through it and come out *superlative people*.

So then. *Evam.*

## **The Radiant Mind Is Unawareness**

Normally the mind is radiant and always ready to make contact with everything of every sort. Although all phenomena without exception fall under the laws of the three characteristics — stress, inconstancy, and not-self — the true nature of the mind doesn't fall under these laws.

The extent to which the mind *does* follow these laws is because the things that fall under these three characteristics come spinning in and become involved with it, so that it goes spinning along with them. Even then, though, it spins in a way that doesn't disintegrate or fall apart. It spins with the things that have the power to make it spin, but the natural power of the mind itself is that it *knows and does not die*. This deathlessness is something that lies beyond disintegration. This non-disintegration is something that lies beyond the three characteristics and the common laws of nature, but we're not aware of it because conventional realities become involved with the mind and surround it, so that the mind's behavior conforms thoroughly to theirs.

The fact that we're unaware that birth and death are things that have always been with the mind infected by defilement, is because ignorance itself is an affair of defilement. *Birth and death are an affair of defilement. Our own true affair, the affair that's ours pure and simple — the affair of the mind pure and simple — is that we don't have the power to be our own true self.*

We have been taking all sorts of counterfeit things as our self all along, and so the mind's behavior is not in keeping with its true nature. Its behavior falls under the sway of the deceits of defilement, which make it worry and fear, dreading death, dreading everything. Whatever happens — a little pain, a lot of pain — it's afraid. If even the least little thing disturbs it, it's afraid. As a result, the mind is filled with worries and fears. Even though fear and worry aren't directly an affair of the mind, they still manage to make it tremble.

We'll see — when the mind is cleansed so that it is fully pure and nothing can become involved with it — that no fear appears in the mind at all. Fear

doesn't appear. Courage doesn't appear. All that appears is its own nature by itself, just its own timeless nature. That's all. This is the genuine mind.

'Genuine mind' here refers only to the purity or the '*saupadisesa-nibbana*' of the arahants. Nothing else can be called the 'genuine mind' without reservations or hesitations. I, for one, would feel embarrassed to use the term for anything else at all.

The 'original mind' means the original mind of the round in which the mind finds itself spinning around and about, as in the Buddha's saying, 'Monks, the original mind is radiant' — notice that — 'but because of the admixture of defilements' or 'because of the defilements that come passing through, it becomes darkened.' The original mind here refers to the origin of conventional realities, not to the origin of purity. The Buddha uses the term '*pabhassaram*' — '*pabhassaramidam cittam bhikkhave*' — which means radiant. It doesn't mean pure.

The way he puts it is absolutely right. There is no way you can fault it. Had he said that the original mind is pure, you could immediately take issue: 'If

the mind is pure, why is it born? Those who have purified their minds are never reborn. If the mind is already pure, why purify it?' Right here is where you could take issue. What reason would there be to purify it? If the mind is radiant, you can purify it because its radiance is unawareness incarnate, and nothing else.

Meditators will see clearly for themselves the moment the mind passes from radiance to mental release: Radiance will no longer appear. Right here is the point where meditators clearly know this, and it's the point that lets them argue — because the truth has to be found true in the individual heart. Once a person knows, he or she can't help but speak with full assurance.

Thus the fact that our mind is surrounded and made to fear, to worry, to love, to hate, or whatever, is caused entirely by the symptoms of conventional reality, the symptoms of defilement. We have no mental power of our own. We have only the power of defilement, craving, and mental effluents pushing and pressuring us day and night while we sit, stand, walk, and lie down.

Where are we going to find any happiness and ease as long as these things, which are constantly changing, keep provoking the mind to change along with them without our being aware of the fact?

There can be no ease in this world — none at all — until these things can be completely eradicated from the heart. Until then, we can have no secure ease and relief in any way. We can only shift and change about, or lean this way and that, depending on how much we're provoked by the things that come and involve us. This is why the Buddha teaches us to cleanse the mind, which is the same thing as cleansing ourselves of suffering.

There is no one who has genuinely penetrated the principles of the truth like the Lord Buddha. Only he can be called '*sayambhu*' — one who needs no teaching or training from anyone else. In curing his heart of defilement, he performed the duties of both student and teacher, all by himself, until he awakened to the level of the superlative Dhamma, becoming the superlative person, the superlative Master.

This is not to deny that on the level of concentration — the development of mental stillness — he received training from the two hermits; but that in itself wasn't the way of extrication leading to the level of omniscience (*sabbaññu*).

By the time he was to attain omniscience, he had left the two hermits and was striving on his own. He came to know the Dhamma on his own and to see on his own, without anyone else's teaching him. He, then, brought that Dhamma to teach the world so that it has known good and evil, heaven, hell, and *nibbana* ever since.

Had there been no one to teach us, we of the world would be completely burdened with the mass of fire filling our hearts and would never see the day when we could put our burdens down.

This being the case, we should appreciate the worth of the Dhamma that the Buddha brought to the world after having endured hardships in a way no one else in the world could have managed.

So now, at present, what is it that covers the heart so that we can't find its radiance and purity, even though each of us wants to find purity?

What conceals it? To answer in terms of natural principles, we should start with the five *khandhas*. As for the 'mind of unawareness,' we can save that for later. Let's just start out with what's really obvious — the five *khandhas* and their companions: sight, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations.

These make contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, and then link up with the mind, forming the basis for this assumption and that.

The mind then takes the objects that have come passing by and uses them to bind itself, to entangle itself, or encircle itself, so that it is completely darkened with love, hate, anger, and all sorts of other states, all of which come from the things I have mentioned.

But what lies buried deep is our belief that the *khandhas* form our self. From time immemorial, whatever our language, whatever our race — even

when we are common animals — we have to believe that these things are us, are ours; that they are a being, the self of a being, our own self. If we become deities, we believe that our divine bodies are ours. If we become hungry ghosts or whatever, the things we dwell in — gross bodies or refined — we take to be us or ours. Even when we become human beings and begin to have some sense of good and evil, we still have to believe that 'This is us,' or 'This is ours.'

Of the five *khandhas*, the body (*rupa*) is 'us.' *Vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* are 'us,' are 'ours.' These assumptions lie buried deep within us. The Buddha thus teaches us to investigate, and we investigate these things so as to see their truth clearly and, then, to uproot our mistaken assumptions and attachments that they are the self. We do this for the sake of freedom and for nothing else.

If we look at these things in their normal state, we might wonder why we should investigate them. Sights are simply sights; sounds are sounds; smells, smells; tastes, tastes; tactile sensations are simply

natural phenomena as they've always been. They've never announced that they are our enemies. So why investigate them?

We investigate them to know the truth of each one of them as it actually is, to realize our own delusions by means of this investigation and to extricate ourselves from them through knowledge — for the fact that the mind lays claim to the *khandhas* as its self, as belonging to itself, is because of delusion and nothing else.

Once we have investigated and clearly understood what these things are, the mind withdraws inwardly through knowledge, understanding, and discernment, with no more concern for these things. We investigate whichever *khandha* is most prominent.

We needn't conjecture or speculate about the fact that we haven't contemplated the five *khandhas* in their entirety, or each *khandha* in turn. We needn't conjecture at all. All we need to do is to see which *khandha* is prominent and merits investigation at the moment — which *khandha* we feel best suited to

handle — and then investigate and explore it so that it becomes clear.

Take, for instance, the body, whichever aspect of the body is most prominent in your awareness — the aspect that has you most interested, that you want most to investigate. Latch onto that spot and focus on examining it so as to see its truth in terms of the question, 'What is stress?'

In the texts we are told that stress (*dukkha*) means 'unendurability,' but this doesn't sit well with my own crass tastes, which is why — one man's meat being another man's poison — I prefer to translate stress as 'a constant squeeze.' This is more in keeping with my tastes, which are very crude. For example, the phrase, '*yampiccham na labhati tampi dukkham,*' is right in line with my translation. In other words, 'Not attaining what is desired is stress.' How is it stress? In that it puts a squeeze on us, or makes us uncomfortable.

If we don't get what we want, we're uncomfortable. Even if we get what we want but then lose it, we suffer stress. Stress in this sense fits the translation,

'a squeeze.' This squeeze is what's meant by stress or unendurability.

If it can't endure, let it go its own way. Why mess with it? Actually, no matter which *khandha*, no matter which of the three characteristics, the mind is the one at fault for getting attached, which is why we have to examine the *khandhas* until we have them clear.

Whatever aspect of the body may be, look so as to see it clearly. If we're not yet clear about the filthiness in our 'physical heap,' we can look at the charnel ground within us so as to see it clearly. When we're told to visit the charnel ground, this is where we make our visit. Even if we visit a charnel ground outside, the purpose is to reflect inwardly on the inner charnel ground — our own body.

As for the external charnel ground, in the days of the Buddha it was a place where corpses were scattered all over the place. The dead were hardly ever buried or cremated as they are today. So the Buddha taught monks to visit the charnel ground, where old corpses and new were scattered everywhere. He also gave

detailed instructions as to the direction from which to enter, in keeping with his sharp intelligence as a self-dependent Buddha, the Teacher of the world. He said to approach from the upwind side and not from the downwind side. Otherwise the stench of the various corpses would be bad for your health.

'When you encounter corpses in this way, how do you feel? Look at the different types of corpses. How do you feel? Now refer inwardly, to your own body, which is another corpse.' This is how he taught the monks to investigate. Once we have an eyewitness — ourself — as to what the corpses in the external charnel ground are like, we can refer inwardly to the internal charnel ground: which is our self again.

Once we have grasped the basic principle, the external charnel ground gradually fades out of the picture. Instead, we investigate our internal charnel ground so that it becomes gradually more and more clear. In other words, we see how this body is a well of filth. Repulsive. Something that constantly has to be washed, bathed, and cleaned.

Is there anything that, once it has become involved with any part of the body, remains clean? Even the food we eat, once we consume it, becomes filthy from the moment it enters the mouth and passes on down. Our clothing is also dirty. It has to be washed and laundered — a lot of fuss and bother. The same holds true for our homes. They constantly have to be cleaned, scrubbed, dusted, and swept. Otherwise, they turn into another charnel ground because of the filth and the smell.

Everywhere, wherever human beings live, has to be cleaned — because human beings are filthy. And since our bodies are already filthy, everything that comes into contact with them becomes filthy.

Even food — delicious, inviting, appealing food — once it becomes mixed with the filth in the body, such as saliva, becomes filthy as well. If you took food of various kinds into your mouth and then spit it out, there'd be no way you could take it back in again. It'd be too disgusting. Revolting. Why? It is because the body is filthy by its very nature, and so whatever becomes involved with the body becomes filthy as well.

To contemplate in this way is called investigating the charnel ground, or investigating the theme of loathsomeness.

So. Focus in on seeing its inherent nature. Look at every facet, in whichever way comes most naturally to you. When you've examined one spot, your knowledge gradually seeps into the next spot and the next. If mindfulness and awareness keep in close connection, discernment can't help but go to work and advance unceasingly. You'll feel profoundly moved as you come to see and know truly, step by step. This is discernment on the first level of investigation.

Once you've investigated filthiness, you then investigate the process of change in the body. In other words, filth is in this body. Dry corpses, fresh corpses, raw corpses, cooked corpses, all kinds of corpses are gathered together in this body, but I've never heard the place where they are barbecued, roasted, and stewed called a crematorium. Instead, it's called kitchen. But actually, that's what it is, a crematorium for animals. And then they're all buried

here in this stomach, this grave. We're a burial ground for all kinds of animals — yes, us! — if we look at ourselves in all fairness, with impartiality, because we're filled with old corpses and new.

Once we have contemplated in this way, then if we don't feel disenchantment, if we don't feel disengagement, what will we feel? — for that's the way the truth actually is.

The Buddha taught us to get to the truth, because this is what the truth is. If we don't resist the truth, we will all be able to unshackle ourselves from our attachments and false assumptions — from our stupidity and foolishness — step by step. The mind will become bright and clear, radiating its brightness with dignity, bravery, and courage in the face of the truth that comes into contact with it at all times. It will be content to accept every facet of the truth with fairness and impartiality.

Even though we may not have yet abandoned our attachments absolutely, we can still find relief in having put them down to at least some extent. We no longer have to be constantly weighed down with our

attachments to the *khandhas* to the point where we are always miserable.

This is in keeping with the saying, 'Fools, the heavier their burdens, the more they keep piling on. Sages, the lighter their burdens, the more they let go — until nothing is left.'

When we investigate in this way, we should examine the process of change in the *khandhas*. Every piece, every bit, every part of the body undergoes change. There's no exception, not even for a single hair. Everything undergoes change in the same way. So which part is us, which part is ours, to which we should be attached?

The same holds true with the word '*anatta*,' not-self. It drives home even more firmly the fact that these things don't deserve our attachment. '*Anatta*' lies in the same parts as change — the very same parts.

They're *anatta*, not ours or anyone else's. *Each one, each one is simply a natural phenomenon mingled with the others in line with its own nature, without*

any concern for who will like it or hate it, latch onto it or let it go.

But we human beings are light-fingered and quick. Whatever comes our way, we snatch hold of it, snatch hold of it, with no concern for right or wrong. We're more light-fingered and quick than a hundred monkeys, and yet all of us, all over the world, like to criticize monkeys for not being able to sit contented and still.

Actually we ourselves can't stay contented and still in any position. We're full of restlessness — unruly, reckless, overflowing our boundaries — and yet we never think of criticizing ourselves. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is thus like a stick for slapping the hands of this light-fingered, unruly monkey.

With the three characteristics, *anatta* among them, he warns us, strikes our wrists: 'Don't reach!' He slaps us, strikes us: 'Don't reach for it as "me" or "mine."' The phrase, 'The body is not the self,' is just like that. 'Don't reach for it. Don't latch onto it.' This is simply so that we will see that it's already not-self. By its nature it's not-self. It doesn't belong to anyone

at all. He's already told us: '*Anatta*: It's not the self.' This is how we investigate the body.

So, now then: Focus on visualizing it as it disintegrates, in whichever way seems most natural to you. This part decomposes. That part decomposes. This part falls off. That part falls off. Let yourself become engrossed in watching it, using your own ingenuity. This falls off, that falls off, until everything has fallen apart — all the bones, from the skull on down. Once the skin that enwraps them has decomposed, the flesh has decomposed, the tendons that hold them together have decomposed, the bones can't help but fall apart, piece by piece, because they are held together only by tendons. Once the tendons decompose, the different parts have to fall off piece by piece in a pile on the ground, scattered all over the place. You can even visualize having vultures, crows, and dogs come to eat and scatter the parts everywhere. How does the mind feel about this?

Well then, look at it. Visualize the liquid parts seeping into the earth and evaporating into the air, then drying away, drying away until they no longer appear. The solid parts, once they've dried, return to the earth from which they came. Earth returns to

earth, water to water, wind to wind. Penetrate down into any of four elements — earth, water, wind, or fire — because each gives clear evidence of the Noble Truths.

We don't have to think that we've examined earth clearly, but this element or that element isn't clear. We needn't think that way at all.

If we examine any one of them until it's clear, we will penetrate them all, because earth, water, wind, and fire are all already open and aboveboard. They appear to our sight. In our body, we already have water. Wind — for example, the in-and-out breath — is already clearly there, already clear to see. Fire — the warmth in the body — is something we all have here in our bodies. So why don't we accept its truth with right discernment? Once we've investigated it over and over again, we have to accept it. We can't resist the truth, because that's why we're here: We want the truth.

So keep investigating. Look for the part that is 'you' or 'yours.' Look for it! There isn't any — not a one! The whole thing originally belongs to them: to earth,

water, wind, and fire. It originally belongs to the different elements.

