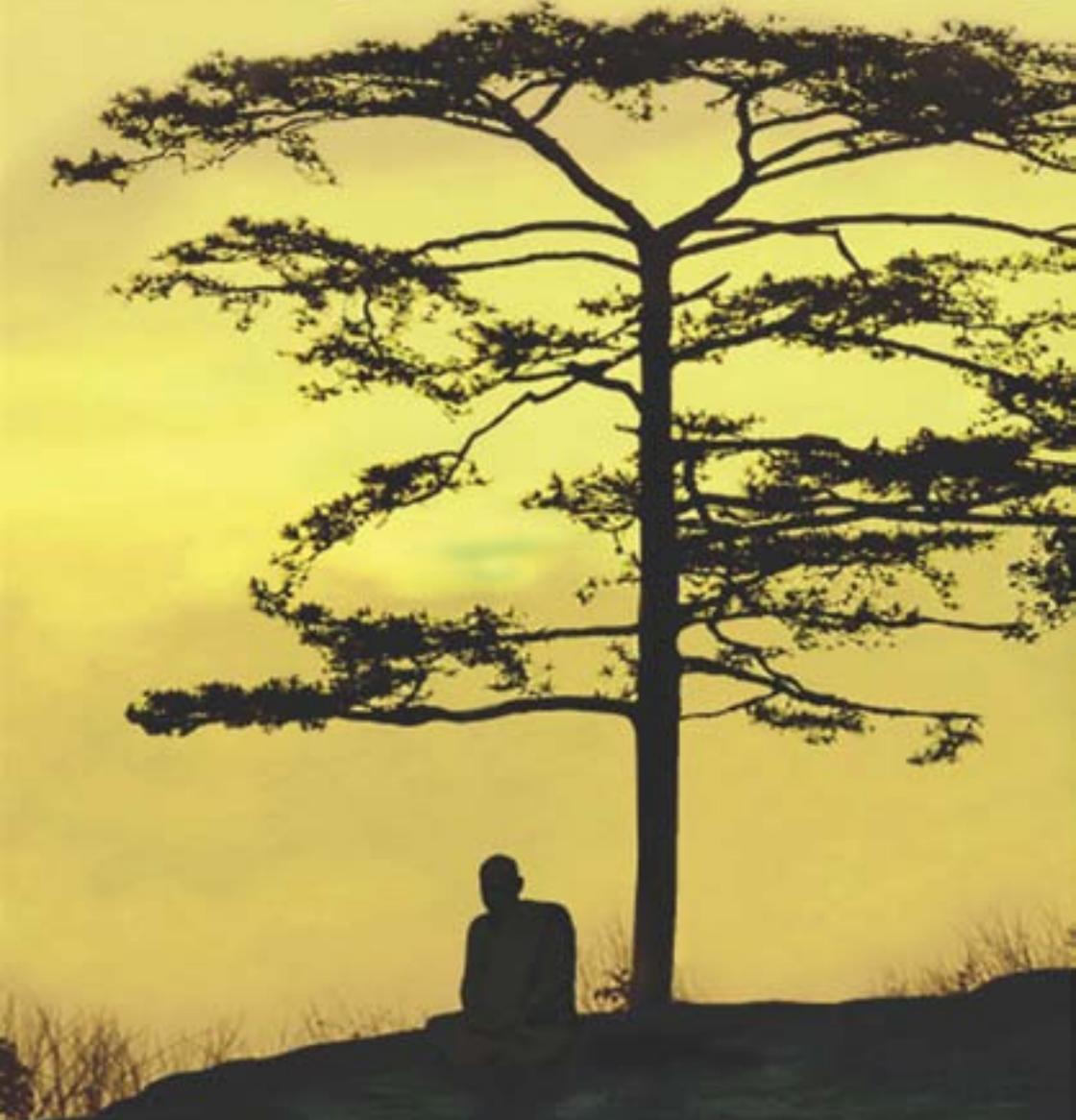


SIMPLE TEACHINGS ON HIGHER TRUTHS



AJAHN ANAN

Introduction



The mind has been spinning all morning, trying to work everything out. We would like to get on with our meditation, but need to resolve this first. It's about the practice. Meditating seems harder these days: less remarkable, less relaxing. Lately there's been a lot of uninvited thinking going on. Something has been drudging up worries, possibilities, old memories, song lyrics.... Hadn't we gone beyond all this? Nevermind, though. We probably just need a change of scene.

Surely it's the monastery itself. Reflecting on some aspects of the place, it seems that things could be better. It could be quieter, for one; there could be less people. The weather could definitely be better, cooler. Maybe we could plant some more trees? And certainly we ought to be able to work out the schedule a bit more efficiently. More time for meditation, less chores. If things were different, we could get beyond all this suffering and discontent, right?

Actually, at the moment there is time. Nothing is being asked of us. But how could we sit in meditation with this feeling

hanging around? It's the lingering unease of uncertainty, of unresolved doubts. Things are not clear. When we try to work out the immediate future, just the next couple months, say, it is still not clear. We are imagining, what if-ing, and there are many loose ends. We are thinking that maybe we would benefit from a change of scene. Either a stay at another monastery or some retreat time, off in the forest. Would that solve things? Hmm. Lets just figure this out and then the mind will be peaceful and we can get on with the real work...

We know we've got to go to see our teacher, Ajahn Anan. We would like to work this out ourself, to reason the mind into submission, but we've been here before. At the moment our mind is a churning, foaming, river eddy. Our mind is a jabbering idiot, a renegade webpage gone mad with pop-up windows. It will most definitely not be reasoned with. It will not be thought into submission. But if we pay Ajahn Anan a visit, things might get resolved. In our forest tradition we take the Ajahn as our mentor, our leader...our father. We rely on him for guidance and advice because he has taken the road of Dhamma before us.

It is nearly 11 am. The need to ease the agitation in the mind has not diminished; if anything, it has become more urgent. So we set off briskly, striding up the hill in the direction of Ajahn Anan's kuti. When we arrive a few minutes later, we find him attending to his duties. At the moment he is talking with some lay

guests from Bangkok, but during a typical day he might also share his time between teaching the monks, overseeing building projects and advising the abbots of his various branch monasteries. He is almost always engaged in solving some issue, moving from one matter to the next. And yet there's something about the way he relates to all this activity—it is not ordinary. From the amount of attention he gives to the task at hand and the ease that pervades it all, it is clear that this is a man who has trained his mind.

Arriving at his seat, we bow and sit quietly to one side. We consider how to best voice our problem, but hesitate, not knowing how to begin, not knowing how to ask. The setting has changed but our mind is carrying on as before, whirling and proliferating. Still, we notice a certain calmness emerging simply from being in his presence. Our worries haven't disappeared, though they seem less fixed, less urgent. And then suddenly, he turns to us and smiles. "What's on your mind?" he asks. It feels like he already knows.

Although higher truths often emerge from the advice that follows, it usually begins much closer to the ground. We might expect him to answer nonchalantly with, "just let go," or "it's all empty," or "what's the point in worrying, death is certain," but he doesn't. He listens. He knows that our suffering is real and he sympathises. As he talks, the meaning behind his words rises gradually, slowly unfurled in the way that kite line might be let out into the breeze. Whether reflections on his own practice, practical

solutions, similes, humour or something left for us to contemplate, he gives us a new way to look at things. And though we didn't know it when we arrived, in the end it is what we were looking for. We realise that our problem wasn't so big after all....

The teachings in this book have been collected from various talks given in Thai, as well as informal, late-night Dhamma discussions. They have been selected with the hope of capturing Ajahn Anan's ability to help us overcome our difficulties and grow in wholesome qualities as a result. The book itself has been laid out in a way that allows us to gradually progress to the higher truths, beginning with the suffering inherent in our situation. Though it may be something hard to grasp, once recognised we can then do something about it. The next sections give us guidance in practising mindfulness and meditation. Following this are teachings on the foundation of meditation practice—virtue and kindness for others. Lastly, we meet the wisdom which reminds us that the end of suffering is actually not that far away.

Contained within these pages are reflections and guidance to aid us on our spiritual journey, this process of educating the heart and mind. We invite you to read, enjoy, and apply them. When we are able to see our suffering and its cause, wisdom can then arise. The Buddha and our teachers have given us the tools to do this, but it's up to us to use them. Some teachings may clarify higher truths instantly, some only after trying the practice out for

ourselves, but in the end Truth is what will lead us to peace and happiness in our lives.

This book has come about through the hard work of many of Ajahn Anan's loyal disciples. We have tried our best to convey the original meaning and flavour of the talks as accurately as possible, and apologise for any errors or misrepresentations that may have occurred in the process of translating and editing.

We offer this as a gift of our devotion and gratitude to the Triple Gem and to our teacher, Ajahn Anan. May all beings grow in happiness and steadily progress towards the end of all suffering.

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samm -Sambuddhassa

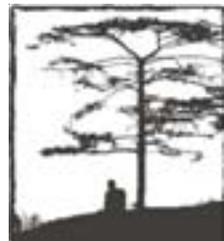
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samm -Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samm -Sambuddhassa

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Perfectly Enlightened One

HAPPINESS

Out of Suffering



Happiness arises from the timely company of friends.
Happiness arises from having few needs.
Happiness arises from accumulated virtue at life's end.
Happiness arises from seeing beyond suffering.

The Buddha
Dhammapada 331

1

What Is This?

This is a path that leads not only to happiness but to inner peace as well. It starts with restraint and practising meditation. When the mind is still, that's when this pure happiness arises. It doesn't depend on external things at all. We don't need to use any external stimulus to experience it, because it is peace and happiness from within. And when we use this to let go of our attachments, we experience an even more profound happiness yet. Practise and you will see for yourself that this is the right way.



2

About Happiness

The Buddha admitted that the various comforts that come from material gain and development are a true form of happiness. But they are only temporary. The kind of happiness we get through having money, property, relationships and the experiences associated with that is temporary. And for that reason there is suffering hidden within. We gain happiness but then lose it again, leading on to a cycle of the mind wanting more, wanting to experience again, wanting to hold and cling to. And that brings suffering. If people never reflect on that then they tend to get caught into this habitual cycle. But Buddhism is helping us to look within that process, to see the suffering that comes with attachment to material happiness, and to realise our potential to find something more deeply satisfying.



3

Working for Inner Wealth

Even though we are busy, even though we have families, we should make time for the practice. We are practising to find internal wealth, the wealth that comes through seeing the Dhamma. Maybe we spend forty hours a week or more finding external wealth, money and the resources to live, but we need to also make time to develop this internal wealth, which is our way to true happiness. Whenever we have free time we can devote it to raising the level of our mindfulness and understanding. Ultimately, we are aiming to develop mindfulness and observe the truth at all times, whether standing, sitting, walking or lying down. And if we put in effort in this way, we will come to see that the Dhamma the Buddha taught is actually very close by.



4

The First Noble Truth

The Buddha encouraged us to awaken to the way things are, to see into the truth of things. He taught us to contemplate the Four Noble Truths, and the First Noble Truth is that there is *dukkha*, stress and suffering. This is part of life. We have unhappy states of mind, pain in our bodies, situations where we don't get what we want, worry and fear, sorrow and anguish, separation from the things and people that we like and love. Just from all the difficulties of living in the world, from work and family affairs, we will meet with stressful situations and different conditions that bring up a sense of discontent in the mind. All of these different experiences we call *dukkha*, suffering. And this is where we have to learn to see it as just suffering, as a Noble Truth, that it's like *this*.

If we have faith in the Buddhist teachings then we have a way to deal with these problems, the suffering that we encounter. The teachings encourage us to practise, to try to overcome all these different unwholesome tendencies that are fed by delusion and misunderstanding and that keep goodness and happiness from arising

in our mind. We have to contemplate these tendencies in order to see them clearly and let them go. Because if we follow them it always leads to suffering. If we follow greed it leads to suffering. If we follow anger it leads to suffering. If we follow delusion it leads to suffering. Whenever we follow these mental defilements they'll pull us towards suffering and pull down the level of our mind. But they don't end there, they don't just arise and pass away. The more we give into them, the more they'll grow, becoming established in our mind and feeding off our lack of understanding.