Now, when you look in this manner, the mind can settle down and grow still. At the same time, these aren't preoccupations that will make the mind proud, conceited, or unruly. Rather, they are themes that calm the heart, which is why the Buddha taught us to investigate them repeatedly until we understand and become adept at them.

When the mind sees clearly with its own discernment, it can't help but withdraw into stillness, firmly centered within, letting go of all its cares. *This is one level in the investigation of the khandhas.*

Now for the next step: Investigate feelings of pain, especially when you are ill or have been sitting in meditation for a long time, and severe pain arises. Take it on, right there. A warrior has to fight when the enemy appears. If there's no enemy, how can you call him a warrior? And what's the enemy? Feelings of pain are the enemy of the heart. When you're ill, where does it hurt? There: You have your enemy. If you're a warrior, how can you run away and hide?

*You have to fight until you gain knowledge and then use that knowledge to come out victorious.*

So. What does the pain come from? From the time we were born until we first sat in meditation, it wasn't there. Before we first became ill, it didn't appear. It appears only now that we're ill. Before that, where was it hiding? If it's really 'us,' our mind should have been aware of it at all times, so why hasn't this kind of pain appeared at all times? Why is it appearing now? If the pain is 'us,' then when it vanishes why doesn't the mind vanish with it?

If they're really one and the same thing, they have to vanish together. The pain should appear as long as the mind is aware. If they're one and the same thing, the pain shouldn't vanish. You have to look and investigate until this is clear. At the same time, analyze the body when the pain arises — when, for example, your legs ache or when this or that bone hurts. Fix your attention on the bone if the bone is really hurting.

*Is the bone the pain? Ask yourself! And whatever you're asking about, focus your attention right there.*

Don't ask in the abstract or absentmindedly. Ask in a way that focuses the mind right down to see the truth. Focus steadily right on the pain. Stare the mind right down on whichever bone you identify with the pain. Look carefully to see, 'Is this bone the pain?' Fix your attention there. Really observe with your own discernment. If this bone is really the pain, then, when the pain vanishes, why doesn't the bone vanish with it? If they really are one and the same thing, then when the pain vanishes, the bone should vanish too. It shouldn't remain.

But look: When the disease goes away, or when we get up from sitting in meditation, the really severe pain vanishes, the stress vanishes. So if they *are* one and the same thing, why doesn't the bone vanish as well? This shows that they aren't one and the same. The feeling isn't the same as the body. The body isn't the same as the feeling. Similarly, the body and the mind aren't one and the same.

Each has its own separate reality. Distinguish them so as to see them clearly in line with this truth, and you'll understand their true nature through

discernment, with no doubts at all. Feeling will appear in its true nature.

Ultimately, the investigation will come circling in, circling in, keep circling in to the mind. The pain will gradually shrink into itself, away from the mind's assumptions. In other words, you will see that the mind is the culprit. The mind is the instigator. The physical pain will gradually subside and fade away. The body will simply be there as the body, with the same reality it had before the pain appeared. And now that the pain has vanished, the flesh, skin, tendon, bone or whatever part you had identified as the pain will maintain its reality in the same way. It isn't the pain. The body is the body. The feeling is the feeling. The mind is the mind. Fix your attention on seeing them clearly. Once the mind has penetrated to the truth, the pain will disappear. This is one result.

Another result is that even if the pain doesn't vanish — here I'm referring to the physical pain — still it can't have any impact on the heart and mind. Ultimately, the mind is serene, secure, and majestic, there in the midst of the physical pain. No matter

which part of the body you say is pained — even if it's the whole body at once — the mind isn't disturbed or agitated in any way. It's relaxed and at ease because it has seen with discernment right through the pain appearing at the moment. This is another sort of result that comes from investigating pain.

When investigating pain, then the greater the pain, the more important it is that your mindfulness and discernment do not retreat. They have to keep advancing so as to know the truth. You needn't aim at making the pain vanish, because such a desire would simply enhance the pain and make it more and more severe.

Actually, *you're making an investigation simply to see the truth.* Whether or not the pain vanishes, know the truth that is the pain or gives rise to the pain by seeing through it with your own discernment: That's enough. Fix your attention there, and these things will keep appearing and disappearing there in the *khandhas*.

The body appears for a certain period and then disintegrates in what we call death. As for feelings of pain, they appear a hundred times in a single day and then disappear a hundred times, a thousand times as well. What's lasting about them? This is the kind of truth they are. Get so you clearly know with discernment the truth of painful feelings as they appear. Don't retreat or let the mind wander adrift.

What is *sañña* labeling at the moment? *Sañña* is the important instigator. *As soon as sankhara fashions anything — blip! — sañña latches right onto it and labels it this, labels it that — stirring things all up.* When we talk about the things that create havoc, provoking this issue and that, we're referring to these characters: *sankharas* and *saññas* that label things and stamp meanings on them. 'This is us. This is ours. This is pain. It hurts right here. It hurts right there. I'm afraid of the pain. I'm afraid to die' — afraid of everything of every sort. These are the characters that fool us into fear, making the mind apprehensive, making it give up its efforts and lose. *Is it good to lose?* Even children playing games have a sense of shame when they lose, and try to make up their losses. As for meditators who lose out to

defilement, who lose out to pain: If they don't feel embarrassed in the presence of the defilements, the pains and themselves, then they're simply too shameless.

Know that *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* are simply individual conditions displayed by the mind. They appear and vanish. '*Sañña anatta*' — see? They too are not-self, so how can you hold to them? How can you believe them to be you, to be yours, to be true? Keep track of them so that you can know them clearly with mindfulness and discernment: audacious, undaunted, diamond-hearted, decisive in the face of defilement and pain of every sort.

*Sankharas*, mental formations: They form — blip, blip, blip — in the heart. The heart ripples for a moment: blip, blip, blip. The moment they arise, they vanish. So what substance or truth can you find in these *saññas* and *sankharas*?

*Viññana*, cognizance: As soon as anything comes into contact, this takes note and vanishes, takes note and vanishes. So ultimately, the *khandhas* are full of

nothing but appearing and vanishing. There's nothing lasting about them that can give us any real sustenance or nourishment. There's not even the least bit of substance to them. So use your discernment to investigate until you see clearly in this way, and you will come to see the real Dhamma taught by the Buddha, which has not been otherwise from time immemorial and by the same token will never be otherwise at all.

Once we've investigated to this extent, how can the mind not withdraw into stillness until it is plainly apparent? It has to be still. It has to stand out. The mind's awareness of itself has to be prominent because it has withdrawn inwardly from having seen the truth of these things. *The mind has to be prominent.* Pain, no matter how horribly severe, will dissolve away through investigation, through the mind's having clearly seen its truth, or if it doesn't go away, then the pain and the mind will each have their own separate reality. The heart will be inwardly majestic. Undaunted and Unfearing.

When the time comes for death, let it happen. There is no more fear, because death is entirely a matter of

*rupa, vedana, sañña, sankhara, and viññana.* It's not a matter of the 'knower' — the heart — breaking apart. It's not the knower — the heart — that dies. Only those other things die. The mind's labels and assumptions have simply fooled it into fear. If we can catch sight of the fact that these labels and assumptions are illusions and not worthy of credence, the mind will withdraw inwardly, no longer believing them, but believing the truth instead, believing the discernment that has investigated things thoroughly.

Now, when the mind has investigated time and again, ceaselessly, relentlessly, it will develop expertise in the affairs of the *khandhas*. The physical *khandha* will be the first to be relinquished through discernment. In the beginning stage of the investigation, discernment will see through the physical *khandha* before seeing through the others and will be able to let it go. From there, the mind will gradually be able to let go of *vedana, sañña, sankhara, and viññana* at the same time.

To put the matter simply, once discernment sees through them, it lets go. If it has yet to see through

them, it holds on. Once we see through them with discernment, we let them go — let them go completely — because we see that they are simply rippings in the mind — blip, blip, blip — without any substance at all. A good thought appears and vanishes. A bad thought appears and vanishes. Whatever kind of thought appears, it's simply a formation and as such it vanishes. If a hundred formations appear, all hundred of them vanish. There is no permanence to them substantial enough for us to trust.

So then. What is it that keeps supplying us with these things or keeps forcing them out on us? What is it that keeps forcing this thing and that out to fool us? This is where we come to what the Buddha calls the *pabhassara-citta*: the original, radiant mind. 'But monks, because of the admixture of defilement,' or 'because of the defilements that come passing through' — from sights, sound, smells, tastes, tactile sensations; from *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana*, that our labels and assumptions haul in to burn us — 'the mind becomes defiled.' It's defiled with just these very things.

Thus investigation is for the sake of removing these things so as to reveal the mind through clear discernment. We can then see that as long as the mind is at the stage where it hasn't ventured out to become engaged in any object — inasmuch as its instruments, the senses, are still weak and undeveloped — it is quiet and radiant, as in the saying, 'The original mind is the radiant mind.' *But this is the original mind of the round of rebirth* — for example, the mind of a newborn child whose activities are still too undeveloped to take any objects on fully. *It's not the original mind freed from the cycle and fully pure.*

So while we are investigating around us, stage by stage, the symptoms of defilement that used to run all over the place will be gathered into this single point becoming a radiance within the mind. And this radiance: Even the tools of super-mindfulness and super-discernment will have to fall for it when they first meet with it, because it's something we have never seen before, never met before, from the beginning of our practice or from the day of our birth. We thus become awed and amazed. It seems

for the moment that nothing can compare to it in magnificence.

And why shouldn't it be magnificent? It has been the king of the round of rebirth in all three worlds — the world of sensuality, the world of form, and the world of formlessness — since way back when, for countless aeons. It's the one who has wielded power over the mind and ruled the mind all along. As long as the mind doesn't possess the mindfulness and discernment to pull itself out from under this power, how can it not be magnificent? This is why it has been able to drive the mind into experiencing birth on various levels without limit, in dependence on the fruits of the different actions it has performed under the orders of the ephemeral defilements. The fact that living beings wander and stray, - taking birth and dying, unceasingly, - is because this nature leads them to do so.

This being the case, we have to investigate it so as to see it plainly. Actually, radiance and defilement are two sides of the same coin because they are both conventional realities. The radiance that comes from the convergence of the various defilements will form

a point, a center, so that we can clearly perceive that 'This is the center of the radiance.' *When any defilement appears, in correspondence with that state or level of the mind, a very refined stress will arise in the center we call radiant.* Thus radiance, defilement, and stress — all three — are companions. They go together.

For this reason, the mind possessing this radiance must worry over it, guard it, protect it, maintain it, for fear that something may come to disturb it, jar it, and obscure its radiance. Even the most refined adulteration is still an affair of defilement, about which we as meditators should not be complacent. We must investigate it with unflagging discernment.

In order to cut through the burden of your concerns once and for all, you should ask yourself, 'What is this radiance?' Fix your attention on it until you know. There's no need to fear that once this radiance is destroyed, the 'real you' will be destroyed along with it. Focus your investigation right at that center to see clearly that this radiance has the characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self just like all the other phenomena you have already

examined. It's not different in any way, aside from the difference in its subtlety.

Thus, nothing should be taken for granted. If anything has the nature of conventional reality, let discernment slash away at it. Focus right down on the mind itself.

All the really counterfeit things lie in the mind. *This radiance is the ultimate counterfeit* and at that moment it's the most conspicuous point. You hardly want to touch it at all, because you love it and cherish it more than anything else. In the entire body there is nothing more outstanding than this radiance, which is why you are amazed at it, love it, cherish it, dawdle over it, want nothing to touch it. *But it's the enemy king: unawareness.*

Have you ever seen it? If you haven't, then when you reach this stage in your practice you'll fall for it of your own accord. And then you'll know it of your own accord — no one will have to tell you — when mindfulness and discernment are ready. It's called *avijja* — unawareness.

Right here is the true unawareness. Nothing else is true unawareness. Don't go imagining *avijja* as a tiger, a leopard, a demon, or a beast. Actually, it's the most beautiful, most alluring Miss Universe the world has ever seen. Genuine unawareness is very different from what we expect it to be.

When we reach genuine unawareness, we don't know what unawareness is and so we get stuck right there. If there's no one to advise us, no one to suggest an approach, we are sure to stay stuck there a long time before we can understand and work ourselves free. But if there is someone to suggest an approach, we can begin to understand it and strike right at that center, without trusting it, by investigating it in the same way we have dealt with all other phenomena.

Once we've investigated it with sharp discernment until we know it clearly, this phenomenon will dissolve away in a completely unexpected way. At the same time, you could call it Awakening, or closing down the cemeteries of the round of rebirth, the round of the mind, under the shade of the Bodhi tree. *Once this phenomenon has dissolved away,*

*something even more amazing that has been concealed by unawareness will be revealed in all its fullness.*

This is what is said to be like the quaking of the cosmos within the heart. *This is a very crucial mental moment: when the heart breaks away from conventions.* This moment, when release and conventional reality break away from each other, is more awesome than can be expressed. The phrase, 'the path of arahantship giving way to the fruition of arahantship' refers to precisely this mental moment, the moment in which unawareness vanishes. As we are taught, when the path is fully developed, it steps onward to the fruition of arahantship, which is the Dhamma — the mind — at its most complete. From that moment on, there are no more problems.

The phrase, 'the one *nibbana*,'<sup>1</sup> is fully realized in this heart in the moment unawareness is dissolving. We are taught that this is the moment when the path and the fruition — which are a pair — come together and meet. If we were to make a comparison with climbing the stairs to a house, one foot is on the last step, the other foot is on the floor of the house. We

haven't yet reached the house with both feet. When both feet are on the floor of the house, we've 'reached the house.' As for the mind, it is said to reach the Dhamma or to attain the ultimate Dhamma, and from the moment of attainment it's called 'the one *nibbana*.'

In other words, the mind is completely free. It displays no further activity for the removal of defilement. This is called the one *nibbana*. If you want, you can call it the fruition of arahantship, for at this stage there are no more defilements to quibble. Or you can call it the one *nibbana*. But if you want to give it the conventional label most appropriate to the actual principle, so that nothing is deficient in conventional terms, you have to say 'the one *nibbana*' so as to be completely fitting with conventional reality and release in the final phase of wiping out the cemeteries of the mind of unawareness.

The Buddha taught,

**n'atthi santi param sukham:**

*There is no ease other than peace.*

This refers to the stage of those who have no more defilements: those who have attained *sa-upadisesa-nibbana* alive, such as the arahants.

To practice the religion means to attend to your own heart and mind. Who is it that suffers pain and difficulty? Who is the suspect, forever imprisoned? Who else, if not the mind? And who has it imprisoned, if not all the defilements and mental effluents? To deal with the situation, you have to deal directly with the enemies of the heart, using your discernment, for only sharp discernment is capable of dealing with the defilements until they dissolve away of their own accord, as I have already mentioned. From that point on, there are no more problems.

As for *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana*, they're simply conditions — just conditions — *no longer capable of affecting or provoking the mind*.

The same with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations: Each has its separate reality. To each one we say, 'If it exists, it exists. If not, no matter.' The only problem has been the mind that

makes labels and assumptions through its own stupidity.

Once it gains enough intelligence, it becomes real. All phenomena within and without are real. Each has its own separate reality, with no more of the conflicts or issues that used to occur.

When we reach the stage where 'each has its own separate reality,' we can say that the war between the mind and defilement is over. When the time comes to part, we part. If not, we live together, like everyone else in the world, but we don't take issue with each other like everyone else in the world, because we've made our investigation.

If the words 'inconstancy, stress, and not-self' don't refer to the *khandhas* for which we are responsible, what do they refer to? So now we have completed our studies — our study of the three characteristics (*tilakkhana*), rather than of the three divisions (*tipitaka*) of the Pali canon, although actually the three divisions are nothing other than the three characteristics, in that the three divisions are a description of the three characteristics throughout.

Inconstancy: the process of change. Stress. Not-self: The *khandhas* are not us — not us while we are living, so when we die what is there to latch onto? When you see the truth in this way, you don't worry or feel apprehensive over the life or death of the *khandhas*. The mind simply perceives the modes in which the *khandhas* behave and break apart, but by its nature it doesn't disband along with the *khandhas*, so there's nothing to fear. If death comes, you don't try to prevent it. If life continues, you don't try to prevent it, for each is a truth.

In completing your study of death, you become the ultimate person — the ultimate you. When you have completed your study of death, you don't fear death — 'If life continues, let it continue; if death comes, let it die' — for you have spread a net around yourself with your discernment. You don't tremble over the truths of which the heart is fully aware at all times.

So. That's enough for now. As it happens, we're at the end of the tape...

**An Heir to the Dhamma**

*A talk given to the monks at Wat Pa Baan Taad.*

The ordinary mind — no matter whose — when it doesn't yet have any standards and meets up with things that drag it here and there in the wrong directions, will tend to go rolling after those preoccupations without let-up, to the point where it can't find any foundation for sustaining its peace and calm. In terms of the Dhamma, these preoccupations are called defilements.

We can see them when we begin to practice: The mind stumbles and crawls along, not at all willing to follow the Dhamma, because the defilements are strong. This is something I haven't forgotten, from the time I first set out to practice up until now, because it's a truth that lies embedded in the heart. How could I forget?

From the very start of my practice, I was really in earnest — because that's the sort of person I was. I wouldn't just play around. Wherever I would take my stance, that's how it would have to be. When I set out to practice, I had only one book — the Patimokkha — in my shoulder bag. Now I was going for the full path and the full results.

I was going to give it my all — give it my life. I wasn't going to hope for anything else. I was going to hope for nothing but release from suffering. I was sure that I would attain release from suffering in this lifetime. All I asked was that there be someone who could show me that the paths, fruitions, and *nibbana* were for real. I would give my life to that person and to the Dhamma through the practice, without holding anything back. If I was to die, I'd die with the practice. I wouldn't die with retreat. My heart was set like a stone post.

The first rains after I had set out to practice, I spent in Cakkaraad District, Korat Province, because I hadn't been able to catch up with Venerable Acariya Mun. I began accelerating my efforts as soon as I got there, and it wasn't long before my mind attained stillness, because I was practicing both day and night.

I wasn't willing to do any other work aside from the work of concentration practice — sitting and walking meditation — in my own stumbling and crawling way. My mind was able to quiet down, so I

really accelerated my efforts; but then, as I've told you before, it regressed when I was making a *klod*. 2

Up to that point, I was no mean hand at concentration. It was really solid. I was sure that the paths, fruitions, and *nibbana* were for real, because the mind was really solid. It wasn't affected by anything at all. But even then it still managed to regress just because I made a single *klod*.

When I reached Venerable Acariya Mun, he taught me the Dhamma as if it came straight out of his heart. He would never use the words, 'It seems to be...', because it really came right out of his heart — how he had practiced, what he had known and seen. It was as if he kept saying, 'Right here. Right here.' So did he see or didn't he? Did he know or didn't he?

'Right here.' Where were the paths, fruitions, and *nibbana*? 'Right here. Right here.' My mind was convinced, really convinced. From that point on I made a resolution: As long as he was still alive, I wouldn't leave him until either he died or I did. As for going-off from time to time to practice on my own, I'd ask to do that as a matter of course, but I'd

take him as my base, as if my home were with him. No matter where I'd go, I'd have to return to him. So then I stepped up my efforts full speed.

That dream I had — I'll never forget it. I've told you all this dream before, but it had such an impact on me that it bears telling again. I had come to stay with him and made my resolution with full conviction, with complete faith in him.

There was no point on which you could fault him. Whatever he did, inwardly or outwardly, was right in line with the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya. There was nothing roundabout or evasive about him. That was why I had made up my mind to stay with him. If he were alive today, I still wouldn't leave him. I'd have to stay with him, although as a matter of course I'd still go here or there from time to time, as I had told myself.

It was only around the fourth or fifth night after I had gone to stay with him... this dream, you know, was really amazing. I dreamed that I was fully robed, carrying my bowl and *klod*, following an overgrown trail through the jungle. There were no

side paths on either side. Both sides were full of thorns and brambles. All I could do was to keep trying to follow the trail, which was just barely a path, all overgrown, just enough to give a hint of where to go.

Finally I reached a point where a thick clump of bamboo had fallen across the trail. I couldn't see which way to go. There was no way around it on either side. How was I going to get past it? I peered here and there until finally I saw an opening — a tiny opening, right along the path, just enough for me to force my way through together with my bowl. Since there was no other way, I removed my outer robe — that's how clear the dream was, as if I weren't dreaming at all — I removed my outer robe and folded it away, just as we keep our robes folded here. I removed my bowl strap from my shoulder and crawled through the opening, dragging my bowl by its strap and pulling my *klod* just within reach behind me. I was able to force my way through, dragging my bowl, my *klod* and my robe behind me, but it was really difficult. I kept at it for a long time until finally I worked my way free. I pulled my bowl, and my bowl came free. I pulled my *klod*, and

my *klod* came free. I pulled my robe, and my robe came free. As soon as I was entirely free, I put on my robe again — that's how clear the dream was — I put on my robe, slung my bowl over my shoulder, and told myself, 'Now I can go on.' I kept following that trail-it was really overgrown — for about another 40 meters, wearing my robe, carrying my bowl and *klod*.

Looking ahead, there was wide open space. In front of me was the ocean. Looking across, there was no further shore. All I could see was the shore on which I was standing and a tiny island, way out in the distance, a black speck on the edge of the horizon. I was going to that island. As soon as I walked down to the water's edge, a boat — I don't know where it came from and I didn't notice whether it was a speedboat or a rowboat or whatever — a boat came up to the shore and I got in. The boatsman didn't say anything to me. As soon as I sat down in the boat and got my bowl and other things in, the boat sped out to the island, without my having to say a word. I don't know how it happened. It kept speeding, speeding out to the island. There didn't seem to be any dangers or waves or anything at all. We went

silently and in no time at all we arrived — because, after all, it was a dream.

As soon as I reached the island, I got my things out of the boat and went ashore. The boat disappeared completely, without my saying even a word to the boatsman. I slung my bowl over my shoulder and climbed up the island. I kept climbing until I saw Venerable Acariya Mun sitting on a small bench, pounding his betel nut and watching me climb up towards him. 'Maha,' he said, 'how did you get here? Since when has anyone come that way? How were you able to make it here?'

'I came by boat.'

'Oho. That trail is really difficult. Nobody dares risk his life coming that way. Very well then, now that you're here, pound my betel for me.' He handed me his betel pounder, and so I pounded away — chock, chock, chock. After the second or third chock, I woke up. I felt really disappointed. I wished I could have continued with the dream to see at least how it ended.

That morning I went to tell my dream to Venerable Acariya Mun. He interpreted it very well. 'This

dream, you know,' he said, 'is very auspicious. It shows the pattern for your practice without any deviations. Follow the practice in the way that you've dreamed. In the beginning, it'll be extremely difficult.' That's what he said. 'You have to give it your best. Don't retreat. The beginning will be difficult. The part where you made it through the clump of bamboo: That's the difficult part. So give it your best. Don't you ever retreat; once you get past that, it's all wide open. You'll get to the island without any trouble. That's not the hard point. The hard point is right here.'

I listened to him, really listened to him, and it went straight to the heart. *'Even if it kills you, don't retreat at this point.* Here at the beginning is the hardest part — where the mind advances and regresses. This part is so hard that you'll want to go smash your head against that mountain over there out of frustration. The mind advances and regresses, over and over again. Once you get past this point, though, you'll make progress easily, without any obstacles at all. That's all there is to it. Give it your best at the beginning and don't retreat. Understand?' That's what he said. 'If you retreat here, you won't get

anywhere. So give it your life. Strike your way through, right here. After all, your vision says you can make it. No matter how difficult it gets, you can make it. So don't retreat.'

I remembered his words and took them to heart — happy and pleased. I kept practicing until that following April in line with what he had said. The mind had regressed ever since December the previous year until December of that year and then on into April. It still hadn't advanced. It would advance to full strength and then deteriorate, again and again, for a year. It wasn't until April that I found a new approach, focusing on my meditation theme in a new way so that it was really solid. From that point on I was able to sit in meditation all night long. The mind was able to settle down in full measure, which is why I accelerated my efforts from then on. Speaking of the difficulty, that's how difficult it really was for me.

From there on in, the mind was centered and never regressed. The way it had regressed before was an excellent teacher. I'd absolutely refuse to let it regress again: That was how I felt. *If it regressed*

*again, I'd die.* I couldn't stand to stay in the world bearing the mass of suffering that would come if it regressed again, because I had already been through it once — more than a year of the most acute suffering. *There's no suffering that burns more than the suffering that comes when the mind regresses.* If it were to regress again, it'd kill me, which was why I was really meticulous in keeping watch over myself from then on. I wouldn't let the mind regress, and so it kept on progressing.

The first time I saw the marvelousness of the mind was when I began sitting in meditation all night — right from the very first night. I was investigating pain, and was it ever severe! At first I hadn't planned on sitting until dawn, you know. I was simply sitting along, and the pain began to grow. No matter how I contemplated it, I didn't get anywhere at all. 'Eh. What is this? Okay, if I'm going to die today, let me die.' So I made resolution in that moment: 'From this moment on, I won't get up until dawn. So. If I survive, so be it. If not, so be it.'

I struck right into the pain, to the point where the mind, which had never examined anything in that

way... Discernment had never moved into action that way, you know, but when it was really cornered, at the end of its rope, discernment stirred itself into action, keeping up with events from every angle until it was fully alert to the pain, alert to the body, and understood the affairs of the mind. Each was a separate reality.

They then split away from one another and disappeared completely, even though nothing like that had ever happened to me before. The body disappeared from my sense of awareness. The pain completely vanished. *All that was left was an awareness that was simply aware.* It wasn't the sort of outstanding awareness we might imagine it to be. It was just simple awareness, but very subtle, very refined, and very amazing in that moment.

When I retreated from that state, I renewed my investigation, but when I used the strategies I had used before, I didn't get any results, because they were now allusions to the past. *I had to come up with new strategies to keep up with the events of the moment.* The mind, then, settled down again. That

night, it settled down three times, and then dawn came. Was I ever amazed at myself!

That morning when I got the chance, I went to tell Venerable Acariya Mun. Normally, I'd be very intimidated by him, but that morning I wasn't intimidated at all. I wanted to tell him the truth, so that he could see the results of my being true — how I had practiced so that things had occurred that way.

I spoke with audacity, even though I had never spoken that way with him before. I really told it to him straight — crash! bang! — and after he had listened, he said, 'That's the way it's got to be.' That's just what he said! He really let me have it. He explained things to my complete satisfaction. It was as if I were a dog: As soon as he praised and spurred me on, this stupid dog I was, was all raring to bark and bite.

After one or two more days, I sat up in meditation all night again. After another two or three more days, I did it again, until the mind was thoroughly amazed.

The affairs of death, you know, disappear when the mind really knows. When you separate the elements (*dhatu*) and *khandhas* to look at life and death, the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire dissolve down into their original properties as earth, water, wind, and fire. Space returns to its original property as space. The mind that used to fear death becomes even more prominent. So what is there to die?

When it knows so prominently in this way, how can it die? *The mind doesn't die.* So what does it fear? We've been lied to. The world of defilements has been lying to us. ('Lying,' here, means that defilement has lied to the living beings of the world, making them fear death, even though actually nothing dies.)

When I'd investigate one day, I'd get one approach; another day, I'd get another approach, but they were all hard-hitting and amazing. The mind was more and more amazing and brave, to the point where I felt, 'When the time comes to die, what sort of pain do they think they're going to bring out to fool me? Every facet of today's pain is complete in every way.

Beyond this, there's simply death. I've seen all these pains, understood them all, and dealt with them all.

So when the time comes to die, what sort of pain are they going to bring out to deceive me? There's no way they can deceive me. The pain will have to be just this sort of pain. As for death, nothing dies. So what is there to fear aside from the defilements that lie to us, making us fall for their fake tricks and deceits? From this point on, I'll never fall for their tricks again.'

That's the way the mind is when it knows, and it knew clearly right from the very first night. As for the mental state that had progressed and regressed, up to that first night it hadn't regressed. Beginning that previous April, it hadn't regressed but it still wasn't clear.

That first night, though, it became clear: 'Oh. This is how it's supposed to be, the mind that doesn't regress.' It was as if it had been climbing up and falling down, climbing up and falling down, until finally it climbed up and grabbed hold tight, one

hundred per cent sure that it wouldn't regress. This was why I stepped up my efforts full speed.

During that Rains Retreat (*vassa*), I sat up all night in meditation nine or ten times, but never two nights in a row. Sometimes, I'd skip two or three nights, sometimes six or seven. I got to the point where I was completely sure about pain — heavy or light, big or small. I understood how to deal with pain, how to sidestep it, how to cure it right in time, without being shaken by it. I wasn't even afraid of death, because I had investigated it with the most completely adroit strategies. Mindfulness and discernment were completely up on death in every way.

Speaking of effort in the practice, my tenth rains — beginning from the April after my ninth rains — was when I made the most all-out effort. In all my life, I have never made a more vigorous effort, in terms of the body, than I did during my tenth rains. The mind went all out, and so did the body. From that point on, I kept making progress until the mind was like rock. In other words, I was skilled enough in the solidity and stability of my concentration that the

mind was like a slab of rock. It couldn't easily be affected by anything at all — *and then I was stuck on that concentration for five full years.*

Once I was able to get past that concentration, thanks to the hard-hitting Dhamma of Venerable Acariya Mun, I set out to investigate. When I began to investigate with discernment, things went quickly and easily because my concentration was fully prepared. It was as if all the materials for building a house were right at hand, but I hadn't yet put them together into a house, and so they were just useless pieces of wood. My concentration simply stopped at concentration that way. When I didn't put it together into mindfulness and discernment, it couldn't support anything at all, which is why I had to set out investigating in the way with which Venerable Acariya Mun hit me over the head.

As soon as he hit me, I set out; and no sooner had I set out than I began to know what was what. I was able to kill off that defilement, cut this one down, step by step. I began to wake up: 'Here I've been lying in concentration as, if I were dead — for all these months, all these years — and it hasn't

accomplished a thing!' So now I stepped-up my efforts at discernment, making it spin day and night without anything to put a brake on it at all.

But, you know, I'm the sort of person who goes to extremes. Whatever track I set out on, that's the only track I take. When I began following the path of discernment, I started criticizing concentration as being like lying down dead.

Actually, concentration is a means for resting the mind. If you practice just right, that's the way it is. But instead, I criticized concentration as being like lying down dead. 'All these years, and it hasn't given rise to discernment.'

So I stepped up my efforts at discernment, beginning first with the body. When I contemplated unattractiveness, it was remarkable, you know. Really remarkable. The mind, when it contemplated, was adroit and audacious. I could perceive right through whatever I looked at — man, woman, no matter how young.

To tell you frankly how really audacious the mind was (and here I have to ask the forgiveness of both the men and women involved if it's wrong to speak too frankly), it wouldn't have to be a question of old women, you know. If the gathering was full of young women, I could march right in without any sign of lust appearing at all. That's how daring the mind was because of its contemplation of unattractiveness.

Looking at a person, there would just be the bones wrapped up in skin, nothing but flesh all glaring and red. So where could I see any beauty? The power of the unattractiveness was really strong. No matter whose body I looked at, that's how I'd perceive it: So where would there be any beauty to make me feel desire? This was why I'd dare march right-in... really beautiful young women, you know. (I'll have to keep asking forgiveness until I've finished with this 'forest madness.') I could march right in with no trouble at all when I felt daring like this, because I was sure of my strength.