The only thing these mental defilements are really afraid of is virtue, concentration and wisdom. This is the path of practice that the Buddha gave us, the path that directly leads to the abandoning of greed, anger and delusion. In the beginning we can find this practice difficult, but just be aware of it, be mindful of it, know that suffering is like *this*. We can suddenly understand, "Oh, life is just this way!" This isn't to judge it or get emotional about it, but just to know, "It's this way and couldn't be any other." Like when we experience problems at work. We know that it is natural for problems to come up, that this is to be expected. When we have this kind of awareness of the inevitability of difficulties, it keeps the mind peaceful. We know that this is just the way things are and don't suffer needlessly over them when they arise.

5

Something We Can Depend On

When we decide to devote our free time to the practice of Dhamma, then we use this time to chant, recollect the teachings, meditate, and develop peace within our heart. We set aside our concerns about work and family and bring the mind to the object of its attention. By establishing mindfulness on the feeling of the breath going in and out, we are developing awareness of the present moment. And when we sustain our attention like this, not letting it stray anywhere else, the mind will start to calm down and become concentrated.

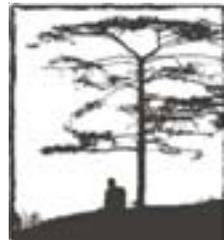
As the mind calms down it experiences rapture, a sense of inner satisfaction arising through the act of mindfully focusing on an object. Along with this sense of inner satisfaction, joy will arise as the mind becomes interested in its meditation object. Sometimes we might even experience a deep inner happiness and contentment of the sort never felt before. It's an internal happiness that arises through the result of our own efforts, having trained the mind to focus its attention on one object. It doesn't arise from contact

with external things in the usual way that we talk about happiness. Before experiencing this, we might never have realised that the practice of continual mindful awareness could bring such a sense of satisfaction. But if we wish for a peaceful mind, we have to understand that true peace and happiness can only be found within.



MEDITATION

The Development of the Mind



Concentration does not arise without wisdom,
nor wisdom without concentration.
One who knows both approaches liberation.

The Buddha
Dhammapada 372

6

The Basics of Meditation

To prepare for sitting meditation, place the right leg on top of the left leg and the right hand on top of the left hand. Sit up straight yet comfortably, feeling balanced and relaxed. If you find this posture isn't suitable, you can sit in a way that is more comfortable, even sitting on a chair if need be. Don't lean too far to the left, right, front, or back. Don't tilt the head too far back or let it hang down. Close the eyes just enough so that you don't feel tense or uptight. Now, establish awareness and imagine that you are sitting all alone.

Following and Counting the Breath

First focus awareness on following the in-breath as it passes three points—beginning at the nose, descending through the heart and finishing at the navel; and secondly following the out-breath in reverse order—starting at the navel, ascending through the heart and ending at the tip of the nose. Once mindful of the in- and out-breathing and proficient at focusing awareness on these three points,

then continue by clearly knowing the in- and out-breaths just at the tip of the nose. Maintain awareness of the sensation of breathing by focusing only on this one point.

If you find the mind is becoming distracted—wandering off to the future, the past, thinking of different things—then reestablish awareness and let go of those thoughts. If the distraction continues, then we have to increase our efforts. One good technique for helping to increase concentration is counting the breath in pairs.

If counting in pairs we count ‘one’ as we breathe in and ‘one’ as we breathe out. With the next in-breath count, ‘two,’ and with the out-breath, ‘two.’ Then, in—‘three,’ out—‘three;’ in—‘four,’ out—‘four;’ in—‘five,’ out—‘five.’ Firstly, we count in pairs up to five. After the fifth pair we start again at one and increase the count of the in- and out-breaths one pair at a time. We count in-out, ‘one;’ in-out, ‘two;’ in-out, ‘three’...up to ‘six.’ After counting each pair of in- and out-breaths we start again at one and increase the pairs incrementally up to ten. Using this method we will be aware of whether our mindfulness is with the counting—totaling the numbers correctly—or lost and distracted.

When competent at counting the breaths, we will see that the breathing is perceived with increased clarity. The rate of counting can now increase in speed as follows: with the in-breath we count, ‘onetwothreefourfive,’ and then with the out-breath, ‘onetwothreefourfive.’ When proficient at counting up to five like

this, we can increase the number to six. Breathing in, count, ‘onetwothreefourfivesix,’ then breathing out, count, ‘onetwothreefourfivesix.’ We can experiment to see whether this is enough to hold our attention or not. Alternatively, we can remain simply counting up to five, whichever feels more comfortable. We should count in this way until we become skilled and proficient. Eventually, we will become aware that the mind has let go of the counting all by itself and feels comfortable simply knowing the in- and out-breathing at the tip of the nose. This can be described as a mind brought to peace through the method of counting.

Buddho

Additionally, we can use the meditation word ‘Buddho’—‘the one who knows’—internally reciting it along with the in- and out-breaths. Breathing in, we recite ‘Buddho,’ and breathing out, ‘Buddho.’ Or we can recite ‘Bud—’ with the in-breath and ‘—dho’ with the out-breath. Whichever works, we keep repeating the word continuously in sync with the breathing. When the mind is calm, the word will naturally disappear by itself without our knowledge. We will simply know the breath as it enters and leaves. As we get calmer the breath becomes more and more refined until it may seem to disappear altogether. In this case we just stay with the knowing, fixing it right on the spot where the breath was last felt.

Sometimes as we focus on the breathing, the mind wanders off thinking and fantasising about the past or the future. At those times we have to put forth effort and come back to the present moment, the awareness of the breath. If the mind is wandering so much that we cannot focus our awareness, then we can breathe in deeply, filling the lungs to maximum capacity before exhaling. We should inhale and exhale deeply like this three times and then start breathing again normally. We can then continue using any of the methods as explained previously.

Walking Meditation

Meditation can also be developed through walking. Stand with composure, the hands clasped lightly in front, right over left. The head should be neither too high nor hung too low. The eyes should be focused forward to an even distance and stray neither left nor right, neither too close nor too far ahead. While walking back and forth, we coordinate the movement of our feet with the meditation word 'Buddho.' As we step forward, leading with the right foot, we internally recite 'Bud-' and with the left foot, '-dho.'

Ajahn Chah taught that while walking meditation we must be aware of the beginning, middle and end of the path. While reciting 'Bud-dho,' we should also fix our mindfulness on knowing our movements in relation to these three points along the path. Upon reaching the end, we stop and establish mindfulness anew

before turning around and walking back, reciting, ‘Bud—dho,’ ‘Bud—dho,’ ‘Bud—dho’ as before.

We can adjust our practice according to time and place. If space allows, we can establish a walking path 25 paces long. If there is less room than this, we can reduce the number of paces and walk more slowly. While practising walking meditation, however, we should walk neither too fast nor too slow.

Stages of Concentration

The essence of meditation is focusing mindfulness solely upon the meditation object. When mindfulness has been properly established, then the heart will be continuously aware of the process of counting, or reciting, or walking, recollecting nothing else. While endowed with mindfulness, the heart will be free of the five hindrances of sensual desire, ill-will, dullness, restlessness and doubt. Concentration then becomes firmer, characterised by a temporary peacefulness of mind called momentary concentration.

If we are focused with continuous mindfulness, then sometimes we will experience rapture. Rapture is characterised by physical sensations of coolness, or surges of energy spreading throughout the body like waves breaking on the shore. These sensations can cause the body to sway or the hair to stand on end and are accompanied by mental perceptions of physical expansiveness. Sometimes it can seem that our hands and feet have

vanished. Feelings in other areas of the body, even the sensation of the whole body itself, can likewise disappear from consciousness. During this period when the mind is peaceful, the mind temporarily lets go of its attachment to the physical body and consequently experiences only feelings of lightness and tranquility. As we sit in meditation and this tranquility increases, it can seem as though we are floating in space, giving rise to feelings of happiness and well-being. At this point we can say that the power of our concentration has deepened to the level of neighbourhood concentration.

As concentration deepens further, the heart experiences even greater rapture and bliss, together with feelings of profound inner strength and stability. All thoughts cease and the mind becomes utterly still and one-pointed. At this stage we cannot control or direct the meditation. The mind follows its natural course, entering a unified state with only a single object of consciousness. This is the level of absorption concentration.



7

Getting to Know the Mind

When we first come to meditate, we will notice quite quickly that even sitting for a minute seems almost impossible. All we get is restlessness and agitation. With practice though, we will soon be able to sit for longer periods. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes—eventually we will be able to sit for half an hour with ease. Sometimes the meditation is peaceful, other times not, but in the beginning stages the key element is patience.

It's important to see that the five hindrances to peace in the mind—sensual desire, ill will, dullness, restlessness, doubt—are not created by meditation. It's just what is there already. In daily life we are used to thinking a lot, and often not in a very skillful or controlled way. This type of thinking tends to agitate the mind and create different types of mental stress. So when we sit down to concentrate on the breath or another meditation object, what we notice first is what is already there. Suddenly we see, “Hmm, there's a lot of thinking going on.” So to begin with, just accept that it's normal for the untrained mind to be like that. And the way to deal

with it skillfully is to develop this quality of mindfulness.

We meditate to get to know our mind. But that doesn't mean we think, "I've got to be peaceful!" If we think and attach in this way then we'll tend to get irritated with ourself when we're *not* peaceful. Our aim is just to know the mind. And when we're working on developing constant awareness, this will include times when we are not very peaceful, when there are thoughts and distractions coming up. So we just know, "Oh, now the mind is distracted." There will also be times when our mindfulness and concentration are strong and the hindrances disappear. At those times we are aware that, "Now the mind is peaceful. Now the mind is calm and concentrated." Whatever the experience, we know it for what it is. That's our aim.



8

Building Momentum Mindfully

If we put forth effort on a daily basis, the meditation will start to gain a momentum of its own. When we wake up we will want to practise meditation, whenever we have spare time we will want to practise meditation, and if the opportunity arises, we will want to practise all day.

If we practise consistently with mindfulness, whatever time of the day we go to meditate, be it in the morning or evening, the mind will move into a state of peace quite easily. This is what we call continuously developing the mind. Whenever we have mindfulness established is a time when we are developing the mind. However, even if we sit all day with our eyes closed, if there is no mindfulness, our efforts will bring little benefit. If we do walking meditation all day but our mindfulness isn't firmly established, this would not be putting forth effort in meditation.

To be truly putting forth effort we should be endeavoring to abandon any unwholesome mental states that have arisen and to bring up wholesome states and maintain them in the mind. The

unwholesome states that we have already abandoned we should be trying our utmost to not to let arise anew. If we are working in this way with mindfulness, then whether we are standing, sitting, walking or lying down, we will truly be developing the mind.



9

Wise Reflection

There will be times when the mind is too restless to simply watch the breath or stay with a meditation word. At these times we may need to use wise reflection. Wise reflection is when we consciously use thought to bring the mind to peace. We can use the recollection of the qualities of the Buddha, the four sublime abidings, recollection of death, chanting, or other modes of contemplating the Dhamma.

Some people find their temperament is more suited to using this reflective and contemplative style of meditation, while others may find that staying with a single meditation object such as the breath will bring their minds to peace quite easily. Many practitioners, however, find benefit in using these two aspects interchangeably as a means of calming the mind.

In the Thai forest tradition, it's quite common for practitioners to use the recollection of the Buddha as their main object of meditation. In addition to reciting 'Buddho' along with the breath, we can also recollect the qualities of the Buddha to

bring the mind to calm. The Buddha was one who was perfectly awakened. His mind was pure, free from mental defilements, free from suffering, experiencing constant peace. Not only did he purify his own mind, finding the way to free it from delusion and attachment, but he also developed the wisdom to teach others to follow this same path.