But this daring wasn't right, in terms of the point at which the mind really had its fill of lust, which is

why I criticized myself afterwards, after the mind had passed this point. This daring was a kind of madness, but while I was following the path, it was right, because that was how I had to follow it through. This is like criticizing food after you've eaten your fill. Right or wrong, it's the same sort of thing.

I contemplated unattractiveness until no physical desire appeared at all. It gradually faded away, all on its own, without giving any reason at any specific time or place. It didn't give me any assurance that lust or passion for the male or female body had disappeared at this or that point in time and place, so I had to deliberate again. I wouldn't go along with this simple fading-away on its own. That is, my mind wouldn't accept it.

If lust had been wiped-out at any particular point, there should have been some sort of indication, so that I could know clearly that it was all gone for this or that reason, at this or that moment, this or that place. It should have had its moment.

So now the mind had to back-up and contemplate to find various approaches to remedy the situation. *If it were really all gone, why hadn't there been a clear indication that it had been wiped out at this or that moment?* As soon as I saw a person's body, I would perceive right through it. There would be nothing but flesh and bones in that body. It wouldn't be a beautiful woman or a beautiful person or anything, because the power of my contemplation of unattractiveness was so strong that I'd perceive everyone as a pile of bones. What would there be to make the mind feel attraction or desire when it's in a state like that?

I now had to turn around and take a new approach. If physical desire had ended without leaving a trace at a particular moment, using a particular strategy, why hadn't there been a clear indication? I turned around and contemplated another way. I brought attractiveness in to force out the unattractiveness — the pile of bones — covering it with skin to make it beautiful.

I had to force the mind, you know. Otherwise it would immediately break through to

unattractiveness, because it was so adept that way. I forced the mind to visualize the bones covered with skin so that they'd be beautiful, and then had that beautiful body cling right to mine. That was how I contemplated. I'd do walking meditation visualizing the beauty of that body clinging to mine, clinging right to mine as I walked back and forth. So. How much time would it take? If there was any desire still left, it would have to show. If not, then let me know that it was gone.

I practiced this way for four full days without any physical attraction or desire appearing at all. Even though it was an extremely beautiful body, nothing appeared. The image kept trying to change into a pile of bones wrapped in skin, but I forced the mind to stay just at the skin level.

The fourth night, tears began to flow. 'I've had enough. I give in.' In other words, the mind wasn't feeling any pleasure. It said that it had had enough, so I tested it again: 'Enough of what? If you admit that there's no more desire, then let me know. I won't accept your giving in like this. To give in like this is just a ruse. I won't go along with it.'

I kept on contemplating every facet to find which facet would make the mind feel desire, to see at which moment the desire would arise, so that I could then take whatever might appear and focus on it as the object to be contemplated and uprooted. The night got later and later, and I kept on focusing in — but I wasn't focused on contemplating unattractiveness at that point. I was contemplating nothing but attractiveness for those entire four days, because I was determined to find an approach to test and learn the truth of the situation.

After about 9 or 10 p.m. the night of the fourth day, there was a flickering, as if the mind was going to feel lust for that beautiful body that had been clinging to me constantly during that period. It was a peculiar sort of flickering. Mindfulness was alert to it, because mindfulness was there all the time. As soon as the flickering appeared, I kept encouraging it. 'See that flickering? We've caught the criminal who has been in hiding. See? So how can it be gone? If it's gone, why does it have to behave like this?' I focused in on it. That flickering was simply a condition of the mind that appeared only slightly,

with no effect on the body at all. It was inside the mind. When I encouraged it, it would flicker again, which proved that it wasn't all gone.

*So now that it wasn't all gone, what was I supposed to do?*

I now had to take a new approach, by alternating my tactics. Since this was a path I had never taken before, something I had never known before, it was very difficult to proceed. As soon as I'd focus on unattractiveness, attractiveness would vanish in the flash of an eye. It would vanish extremely fast because I was already adept at unattractiveness. As soon as I'd focus on unattractiveness, the body would turn immediately into a pile of bones, so I would have to focus on attractiveness to make it beautiful again. I kept changing back and forth between the two this way. This took a long time because it was a path I had never trod. I didn't understand, so I had to try out different methods until I could be sure and settle on one path or another.

I finally came to the truth when I was sitting visualizing an image of unattractiveness right in front of me. The mind focused on unattractiveness standing still right there. I wouldn't let it move or change in any way. I had it stay right there like that. If it was an image of bones wrapped in skin or a pile of bones with the skin removed, I had it stay right there in front of me. The mind stared right at it, with mindfulness focused, waiting to learn the truth from that image of unattractiveness, to see what it would do, how this pile of unattractiveness would move or change.

However I stared at it, that's how it would stay, because of the adeptness of the mind. If I wouldn't have it destroy the image, it wouldn't destroy it. I forced it not to destroy it. If I had focused on destroying it, it would have been demolished in an instant because of the speed of discernment. But I didn't let the mind destroy it. I had it stay right there in front of me in order to exercise and experiment to find the truth of which I could be certain.

As I kept focusing in, the image of unattractiveness standing there before me was gradually sucked into

the mind, absorbed into the mind, so that I finally realized that unattractiveness was a matter of the mind itself. The state of mind that had fixed on the idea of unattractiveness sucked it in — *which meant that attractiveness and unattractiveness were simply a matter of the mind deceiving itself.*

The mind then let go in a flash. It let go of external unattractiveness. It understood now because it had made the break. 'This is how it's supposed to be. It's been simply a matter of the mind painting pictures to deceive itself and getting excited over its shadows.

Those external things aren't passion, aversion, and delusion. The *mind* is what has passion, aversion, and delusion.' As soon as the mind knew this clearly, it extricated itself from external affairs and came inward. As soon as the mind would 'blip' outward, it knew that these inner affairs were displaying themselves. So now the image of unattractiveness appeared exclusively within the mind.

I then focused and investigated within the mind. But now it wasn't a matter of that sort of passion. It was something very different. The affairs of worldly

passion now were all gone. The mind understood clearly that things had to make the break that way. It had passed its verdict. It had understood. So now that there was the image appearing within, the mind focused within.

As soon as it focused within, it knew clearly that this internal image came from the mind. When it disappeared, it disappeared here and didn't go anywhere else. The instant after I'd focus on making it appear, it would vanish. Before I had focused on it for long, it would vanish.

After that, it was just like a lightning flash: As soon as I focused on making an image, it would vanish immediately, so there was no time to elaborate on its being attractive or anything at all, because of the speed of the arising and disappearing. The instant it would appear — blip! — it would vanish.

From that point on, there were no more images in the mind. The mind became a completely empty mind. As for external unattractiveness, that problem had already been taken care of. I had understood it from the moment it was sucked in toward the mind,

and the mind had immediately let go of external unattractiveness.

It let go of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, everything external — because the mind was what had been the deceiver. Once I understood this point clearly, those other things were no longer a problem. The mind had understood immediately and let go of external things once and for all.

After the internal images had all disappeared, the mind was empty. Completely empty. Whatever I focused on was completely empty. I'd look at trees, mountains, buildings, and see them simply as shades, as shadows. The major part — the mind — was empty all through. Even when I'd look at my own body, I'd see it simply as a shadow. As for the mind itself, it was empty clear through — to the point where I exclaimed to myself, 'Is the mind really this empty?' It was empty at all times. Nothing passed into it.

Even though it was that empty, I would form mental pictures as a way of exercising it. Whatever image I'd form would be a means of exercising the mind to

make it even more adept at emptiness, to the point where after a single blip it'd be empty — a single blip and it'd be empty. The moment anything was formed — blip! — it'd be empty right then.

At this point — the point where the mind was empty in full measure — this awareness was also prominent in full measure. It fully comprehended *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara* and *viññana*. It fully let go of them on its own, without anything left. All that was left was awareness. There was a feeling of relatedness and intimacy, a very subtle sensitivity for this awareness that is hard to describe in line with its reality. There was a feeling of absorption exclusively for this awareness. Any other condition that arose would vanish in the same instant.

I kept watch over it. Mindfulness and discernment on this level: If this were the time of the Buddha, we would call them super-mindfulness and super-discernment, but in our day and age we shouldn't reach for those labels. It's enough for our purposes to call them automatic mindfulness and discernment. That's appropriate enough for them. There's no need to call them anything more exalted than that, for this

doesn't deviate at all from the truth as it exists. This is why the mind was prominent, and this prominence made it bright all the way through.

One day I was doing walking meditation on the western side of Wat Doi Dhammachedi. I had gone without food for three or four days, and that day was the lunar sabbath, so people were coming to the monastery to give alms. I went off to do walking meditation from daybreak and came back only when it was time to receive alms in front of the main hall.

When I was standing in contemplation on the meditation path, an uncanny feeling of wonder arose, to the point where I exclaimed, 'Why is it that this mind is so amazing? Whatever I look at — even the earth on which I'm treading and see clearly with my eyes — why is it that the mind, which is the major part, is completely empty? There are no trees or mountains in the mind. It's completely empty, with nothing left. There's nothing but emptiness filling the heart.'

I stood there contemplating for a moment, when a kind of realization appeared: *'If there is a point or a*

*center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of a level of being.'* That's what it said, and I was bewildered.

Actually, the word 'point' referred to that point of the knower. If I had understood this problem in terms of the truth that appeared to warn me, things would have been able to disband right then and there. But instead of understanding, I was bewildered — because it was something I had never before known or seen.

If there was a point, it would be the point of the knower.

If there was a center, it would mean the center of the knower.

Where was it? *There in that knowing mind.*

That was the essence of a level of being. The statement that appeared in the mind already said so clearly. There was nothing at all wrong about it, but I was simply bewildered — 'What is this?' — so, for the time being, I didn't get any benefit from it at all. I let more than three months pass by in vain, even though the problem was still weighing on the mind. I couldn't set it down.

When the time came for me to know, I was contemplating just the mind — nothing wide-ranging or anything — because the mind had already known everything on the blatant level. Whatever sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations there might be throughout the cosmos, the mind had already known, understood and let go. It wasn't interested in investigating them. It wasn't even willing to investigate *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, or *viññana* at all. It was interested only in that conspicuous awareness, together with the subtle feelings within the mind.

Mindfulness and discernment kept making contact with that awareness, examining it back and forth. But you should know that the 'point' [which] I referred to was still a conventional reality.

No matter how magnificent it might be, it was still magnificence in the realm of convention. No matter how radiant or splendid it might be, *it was still radiance and splendor in the realm of convention, because there was still unawareness (avijja) within it.*

Unawareness forms the essence of conventional reality. The point of that prominence eventually began to show its ups and downs — in keeping with the very refined level of the mind — so that I was able to catch sight of them. Sometimes, it was a little tarnished, sometimes radiant, sometimes stressful, sometimes, at ease, in line with the refinement of the mind on this level, enough for me to detect its irregularities.

Mindfulness and discernment on this level were very meticulous guardians of this state of mind, you know. Instead of aiming my guns — mindfulness and discernment — in on the mind, I had aimed them outside, as unawareness had deceived me into doing. This is why unawareness is said to be really cunning. There is nothing more cunning than unawareness, which is the final point.

Greed, for example, is something blatant, easy to understand and plainly harmful, and yet world is still content to feel greed. Think about it! Anger is also blatant, and yet the world is still content to feel anger. Infatuation, love, hate: All these things are

blatant, easy to understand and plainly harmful, and yet the world is still content to feel them.

*But this was not the same sort of thing at all.* It had gone way beyond. It had let go of all those other things, but why was it still attached to this radiance, this marvel? Now that it was inside, it would become tarnished, just a little. It would display stress, just a little — which was a form of change and nothing constant or trustworthy — so that I could catch sight of it, using mindfulness and discernment that were continually focused there at all times without letup, trying to know and see how this state of mind would behave.

Ultimately, there was no escaping it: I had to see that this state of mind was nothing to be trusted, so I came to reflect, 'Why is it that this state of mind can be so changeable? Now it's defiled, now it's radiant, now it's easeful, now it's stressful. It's not always constant and true. Why is it that a mind as refined as this can still show such a variety of conditions?'

As soon as mindfulness and discernment had turned to take an interest in investigating this state of mind,

a totally unexpected realization sprang up within the mind: *'Defilement, radiance, ease, and stress: These are all conventional realities. They're all anatta — not-self.'*

That was enough. Mindfulness and discernment realized that that state of mind immersed in unawareness was a conventional reality that should simply be let go. It shouldn't be held on to.

A moment after this realization arose to warn mindfulness and discernment, which were acting as the sentinels at that moment, it was as if the mind, mindfulness, and discernment each became impartial and impassive, not stirring themselves to perform any duty at all. At that moment the mind was neutral, not focused on anything, not alluding absentmindedly to anything anywhere. Discernment didn't do any work. Mindfulness was alert in its normal way, without being focused on anything.

*That moment — when the mind, mindfulness, and discernment were each impassive and impartial — was the moment when the cosmos in the mind over which unawareness held sway trembled and quaked. Unawareness was thrown down from its throne on*

the heart. In its place, the pure mind appeared at the same moment that unawareness was toppled, smashed, and eradicated through the power of triumphant mindfulness and discernment — the moment when the sky came crashing down and the cosmos (within) trembled and quaked, showing its final marvel on the border between convention and release.

Judgment was passed in the court of justice, with knowledge and vision of release acting as judge. The middle way, the truth of the path, was declared absolute winner, while the truth of the origin of stress was knocked out and carried off on a stretcher, with no way of reviving ever again.

I was utterly astounded and exclaimed, 'Isn't it amazing? Isn't it amazing? Where has this Dhamma been hiding? How is it that the genuine Dhamma, this amazing Dhamma, exceeding all expectations — exceeding all the world — has now appeared in the mind and is one with the mind?

And before where were the Buddha and Noble Sangha? How is it that these tremendously amazing

refuges have now become one with the heart? Is this what the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are like?' They didn't fit in with any guesses or speculations at all, but were simply a pure truth dwelling with a pure truth.

Then I reflected with discouragement back on my fellow living beings with regard to the Dhamma that was in my heart: 'Since this is what the genuine Dhamma is like, how could it be brought out and taught so that others would know and understand? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to live alone until the day the body breaks apart, rather than try to teach anyone?'

As soon as I considered this, a kind of realization suddenly appeared to me: 'The Lord Buddha knew this amazing Dhamma all by himself but was able to become the Teacher of living beings throughout the three levels of the cosmos. How is it that I have been able to teach myself and yet get discouraged at the thought of being able to teach others? The way to teach, the way to know isn't hidden or mysterious.' When I realized this, my discouragement at the

thought of teaching my friends gradually faded away.

This event made me think of the first moments after the Buddha's Awakening, when he wavered at the thought of taking the excellent Dhamma in his heart and teaching it to the world because he felt that it lay beyond the capability of other people to realize it. Even though he had aspired to be a Teacher, to instruct the world, he felt that the Dhamma he had realized was a Dhamma beyond reach, that it would be hopeless to encourage the world to accept it and practice so as to know it.

But when he reflected on the path he had followed to Awakening, he realized that the Dhamma wasn't beyond reach or beyond hope, that there would be infinite benefits for the world if he were to teach the way of the Dhamma whose results he had come to see beyond a doubt. This was why he made up his mind to teach the world from that point on.