Because of our faith in the Buddha and his teachings, when we enter or leave a hall it is customary to pay respects by bowing three times to the Buddha statue. When we do this, we are recollecting the enlightenment of the Buddha and what that signifies. We recollect the qualities of mind that he perfected, namely his great compassion, great purity and great wisdom. He developed these virtues and other aspects of his spiritual practice over countless lifetimes, all the while holding the vow to become a Buddha. His vow was finally realised as he experienced the happiness of liberation sitting under the Bodhi tree in India 2,500 years ago. He then began to teach the way out of suffering that he had realised for himself. The Buddha taught the way to perfect peace and happiness, out of kindness and compassion for all the other beings living in this world. And as his disciples too became enlightened, they were sent out to spread the teachings for the benefit of all beings. Those teachings have been handed down and shared to this very day. It is because of this that there are still enlightened beings appearing in the world.

10

The Four Sublime Abidings

Reflecting on the four sublime abidings—loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity—is another contemplative method which brings great benefit to the practitioner. True *mettā*, or loving-kindness, is unbiased and unbounded. But when we first begin to develop *mettā*, we must start by establishing a sense of goodwill for ourself. We genuinely wish ourself happiness and good things. Then progressing from this foundation, we can think of a parent or loved one, and send them loving-kindness. Following this we think of someone we feel neutral towards and spread loving-kindness to him or her as well. Lastly, we focus on someone with whom we have conflict. By progressively developing loving-kindness in this way, the practice can grow to include all beings. To be able to spread pure loving-kindness like this we have to develop it often. But with consistent practice, the power of our *mettā* will gradually grow.

If we keep applying mindful awareness to these thoughts of loving-kindness, the mind will naturally start to calm down and

become collected. As it begins to experience the peace of concentration, we will feel relaxed and happy within ourself. The mind will be stable and calm. And from here concentration and loving-kindness progress hand-in-hand, as at this point they are almost the same thing. When the mind gains calm, it will naturally be free of irritation. And by keeping mindfulness on the meditation object, eventually we will get to the point where there is no ill-will in the mind at all. This will be known, and the mind will be peaceful and still.

Karu , compassion, is recognising that all beings have suffering and that we want to do something about it. Developing compassion is similar to the way we develop loving-kindness. Firstly, we acknowledge the suffering that we ourself experience, whether great or small, and make the aspiration that through our practice of Dhamma we will be able to transcend the various forms of suffering in this life. Next we move onto the people for whom we feel love and affection, recognising the suffering that they experience and sincerely wishing they be freed from it. Finally, we move onto people we feel neutral towards and to those with which we are having conflicts. Once again, as with loving-kindness, the goal is to develop the strength of our compassion to encompass all beings indiscriminately.

Loving-kindness and compassion are so closely related that by developing one we will be consequently developing the other.

In fact, in the *mett* chant that we do, we are inclining the mind towards thoughts of compassion through cultivating loving-kindness. Using the phrases, “May all beings have freedom from hostility, freedom from ill-will and anxiety, may they maintain wellbeing in themselves and be released from all suffering,” we cultivate the feeling of wanting to help those beings, of wanting to remove the causes for their suffering.

With *mudit* , sympathetic joy, we foster an awareness of what is already good and abundant in our life and wish that we will not be separated from that. We take joy in that abundance and good fortune. We then recollect other beings who are currently experiencing good fortune, sincerely wishing that they too will not be separated from that abundance, that wellbeing, those good opportunities. We bring up appreciation for the goodness in their lives, and lastly, practise by wishing that all beings could have these good opportunities and experience such wellbeing.

Finally, for the cultivation of *upekkh* , equanimity, we contemplate karma. We look at our own situation and the different painful things that we can't really resolve yet. With the understanding that karma is a very real and powerful force, we consider that these difficulties must have come into being because of our past actions. By contemplating in this way we can develop patience and equanimity, accepting our situation and not contending with our karma. With regards to others, we still cultivate

loving-kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy. But we also understand that beings fare according to their past actions. We contemplate the fact that sometimes we simply can't help certain beings because of their karma, and that we can't resolve all of our own karma yet either. When we can abide in equanimity we don't suffer unnecessarily about this. This is called developing the quality of *upekkh* .



11

Recollection of Death

Ajahn Chah frequently recommended the contemplation of death, particularly at times when the mind is agitated and restless, thinking uncontrollably. Because it's such a powerful recollection, when we are overwhelmed by some aspect of greed or anger—or just deluded by confusion and doubting—it can cut through all this, bringing a sense of finality into the mind. “Wait. I am going to die soon.” It will cut through all those other less important, secondary thoughts that are bothering the mind at that time. This is a very useful meditation technique.

We can practise the recollection of death by contemplating the uncertainty of our lives and the certainty of death. We continuously reflect that having been born, we must also die. Hearing news of death and loss, we can likewise reflect upon our own mortality. Suppose that the global human population amounted to six billion people, of whom sixty million died every year, six-hundred million every decade. If there were no new, supplementary births, then within a century the entire population

of the world would have passed away—all six billion people. However, because there are additional births replacing those who have died, we fail to see the presence of death, except for those terrible events that stem from natural disasters. When great numbers of human beings die through events such as these, we can reflect that we too must also die, that we cannot escape from death.

When we contemplate the Dhamma, however, we have to do it in the correct way. Reflecting on impermanence and the uncertainty of life, we might get to the point where we see that all of us must come to the same end. There is no way around this, for ultimately, we all have to die. But it's important that we contemplate in a skillful way, arousing urgency and energy in the practice. The contemplation should be developing mindfulness and wisdom, bringing the mind to greater peace. If it is done unskillfully it can bring depression, seeing life as meaningless. And if we have that kind of negative reaction, then we have to stop and realise that it isn't going in the right direction, that it isn't bringing the correct results. So as we contemplate and practise the Dhamma, we have to always look at the results of what we are doing to gauge whether we are practising in the correct way. If there is more energy, more effort, more peace, then that is the sign that it's going in the right direction.

12

Using Chanting to Aid Meditation

The practice of Buddhist chanting helps to calm the mind, focusing it on the Dhamma and giving rise to coolness and peacefulness. Before practising meditation, we can use this act of chanting as the object of mindfulness. Found in these chants are the very teachings that the Buddha gave us, and if we chant them with mindfulness it can give rise to a sense of inner joy. This will help us to recollect and contemplate the teachings, letting them sink into the heart a little more each time. We may start by chanting the daily devotions, reciting the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. We can then bring up thoughts of loving-kindness, directing them first towards ourself and then towards all beings.

Chanting is also useful for overcoming the hindrance of dullness. But if we are meditating and still can't get rid of the dullness or sleepiness, then we can change posture and do some walking meditation instead. We can even try walking backwards, or sitting on the edge of a wall or in a high place. The aim is to give rise to a sense of mindfulness and carefulness, which will make the mind

alert. If we do sit in a high, dangerous place, hopefully we will wake up. But if we're still tired and drowsy, it's better to get down, better not to fall and die. We still haven't realised the Dhamma yet, so we have to use our wisdom as well...



If you want to do some chanting on the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and loving-kindness, see the chanting section at the end of the book.

13

Observing the Three Characteristics

We use wise reflection to contemplate the Dhamma, in particular the three characteristics of existence—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. Contemplating these three characteristics will help to lessen the mental proliferation which normally agitates the mind. Using mindfulness, formal meditation, and now contemplation, this will increase the amount of present moment awareness and decrease the amount of imagining and daydreaming. We will be able to catch all the old memories, moods, and thoughts much more quickly and little by little let them go. The more we can let go of all this mental proliferation, the less stress and suffering.

Contemplate this mind, the mind which tends to proliferate and fantasise, straying into past and future. We should train ourself to see things as not sure, as changing, as impermanent. No matter how much we try to plan out the future, it never turns out the way we think. A lot of time can be wasted in this kind of thinking. But because we are still obstructed by delusion, these

mental formations are continuously occurring. So the skilled practitioner keeps watching the mind, seeing through all this proliferation as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. If we look for a self, a person, a being, any solid me or other in this mental proliferation, it won't be found. This is called using impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self as our object of meditation.

Ajahn Chah would say that using the three characteristics as a meditation object gives rise to true wisdom. It has the strength to change the wrong views and distortions of the mind. But if wisdom is not arising in its fullest, it's because our concentration is not strong enough. In that case we have to go back and reestablish our awareness on the in- and out-breaths, giving the mind time to rest in the calm of concentration.

If we are doing too much contemplation without first calming the mind, we'll find the thinking becoming restless and excessive, and that we're only watching the mind proliferating. This isn't the correct way of contemplation. So again we have to come back and make the mind peaceful, giving it time to rest and to regain its strength. Whichever method we use to settle the mind, whether mindfulness of breathing, *mett* meditation, recollection of the Buddha or death contemplation, they all bring us the same result.

14

Going beyond Calm

If we keep practising like this, regularly meditating and developing mindfulness in daily life, then sooner or later we will reach a point where we sit down to meditate and experience a sense of great peace. We feel light in body and the mind seems to gather together and drop all its usual worries and concerns, becoming very still and concentrated. This is the result of all the effort put into developing mindfulness.

Concentration is the foundation, but we must go beyond the calm of concentration and use its power to develop wisdom. Up to now we've found wisdom coming from hearing and listening. This is wisdom coming from the discussion of concepts and things, from asking and answering questions, from knowledge of the scriptures. This is a certain kind of wisdom, but it is wisdom that depends on the dimension of memory and thoughts. This kind of wisdom plays a certain function and gives one level of understanding, but the true Dhamma that the Buddha taught comes from the pure mind, the enlightened mind, the awakened mind. By putting

the teachings into practise and gaining concentration we can experience genuine wisdom. This is clear-seeing rather than the more thinking-based reflection done in the preliminaries of the practice. The wisdom that arises through concentration has the strength to overcome the unwholesome habits and tendencies of the mind. And so when we look over the books again our understanding is real, because we have experienced it for ourself.



15

Bringing the Practice Home

When you come home each day, develop an attitude of one who is dedicated to the practice. Try not to bring all your worries and concerns about work home with you; when you come home try to set them aside. If you have a little altar or shrine at home, you might find some time to bow and do a little bit of chanting, just to put yourself in a good space. And of course do some meditation as well. Try to develop the self-discipline and motivation to do this on a regular basis. Because if you develop it as a regular habit, you'll find that you're always refreshing your efforts in the practice, refreshing your confidence in the teachings.

As long as we keep up that sincere effort, there will be some good energy there. Even if we're not perfectly peaceful yet, we'll find that we remain inspired. This will give us the ability to resist the normal moods and unwholesome mind states that we might otherwise get caught into. What we must be careful of, though, is becoming lazy or overly-distracted. If we don't develop good habits and self-discipline, the practice can become very patchy,

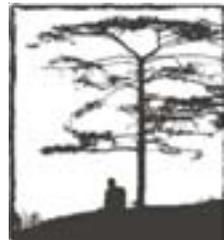
meaning sometimes we do it and other times not. Gradually the unwholesome habits of the mind have a chance to take over again, and even when we do come to meditate the mind is caught up in distracted thinking and proliferation. Eventually we'll start to feel that it's not worth it, that the practice isn't getting anywhere, and maybe give it up. So we have to maintain that motivation. Find ways to keep putting effort into the practice, however small, because it will always help to energise the mind and bring up motivation. As long as you have that then you'll keep on practising.

Before I became a monk I had a regular job. I'd go to work and come home in the evening. But because I saw the value of meditation, I always tried to make time in the evening to put some effort into the practice. However tired and exhausted I felt, I would still try to set aside one hour for chanting and meditation. And I found that just by putting in that effort, some days I would be calm and peaceful and all the feelings of tiredness would disappear. I felt refreshed from my practice, and that inspired me to keep doing it. Keeping up our motivation and wholesome efforts, we'll find that mindfulness and wisdom will steadily grow.



MINDFULNESS

The Heart of the Practice



In the practice of Dhamma all we need is mindfulness.
Everything in the world will then become clear.

Ajahn Bua Siripuno

16

Present Moment Awareness

The reason it is difficult for us to maintain awareness of the present moment is that since we've been born, we've been trained in thinking and remembering. And this use of the thinking mind takes us away from the present moment. This is where the problem lies, where the crux of the matter is, because we have been training in not being in the present moment. And the result is confusion and discontent. What's more, all of this associative thinking based on different memories and concepts creates an identity to attach to, worsening the problem. So developing enough awareness to really stay in the present moment...we have to be patient and give it time. One year, ten years, maybe even longer. The important thing is to start practising.



17

From Moments to Minutes

Remember that mindfulness always begins with brief, separate moments. It's like when we turn on a tap. At first the water slowly drips out: drop...drop...drop...but soon those drops join together to become a steady flow of water. Similarly, at first there might be just occasional flashes of mindfulness, but if we work at it, these moments will join up and become a continuous stream. We can achieve this by putting effort into being mindful of physical things: our posture, our activities, our breathing, or whatever else we are presently doing.

At any time, in any posture, we can develop the same qualities as in formal meditation. The main thing when practising mindfulness is restraining the mind, not letting it fall into the usual mental proliferation or distraction that takes it away from the present moment. This means letting go of thoughts about the future—planning, worrying—and letting go of different thoughts about the past. When we are doing a job and practising mindfulness, we just bring our mind to focus on that job. And if we learn to do this in

daily life, we'll find that we're bringing up mindfulness at all times. When we come to sit mediation our mind will already be calm, composed and prepared. Our formal meditation will go better as a result.



18

Bringing it Back (Again and Again)

We must always be developing mindfulness. When problems arise, either at work or home, the tendency will be to start proliferating about that, becoming upset and agitated. So when we see ourself getting lost in different thoughts and worries, we have to bring the mind back to the present moment as quickly as we can, focusing on the task at hand. And maybe wait until the mind is calm and concentrated again, reestablished with present moment awareness, before considering the aspects of whatever went wrong. “Why did this happen? If I made a mistake, what was it? How can I keep it from happening again?” These kinds of reflections can be brought up once the mind is calm. But we probably don’t want to do that straight away, while we’re still wound up in the whole situation.

At first our job is just to bring the mind back to awareness of the present moment and not get caught into too much stress about it. If we practise like this we’ll see that our real task is to learn how to quickly establish mindfulness. When we notice we’ve lost mindfulness, getting caught into different moods and

emotions, the practice is about recognising that and then reestablishing awareness in the present moment. And how skillfully we do that...that's how well our practice is going.



19

Like Training Water Buffaloes

When we attach to thoughts that arise in the mind, these become karma. Sometimes when we are practising, unskillful thoughts come into the mind. They come quickly and seem to be uncontrollable, so what can we do? We must keep reestablishing mindfulness to catch them as they arise. We must try to stay on top of what we are thinking. The mental state we are currently experiencing: Is it skillful or unskillful? If we know it is unskillful, then let it go. Use that awareness to realise that it will bring harm and suffering, and let it go. It then hasn't made any bad karma yet. Actually, it is good karma in that we are establishing mindfulness and letting it go.

Ajahn Chah would compare this to a farmer and his water buffalo. The farmer knows he has to keep a close watch over the buffalo at all times, because if he doesn't, it will head straight for the rice plants and ruin his crop. If the farmer loses mindfulness, the buffalo will destroy the whole field. It's the same with the mind. If we don't keep a close guard over it, it will chase after all the mental impressions that arise.

Whatever we do, whether in daily life or in the monastery, the task is to maintain mindfulness, to keep on watching and knowing any impressions that come into the mind. Investigate what kind of state the mind is in. Is it experiencing happiness? Sadness? Displeasure? Restlessness? Whether it's rapture, calm or wisdom, we just keep on watching, knowing whatever is present in the mind. Whatever we experience, we should repeatedly remind ourselves that it isn't permanent, it's not sure. Whenever we experience feelings of suffering—hatred, anger, stress or fear—our task is the same. We must teach and remind ourselves, even admonish ourselves. “Hey, Suffering, you're not permanent! I'm not the owner of you! If you're going to suffer, well go ahead and suffer! Follow your own course, I'm not getting involved!” This is having present moment awareness to continually guard and train the mind.



20

Committing to Mindfulness

It's important to get the right attitude and motivation with practice. Often this means just trying to begin the day in the right way. When you get up in the morning, really say to yourself that, "Today I want to practise, doing all my duties and activities in a mindful way. I want to try to develop mindfulness as much as I can. If I meet with any difficult situations, difficult people who test my patience, bringing up moods of irritation, anger or aversion, I'm not going to give into those moods. I'll be patient and practise mindfulness with whatever difficulties I encounter."

Try and set up this attitude ahead of time so that when you get to work you have the right frame of mind. Also, be looking for times and occasions when you can practise mindfulness in a more direct way—while working, during little breaks, in the lunch hour, at different times. You might find it helpful to occasionally take a few minutes just to compose the mind and bring it back to the breathing before you carry on again with your duties.

Ajahn Chah always emphasised that the main thing is not

to stop, not to give up. Keep going, keep practising, developing mindfulness in every posture, every moment. The development of mindfulness is very much like building a dam. Once we build a dam then we can prevent water from flowing all over the place and channel it to be of use. In the same way, mindfulness helps to restrain unwholesome tendencies of the mind and assists the practice of meditation. You'll find that when you're sincerely committing yourself to the practice, you'll become more aware of what you're saying and doing throughout the day. Both in work and family, you'll be able to observe your mind better from moment to moment, sending results out through the rest of your life.



21

The Wisdom of Patience

When we've heard about the attainments that come from the practice, this can make us very impatient to see results. But we have to see that it is like planting a tree. If we plant a tree and just keep looking at it wondering when it is going to grow up, then of course we won't be very peaceful. We have to realise that these things take time; they have to grow and develop in their own way. Keep practising, keep putting in the wholesome effort, and don't be disheartened if at times you're not peaceful. Sometimes we may feel that, "Oh, the mind isn't very concentrated or mindful. I'm not getting anywhere. I might as well just give up." This is just the tricks of the mind. As we keep putting effort into mindfulness, it's like giving water to that tree to support its growth. When we have faith in the teachings and put time into the practice, the mind will soon become peaceful and our doubts will drop away.



22

Arriving Home

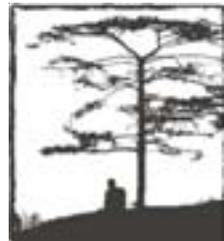
A house is a place for rest and shelter. We go out, work and do things, but then we come back to our house, our home. It's a place where we can rest that protects us from the elements outside, the sun, wind, rain and cold. But we also have our inner home, and that is the heart. It also needs its place of rest, protection from the mental heat of stress and suffering we experience as human beings.

For this we need the shelter of the Dhamma. This is the truth we develop in our heart, our protective shade from the effects of living in the world. The way we do this is by putting the teachings into practice on a daily basis, developing ourself in generosity, virtue, mindfulness and wisdom. And with the calm and peace that these qualities bring, we can reflect on our experience to see why we suffer and how to let go.



MOTIVATION

Why Practise?



People should think about what their lives
will be like if they don't do meditation.
What will their hearts be like then?
And what will they have developed
in their hearts to carry on to the next life?
Because the next life is only as good as we make it in this life.
If you don't take advantage of your opportunity
to do meditation in this life, why should you
expect to get the same opportunity in the next life?
You may not get such a good chance again.

Ajahn Pa va ho

23

Searching for Something Real

Even if we seek out all the pleasures and material comforts that the world has to offer, one day we will have to leave it all behind. When we really contemplate this, we can clearly see that these things we search for have no real, lasting essence. The motivation to practise comes from searching for something that is real and lasting. That thing is enlightenment, *nibb na*. It's an unchanging happiness that never dies, the perfect place of peace.

It's natural when we begin to practise that there will be uncertainties and doubts about some aspects of the teachings. But what we should do is keep an open mind and carry on practising. We don't have to fully believe or fully reject. We learn to internalise the teachings and develop our own understanding through the practice. Ultimately that is the place where we can understand these truths, in our own mind.



24

A Sense of Separation

The mind's natural tendency is to grasp at whatever it contacts, whatever object it experiences. Between the eye seeing forms, the ear hearing sounds, the nose smelling odours, the tongue tasting flavours, the body contacting various tangible feelings, and mental impressions arising, we can see how much sense contact and stimulation goes through the mind in just one day. Whether at work or in a quiet place of meditation we are usually overrun by sense impingements. If we have no awareness at these points of contact, the mind will continuously chase after and cling to these impressions.

However, if we develop mindfulness at this point, we'll experience a coolness, a detachment from sense impressions. The more we maintain a sense of separation—the mind cool and observing things as they are—the less we'll keep falling into moods of attraction and aversion that have a very hot effect on the mind. Whether it is moods based on greed, anger or delusion, they heat the mind up, confuse it, and bring it to discontent. Ajahn Chah

said this is where we have to contemplate, to really watch this process and see how suffering arises.

So in the practice of developing mindfulness and wisdom, our task is observing the mind. Every moment that there is sense contact we observe the mind. When our eyes see forms, our ears contact sounds, our tongue contacts taste, our nose contacts smells, our body has touch and the mind itself contacts concepts and ideas, we observe this process where attraction or aversion arise. This is where we have to learn to establish mindfulness and watch over the mind with a sense of detached knowing. Just as a child needs somebody to watch over it, to teach and protect it, so it is with the mind. Because an unguarded mind will get itself into all sorts of trouble.

If we keep developing and bringing up mindfulness, then we'll see the true nature of every mental state, every mood, and every thought as something that is not sure. If we like something—it's not sure, it can change. If we dislike something—it's not sure, it can change. We love, we hate: all these different moods we have are impermanent. They aren't anything real, anything substantial that we should believe in or attach to. If we see this truth and keep applying mindfulness and wisdom in daily life, the unwholesome mental tendencies which lead to stress and suffering will begin to lose their power over us. And as they keep fading away and disappearing, we keep replacing them with more mindfulness and

wisdom, bringing the mind to a state of peace. When we see this result from our practice, then we'll know, "Ahh, so *this* is the way...I *am* able to develop more calm and clarity in my life." This is what keeps us practising, moving towards the realisation of the end of suffering. This is the purpose of the practice.



25

The Fullness of the Dhamma

One time a group of Korean Buddhists came to visit Ajahn Chah. They had been visiting many teachers around Thailand asking the same set of questions: “Why do we practise the Dhamma? How do we practise the Dhamma? And having practised the Dhamma, what result can we expect from the practice?” But Ajahn Chah didn’t just answer directly, he answered by giving them another set of questions. He said, “Why do you eat food? How do you eat? And having eaten, how do you feel?”

This made the group very happy. It was an answer that they had never received before, but they quickly understood what he was pointing to and were very satisfied. They understood that we eat because we are hungry, we eat by taking the food and consuming it, and once we’ve eaten we feel full and our hunger is gone. Similarly, we practise because we are suffering, we practise by taking the Buddha’s teachings and following them, and once we’ve finished the practice we reach the point where all our suffering is gone.

26

The Bigger Picture

Whenever we experience any difficulties or problems in life, we can see this as karma, as the fruits of our actions. But on a more profound level, we can say that this is simply the suffering of life. The Buddha talked of the Four Noble Truths, the First being that there is stress and suffering associated with living in this world. And we can see in the broader picture that these kinds of things happen—we have to earn a living, find food and shelter, interact with others, and with this we have obstacles and challenges that come up. This is part of our situation as a human being, we have to live in this world and there is stress and suffering associated with that. So just be aware of this. What we are doing is bringing up awareness of the unsatisfactory side of life. And along with that awareness, wisdom can arise.

But this First Noble Truth is warning us as well. When we reflect on the suffering of life, we are also getting a warning that it's probably not the only time it will arise—that there will be more cases like this. At the very least we all have to get older, bringing

discomfort, sickness, and one day, death. So when we reflect wisely on a situation where suffering has arisen, what this is doing is giving us the understanding which keeps our mind peaceful in these different situations. In this way we see the whole picture, including the unsatisfactory side of our existence as human beings. We are no longer lost in wanting everything to be perfect when it can't be. We're making our suffering into something useful by contemplating it, seeing it for what it is. This is wisdom.