The reason I had felt the same way was because it was a Dhamma I had never before seen or known, and it was a Dhamma utterly amazing. When I

looked solely at the results in the present, without reflecting back on the causes — the path I had followed — I felt disheartened and abandoned the idea of telling or teaching anyone about this Dhamma. But since reflecting back on the path I had followed, I have felt more like speaking and acting out the various facets of the Dhamma, in line with the various levels of people who have become involved with me, who have studied and trained with me ever since, to the point where I have become a sham *Acariya* as decreed by monks, novices and people in general. This being the case, I've had to speak, teach, preach, and scold, heavily or lightly as events may call for.

I have to beg the forgiveness of my listeners and readers for speaking in an uncouth way to the point of being ugly, but when this scrap of a monk was hiding out in the forest and mountains, he suffered mightily while training himself by struggling in various ways on the verge of death — because of all sorts of sufferings — without anyone to provide him with a funeral.

No one knew or was interested, except for a few of those people in the forest and mountains on whom I depended to keep my life going from one day to the next, who may have known of some aspects of some of my sufferings.

For this reason, the statement that the Buddha practiced to the point of losing consciousness before gaining Awakening is a truth that those who practice wholeheartedly for the sake of the Dhamma, the paths, fruitions, and *nibbana*, have to believe wholeheartedly without any doubt.

Only those who have never practiced or had any interest in practice, or who practice by tying pillows to the backs of their heads and waiting for defilement to die, or dig graves for defilement by lying down and waiting to rake in the paths, fruitions and *nibbana*, won't believe in the difficulty with which the Buddha and his Noble Disciples practiced.

Especially at present, when people are very clever: Whatever would fly in the face of their already being wise and all-knowing, no matter how right or good or fantastic that thing might be, they aren't willing to

use it to take the measure of their own wisdom. *As a result, their wisdom can't escape creating a lot of foolishness for themselves and the common good.* For this reason, the path leading to depravity for the mind and the path leading to Dhamma within the mind are very different.

Those who practice, the Dhamma says, are those who investigate and reflect on every facet of the world and the Dhamma without being complacent. No matter what posture we are in, and no matter where, we should always use mindfulness and discernment to look after ourselves.

We shouldn't be concerned with the deficient or developed manners, the good or bad behavior of other people, the points they give us or take away, more than we are concerned with our own deficient or developed manners, our own good or bad behavior and the points we give or take away from ourselves. This is the path of the Dhamma for those who practice the Dhamma, who are always imbued with Dhamma. The opposite way is the low path for those with low minds, with no righteousness infiltrating them at all. This is a warning for all those

meditators who have come here for training to understand and take to heart.

The Dhamma I have related today is mostly personal and isn't appropriate to be made public to people at large whose sensitivities may vary. I myself might be open to criticism, and it might be harmful to the attitudes of those who hear or read when the tape is transcribed onto paper — except for restricted circles of people who would understand.

To make this talk public thus goes against the grain with me, but the extent to which I have made it public is out of sympathy for those who have come for training in all rectitude and who have pleaded with me to make it public as an example that those who practice may follow for a long time to come.

If this is wrong in any way, I ask the forgiveness of all my readers. It's with the thought that there will be many people endowed with rectitude in the practice of meditation, both now and the future who might get some benefit from this outlandish talk, in which I had to put up with the embarrassment of having exposed my own stupidity.

## **Unawareness Converges, Concealing The True Dhamma, the True Mind**

*This Dhamma talk was given as an answer to a question posed by one of the more important senior monks of our day and age. The gist is as follows:*

This was when I began to investigate into the converging point of the cycle of defilement — namely, unawareness. While I was investigating, I didn't know that I was investigating unawareness. I was simply thinking, 'What is this?' There was an uncertainty right there, so I focused the mind there, directed my attention to investigate what it was, where it came from, where it was going.

It so happened I hit the right spot: I say this because I didn't know that it was called, or what unawareness was. Actually, unawareness and its name are very different. We see its currents spreading out all over the world, but those are only its branches. It's like trying to catch an outlaw: At first all we can catch are his henchmen. Whoever we catch is just a henchman. We don't know where the chief outlaw is, or what he looks like, because we have never seen him.

We catch lots of his henchmen, closing in on him, encircling him. This is called laying siege to the outlaw. Our police force is very large and very strong. Each person on the force helps the others, so they have a lot of strength, surrounding the spot where the outlaw lies, catching this person, tying up that one. Ordinarily when they're asked, outlaws won't tell who their chief is. Whenever we catch an outlaw, we tie him up until no one is left inside our siege line. The last person left is the chief outlaw. The last person lies in a strategic place, because his henchmen have to guard him well on all sides so that no one can easily slip in to see him.

The henchmen keep getting captured one after another until we reach the cave in which the chief outlaw is hiding, and then we kill everyone in there. This is when we know clearly that the wily outlaw has been wiped out for good.

This is simply an analogy. To put it in other words, the mind's involvement with anything is a branch of delusion. Regardless of whether the delusion leads in a good or a bad direction, it's nothing but an affair

of unawareness and the branches of unawareness, but actual unawareness itself doesn't lie there. So the tactics for investigating it, if we were to use another analogy, are like bailing water out of a pond to catch the fish in it. If there's a lot of water, we don't know how many fish it contains. So we keep bailing out the water until it starts receding lower and lower. The fish gather together. Each fish, wherever it is, swims down deeper into the water. The water keeps getting bailed out, and the fish keep gathering together. We can see where each fish is going, because the water keeps receding until at last, when the water is dry, the fish have nowhere to hide, and so we can catch them.

Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, together with the mental acts that intermingle with them: These are like the water in which the fish live. To investigate these things is not for the purpose of taking possession of them but for the purpose of killing defilement, in the same way that a person bails out the water, not because he wants the water but because he wants the fish. To investigate these things is not for the purpose of taking possession of

them but for the purpose of knowing them, stage by stage.

As soon as we know to a certain point, we are no longer concerned with that point. We know the things with which we are involved, as well as the fact that we are the one at fault for being involved, that our own misunderstanding is what deludes us into loving and hating these things.

At this point, the scope of our investigation keeps narrowing in, narrowing in, just as the water keeps receding. Whatever elements or *khandhas* we investigate, they are just like external things in general. There are no differences. On the material side, the elements are the same elements. The difference lies in the acts of the mind that display themselves — but we aren't yet aware of them, so we go labeling things in line with them, which is still one of the branches of unawareness. But as our investigation seeps deeper and deeper into the central area, the more clearly we see the things that come to be involved with us, the more clearly we see the mind as it goes out to become involved each time

— in the same way that the more the water recedes, the more clearly we see the fish.

As we investigate, the more clearly we see phenomena outside and inside the body, as well as our own mental concomitants (*cetasika*), then the more clearly we see the point where the chief culprit lies.

As our investigation keeps closing in, the mind's focus grows narrower and narrower. Its concerns grow less and less. The currents sent out by the mind grow shorter. As soon as it stirs itself to become involved with any object, we investigate both that object and the stirring of the mind as it goes out to act. We see both aspects.

We see the causes and results on both sides, namely (1) the side with which the mind involves itself, the things with which it is involved; and (2) the one who becomes involved. Discernment keeps moving in, step by step.

When it moves in and reaches unawareness itself, meditators for the most part — if no teacher has

warned them in advance — are bound to hold to that as their real self. This is because they have investigated and seen all things clearly in the heart, so that they are fully wise to those things and have let them go, with nothing remaining — *but what is it that knows those things?* This is what they take and cherish.

This is termed unawareness converging, but it turns into their 'self' without their realizing it. The mind gets deluded there. *The term 'unawareness' refers to this very delusion about oneself.* Delusions about outside things are not matters of actual unawareness. Because of our delusion about this, because of our delusion about that which knows all other things, we forget to investigate and pass judgment on what it is — because when the scope of the mind narrows, it gathers itself into a point.

The point of the mind that appears at this stage is a radiant mind, bright, cheerful, and bold. All happiness seems to be gathered right there. What do these things come from? If you were to call them results, I'd have to admit that they are results. We could say that they're results of the practice — if we

aren't deluded about this point. If we're still deluded, these things are still the origin of stress. This is the central point of the origin of stress.

But if we're meditators who are always interested in investigating whatever comes our way, we won't overlook this. No matter what, we can't help but become interested in investigating this point — because we have already investigated and understood all things of every sort to the point where the mind won't make contact with them. If we take the mind out to investigate anything, it won't make contact, because it has already had enough of that thing.

Now, every mental act that arises, arises from this point. Thoughts that form, form from this point. The happiness that appears, appears here. The happiness that appears undergoes changes we can see: This is what makes us begin investigating again, because this is a level in which we are very observant. When we observe the happiness, we see that it isn't steady, for the happiness produced by unawareness is a conventional reality. Sometimes it gets tarnished a little — just a little — enough for us to know that it

isn't uniform. It keeps changing in that way, in line with its status as a refined phenomenon.

This is the point that we trust and believe in. Even those who practice with intensity and extreme interest will fall for this point and become attached to it if no one has explained it to them in advance. But even though we trust in it, we can't help observing it if we are interested, because that's all there is that attracts the heart. This is what causes us to be attracted to it, to be content with what appears. As long as we have been investigating, that's the way it has been — to the extent that we don't know what unawareness is — and so we believe that this will be *nibbana*, this point that is bright and clear all the time.

'All the time' here means all the time for those meditators who are persistent in cleansing it and who aren't entirely complacent in their trust for it, who are very protective of this point and won't let anything touch it. Such people use a great deal of caution. As soon as anything touches that point, they will rectify it immediately.

But they don't know what it is that they love and cherish. Even though that love and cherishing is clearly a burden, they don't realize the fact at that moment. Only when enough time has passed for them to be ready to know, will they become interested in investigating this point. 'What is this? We've investigated everything of every sort, but what is this?' Now the mind focuses in on that point. Discernment probes in. 'What is this, for sure? Is it true yet or not? Is it awareness or unawareness?' These doubts keep nagging at the mind.

But we keep on investigating and contemplating, using discernment without ceasing — because this is something we have never seen, never met with before — to see why we love it, why we are protective of it.

If it's something true, why do we have to love and protect it? Why do we have to care for it? *To care for something is a burden*, in which case this must be a hazard for the person who cherishes and cares for it, or something that shouldn't be trusted — even though at that moment we still don't know what it is, whether it's really unawareness or not, because we

have never seen how true awareness differs from unawareness, or how release differs from conventional reality. This is where discernment becomes interested in investigating.

Now, I'd say that this is something very elaborate and involved. If I were to describe it in line with how I investigated it, or to condense it so as to give the gist in a reasonable amount of time, I'd summarize quickly by saying *whatever makes an appearance, investigate it*. Whatever makes an appearance is a matter of conventional reality — I'm referring here to the refined phenomena that appear in the heart.

Ultimately, even that very point with its brightness is the point of genuine unawareness. Focus down on it, using discernment. Just as all phenomena in general are simply phenomena, this nature is also simply a phenomenon in exactly the same way. We can't latch onto it as being 'us' or 'ours' — *but our protectiveness shows that we hold to it as being us or ours, which is a mistake*.

Discernment probes inward to see just what this is, as if we were to turn around to look at ourselves. We look outside and see the earth, the sky, the air. Whatever passes into our range of vision, we see. But if we don't look back at ourselves, we won't see ourselves. Discernment at this stage is very quick. It looks back and forth, back and forth, to see this last point or this last stage, and its investigation is just like its investigation of things in general. It investigates not to take possession of its object but simply to know its object for what it truly is.

When this disbands, it's not like other things disbanding. When other things disband, they go with a feeling that we understand them. But this isn't like that. When it disbands, it disintegrates in an instant, like a lightning flash. There's an instant where it acts of its own accord — or you could say that it flips over. It flips over and disappears completely.

When it disappears, that's when we know that it was genuine unawareness — because once this has disappeared, nothing more appears for us to doubt.

What remains is nothing like it at all. It's a pure nature. Even though we have never seen it before, when it appears in that moment, there is nothing to doubt — and that's how the burden is all gone.

The word 'I' refers to this genuine unawareness. It means that this unawareness is still standing. Whatever we have been investigating has been for its sake. Whatever we say we know, this 'I' is what knows. Radiant? 'I'm' radiant. Light? 'I'm' light. Happy? 'I'm' happy. 'Me,' 'I,' they refer to this. This is genuine unawareness. Whatever we do is for its sake. Once it disintegrates, there is nothing more for anything's sake. It's all gone.

If we were to make an analogy, it's like a water jar whose bottom has been smashed. No matter how much water we may pour into it, nothing stays in the jar. Everything that may be formed in line with the nature of the *khandhas* can still be formed, but nothing sticks because the vessel — unawareness, the chief culprit — has disintegrated.

As soon as *sankharas* form — blip! — they vanish. They simply pass by, disappearing, disappearing,

because there's no place to keep them, no one who owns them. The nature that realizes that nothing is its owner *is a nature that has reached its fullness*. It is, thus, a genuinely pure nature and no longer a burden that needs to be watched over or protected from danger ever again.

This unawareness is what has been concealing the true Dhamma, the true mind, all along. This is why we haven't seen the true, natural marvelousness of the mind.

For this reason, meditators who reach the stage of this pitfall latch onto it as something marvelous, love it, cherish it, are protective of it, and regard it as 'me' or 'mine': 'My mind is radiant. My mind is courageous and brave. My mind is happy. My mind knows everything of every sort' — *but this nature doesn't know itself, which is why the Buddha called it genuine unawareness*. Once we turn around and know it, it disintegrates. Once it disintegrates, it's just like opening the lid of a pot: Whatever is in the pot, we can see it all. Only unawareness keeps the mind concealed.

This purity is a truth that lies beyond the truths of stress, its origin, its cessation and the path. It's a truth beyond the four Noble Truths. Of the four truths, one pair binds, the other unbinds and stops. What do they bind and unbind? They bind the heart, or keep it covered; and they unbind the heart, or uncover it. They open up the things that cover it so as to reveal its purity in line with its truth. Its truth is already there, but the two truths of stress and its origin keep it concealed, just as the lid of a pot conceals whatever is in the pot so that we can't see it.

The path — the practice — opens it. The path and the cessation of stress open the pot so that we can see clearly what's inside. Even though the purity is already there, it's concealed by the first two truths and revealed by the truths that unbind. This is what is bound, this is what is revealed. Once it's revealed, there are no more problems.

Both pairs of truths are activities. Both are conventional realities. The path and the cessation of stress are conventional realities. Once they have performed their duties, they pass. Stress and the

origin of stress are also conventional realities. Once the two conventional realities remedy the two conventional realities, that pure nature is a nature that stays fixed.

What we see at that point is called release. Things are opened so that we see release, or natural purity. The burden of the task is ended right here. When the mind is pure, it doesn't confer any titles on itself. As for external things, the worldly phenomena (*loka-dhamma*) connected with external things, they're far away.

The worldly phenomena that we used to say were good or bad, pleasant or painful in the heart, are no longer a problem once that point has disintegrated.

When we investigate to this level, it's not wide-ranging. If we can derive an approach from the explanations given by a meditation master who has known and passed this stage, we can make quick progress — but it's important that we not set up any expectations.

*Expectations are not the path.* Whatever appears, keep investigating and understanding that point —

each successive thing as it appears. That's the correct path.

'Unawareness' refers to the nature I have just explained. That's genuine unawareness. All other things are just its branches. Like a vine whose stem grows in one place but that creeps to who-knows-where, no matter how long it is, it keeps creeping and climbing. When we catch hold of it, we follow it in, follow it in, until we reach its stem. Here's the stem. Here's the root. Once we pull up the root, the whole thing dies.

In the same way, the branches of unawareness are many and long, so that when we actually reach unawareness, we don't know what it is. But we investigate it. Discernment probes on in. Even though we don't know that this is unawareness, our investigation is on the right path, and so unawareness opens up of its own accord, in the same way as when we eat: Fullness appears clearly for us to see step by step all on its own.

So to summarize the issue of whether unawareness is a factor of rebirth or a factor of *kamma*: It creates levels of being, it creates *kamma* relentlessly.

These are both matters of the same cycle. It keeps creating levels of being within itself. The mind can't lie still. It simply keeps creating being and birth all the time. It works at accumulating these things for itself, but for the most part it accumulates things that weigh it down constantly, making it sink to lower levels.

When people talk about destroying the wheel of *kamma*, this unawareness is what's destroyed. Once this is destroyed, there are no more connections to create further levels of being and birth. Even though the things that used to be involved with us continue to become involved as they normally did, they pass by. They don't seep in. They don't set up house and move into this spot the way they used to. They simply pass by. And we know that this pure nature doesn't connect with anything. We have seen the connections of the mind, step by step, and when we reach the level where it doesn't connect with anything, we know.

As for knowing the question of levels of being and birth, as to whether or not we'll be reborn, there is no need to speculate, because the present already tells us clearly that when there are no connections to levels of being and birth inside us, as we plainly see, there are no levels of being or birth to continue into the future.

The factory has been destroyed, and there is no way it can rebuild itself. There is no way it can produce issues as it used to. The factory that produced suffering has been destroyed once and for all.

The phrase '*khandhas* pure and simple' refers to this stage. The *khandhas* are *khandhas* pure and simple, without any defilements. If the mind isn't defiled, the *khandhas* aren't defiled. They are simply tools. If the central part — the mind — is defiled, each *khandha* follows it in being defiled. The body becomes a means for increasing defilement in the heart. *Vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* all become means for increasing defilement in the heart. If the mind is pure, the *khandhas* for their part are also pure. Nothing is defiled. But if the mind is defiled,

the *khandhas* are defiled all the livelong day. This is the way the truth is.

The creation of being and birth is a matter of the mind that keeps producing itself. It can't stay still. A mind that has the cycle in charge of its work or supervising its work will have to keep itself spinning all the time. Whatever thoughts it spins are for the sake of creating being and birth. As soon as the cycle disintegrates, there is nothing to create being and birth any more.

Those whose minds have attained realization exclaim spontaneously in the heart to proclaim the Dhamma unabashedly to the world, saying that there are no more levels of being in which they are to be reborn — as when the Buddha exclaimed, '*anekajati-samsaram...*'<sup>3</sup> because he knew right in the present that there was nothing creating itself.

Goodness stayed in its own territory and didn't seep in, didn't mingle. Evil stayed in its own territory and didn't seep in or mingle. They didn't come running in. When we say that they didn't come running in, it's not that he forced them not to. It was simply their

own nature. When these things come running in we don't force them to. There's simply a medium along which they run.

When there's no more medium, they disconnect of their own accord.

It seemed to me when I was investigating this — when unawareness disappeared — that there was a moment that let me know very clearly. It was a moment — an instant I hadn't anticipated or expected. It was an instant that grabbed my attention.

The instant unawareness disappeared was an instant in which it displayed itself, as if it flipped itself over into a new world (if you were to call it a world). It flipped in the flash of an eye and vanished in the same instant, although this wasn't anything I had anticipated. I hadn't intended for it to flip. It happened of its own accord. This is something very subtle that is impossible for me to describe correctly in line with the truth of that instant.

In practicing the religion, if we practice it really to gain release from suffering, there are two intricate points:

To separate the attachments between the mind and the body: This is one intricate point; and then this second intricate point that was the final point of my ability. Other than that there's nothing devious.

Once, when I went to practice at Wat Doi Dhammachedi, the problem of unawareness had me bewildered for quite some time. At that stage the mind was so radiant that I came to marvel at its radiance. Everything of every sort that could make me marvel seemed to have gathered there in the mind, to the point where I began to marvel at myself, 'Why is it that my mind is so marvelous?' Looking at the body, I couldn't see it at all. It was all space — empty. The mind was radiant in full force.

But luckily, as soon as I began to marvel at myself to the point of exclaiming deludedly in the heart without being conscious of it — if we speak on the level of refined Dhamma, it was a kind of delusion; it was amazed at itself, 'Why has my mind come so

far?' — at that moment, a statement of Dhamma spontaneously arose.

This too I hadn't anticipated. It suddenly appeared, as if someone were speaking in the heart, although there was no one there speaking. It simply appeared as a statement: *'If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of a level of being.'* That's what it said.

That phenomenon actually was a point: the point of knowledge, the point of radiance. It really was a point, just as the statement had said. But I didn't take into consideration what the 'point' was and so I was bewildered.

Instead of gaining an approach from the warning that had appeared, I took the problem to chew over until I came to consider the part about the 'point.' That was what ended the problem. I then came back to understand clearly the matter of, 'If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of a level of being.' That was when I understood, 'Oh — I see. The words "point" and "center" refer to just this.'

Before, I hadn't understood. It really was a point. No matter how marvelous, it was the point of the marvelousness. It was a point there to be known. Once that disintegrated, there were no more points, because every point is a conventional reality. No matter how refined, each is a conventional reality.

This is why I am always teaching my fellow meditators: 'Once you've reached that point, don't be protective of anything. Investigate on in. Even if the mind should actually be demolished by that investigation, let it be demolished. Whatever is left to be aware of the purity, let it be aware — or if everything is going to be demolished so that there is nothing left to be aware of purity, then at least find out. Don't be protective of anything at all.' I say this out of fear that they'll be protective of this thing.

If they aren't warned that forcefully, then no matter what, they're bound to get stuck. All I ask is that they find out: 'Whatever is going to vanish, let it vanish. Even if the mind is going to vanish from the power of the investigation, let it vanish. There's no

need to protect it.' When investigating, you have to take it that far.

But there's no escaping the truth: Whatever arises has to vanish; whatever is true, whatever is a natural principle in and of itself, *won't vanish*. In other words, the pure mind won't vanish.

Everything of every sort may vanish, but that which knows their vanishing doesn't vanish. *This vanishes, that vanishes, but the one that knows their vanishing doesn't vanish*. Whether or not we try to leave it untouched, it keeps on knowing. But to try to protect it is tantamount to protecting unawareness, because unawareness is subtle. It's there in the mind. To be protective of the mind is tantamount to being protective of unawareness.

So then. If the mind is going to be destroyed along with it, let it be destroyed. To make a comparison with slashing, slash right on down. Don't let there be anything left. Let everything in there close up shop and leave. To take it that far is just right.

If you're hesitant, then you are sure to get stuck at this level. That's why you can't let yourself be hesitant. You have to take the defilements all out.

Whatever is going to vanish, let it all vanish. As for that which is in no position to vanish, it won't vanish no matter what. To put it simply, it's as if bandits had gotten into this house. If you're protective of the house where the bandits are, then — Bang! — they'll shoot you dead. So if you should burn the whole house down, then burn it down. If you let the bandits stay there, they'll go on to destroy things that have more value than the house. So be willing to sacrifice the house. Set fire to it. This is called setting fire to unawareness. If the mind is really going to vanish, let it vanish.

But actually the mind doesn't vanish. Only when you have burned that thing will you know: 'Oh — the thing of value has been lying beneath the power of unawareness. Unawareness has had it covered.' The instant unawareness vanishes, this other thing is revealed. Instead of vanishing too, it doesn't vanish, *but if you're protective of it you'll be stuck and will never get free.*

The period when I was investigating this point was after Venerable Acariya Mun had passed away. I really felt at the end of my rope. I couldn't stay with my fellow meditators.

I couldn't stay with anyone at all. They'd get in the way. They'd spoil the fun of my internal efforts at investigation — because at that time the mind was really spinning. It had reached the level where it would spin and spin without stopping. At the time, I called it 'spinning as a wheel of Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka*), not as a wheel of rebirth (*vatta-cakka*).' It spun to release itself. It spun all the time. And as soon as it fully reached a state of enough, it stopped — completely and unexpectedly.

For a while, at first, I had been getting annoyed. 'The more I've investigated this mind — and the more refined it has become — why has the burden, instead of growing lighter, become so heavy like this? And it doesn't have any sense of day or night — why is it?' I was getting a little concerned and annoyed.

But even though I was annoyed, the mind didn't let up. It kept spinning there, right before my eyes. It kept spinning, scratching, and digging, looking for things that I hadn't yet known or seen. Wherever I was caught up at any point, it would keep digging and scratching its way away. As soon as it made contact, it would immediately latch on and stick with it. As soon as it understood, the matter would pass and disappear. The mind would then continue probing. Had Venerable Acariya Mun been alive at that point, things would have gone more quickly.

This is why I have taught my fellow meditators that I'll give them my all. If I can't solve their problems, I'll take them to a teacher who can. Those are the lengths I'll go to — so that my fellow meditators can put their minds to rest. And for this reason, I'm not willing to have some of my talks recorded, because I let everything out. As soon as I've finished, the sound vanishes. I talk just for those who are there.

People who didn't understand those matters would think I was bragging. Actually, I speak in line with the truth and to encourage my students: 'It has to be like this. You have to slash into it like this.' That's

just how I put it. It's as if I give myself as a guarantee so that my students can be confident that what I say isn't wrong and so that they'll feel inspired to apply themselves to the effort with strength and resilience. Other people, though, who didn't understand my motives or anything, would think I was bragging. Instead of benefiting, they'd be harmed. Even if I weren't harmed, they might be, so I have to be careful.

For this reason, on some occasions and with some people where I should really pull out all the stops, that's what I do. Otherwise I can't put my mind to rest about them. We really have to give and take. It's as if we both open up and give it our all to the point where we keep nothing back, not even a cent. This is the way it sometimes is, on some occasions, but not always. It depends on the situation, how far we should go. If we go that far, then if other people listened in, they'd think we were crazy.

I myself, when listening to Venerable Acariya Mun talk: If he'd take it that far, it'd go straight to the heart. For three days afterwards I would feel as if the leaves on the trees weren't moving. The atmosphere

would seem absolutely still. The power of his Dhamma blanketed everything — because the people listening were really intent on listening, the person speaking was really intent on speaking, and so they reached each other. As for us, even when we're told, 'This. This. It's like this,' we still don't see. It's like pointing out things to the blind — pitiful, when you think about it.

For this reason, wherever I am, if I haven't bowed down to Venerable Acariya Mun, I can't lie down to sleep, no matter where I am. Even if I'm about to do walking meditation, I first face in his direction and pay him homage. If there's a picture of him as a conventional focus, I pay homage to his picture. If there's nothing, I take his virtues and form them into a convention to which I pay respect. His virtues will never fade for me. It's as if he hadn't passed away: a nature that stays like that, as if he were watching me all the time.

This is why all the Noble Disciples who have seen the principles of the truth of the Lord Buddha with their full hearts submit to him. That is, they submit to the principles of the truth that are principles of

nature; they don't submit to his person or anything like that. *They submit in that the principles of the truth are now the same for them and will never fade.* No matter how far they may be from him, that truth will never fade, because the truth is the same for all of them.

Even though the Buddha may have entered total *nibbana* more than 2,500 years ago, this is not a problem that has an impact on the truth appearing in our hearts. It's simply the passage of conventional time or of the body — that's all — but the principle of that truth is unmoving: always one who is pure. Whether alive or totally *nibbana*-ed, it's one who is pure.

This is a truth that is fixed. Those who know this principle of the truth all trust it in the same way, because the true Buddha, the true Dhamma, and the true Sangha lie in the heart. The heart truly pure is the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha in full measure, untouched and undisturbed by time or place, unlike conventional realities in general.

**The Conventional Mind, The Mind Released**

Once the mind has been well-cleansed so that it's constantly radiant, then when we're in a quiet place, without any sounds — for instance, late in the still of the night — even if the mind hasn't gathered in concentration, we find that when we focus on that center of awareness, it is so exceedingly delicate and refined that it's hard to describe. This refinement then becomes like a radiance that spreads all around us in every direction. Nothing appears to be making contact with the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and feeling at that moment, even though the mind hasn't gathered into the factors of concentration.

Instead, this is the firm foundation of the mind that has been well-cleansed and displays a striking awareness, magnificence, and sensitivity within itself.

With this type of awareness, it's as if we weren't dwelling in a body at all. This is a very refined awareness, pronounced within itself. Even though the mind hasn't gathered in concentration, still — because of the refinement of the mind, because of the pronounced nature of the mind — it becomes a pronounced awareness, without any visions or

images appearing at all. This awareness is preeminent exclusively in itself. This is one stage of the mind.

Another stage is when this well-cleansed mind gathers into stillness, not thinking, not forming any thoughts at all. It rests from its activity — its rippling. All thought-formations within the mind rest completely. All that remains is simple awareness — which is called the mind entering into stillness. Here even more so, nothing appears at all. All that appears is awareness, as if it were blanketing the entire cosmos — because the currents of the mind aren't like the currents of light.

The currents of light have their end, near or far, depending on the strength of the light. For example, with electric light, if the candle power is high, it will shine for a long distance. If low, it will shine for a short distance.

But the currents of the mind aren't like that. They have no 'near' or 'far.' To put it simply, there is no time or place. The mind can blanket everything. Far is like near. 'Near,' 'far': They don't really apply. All

that appears is that awareness blanketing everything to the ends of the universe.

It's as if all that appears in the entire world is this single awareness, as if there were nothing in our consciousness at all, even though everything still exists as it always has. This is what it's like: the power of the mind, the current of the mind that has been cleansed of things that cloud and obscure it. Even more so when the mind is completely pure: This is even harder to describe.

I wouldn't know how to label it, because it's not something to be labeled. It's not something that can be expressed like conventional things in general, because it's not a conventional reality. It lies solely within the range of those who are non-conventional, who know their own non-conventionality. For this reason, it can't be described.

Now, the world is full of conventions. Whatever we say, we need to use a conventional picture, a supposition, to make comparisons in every case. 'It seems like this. It seems like that.' Or, 'It's like this. It's like that. It's similar to that.' For example, take

the word, '*nibbana*.' Ordinary defilement — our ordinary mind — requires that we think of *nibbana* as broad and spacious, with nothing appearing in it. But we forget that the word *nibbana*, which is a conventional word, still has some conventionality to it.

We might even think that there's nothing in *nibbana* but pure people milling around — both men and women, because they both can reach purity: *Nibbana* has nothing but those who are pure, milling around to and fro, or sitting around in comfort and peace without being disturbed by sadness, discontent, or loneliness as we are in our conventional world so full of turmoil and stress.

Actually, we don't realize that this picture — of pure men and women milling or sitting around happily at their leisure without anything disturbing them — is simply a convention that can't have anything to do with the release of actual *nibbana* at all. When we talk about things that are beyond the range of convention — even though they may not be beyond the range of the speaker's awareness, even though

they may be well within that person's range — they can't be expressed in conventional terms.

Whatever is expressed is bound to be interpreted wrongly, because ordinarily the mind is always ready to be wrong, or continues to be wrong within itself.

As soon as anything comes flashing out, we have to speculate and guess in line with our incorrect and uncertain understanding — like Ven. Yamaka saying to Ven. Sariputta that an arahant no longer exists after death.

Ven. Yamaka was still an ordinary, run-of-the-mill person, but even though Ven. Sariputta, who was an arahant, tried to explain things to him, he still wouldn't understand, until the Lord Buddha had to come and explain things himself. Even then — if I'm not mistaken — Ven. Yamaka still didn't understand in line with the truth the Buddha explained to him. As I remember, the texts say that Ven. Yamaka didn't attain any of the paths and fruitions or *nibbana* or anything.

Still, there must have been a reason for the Buddha's explanation. If there were nothing to be gained by teaching, the Buddha wouldn't teach. In some cases, even when the person being taught didn't benefit much from the Dhamma, other people involved would. This is one of the traits of the Lord Buddha. There had to be a reason for everything he'd say. If there was something that would benefit his listeners, he'd speak. If not, he wouldn't.