27

The Dhamma is Always Here

We could compare the Dhamma with the nature that surrounds us here at the monastery. Trees and mountains all around. But before we knew of this place perhaps we didn't realise there were trees and mountains here, very peaceful, quiet surroundings. It's only after we come here and look around that we can see, "Oh...it's like *this*."

The Dhamma is the same. It is always here, but most of the time we don't see it. What the Buddha did is rediscover that Dhamma, revealing the truth of our existence and then teaching it to others. And though the teachings have been preserved in the books and scriptures, what the Buddha was pointing to is just the true nature of reality—that all conditioned things arise and pass away.

All things arise dependent on certain conditions, and when those conditions change they cease. That's a very simple teaching but also very profound. It affects all aspects of life, both the material and the mental world. Over and over again the Buddha said to

look within to see this truth. It's there all the time, but we have to look into our own mind and understand it there.

Most people try to find happiness by developing the world materially. We develop our countries, our cities, the economy, and every other aspect of our lives on this external, material level. But too often we are not looking inwardly, which is the way to true peace of mind. This body and mind are conditioned things that arise and pass away. Anything which is subject to change cannot be held on to. When the mind sees this, it can begin to let go.



28

Arising and Passing Away

Since everything in the world simply arises, remains, and then passes away, how could it bring us any lasting happiness? We have to ask ourselves, “Have we ever experienced happiness in the past? Have we ever experienced pleasure? Pain? Suffering?” We can see that these feelings simply arise, remain, and then pass away. There is no permanent core to any of it, no real, abiding self.

Contemplate impermanence in this body. Contemplate the changing nature of this body as it grows and ages. Even from moment to moment we can see change, can't we? We breathe in and then we breathe out. Just that much is teaching us that this body is impermanent. Or we can contemplate on the long term, seeing how this body evolves from infancy to adulthood to old age and eventually goes on to death. We can contemplate to see the weakness of this body and the pains and discomfort that come through illness. All of this is showing us impermanence. Ultimately this body cannot last. When we contemplate like this, we come to understand truth. And it applies to the whole world around us.

A very skilled carpenter can make something elaborate and beautiful, sturdy and long lasting, but in time it still has to deteriorate, break apart and crumble away. Things like machinery or engines, even if they are made out of strong steel, still wear out and break down. They have to degenerate. All the substances and things of the world—vehicles, houses, halls, trees, hills—they all come into existence, remain for awhile, and then at the end of their life span break down and crumble away. This is just the normal course of things.

Life is precious but very uncertain. We have had the good fortune to be born into the world as human beings, and yet we don't know how long we will live. So we should make use of our time while we still have it, being careful and heedful, doing good. As we develop ourself in beneficial ways, practising generosity, virtue and meditation, we will fulfill our potential as human beings. When we think like this, and consider that we don't know how long we have in this life, then there's no time to be careless. The Buddha said that one who lives carelessly doesn't follow the Dhamma. It's as if they are already dead.



29

Letting Suffering Become Our Teacher

When we face suffering in life, it's important to contemplate to gain a balanced view. Everyone, without exception, is subject to old age, sickness, death, and various other kinds of suffering. Life does have its imperfections. There are many aspects of our personal life and the world around us that are unpleasant, and sometimes that may be due to our own mistakes. But the thing that can make the world perfect is this path of practice. If we apply mindfulness and wisdom to our problems, the mind will come to see and accept the truth of existence. This is the way to peace and an end of suffering.

In the time of the Buddha there was a woman named Kisa Gotami who fell into great suffering after the death of her newborn son. Overcome with grief and not knowing what else to do, she brought the child to the Buddha.

“Can you help me?” she asked. “My baby has died and I want to bring him back to life.”

“I can help you,” the Buddha said, “but I’ll need a special ingredient. You must go and find me a mustard seed from a house where nobody has died in the last hundred years.”

She readily agreed and went about asking people if they had a mustard seed. At every house they would rush to fetch her one, but then she would also ask if anyone had died there in the last hundred years. And they would always reply that of course someone had. Grandmothers, uncles, mothers, children—somebody had always died. In the end the woman couldn’t find a single house untouched by death. Suddenly she realised what the Buddha was teaching her, that yes, life is impermanent, we must all pass away. We must all come to separation from the people that we love. And as she accepted the truth of this, right view and wisdom were established in her mind.



30

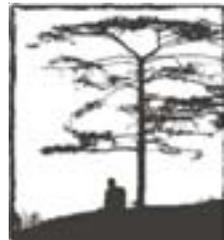
The Time is Now

Reflect on how quickly life passes by, day by day, month by month, year by year. Right now we are alive, look back...look back to the past that has already gone by. Each day, each month, each year...gone in a flash! Life doesn't last long. It's like dew on the tip of a blade of grass. When the sun rises, it dries up and vanishes. Or like foam on the ocean waves. These things arise, and in a short time they disappear. As soon as we are born, we are moving towards old age. Old age is followed by illness, illness is followed by death. It doesn't take long. The Buddha warned us to not be heedless. Whatever your age, don't be heedless. Even as a child, life is not certain. We can die before our time, not even getting to grow old. The days and nights keep passing by, passing by. Right now what are we *really* doing?



VIRTUE

Guidelines for Life



There is no treasure more valuable in this world
than someone well-established in virtue.

Ajahn Mah Bua asampanno

31

The Value of Goodness

The peace that arises from *sila*, virtue, is indispensable for developing concentration. If our moral conduct is shaky, then the mind will be shaky as well. There will be remorse, regret, and various other kinds of mental states which keep concentration from arising. And when concentration is weak, it is very difficult to see into the truth of things. It is important to see the value of virtue in this way.

The whole path of practice, right from the beginning, supports the arising of true peace and happiness. Practising generosity and kindness in daily life brings one kind of happiness to the mind. The practice of virtue, developing care and attention around our speech and actions, brings a deeper kind of happiness. And the practice of meditation brings a kind of happiness that is deeper yet.

The cultivation of Dhamma practice is like planting a tree. If you are living in a place where there is a lot of hot sunshine and no shelter, this will cause discomfort. But if you plant a tree and water it and look after it, that tree can grow up to bring you shade and protection from the hot sun. In the same way, by developing

generosity, virtue and meditation, we're provided with protection from the heat and suffering of the world. Without them it's like having nothing to protect us, nothing to give us shade.



32

A Foundation for the Heart

Whether matters of work or family, the Buddha gave us advice for going about them in a beneficial way. He taught us to be diligent in all our duties and responsibilities. He taught us to live harmoniously, developing an attitude of well-wishing and consideration for others. He taught us to be generous with our earnings and possessions, allowing us to give up our more selfish desires. All of these guidelines will aid our spiritual development.

It's important to understand the value of building a strong foundation in goodness. Just as when we build a hall we first need a strong foundation, in the practice of Dhamma we need a strong foundation within our heart. We should try to sincerely commit ourself to living harmlessly by keeping moral precepts and cultivating feelings of kindness and forgiveness for others. The mind will then have a sense of renunciation, learning how to give up attachment to the world for a higher good. Living in this way lifts up the level of our mind, giving rise to inner peace and happiness. This is called *sila* and forms the foundation of Dhamma practice.

33

Sîla

We have to begin with a foundation of *sîla*. This is very important. At first, we may find this aspect of the practice difficult, and it can even seem like it is increasing our sense of suffering. But if we have patience and stick with it, the result will be greater happiness throughout our life. The moral precepts are teaching us to be very careful, very mindful of what we say and do. Relying on them as a standard will stop the unwholesome mental tendencies from displaying themselves in our speech and actions. In other words, they stop us from creating suffering on the coarsest level.

By using these guidelines to live in a skillful way, we will discover a sense of moral shame and wholesome fear of wrongdoing. And once we have established this restraint in our heart and we're being very careful how we act and speak, immediately we'll gain happiness from that. This is happiness experienced as a sense of spaciousness and radiance of mind. It is the freedom from remorse and unwholesome tendencies.

34

A Standard for Living

The most basic level of *s la* is the five precepts. These are five simple guidelines we undertake to help us live in a way where we are not harming ourselves or others. They are:

1. To refrain from killing or harming other beings;
2. to refrain from stealing, taking what is not given;
3. to refrain from sexual misconduct;
4. to refrain from speech which is untruthful, speech which is divisive, speech which is coarse and unpleasant, and speech which is frivolous;
5. to refrain from taking alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants which lead to heedlessness.

Normally we follow the five precepts as our basic standard, but when we have the opportunity we can take on the eight precepts as a way of increasing our effort. Keeping the eight precepts is a form of renunciation. We don't eat after midday, leaving more time for meditation and eliminating the burden of having to look for food.

We make a determination not to engage in any kind of sexual activity or spend time listening to music and other forms of entertainment. We don't bother with make-up, jewelry or perfume, and abstain from resting on overly-comfortable beds which would cause us to indulge in sleep. When we keep the eight precepts we give up these small, external forms of happiness for the sake of dedicating ourselves to the practice of Dhamma. Just keeping them for a day can bring great benefit, helping to prepare the mind for the practice of meditation and spiritual development.



35

Right View

The Noble Eightfold Path begins with Right View, which includes an understanding of karma. Knowing what is wholesome karma and what is unwholesome karma, what will lead us to happiness and what will lead us to suffering—it all starts in the mind with our intentions and thoughts. If our thoughts are skillful, our speech and actions will be skillful following that, which will bring us happiness. If our thoughts are unskillful, then our speech and actions will be unskillful, and this will bring suffering. We can see in society that when people do get caught into situations where they're suffering in different ways, it usually stems from wrong views and a lack of understanding about karma. The results they are experiencing are often just a product of their own unskillful words or actions.

When we have Right View, understanding the law of karma, it will always keep the mind cool. This is the way of Dhamma. When we go the other way, falling into wrong views and negativity, the result is that we feel hot. But if we understand the suffering

that comes from having thoughts based in greed, anger and delusion, we'll see the value of not following them. Even though we can't yet stop them from arising, by establishing ourself in *s la*, carefulness and restraint, we can prevent them from spilling out into our external behaviour.

Without the presence of *s la* in our life, we will have nothing to direct us. When we have to make decisions—finding the right way to speak and act—we won't have any guidelines to follow. So being well-established in *s la* is like having a compass to guide us through life. Whether in the practice itself or more general issues, we will be able to avoid creating suffering for ourself and others. This is the importance of *s la*.



36

The Gift of Giving

As our practice develops, it may be that others criticise us for trying to let go of attachment and desire. They think it's not normal, so they say, "You're strange and foolish if you don't want anything in life." But we have to understand that there are different levels of desire. Working in the world, one earns money in order to buy things. And as long as we are doing that within the boundaries of *s la*, not harming or taking advantage of others, then there is nothing wrong with that. On the refined level, we would still call it desire in the sense of wanting to get things. But on the level of *s la*, it is not unwholesome. It is not going beyond the boundaries of moral conduct.

As we progress in our practice, we come to see the value of practising generosity, sharing what we have. We can do charitable things like feeding homeless people, donating blood, assisting the elderly, supporting disaster relief and offering financial aid to worthwhile causes. We can also support the Sangha with the four requisites: food, shelter, clothing and medicine. As we nourish their

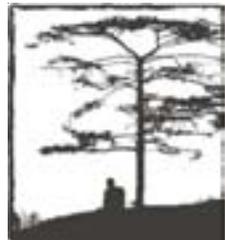
bodies, they nourish our hearts by teaching us Dhamma. And as we practise giving away and sharing, we will find a sense of contentment arising. Even so, others may say, “This is strange. Why do you give away your possessions and money like that?” We may just have to accept that perhaps they don’t see the value in it yet. But if we contemplate this, we can see that if we put all our energy into making more and more money, then we would have no time left for our spiritual practice. Reflecting in this way with wisdom, we may come to question the idea of placing work first, of accumulating more material wealth and possessions.