This is the nature of the Buddha: fully reasonable, fully accomplished in everything of every sort. He wouldn't make empty pronouncements in the way of the rest of the world.

So when he spoke to Ven. Yamaka, I'm afraid I've forgotten the details 4 — because it's been so long since I read it — to the point where I've forgotten who benefited on that occasion, or maybe Ven. Yamaka did benefit. I'm not really sure. At any rate, let's focus on the statement, 'An arahant doesn't exist after death,' as the important point.

The Buddha asked, 'Is the arahant his body, so that when he dies he is annihilated with the body? Is he

*vedana? Sañña? Sankhara? Viññana?* Is he earth, water, wind, or fire, so that when he dies he's annihilated with these things?' He kept asking in this way, until he reached the conclusion that the body is inconstant and so disbands. *Vedana, sañña, sankhara,* and *viññana* are inconstant and so disband. Whatever is a matter of convention follows these conventional ways.

*But whatever is a matter of release — of purity — cannot be made to follow those ways, because it is not the same sort of thing.* To take release or a released mind and confuse or compound it with the five *khandhas*, which are an affair of conventional reality, is wrong. It can't be done. The five *khandhas* are one level of conventional reality; the ordinary mind is also a level of conventional reality.

The refinement of the mind — so refined that it is marvelous even when there are still things entangling it — displays its marvelousness in line with its level for us to see clearly. Even more so when the things entangling it are entirely gone, the mind becomes Dhamma. The Dhamma is the mind. The mind is Dhamma. The entire Dhamma is the

entire mind. The entire mind is the entire Dhamma. *At this point, no conventions can be supposed, because the mind is pure Dhamma.* Even though such people may still be alive, directing their *khandhas*, that nature stays that way in full measure.

Their *khandhas* are *khandhas* just like ours. Their appearance, manners, and traits appear in line with their characteristics, in line with the affairs of conventional reality that appear in those ways, which is why these things cannot be mixed together to become one with that nature. When the mind is released, the nature of release is one thing; the world of the *khandhas* is another world entirely.

Even though the pure heart may dwell in the midst of the world of the *khandhas*, it is still always a mind released. To call it a transcendent mind wouldn't be wrong, because it lies above conventional reality — above the elements and *khandhas*.

The transcendent Dhamma is a Dhamma above the world. This is why people of this sort can know the issue of connection in the mind. Once the mind is

cleansed stage by stage, they can see its beginning points and end points. They can see the mind's behavior, the direction towards which it tends most heavily, and whether there is anything left that involves the mind or acts as a means of connection. These things they know, and they know them clearly. When they know clearly, they find a way to cut, to remove from the mind the things that lead to connection, step by step.

When the defilements come thick and fast, there is total darkness in the mind. When this happens, we don't know what the mind is or what the things entangling it are, and so we assume them to be one and the same. The things that come to entangle the mind, and the mind itself, become mixed into one, so there's no way to know.

But once the mind is cleansed step by step, we come to know in stages until we can know clearly exactly how much there is still remaining in the mind. Even if there's just a bit, we know there's a bit, because the act of connection lets us see plainly that, 'This is the seed that will cause us to be reborn in one place or another.'

We can tell this clearly within the mind. When we know this clearly, we have to try to rectify the situation, using the various methods of mindfulness and discernment until that thing is cut away from the mind with no more connections.

The mind will then become an entirely pure mind, with no more means of connection or continuation. We can see this clearly.

*This is the one who is released. This is the one who doesn't die.*

Our Lord Buddha — from having practiced truly, from having truly known in line with the principles of the truth, seeing them clearly in the heart — spoke truly, acted truly, and knew truly. He taught what he had truly known and truly seen — and so how could he be wrong? At first, he didn't know how many times he had been born, or what various things he had been born as. Even concerning the present, he didn't know what his mind was attached to or involved with, because he had many, many defilements at that stage.

But after he had striven and gained Awakening, so that the entire Dhamma appeared in his heart, he knew clearly. When he knew clearly, he took that truth to proclaim the Dhamma to the world and with intuitive insight knew who would be able to comprehend this sort of Dhamma quickly, as when he knew that the two hermits and the five brethren were already in a position to attain the Dhamma. He then went to teach the five brethren and attained the aim he foresaw.

All five of them attained the Dhamma stage by stage to the level of arahantship. Since the Buddha was teaching the truth to those aiming at the truth with their full hearts, they were able to communicate easily. They, looking for the truth, and he, teaching the truth, were right for each other.

When he taught in line with the principles of the truth, they were able to comprehend quickly and to know step by step following him until they penetrated the truth clear through. Their defilements, however many or few they had, all dissolved

completely away. The cycle of rebirth was overturned to their complete relief.

This is how it is when a person who truly knows and truly sees explains the Dhamma.

Whether it's an aspect of the Dhamma dealing with the world or with the Dhamma itself, what he says is bound to be certain because he has seen it directly with his own eyes, heard it with his own ears, touched it with his own heart. So when he remembers it and teaches it, how can he be wrong?

He can't be wrong. For example, the taste of salt: Once we have known with our tongue that it's salty and we speak directly from the saltiness of the salt, how can we be wrong? Or the taste of hot peppers: The pepper is hot. It touches our tongue and we know, 'This pepper is hot.' When we speak with the truth — 'This pepper is hot' — just where can we be wrong?

So it is with knowing the Dhamma. When we practice to the stage where we should know, we have to know, step by step. Knowing the Dhamma

happens at the same moment as abandoning defilement. When defilement dissolves away, the brightness that has been obscured will appear in that very instant.

The truth appears clearly. Defilement, which is a truth, we know clearly. We then cut it away with the path — mindfulness and discernment — which is a principle of the truth, and then we take the truth and teach it so that those who are intent on listening will be sure to understand.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma in 84,000 sections (*khandha*), but they aren't in excess of our five *khandhas* with the mind in charge, responsible for good and evil and for dealing with everything that makes contact. Even though there may be as many as 84,000 sections to the Dhamma, they were taught in line with the attributes of the mind, of defilement, and of the Dhamma itself for the sake of living beings with their differing temperaments. The Buddha taught extensively — 84,000 sections of the Dhamma — so that those of differing temperaments could put them into practice and straighten out their defilements.

And we should make ourselves realize that those who listen to the Dhamma from those who have truly known and truly seen — from the mouth of the Buddha, the arahants, or meditation masters — should be able to straighten out their defilements and mental effluents at the same time they are listening. This is a point that doesn't depend on time or place. All the Dhamma comes down to the mind. The mind is a highly appropriate vessel for each level of the Dhamma.

In teaching the Dhamma, what are the things entangling and embroiling the mind that are necessary to describe so that those who listen can understand and let go? There are elements, *khandhas*, and the unlimited sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations outside us, which make contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and heart within us. Thus, it is necessary to teach both about things outside and about things inside, because the mind can become deluded and attached both outside and inside. It can love and hate both the outside and the inside.

When we teach in line with the causes and effects both inside and out, in accordance with the principles of the truth, the mind that contemplates or investigates exclusively in line with the principles of truth has to know, step by step, and be able to let go.

Once we *know* something, we can let it go. That puts an end to our problem of having to prove or investigate the matter again. Whatever we understand is no longer a problem because once we have understood, we let go. We keep letting go, because our understanding has reached the truth of those various things in full measure.

The investigation of the Dhamma, on the levels in which it should be narrow, has to be narrow. On the levels in which it should be wide-ranging, it has to be wide-ranging in line with the full level of the mind and the Dhamma. So when the heart of the meditator should stay in a restricted range, it has to be kept in that range.

For example, in the beginning stages of the training, the mind is filled with nothing but cloudiness and confusion at all times and can't find any peace or

contentment. We thus have to force it to stay in a restricted range — for example, with the meditation word, '*buddho*,' or with the in-and-out breath — so as to gain a footing with its meditation theme, so that stillness can form a basis or a foundation for the heart, so that it can set itself up for the practice that is to follow. We, first, have to teach the mind to withdraw itself from its various preoccupations, using whichever meditation theme it finds appealing, so that it can find a place of rest and relaxation through the stillness.

Once we have obtained enough stillness from our meditation theme to form an opening onto the way, we begin to investigate. Discernment and awareness begin to branch out in stages or to widen their scope until they have no limit. When we reach an appropriate time to rest the mind through the development of concentration, we focus on tranquillity using our meditation theme as we have done before, without having to pay attention to discernment in any way at that moment. We set our sights on giving rise to stillness with the meditation theme that has previously been coupled with the

heart or that we have previously practiced for the sake of stillness.

We focus in on that theme step by step with mindfulness in charge until stillness appears, giving peace and contentment. This is called resting the mind by developing concentration.

When the mind withdraws from its resting place, discernment has to unravel and investigate things. Let it investigate whatever it should at that particular time or stage, until it understands the matter. When discernment begins to move into action as a result of its being reinforced by the strength of concentration, its investigations have to grow more and more wide-ranging, step by step.

This is where discernment is wide-ranging. This is where the Dhamma is wide-ranging. The more resourceful our discernment, the more its investigations spread until it knows the causes and effects of phenomena as they truly are. Its doubts then disappear, and it lets go in stages, in line with the levels of mindfulness and discernment suited to

removing the various kinds of defilement step by step from the heart.

The mind then gradually retreats into a more restricted range, as it sees necessary, all on its own without needing to be forced as before — because once it has investigated and known in line with the way things really are, what is there left to be entangled with or to be concerned about? The extent to which it is concerned or troubled is because of its lack of understanding. When it understands with the discernment that investigates and unravels to see the truth of each particular thing, the mind withdraws and lets go of its concerns.

It goes further and further inward until its scope grows more and more restricted — to the elements, the *khandhas*, and then exclusively to the mind itself. At this stage, the mind works in a restricted scope because it has cut away its burdens in stages.

What is there in the elements and the *khandhas*? Analyze them down into their parts — body, feelings, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* — until you have removed your doubts about any one of them.

For example, when you investigate the body, an understanding of feeling automatically follows. Or when you investigate feelings, this leads straight to the body, to *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana*, which have the same sorts of characteristics — because they come from the same current of the mind. To put it briefly, the Buddha taught that each of the five *khandhas* is a complete treasury or complete heap of the three characteristics.

What do they have that's worth holding on to? The physical elements, the physical heap, all physical forms, are simply heaps of the elements. *Vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* are all mere mental phenomena. They appear — blip, blip, blip — and disappear in an instant. What value or substance can you get from them?

Discernment penetrates further and further in. It knows the truth, which goes straight to the heart, and it lets go with that straight-to-the-heart knowledge. In other words, it lets go straight from the heart. When the knowledge goes straight to the heart, it lets go straight from the heart. Our job narrows in, narrows in, as the work of discernment dictates.

This is the way it is when investigating and knowing the path of the mind that involves itself with various preoccupations. We come in knowing, we come in letting go step by step, cutting off the paths of the tigers that used to roam about looking for food — as in the phrase from the Dhamma textbooks:

'Cutting off the paths of the tigers that roam about looking for food.' We cut them out from the paths of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body along which they used to roam, involving themselves with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, gathering up poisonous food and bringing it in to burn the heart.

Discernment, thus, has to roam about investigating the body, feelings, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* by probing inward, probing inward along the paths that the tigers and leopards like to follow, so as to cut off the paths along which they used to go looking for food.

The Buddha teaches us to probe inward, cutting off the paths until we have the tigers caged. In other

words, unawareness, which is like a tiger, converges in at the one mind. All defilements and mental effluents converge in at the one mind. They can't go out roaming freely looking for food as they did before.

The mind of unawareness: You could say that it's like a football, because discernment unravels it — stomps on it, kicks it back and forth — until it is smashed to bits: until the defilement of unawareness is smashed inside. This is the level of the mind where defilement converges, so when discernment unravels it, it's just like a football that is stomped and kicked. It gets kicked back and forth among the *khandhas* until it's smashed apart by discernment.

*When the conventional mind is smashed apart, the mind released is fully revealed.*

Why do we say the 'conventional mind' and the 'mind released'? Do they become two separate minds? Not at all. It's still the same mind. When conventional realities — defilements and mental effluents — rule it, that's one state of the mind; but when it's washed and wrung out by discernment

until that state of mind is smashed apart, then the true mind, the true Dhamma, which can stand the test, doesn't disappear with it. The only things that disappear are the things inconstant, stressful, and not-self that had infiltrated the mind — because defilements and mental effluents, no matter how refined, are simply conventions: inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

When these things disappear, the true mind, above and beyond convention, can then appear to its full extent. This is what's called the mind released. This is what's called the pure mind, completely cut off from all connections and continuations. All that remains is simple awareness, utterly pure.

*We can't say at what point in our body this simple awareness is centered.* Before, it was a prominent point that we could know and see clearly. For example, in concentration we knew that it was centered in the middle of the chest. Our awareness was pronounced right there. The stillness was pronounced right there. The brightness, the radiance of the mind was pronounced right there. We could see it clearly without having to ask anyone. All those

whose minds have centered into the foundation of concentration find that the center of 'what knows' is really pronounced right here in the middle of the chest. They won't argue that it's in the brain or whatever, as those who have never experienced the practice of concentration are always saying.

But, when the mind becomes a pure mind, that center disappears, and so we can't say that the mind is above or below or in any particular spot, because it's an awareness that is pure; it's an awareness that is subtle and profound above and beyond any and all conventions. Even so, we are still veering off into conventions when we say that it's 'extremely refined,' which doesn't really fit the truth, because, of course, the notion of extreme refinement is a convention.

We can't say that this awareness lies high or low, or where it has a point or a center — because it doesn't have one at all. All there is, is awareness with nothing else infiltrating it. Even though it's in the midst of the elements and *khandhas* with which it used to be mixed, it's not that way any more. It now lies world apart.

We now can know clearly that the *khandhas* are *khandhas*, the mind is the mind, the body is the body; *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana* are each separate *khandhas*. But as for feelings in that mind, they no longer exist, ever since the mind gained release from all defilement. Therefore the three characteristics, which are convention incarnate, don't exist in that mind. The mind doesn't partake of feeling, apart from the ultimate ease (*paramam sukham*) that is its own nature — and the ultimate ease here is not a feeling of ease.

When the Buddha teaches that *nibbana* is the ultimate ease, the term 'ultimate ease' is not a feeling of ease like the feelings or moods of the mind still defiled, or the feelings of the body that are constantly appearing as stress and ease. The ultimate ease is not a feeling like that. Those who practice should take this point to heart and practice so as to know it for themselves. That will be the end of the question, in line with the Dhamma that the Buddha says is *sanditthiko* — to be seen for oneself — and on which he lays no exclusive claims.

Thus, we cannot say that the mind absolutely pure has any feeling. *This mind has no feeling.* The term 'ultimate ease' refers to an ease by the very nature of purity, and so there can't be anything inconstant, stressful, or not-self found infiltrating that ultimate ease at all.

*Nibbana* is constant. The ultimate ease is constant. They are one and the same. The Buddha says that *nibbana* is constant, the ultimate ease is constant, the ultimate void is constant. They're all the same thing — but the void of *nibbana* lies beyond convention. It's not void in the way the world supposes it to be.

If we know clearly, we can describe and analyze anything at all. If we don't understand, we can talk from morning till night and be wrong from morning till night. There is no way we can be right, because the mind isn't right. No matter how much we may speak in line with what we understand to be right in accordance with the Dhamma, if the mind that is acting isn't right, how can we be right? It's as if we were to say, '*Nibbana* is the ultimate ease; *nibbana* is the ultimate void,' to the point where the words are always in our mouth and in our heart: If the mind is

a mind with defilements, it can't be right. When the mind isn't right, nothing can be right.