This spiritual wealth we are accumulating, we can see for ourself that it’s worthwhile, that it makes us happy. Faith, renunciation, generosity, virtue, wisdom—these qualities that we develop through the practice will follow us beyond death. And as for what other people say, we just have to accept that these are their views. It’s alright for them to have their own views, because the happiness we get from the practice is right there in front of us. Even if they say we are foolish, we don’t need to worry. We already know for ourself, “This is not foolish. It is wise.”



KARMA

Actions and Their Results



Obviously there is a root cause
for all the goodness and evil,
all the happiness and suffering experienced
by people everywhere in the world.
Karma exists as a part of our very being.
We create karma every moment,
just as the results of our previous karma
arise to affect us every moment.

Ajahn Mun Bh ridatta Thera

37

Karma Here and Now

What makes people come into this world in the way they do? Some people are born into a rich, harmonious family, strong and healthy. Others are born into poverty or disease. Others are born in a place with war, famine and other problems. Why is that? Why do we have different character traits? We are born into the world with different characters, with different ways of thinking. Is this karma?

The question of past and future lives, beings reborn according to their karma, has been an issue for thousands of years. Often people in the world have the view that there is nothing after death. It doesn't matter what we do, we may as well do whatever we want, because when we die we won't have to face any sort of consequences. These views inform the way people live. And it's almost impossible to prove this matter to someone who is skeptical about past and future lives, because it's not something we can bring out and show them in that way.

When people asked Ajahn Chah this question, he would say that actually it's not something we need to prove. The place to

learn and understand this issue is in the present life. We can look at it this way: if we live in a virtuous way, trying to cultivate goodness and conduct our lives skillfully, what will result from that? The result will be our own happiness and the ability to help create a happy society around us. Even if there's only this life, if when we die that's the end of it, then there is still no loss because we have experienced happiness in this life from our good actions. And if there is such a thing as karma, then the goodness of all we have done in this life will not be lost, but will carry on to bring us happiness in future lives as well. On the other hand, if we live in an unskillful way—anti-socially, aggressively, exploiting or harming others—we can look at the results right in this present life. What we will find is a lot of suffering and confusion for ourselves and the people around us. And if there is such a thing as future lives and fruits of our karma...well, it's not going to be good, is it?

Still, we only need to focus on this very life. What are we doing right now? The way we conduct ourselves, our attitudes, our views, the way we think, everything. This is bringing results right now and we can see it happening. So the important thing is to understand our own mind. This is the place to practise, this is the emphasis. It is not something we have to project into the future, seeing heaven or hell or even *nibbana* as some kind of distant state. Instead we can look at our mind and see that the causes for happiness and suffering or heaven and hell are arising right here, right now.

They are not something external or far away. We are practising for happiness and liberation right in the present moment.



38

Karma is Action

Karma is made through intentional acts of body, speech and mind. Wholesome intentions arising in the mind will lead to wholesome speech and actions, while unwholesome intentions will lead to unwholesome speech and actions. We could say that this is what governs the world—the collective karma of all beings. Every individual is making karma each moment, and this is what leads to the cycle of birth and death, that is, continued existence. When we contemplate, we can see the value of making good karma, for the happiness we experience comes from training and bringing up wholesome intentions of body, speech and mind. And this is what Buddhist practice is encouraging us to do. Whatever effort we put into developing ourself in wholesome ways will bring benefit and happiness.

The more we contemplate karma the more we see that we are receiving the fruits of our actions all the time. We've made both good and bad karma in the past, and this is giving results which we experience in the present. When we think about the bad

karma we have made in the past, the important thing is to reflect on it wisely. If we can learn from it and change our ways, that is good. But to keep thinking back and attaching to these negative states of mind is not correct. If we practise mindfulness and develop an understanding of the mind, then we will be able to catch those moments of guilt or depression over the things we have done. We can see those feelings are not helpful to us because the past can't be changed. It is good if we can learn from it and make changes, but other than that there is no point in needlessly suffering by feeling self-aversion or remorse.

The correct way is to apply oneself to developing good karma from now on. We are then creating the causes for happiness and benefit both in the present and the future. This is why we practise. When we understand the importance of karma we will commit ourselves to generosity, keeping precepts and meditation—all for the purpose of gradually raising the level of our mind. As we put effort into the practice, creating more good karma, the result will be more peace within. This is the truly wise and correct thing for a human being to do, to develop him or herself in wholesome ways.



39

No Excuses

Some people think that harmful actions don't always lead to negative results. They think they can get away without any consequences? Is this true?

If people don't see the fruits of their actions yet, it is because of the presence of delusion. They are not very aware. Unfortunately, this doesn't nullify the results of what they are doing or mean that there is no karma at work. Karma is a natural law. It is a natural force that we can see at work all the time. So if people are creating the causes for suffering, then that suffering will come whether they recognise it or not. It is even worse if they don't see the harm in their behaviour, because then they don't recognise how they are causing themselves suffering. But when we do understand karma we can look at our life and say, "Ah, when I speak in this way, when I act in this way, that brings suffering." And because we want to be happy, free from regret and worry, we are motivated to live in a moral way.

40

Dealing with Pests Wisely

How do we deal with insects and pests that come into our home? I don't want to break the first precept or make bad karma.

Practising with the first precept, we establish the clear intention in our mind that we are not going to kill other beings. With the very small creatures, like insects, we just have to do the best we can in each situation. One can use different chemicals and methods to prevent them from entering. We still have that basic intention of not deliberately killing beings, but if in the course of cleaning some insects are harmed, then we have to accept that that's their karma. With bigger animals like rats or mice, we should be able to find humane ways to deal with them. There are certain traps where you put some bait inside and a door closes behind them. They can then be taken a long way away and released.

We have to understand that everything is subject to its karma. It is often very difficult to move around and do things in the world without harming small creatures like insects. Sometimes

it is unavoidable, like when they get squashed on the windscreen while we are driving, or when they fly into a lit candle at night. We are not deliberately harming them. Our intention is not to kill, but it is the way of the world that some of this will occur. So we should not take it as a personal failing, or as if we are making bad karma.

When we are cleaning or sweeping, sometimes a few insects do die. We should see that our intention is not to kill but to keep our place clean. It is unfortunate some of the insects are harmed, but this is very different from using poison and baits to deliberately kill them. With an understanding of karma and intention, we do the best we can to find skillful, humane ways of dealing with pests.



41

Adrift in the Ocean of Karma

Let me tell you about a disciple of mine. He was formerly a fisherman by trade, going out and pulling in boatloads of fish to be sold and killed. In Buddhism, this would be understood as bad karma. One day, far from shore, he was involved in a boating accident which left him drifting in the ocean for three days and three nights, clinging to a piece of wood. We could say that it looked like he was going to receive the results of his unwholesome livelihood, drowning in the ocean and being eaten by fish. Though he assumed he was going to die, he made a very firm vow in his mind: if he did get rescued he would enter the monastic order. It's now been over 15 years since he ordained.

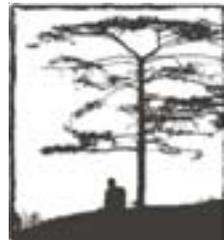
Sometimes crisis situations bring out very wholesome aspirations in people, positive thinking which can quickly get a good result. This can change their lives drastically. Really, though, we should commit ourself to making good karma regularly, not just waiting until times of crisis. Our lives are so uncertain. And since we don't know how long we will live for, we should really

treasure our time. We should try to live as skillfully as we can while we have the chance.



KINDNESS

Being at Ease



My religion is kindness.

The Dalai Lama

42

How to Live in the World

We have to be involved with society. We have duties and work. And although society isn't always peaceful or harmonious, the Buddha taught that the source of this always comes back to the individuals, because their hearts are not in line with truth. As long as people are still caught into different unwholesome tendencies of greed, anger, and delusion, then they are going to speak and act accordingly. And from this problems and misunderstandings arise.

There are various way of dealing with this. In the world we have the laws and regulations of the land. The aim of this is to give people a standard of behaviour that will lead to a peaceful, harmonious society. And when people don't follow the laws, then there are always problems, aren't there? When people follow their own views and opinions, their anger and greed, acting in selfish or aggressive ways, this is where problems that we face in the world arise from.

On the level of Dhamma, however, it's important to realise that everyone has his or her own levels of greed, anger and delusion.

That is something we have to accept and work with. And the way to do this skillfully is: one, to understand that everyone is in that position; and two, to have an attitude of kindness and compassion. This doesn't mean to say we encourage people when they are acting in harmful ways. But we know that's how people are and we don't take it personally. By giving importance to kindness and compassion, we can deal with the day-to-day problems of society in such a way that we don't create more suffering out of them.



43

Willingness to Learn

The Buddha taught how to live in the world in a peaceful and harmonious way. He said that we must develop kindness and a sense of being willing to sacrifice. A husband needs to sacrifice for his wife, a wife for her husband. Parents must sacrifice for their children, and children for their parents. All members of a family should sacrifice for one another. This is the way society functions when it is functioning well. When people are harmonious and living together in peace, there will always be this willingness to sacrifice.

We should also be open to listening to others, especially people who have developed themselves in virtue, concentration and wisdom. They understand what ways of thinking create suffering, and can help point out where we have gone astray. This is why we respect teachers who have practised for themselves, bringing their minds to clarity and insight. They have more experience on how to look after the mind, how to behave correctly, and how to progress in the path of practice. So whatever words of guidance or helpful reflections they give us, we should listen carefully. But this

can apply to our friends and relatives as well. The Buddha encouraged us to be able to communicate with others, to receive reflections and advice. Rather than pushing it away, we consider it carefully and compare it with our own experience.



44

Beyond Judgment

Unless we have perfected mindfulness and wisdom, we will still get caught into liking and disliking. This will often affect our views of other people. When we have attachments and preferences—we like this, we don't like that—then of course that can make us judgmental. Seeing traits that we like we say someone is good, and seeing traits that we dislike we say someone is bad. Based on these parts we may paint the whole picture, deciding that this person is completely good, or that person completely bad. But this is coming from attachment and delusion.

The Buddha said the way to remedy these judgmental tendencies is to come back and look at our own mind. The more we study our own mind, our own life, our own behaviour, the more our view will become clear and unbiased. So first of all, we look at our actions and ask: “Are my actions skillful or unskillful? What are the results of my actions?” We look at our speech: “Is my speech skillful or unskillful? What are the results of my speech?” And then we look deeply into our mind to see what we are thinking.

“Are my thoughts skillful or unskillful? What are the results of my thinking?” As we learn to do this, instead of looking outside and judging the world and the people around us, we will turn inside and look at our own mind. This will bring us in line with the teachings of the Buddha. We will then know for ourselves whether we are using our mind in a way that is skillful or unskillful. This will take us beyond judging others.

And yet some people will still judge us. Whatever we do, some people will say it is right, while others say it is wrong. This is how it is living in the world. But what they say isn't the full story, is it? We have to look at our own mind and know for ourselves. Were our actions skillful or unskillful? Sometimes we do something good, but others still criticise us. If we know from our own investigation that what we did was truly good, then we won't suffer over it. At other times we do something wrong, but other people praise it. Again we have to go back and investigate, asking, “Was it really good or not?” We can't always take the words of others for truth, but by investigating we will know for ourselves.



45

The Value of Good Friends

The Buddha said that good things come from being with good friends. They bring out good traits in us. But try to avoid bad friends. These are the ones that take us off drinking, gambling, and so on, leading to harmful situations. This teaching also applies inwardly. That means to avoid mingling with the negative forces in our own mind, staying with the wholesome thoughts and aspirations instead. If we are doing this well, then our practice will be strong. We will know for ourselves what is going to bring us happiness and what is a good way to live. So even when mixing with other people, if they are caught into wrong views or don't yet understand the path, we still won't be swayed. This is because we are firm, and we understand for ourselves.

The Buddha taught to associate with good, wise people and to avoid those who are foolish or reckless. But sometimes it happens that we have friends with some negative, harmful traits and we want to help them out. The important thing to recognise is that we ourselves have to be in a strong enough position mentally

before we can help. Because if we are still not firmly established in our practice, then of course we will be affected by the people we are with. They influence us, either subtly or directly, and the danger is that we might be swayed by them and lose our way. But if we are strongly established in our practice—we know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong—then even if people have some bad habits, we will not be influenced or swayed. Maybe we will be able to help them a bit, offering advice and support.

Even the Buddha in some of his past lives wasn't yet inspired to practise the Dhamma. He was more interested in worldly things. But in one past life he had a friend who wanted to go listen to the teachings of the Buddha of that era. And our Buddha didn't yet have faith and wasn't interested in going. So the friend grabbed hold of his topknot and said, "You've got to go!" And in India, the topknot of your hair is the highest and most respected thing. People don't just pull it for no reason. His friend literally dragged him there. But when he saw the Buddha, he realised the importance of the teachings and began practising. This is an example of the value of good friends. Sometimes we don't yet see what is important in life, but a good friend can take us towards it.



46

Being a Good (and Wise) Parent

It's helpful to rely on the four sublime abidings—loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity—when dealing with our children. When we bring children into the world, our first instinct is always going to be loving-kindness. We have love for them because they are our children. And one of the foremost qualities of a good parent is that they help without wishing for anything in return. They aren't looking for anything back, they just give. This is correct—we should always have that sense of well-wishing and kindness for our children. Then when they fall into suffering of any kind, compassion naturally arises. We don't want them to suffer and so wish for an end to their suffering. Conversely, when our children meet with any kind of success or happiness in life, we can share in that by feeling happy for them and hoping it continues. And finally, if in certain situations they are having problems but it is beyond our ability to help them, then the correct approach is that of equanimity. We have to understand that everyone is subject to their karma, and our children bring their own karmic

accumulations—habits, characteristics, personality traits—with them into the world.

If our children are having problems but there is nothing we can say or do, then we have to step back. This is equanimity, where we have a sense of balance and patience. We understand karma and accept that at the moment there is not much we can do to change things. “Oh, at the moment the situation is like this. It’s beyond my control.” There is still love for them, but we are not trying to force them to change. Conditions will change on their own.

If our children don’t solve things themselves then maybe later we will be able to teach and help them. But we have to remember, especially in the long term, that things are not certain, that people change. Sometimes children are really good. They have many good qualities, and because of this they are popular. Then they grow up and get married and move away. They have their own families now, their own responsibilities. And that’s it. They have no time left for us because they already have their own duties and obligations.

Other children may start off as being not very ‘good.’ Not very successful, not very responsible. But later on they might be the ones who end up looking after us and helping us most when we are older. I have seen this on many, many occasions. And thinking that the ‘good’ child will stay and look after you and the ‘bad’

child will go away and never help—these are not sure things. They can change one-hundred percent over the course of a life time. So we should remember that. Karma is changeable. People are changeable. It is not the case that everything is going to be fixed as it is forever. When we remember these truths, it helps us to let go a bit more. Our child may have all kinds of good qualities that simply haven't flowered yet. If we can have patience and think in this way, then we don't have to suffer or worry so much. We can let go and just see what happens.



47

Repaying Our Parents

Even if we accumulate great wealth, many possessions, and an esteemed position in society, if we show no gratitude or kindness towards our mother and father, then we are without true wealth. To put it simply, we are without the distinguishing features of a good person.

When we realise the goodness our parents have shown towards us, we should try to repay that goodness with wholehearted effort. They cared for and looked after us for many years, so we can in turn look after them in their old age. And even if they have passed away, we can still benefit our parents by performing good deeds and sharing the merit with them. When we are in school, we should be diligent and put all our efforts into studying and succeeding with the best possible grades, so as to not cause them any anxiety. This will also assist us in finding a good job. Moving from there into the workforce, we then have opportunity to assist our parents financially or with whatever physical help they might need. At this point in our life, we can start to look after our parents

in the way they have looked after us up until now.

Our parents have our best interests at heart and do whatever they can to guide us in life. Sometimes they aren't practising generosity, virtue or meditation, and we worry about their inner welfare. But if we truly want to help them, the best we can do is to develop goodness within ourselves first. When they see the positive results in us, they will naturally be inclined to follow our example.



48

Honouring Gratitude

It's normal that in the course of our relationship with our parents there will be some conflicts and disagreements. But deep in our heart we still have a sense of appreciation and gratitude towards them, even if sometimes negative emotions spill out. So we ask them to forgive us and we also forgive them. Our parents have shown us great kindness throughout their lives. So if at any times we have mistreated them, we should ask wholeheartedly for their forgiveness.

We can also repay our debt to them by being cautious with our speech and behaviour. Since the day we were born they looked after our welfare. They imparted knowledge, raised us, and cared for all our needs. So if we speak or act in a harsh way towards our parents, even the smallest thing can have a great impact. Words take on an extra intensity and meaning when they come from one's own children. This is the love a parent feels for their child.

If our parents have reached a stage where they can no longer look after themselves, it's now the time for us to selflessly give all

the assistance we can. We repay our debt by caring for and looking after them with all the kindness in our heart. And as we perform these types of good, wholesome actions and express our gratitude, then our lives will take on a newfound, inner wealth and meaning. Being supportive of one's parents, the Buddha said, is among the highest blessings.



49

Expecting and Accepting

Old age, sickness and death are the most normal things in the world. We have to expect this and see that they are part of life. The average lifespan is 75 or 80 years old. We should think, “How old am I now? If I’m 45 years old then I’ve got about 30 years to go.” Thinking like this we become aware of the impermanence of life and wake up to the fact that we won’t be here forever.

There was a question of how to cope with the fact that one’s father is very old, lying in bed close to death. In this case the father is 89 years old, so there is no need to cry or to be sad, he’s actually had a very long life. He has outlived the Buddha by nine years already; the Buddha only reached 80. The Buddha said that long life is the positive karmic result of not killing. So this is probably his good karma from the past—not harming or killing animals.

We should be happy if our father has had a long life. But at the same time see that this body and mind are impermanent things which arise and pass away. They don’t stay around forever. We can

expect that as people get older they are going to die. And if their bodies and minds are failing and there is pain and discomfort, we don't want them to have to experience that on and on and on. We might actually feel happy and willing to let them go, wishing that the fruits of their good karma bring them a good, strong body in their next life. Because if they are in a state where they are very ill and suffering, maybe it's more skillful to be ready to let them go.

To do this we have to really contemplate the truth and bring it into our heart. The truth is that our existence as human beings is impermanent, and when we die we have to separate from everything and everyone. If we really accept that, we can be peaceful with this truth. Instead of feeling sad at the death of a loved one, we can know that this is the way of things and be happy for the good they have done.



50

Relating to Pigs and Children

There was once a pig farmer who came to Ajahn Chah and complained, “Oh, the economy, it’s terrible! The price of pork is falling so much! I’m not getting near as much profit as I used to!” And Ajahn Chah said, “Well, I don’t see the pigs complaining! I never see them arguing about the price of their meat...and who are the ones giving up their lives?”

Ajahn Chah often gave simple reflections like these, allowing people to let go of their stress and showing a different way of looking at things. Not only would they get a laugh out of it, but they would also realise that much of the suffering we build up in our mind is not all that we think it is. It’s not always due to others, but rather just our own clinging and attachments.

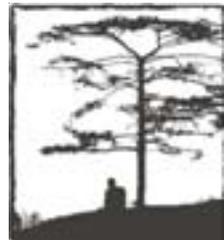
Another time a man came to Ajahn Chah saying, “I’m so stressed trying to look after my children. They are really stubborn and giving me a lot of trouble.” So Ajahn Chah asked, “Well, who wanted the children? Whose decision was it to have the children?” As the man stopped to think, Ajahn Chah said, “Maybe we’ll give

the children fifty percent, and you take fifty percent of the blame as well!”



WISDOM

Insight into Truth



It is wisdom that enables letting go of a lesser happiness
in pursuit of a happiness which is greater.

The Buddha

Dhammapada 290

51

Untying the Knot of Not-Knowing

The Buddha taught that delusion creates the world. When the heart is covered over with delusion, it will bring up a sense of self all the time, identifying with this body, this mind and the experience of the world. We will think that this is mine—my part of the world, my house, my car, my land, my everything. The sense of self is fed by this delusion, this not-knowing. All our desires and attachments flow from this not-knowing, from not understanding truth. So the way of Buddhism is to cultivate the opposite of not-knowing. We cultivate the knowing, the understanding, that comes through continuous awareness. As we develop this continuous awareness, we begin to see the arising of this sense of self and all the desires and attachment that we are normally lost in. When the mind can see that, then it will detach from the normal process of labeling things and creating a sense of self around our experiences. And with that there is no longer anyone who creates the world. There is no one who owns the world. Our old way of looking at things disappears.

52

Seeing Through the Mirage

Wisdom means knowing things as they really are. The mind is used to seeing things wrongly, viewing the world in a distorted way. It is used to seeing what is impermanent as permanent, what is changing as unchanging, what is suffering as happiness, and what is not-self as self. The mind is that which simply knows objects and experiences. When it is not still and peaceful, then it is getting lost in these objects, these mental impressions. This is the point where we get lost in the world and where suffering arises from. But the concentrated mind is peaceful. It knows objects as objects and is not lost.

Ajahn Chah used the simile of a room with only one chair. When guests come, we know that they have come in. But there is only one chair and we are sitting on it already, so the various guests cannot stay. When we always remain on this one chair, the guests will come but then they will have to leave. So it is with a mind strengthened by mindfulness and concentration. Whatever objects come in, the mind will know them. They cannot stay. Knowing

things as they really are, true wisdom begins to arise.



53

Not Ours

The senses and their respective objects are just the way they are according to nature. Eyes are just eyes, sights are just sights. They don't proclaim themselves to be anything at all. It is this sense of self that gives meaning to them by reacting with attraction or aversion. But with mindfulness and clear comprehension keeping up with the process of sense contact, the mind will see in accordance with truth: all phenomena are simply arising, remaining and passing away.

Ajahn Chah frequently taught what he called, “the practice which is never wrong.” This is the practice of restraint, of watching and guarding the six sense faculties—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Whenever we experience the eye seeing forms, the ear hearing sounds, the nose smelling odours, the tongue tasting flavours, the body feeling tactile sensations or the mind experiencing mental objects, Ajahn Chah would teach to contemplate these experiences right at that point, to know them and understand them, seeing them clearly as changing and impermanent.

It's like walking along a road. There might be various things in our way: rocks, sticks or rubbish. But we just clear them aside and keep walking, not letting them worry us. The mental impressions are obstructions as well, but if we quickly clear them away by seeing them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, we keep progressing. When we let go of our attachment to these obstructions, we see that they are simply objects of the mind.

When we experience happiness, we say, "*I am happy.*" We take this state to be ours at that time. But that happiness doesn't last does it? It comes up according to conditions. And as those conditions change and pass, that mood, that feeling will pass as well. Suffering is the same. It comes up according to conditions, and then changes and goes away again. In fact, the whole world is in a constant state of change, arising and passing away, completely beyond our control. If any of this could be taken as "mine," then it should be able to remain the way we want it to. But it doesn't. If there were really a permanent self, we would be able to control our moods to maintain them or prevent them from occurring. But we can't. They arise and pass away according to conditions. And because of this they are unsatisfactory. But when we know them all as they arise and pass away, then there won't be any suffering in the mind. We won't attach to them as *my self, my mood, my happiness, my unhappiness.* We will see the truth, realising, "Oh, these don't belong to me." And that's when the mind lets go.

54

The Dynamics of Change

The most obvious place we can observe and contemplate the truth of not-self, or *anatt*, is just with our own breath. Anytime we turn our attention to observe the breath, we can see that it is merely carrying on its function. The breath goes in and then it goes out. It arises, it passes away. And that whole process of the breathing is beyond our control, isn't it? We can't say this breath is ours...whether we say that or not, it just carries on by itself! Anytime we can observe something following its natural function, this is showing us the truth of not-self. Everything that we take as a self, believing, "This is me, this is mine," if we keep investigating we will gradually come to see the truth.