Once the mind is right, though, then even when we don't say anything, we're right — because that nature is already right. Whether or not we speak, we're right. Once we reach the level where we're right, there's no wrong. This is the marvel that comes from the practice of the religion.

The Buddha taught only as far as this level and didn't teach anything further. It's in every way the end of conventions, the end of formulations, the end of defilement, the end of suffering and stress. This is why he didn't teach anything further, because this is the point at which he fully aimed: the full level of the mind and of the Dhamma.

Before he totally entered *nibbana*, his last instructions were,

'Monks, I exhort you. Formations are constantly arising and ceasing. Investigate formations that are arising and disbanding, or arising and ceasing, with non-complacency.'

That was all. He closed his mouth and never said anything again.

In this teaching, which has the rank of a final instruction, how should we understand or interpret the word 'formation' (*sankhara*)? What kind of formations does it refer to? We could take it as referring to outer formations or inner formations and we wouldn't be wrong. But at that moment, we can be fairly certain that those who had come to listen to the Buddha's final instructions at the final hour were practicing monks with high levels of mental attainment, from arahants on down. So I would think that the main point to which the Buddha was referring was inner formations that form thoughts in the mind and disrupt the mind at all times. He taught to investigate the arising and ceasing of these formations with non-complacency — in other words, to investigate with mindfulness and discernment at all times. *These formations cover the cosmos!*

We could, if we wanted to, analyze the word 'formations' as outer formations — trees, mountains, animals, people — but this wouldn't be in keeping

with the level of the monks gathered there, nor would it be in keeping with the occasion: the Buddha's last moments before total *nibbana* in which he gave his exhortation to the Sangha: the ultimate teaching at the final hour.

His final exhortation dealing with formations, given as he was about to enter total *nibbana*, must, thus, refer specifically to the most refined formations in the heart.

Once we comprehend these inner formations, how can we help but understand their basis — what they arise from. We'll have to penetrate into the well-spring of the cycle of rebirth: the mind of unawareness. This is the way to penetrate to the important point. Those who have reached this level have to know this. Those who are approaching it in stages, who haven't fully reached it, still know this clearly because they are investigating the matter, which is what the Buddha's instructions — given in the midst of that important stage of events — were all about.

This, I think, would be in keeping with the occasion in which the Buddha spoke. Why? Because ordinarily when the mind has investigated to higher and higher levels, these inner formations — the various thoughts that form in the mind — are very crucial to the investigation because they appear day and night, and are at work every moment inside the mind.

A mind reaching the level where it should investigate inner phenomena must thus take these inner formations as the focal point of its investigation. This is a matter directly related to the Buddha's final instructions.

*The ability to overthrow unawareness must follow on an investigation focused primarily on inner formations.* Once we have focused in, focused in, down to the root of defilement and have then destroyed it, these formations no longer play any role in giving rise to defilement again. Their only function is to serve the purposes of the Dhamma. We use them to formulate Dhamma for the benefit of the world. In teaching Dhamma we have to use thought-

formations, and so formations of this sort become tools of the Dhamma.

Now that we have given the *khandhas* a new ruler, the thought-formations which were forced into service by unawareness have now become tools of the Dhamma — tools of a pure heart. The Buddha used these thought-formations to teach the world, to formulate various expressions of the Dhamma.

The Dhamma we have mentioned here doesn't exist solely in the past, in the time of the Buddha, or solely in the future in a way that would deny hope to those who practice rightly and properly. It lies among our own *khandhas* and mind, in our body and mind. It doesn't lie anywhere else other than in the bodies and minds of human beings, women and men. The defilements, the path, and purity all lie right here in the heart. They don't lie in that time or period way back when, or with that person or this. They lie with the person who practices, who is using mindfulness and discernment to investigate right now.

Why? Because we are all aiming at the Dhamma. We are aiming at the truth, just like the Dhamma, the truth, that the Buddha taught then and that always

holds to the principle of being '*majjhima*' — in the center — not leaning toward that time or this, not leaning toward that period or this place. It's a Dhamma always keeping to an even keel because it lies in the center of our elements and *khandhas*. *Majjhima*: in the center, or always just right for curing defilement.

So please practice correctly in line with this Dhamma. You will see the results of '*majjhima*' — a Dhamma just right, always and everywhere — appearing as I have said. *Nibbana*, the ultimate ease, will not in any way lie beyond this knowing heart. And so I'll ask to stop here.

### **Postscript**

*An excerpt from a letter written by Venerable Acariya Maha Boowa to Mrs. Pow Phanga Vathanakul, dated February 26, 1976.*

The practice of the Dhamma in keeping with the Dhamma that he gave with utter compassion unequaled by that of anyone else in the world: This is the true homage to the Buddha. The seeing of the truth that lies within you, using discernment step by step at all times: This is the seeing of the Buddha

step by step. The seeing of the truth with the full heart using discernment: This is the seeing of the Buddha in full. The true Buddha, the true Dhamma, lie with the heart. To attend to your own heart is to attend to the Buddha. To watch over your own heart with mindfulness and discernment is truly to see the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

The king of death warns and assaults the bodies of the world's living beings in line with the principles of his truth. You have to greet his warnings and assaults with mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and unflagging persistence, and take out your treasures — the paths, fruitions, and *nibbana* — to flaunt in his face, braving death in the course of persistent effort. You and he, who have regarded each other as enemies for such a long time, will then become true friends — neither of you to take advantage of the other ever again.

The body and the *khandhas* are things that the world must relinquish in spite of its regrets. You should relinquish them with mindfulness and discernment before the time comes to relinquish them in the way

of the world. This is the supreme letting-go, second to nothing.

Please take this to heart, because it is written straight from the heart.

*Evam.*

## **Glossary**

### **Acariya:**

Teacher; mentor.

### **Anatta:**

Not-self; ownerless.

### **Aniccam:**

Inconstant; unsteady; impermanent.

### **Arahant:**

A person whose heart is free of mental effluents (see *asava*) and who is thus not destined for future rebirth. An epithet for the Buddha and the highest level of his Noble Disciples.

### **arammana:**

Preoccupation; mental object.

### **Asava:**

Mental effluent, pollutant, or fermentation — sensuality, states of being, views, and unawareness.

### **Avijja:**

Unawareness; ignorance; obscured awareness; delusion about the nature of the mind.

**Ayatana:**

Sense medium. The inner sense media are the sense organs — eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The outer sense media are their respective objects.

**Brahma:**

'Great One' — an inhabitant of the heavens of form or formlessness.

**Brahman:**

Used in the Buddha sense, this term is synonymous with arahant.

**Buddho:**

Awake; enlightened. An epithet for the Buddha.

**Cetasika:**

Mental concomitant (see *vedana*, *sañña*, and *sankhara*).

**Dhamma (dharma):**

Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles underlying their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By

extension, 'Dhamma' is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of *nibbana*, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

**Dhatu:**

Element; property, impersonal condition. The four physical elements or properties are earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (motion), and fire (heat). The six elements include the above four plus space and cognizance.

**Dukkha(m):**

Stress; suffering; pain; distress; discontent.

**Evam:**

Thus; in this way. This term is used in Thailand as a formal closing to a sermon.

**Kamma (karma):**

Intentional acts that result in states of being and birth.

**Kayagata-sati:**

Mindfulness immersed in the body. This is a blanket term covering several meditation themes: keeping the breath in mind; being mindful of the body's posture; being mindful of one's activities; analyzing the body into its parts; analyzing the body into its

physical properties (see *dhatu*); contemplating the fact that the body is inevitably subject to death and disintegration.

**Khandha:**

Heap; group; aggregate. Physical and mental components of the personality and of sensory experience in general (see *rupa*, *vedana*, *sañña*, *sankhara*, and *viññana*).

**Kilesa:**

Defilement — passion, aversion, and delusion in their various forms, which include such things as greed, malevolence, anger, rancor, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, miserliness, dishonesty, boastfulness, obstinacy, violence, pride, conceit, intoxication, and complacency.

**Loka-dhamma:**

Worldly phenomenon — fortune, loss of fortune, status, disgrace, praise, censure, pleasure, and pain.

**Lokuttara:**

Transcendent; supramundane (see *magga*, *phala*, and *nibbana*).

**Magga:**

Path. Specifically, the path to the cessation of suffering and stress. The four transcendent paths — or rather, one path with four levels of refinement —

are the path to stream-entry (entering the stream to *nibbana*, which ensures that one will be reborn at most only seven more times), the path to once-returning, the path to non-returning, and the path to arahantship.

**Mara:**

Temptation; mortality personified.

**Nibbana (nirvana):**

Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from mental effluents, defilements, and the round of rebirth (see *asava*, *kilesa*, and *vatta*). As this term is used to denote also the extinguishing of fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burning fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound.)

**Pañña:**

Discernment; insight; wisdom; intelligence; common sense; ingenuity.

**Parami:**

Perfection of the character — generosity, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, forbearance, truthfulness, determination, good will, and equanimity.

**Parisa:**

Following; assembly. The four groups of the Buddha's following are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

**Patimokkha:**

The basic code of 227 precepts observed by Buddhist monks, chanted every half-month in each assembly of monks numbering four or more.

**Phala:**

Fruition. Specifically, the fruition of any of the four transcendent paths (see *magga*).

**Puñña:**

Merit; worth; the inner sense of well-being that comes from having acted rightly or well.

**Rupa:**

Body; physical phenomenon; sense datum.

**Sabhava-dhamma:**

Phenomenon; an event, property, or quality as experienced in and of itself.

**Sallekha-dhamma:**

Topics of effacement (effacing defilement) — having few wants, being content with what one has, seclusion, uninvolvedness in companionship, persistence, virtue, concentration, discernment, release, and the direct knowing and seeing of release.

**Samadhi:**

Concentration; the practice of centering the mind in a single sensation or preoccupation.

**Sammati:**

Conventional reality; convention; relative truth; supposition; anything conjured into being by the mind.

**Sanditthiko:**

Self-evident, visible here and now.

**Sangha:**

The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, this refers to the Buddhist monkhood. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the transcendent paths (see *magga*) culminating in *nibbana*.

**Sankhara:**

Formation. This can denote anything formed or fashioned by conditions, or — as one of the five *khandhas* — specifically thought-formations within the mind.

**Sañña:**

Label; perception; allusion; act of memory or recognition; interpretation.

**Sati:**

Mindfulness; alertness; self-collectedness; powers of reference and retention.

**Satipatthana:**

Foundation of mindfulness; frame of reference — body, feelings, mind, and mental events, viewed in and of themselves as they occur.

**Sa-upadisesa-nibbana:**

Nibbana with fuel remaining (the analogy is to an extinguished fire whose embers are still glowing) — liberation as experienced in this lifetime by an arahant.

**Sugato:**

Well-faring; going (or gone) to a good destination. An epithet for the Buddha.

**Tanha:**

Craving, the cause of stress, which takes three forms — craving for sensuality, for being, and for not-being.

**Tathagata:**

One who has become true. A title for the Buddha.

**Tilakkhana:**

Three characteristics inherent in all conditioned phenomena — being inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

**Tipitaka (tripitaka):**

The Buddhist Canon; literally, the three 'baskets' — disciplinary rules, discourses, and abstract philosophical treatises.

**Uposatha:**

Observance day, corresponding to the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist lay people gather to listen to the Dhamma and to observe special precepts. Monks assemble to hear the Patimokkha on the new-moon and full-moon *uposatha* days.

**Vassa:**

Rains Retreat. A period from July to October, corresponding roughly to the rainy season, in which each monk is required to live settled in a single place and not wander freely about.

**Vatta:**

The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This denotes both the death and rebirth of living beings and the death and rebirth of defilement within the mind.

**Vedana:**

Feeling — pleasure (ease), pain (stress), or neither pleasure nor pain.

**Vijja:**

Clear knowledge; genuine awareness; science (specifically, the cognitive powers developed

through the practice of concentration and discernment).

**Vimutti:**

Release; freedom from the fabrications and conventions of the mind.

**Vinaya:**

The disciplinary rules of the monastic order.

**Viññana:**

Cognizance; consciousness; the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur.

**Notes**

1.This is an indirect reference to a passage in a Thai Dhamma textbook that reads, 'The transcendent Dhammas are nine: the four paths, the four fruitions, and the one *nibbana*.'

2.A small umbrella-like tent used by meditating monks.

3.A reference to the *Dhammapada*, verses 153-54:

Through the round of many births

I wandered without finding

The house builder I was seeking:

Painful is birth again and again.

House builder, you are seen!

You will not build a house again.

All your rafters broken,

The ridge pole destroyed,  
Gone to the Unformed, the mind  
Has attained the end of craving.

4. See the *Yamaka Sutta* and *Anuradha Sutta* in *Samyutta Nikaya XXII.85-86*.

If anything in this translation is inaccurate or misleading, I ask forgiveness of the author and reader for having unwittingly stood in their way. As for whatever may be accurate, I hope the reader will make the best use of it, translating it a few steps further, into the heart, so as to attain the truth to which it points.

The translator

**Provenance:**

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**Editor's note:** This book is a free gift of Dhamma and may not be offered for sale, for as the Venerable Acariya Maha Boowa has said, 'Dhamma has a value beyond all wealth and should not be sold like goods in a market place.' Inquiries

concerning this book may be addressed to: Wat Pa Baan Taad, c/o Songserm Service, 89 Posri Road, Udorn Thani 41000 Thailand.

## **Biographical Note**

Venerable Acharn Maha Boowa was born in Udorn-thani, North-east Thailand in 1913. He became a monk in the customary way at a local monastery and went on to study the Pali language and texts. At this time he also started to meditate but had not yet found a suitable Teacher. Then he caught sight of the Ven. Acharn Mun and immediately felt that this was someone really special, someone who obviously had achieved something from his Dhamma practice.

After finishing his *Grade Three Pali studies*<sup>1</sup> he therefore left the study monastery and followed Ven. Acharn Mun into the forests of N.E. Thailand. When he caught up with Ven. Acharn Mun, he was told to put his academic knowledge to one side and concentrate on meditation. And that was what he did. He often went into solitary retreat in the mountains and jungle but always returned for help and advice from Ven. Acharn Mun. He stayed with Ven. Acharn Mun for seven years, right until the Ven. Acharn's passing away.

The vigor and uncompromising determination of his Dhamma practice attracted other monks dedicated to

meditation and this eventually resulted in the founding of Wat Pa Bahn Tahd, in some forest near the village where he was born. This enabled his mother to come and live as a nun at the monastery.

Ven. Acharn Maha Boowa is well known for the fluency and skill of his Dhamma talks, and their direct and dynamic approach. They obviously reflect his own attitude and the way he personally practiced Dhamma. This is best exemplified in the Dhamma talks he gives to those who go to meditate at Wat Pa Bahn Tahd. Such talks usually take place in the cool of the evening, with lamps lit and the only sound being the insects and cicadas in the surrounding jungle. He often begins the Dhamma talk with a few moments of stillness — this is the most preparation he needs — and then quietly begins the Dhamma exposition. As the theme naturally develops, the pace quickens and those listening increasingly feel its strength and depth.

The formal Dhamma talk might last from thirty-five to sixty minutes. Then, after a more general talk, the listeners would all go back to their solitary huts in the jungle to continue the practice, to try to find the Dhamma they had been listening about — inside themselves.

Note:

1. On completion of *Grade Three Paali*, one is given the title *Mahaa*. There are nine grades in all.

**Thus ends this text.**

**▲Note:** Some editorial changes have been made in the above to standardize the punctuation, and some missing [or implied] words have been inserted where syntax demanded it, but nothing has been done which would change the intended textual contextual.

Those who are interested may search for the biography of Acharn Mun, the reading of which is a life changing experience in itself. Search, for example, for Acariya Mun Bhuridatta on BuddhaNet