These various parts of the body, are they a self? Pick any part, the teeth, for instance. Ask yourself, are these teeth really me? Are they mine? When they fall out, are they me? Are they mine? Contemplating this physical form, we see that what we call *my* body comes from the food and drink that we take in which supports the arising of the four elements. As we absorb in more and more of

these four elements, the body grows up from a baby to a child to a youth to an adult. And through delusion we label this as a person, don't we? We say that this is *me*, *mine*, *my* body. But when we investigate the nature of things, we see that this thing that we call a person is impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. The four elements that make up this body are not going to last forever, are they? It's their nature to change and break up, to get old and degenerate, and eventually they'll separate and completely disappear. If we continue to contemplate this with mindfulness and wisdom we'll see that in actuality these four elements are empty, that within them there is no self to be found.



55

We're All in the Same Boat

We have to learn how to contemplate the truth of this life, of this existence. Where do we come from as human beings? We've been in the womb of our mother, literally just a little drop of liquid. And over time more and more of the four elements come together—earth, fire, water and air—growing and developing to form that one little drop into a human being. And straight away our consciousness attaches to this form; we start to see it as a self...as our self. Unfortunately, the attachment to this body leads on to all kinds of worries and suffering, both in the world and in our own life.

Reflect on the unsatisfactoriness of this body. Since it is subject to change, how can it be satisfactory? Just look at our posture. We experience discomfort because we can't remain still. We have to move around from moment to moment, from standing to sitting to lying down and then up again. We walk and then we stop. If we didn't change our posture, the pain would quickly become intolerable, wouldn't it? We don't normally contemplate these things.

This body just keeps getting older and older. Although we may do the best to look after ourselves, no matter what we do, as time passes the body naturally degenerates getting illnesses and pains. This body is in a constant state of change. The longer we keep using it, the more prone it is to diseases. By the time people reach 80, their brains don't function like they used to, their memory has deteriorated. The bones get frail. The heart, kidneys, lungs, and liver all start to cause trouble. But this is just the natural course of the body. The Buddha taught that all things are impermanent, they cannot last. We cling to the notion that they will be here for a long time, but really, this cannot be.

When we go to hospital, everyone wants to be cured, nobody wants to die. But this just isn't possible. We do our best to treat the body and if it heals we accept that. But if it doesn't we have to accept that, too. Even the doctors have to die. How many doctors have we seen that are over 100 years old? Doctors have the ability to heal people to some extent. But to stop death? This they can't do. Doctors, nurses, they all have to die as well. We all have aging, illness and death as a part of nature.

If we have an eye, we are subject to diseases of the eye. If we have a liver, we are subject to diseases of the liver. When we have arms and legs, then there will be pain in the arms and legs. When we have bones, then there we will be aches and pains within our bones. This is just the nature of the body—to be subject to pain

and disease. We have to realise that we cannot control or command it. If we could, we wouldn't let it get old, get sick, break apart or die. When we are born we don't see the old age, sickness and death that is inherent within birth. But birth is the very condition that leads to old age, which leads on to pain. When one is very old and pain and suffering is at its peak, the physical form will then break apart and fade away. Conventionally we call this death.



56

A Mind Unbound

In the beginning we are still strongly bound by a sense of self, which in essence is delusion, not-knowing. There is craving and clinging encircling the mind. Now, if delusion, craving and clinging *were* the mind, then there would be no way for us to purify our minds and make them serene and clear. But the mind and the mental defilements are separate entities. These defilements have gradually moved in and taken the mind from its natural state. They have been with us for so long that it is beyond the scope of what we can comprehend.

The original mind is pure and radiant. And even now we will notice that at times our mind is free from greed, anger and delusion. So how do delusion, craving and clinging originate within the mind? Where do they arise from? They come in through the sense organs, namely the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. If the mind gets caught into attraction or aversion at these points of contact, the defilements arise simultaneously. But if we can maintain a state of detached awareness, unmoved by attraction and aversion,

then the mind will be beyond the reach of the defilements. This is a mind free from greed, anger and delusion.



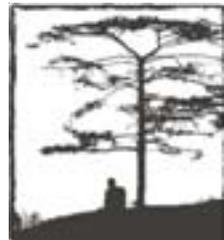
57

The End of All Clinging

When we have generosity, virtue, loving-kindness and the practice of meditation combined, we will be strengthening the power of our mindfulness for our investigation into truth. Look at the mind as just the mind, not a person, being, self, me or others. Even though we may have wholesome states of mind arising, we have to learn to let them go as well, not allowing a sense of self to form. By now you might be confused and think, “If I let everything go, even wholesome states, there’ll be nothing left.” But we must remember that the aim of the practice is to abandon self-identity view. Because if we feel superior to others, this is another cause for suffering. If we cling to the notion that we are better, equal, or inferior to others, this is just self-identity view. Whenever there is self-identity view, there are mental defilements. And wherever there are mental defilements, there will be suffering as well. If we can let go of both the wholesome and the unwholesome, then we will see the mind in its natural state.

LETTING GO

Completing the Path



If you let go a little, you will have a little peace.

If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace.

If you let go completely, you will have complete peace.

Ajahn Chah

58

The Most Important Thing

There was once a layman who came to visit Ajahn Chah. At that time, something was bothering this man and he was really suffering. So he went to seek Ajahn Chah's guidance. When he arrived at the monastery he found him carrying a heavy bucket. Ajahn Chah gave it to him to carry, and then started talking generally about this and that, steering the topic away from the man's problem. Soon he forgot all about what was bothering him. After awhile Ajahn Chah said, "Hey, you've been holding that bucket for a long time, isn't it heavy?"

"It sure is," the man replied.

"Well, if it's heavy, why don't you put it down?"

He put the bucket down, along with the problem that was bothering him.

When you can put down your burdens, the result is great lightness of body and mind. This is the way it is when you let go. When you let go of things, that's when emptiness arises. There's no attachment,

no heaviness, no suffering. Letting go is the most important thing, more important than anything we might hold on to.

Ajahn Chah was a very diligent teacher, always finding skillful means to help people let go of their attachments. In fact, we can say that was the flavour of his teaching—getting people to let go. On the level of morality, letting go of the things that led them to break precepts and make bad karma. On the level of concentration, letting go of thoughts, worries and moods. And then on the level of wisdom, getting them to see the very impermanent nature of all these mental states that we normally take as a self. We say, “I’m stressed. I’m angry. I’m depressed.” But those are actually just conditions of mind. When we see that they are impermanent, we are able to let them go.

Ajahn Chah used to say that people who don’t know very much are actually easier to teach. Generally, the more we know, the harder it is to see the Dhamma. This is because we tend to wrongly attach to our knowledge. We can attach to views about the practice, about different techniques, even to states of calm and happiness that arise. But all that attachment is what we call ego, a sense of self which comes up and blocks our progress. If we cling to these views we will never get to the cessation of suffering. We have to contemplate to see the harm in them and let them go.

59

Unmoved by the World

If we hear somebody criticising us, can we let it go? If someone praises us, how do we feel? Because in reality praise and blame are of equal worth—they are just sound. It's like having a five kilogram piece of gold and a five kilogram piece of rock. We give great value to the gold and don't see any value in the rock. That's the way the mind is. If we find this piece of gold, we will happily pick it up and carry it around with all our enthusiasm, even if it's heavy. But if it's the rock, we're not interested. As soon as we try to pick it up, we complain that it's too heavy and don't want to drag it around. We're not interested in it because we think it has no value. That's how the mind sees things.

But as we progress in the practice, we see these two things as having the same value—both of them are heavy. Whether it's five kilograms of gold or five kilograms of rock, grasping onto either one is equally burdensome. The mental impressions we experience are the same: if we hold onto them they will be heavy. Whether praise or blame, we see them as having the same value, as

impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. Praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, pleasure and pain—these eight worldly conditions are the normal ways of the world. But by seeing them as being of equal value, as empty, they will cease to bring us suffering.



60

Beyond All Conventions

Whoever follows the proper path of practice can let go of his or her attachments. By developing virtue, concentration and wisdom, we're taking the mind to a place of clarity where it can see the true nature of all things. There's just pure understanding, pure insight, beyond the normal conventions of reality that we attach to. It takes us beyond being a layperson, beyond being a monk or nun, beyond gender, beyond age.

When we see beyond these conventions of existence, this is when liberation will arise within the mind. It becomes free of all clinging and attachment to mental impressions. Once it is no longer lost in mental impressions, it is no longer deluded by the world. Ajahn Chah used to give a simile of water. When the mind clings to mental impressions, it's like adding drops of dye to clear water. Whichever colour dye we put in, the water changes colour accordingly. But if we take the dye out, the water returns to its clear, natural state. Whether greed, aversion, delusion, love, hate, stress, fear—whatever the mind experiences, it gets coloured by these

states. But a mind that sees the arising and passing of mental impressions does not get lost in them. It is not coloured.

If our mindfulness is weak we will cling to these impressions. This is what sustains *sa s ra*—the cycle of birth and death. This cycle is sometimes happiness on the level of heaven, sometimes suffering on the level of hell. Our physical body only experiences one birth that will last many years, but the mental births arise in rapid succession. In one day the mind can experience so many ups and downs, so much change, so many ‘lifetimes.’ This can be seen as so many births and deaths in just one day. A mind without clinging, though, can experience real happiness, clarity, and a sense of lightness and freedom. It can uproot this sense of self that has kept us deluded for an inconceivable length of time.

This is seeing the Dhamma. As the Buddha said, one who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha. And by seeing the Dhamma, one becomes part of the noble Sangha. Whether we are a monk or a nun, a novice or a lay person, these are just conventions. Though we might shave our heads and put on the robes, we are still not yet part of the true Sangha. But with really seeing the Dhamma, this is the real Sangha, the noble Sangha, regardless of whether we are ordained or not. Those who practise the way of virtue, concentration and wisdom are the noble disciples of the Buddha.

Whether lay or ordained, if a person really sees the Dhamma, the mind is bright and pure. This is the mind that is

Buddha. But this doesn't mean one is a 'Buddha;' this Buddha is the state of awakening which comes from following the teachings. Once awakened to this state of mind, one's knowing is complete and perfect. People go on pilgrimage to India, going to see the place where the Buddha was born, the place where he was enlightened, and where he passed away. They do this so as to recollect the great qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, bringing peace and joy to their hearts and the encouragement to practise harder. But when we realise the true Dhamma, this is seeing the Buddha within oneself.

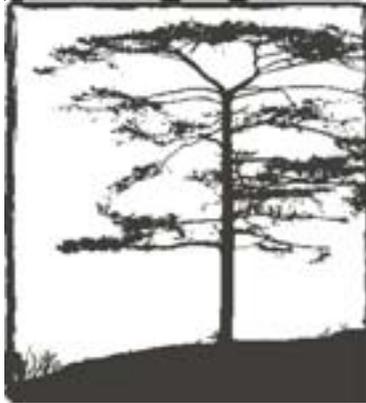


61

We're Already on Our Way

Don't ever overlook the importance of the effort you've been making in your practice, this effort to see the Dhamma. You might think it's only a little, but even a little effort in the Dhamma is so worthwhile. We have to remember that the road to enlightenment is generally a gradual one, but the rate of progress also depends on our karmic situation and where we are in our spiritual development. Maybe it's going to take a bit of time, maybe not. Yet the more we practise, the further we'll go.





Whether in a forest,
a town or open country,
delightful is the dwelling place
of one now fully free.

The Buddha
Dhammapada 98



*The thing that can make the world perfect
is this path of practice. When we apply
mindfulness and wisdom to our problems,
this is the way to peace and the end of suffering.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized letters and a long, sweeping line that extends upwards and to the right.

Ajahn Anan Akiñcano