



FISTFUL OF SAND

*Fistful  
of Sand*

*&*

*The Light  
of Discernment*

the Teachings of

*Phra Ajaan Suwat  
Suvaco*

*(Phra Bodhidhammācariya Thera)*

translated from the Thai by  
*Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*

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questions about this book may be addressed to

Metta Forest Monastery  
Valley Center, CA 92082-1409  
U.S.A.

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## INTRODUCTION

IN THE SUMMER OF 1989, Larry Rosenberg — one of the guiding teachers at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts — invited Phra Ajaan Suwat Suvaco to lead a two-week retreat at IMS the following spring. Ajaan Suwat had been living in the United States for several years at that point, founding monasteries for the Thai communities in the Seattle and Los Angeles areas, but this was his first opportunity to teach large numbers of non-Asian Americans. The retreat was held in the first two weeks of May, 1990, with approximately 100 people attending. I was brought from Thailand to serve as interpreter.

The format of the retreat was simple. The retreatants did sitting and walking meditation from early morning to late at night. There had been a plan to encourage them to do walking meditation in the stately forest behind the center, but the weather was so chilly and rainy throughout the retreat that everyone was confined to the building. One pleasant exception was the evening of *Visākha Pūja* — the holiday celebrating the Buddha's birth, Awakening, and final passing away. This occurred toward the beginning of the retreat, and provided an opportunity for the retreatants to perform a candlelit circumambulation of the IMS complex as a full moon rose in the clear, cold, twilight sky over the pines.

Throughout the retreat, Ajaan Suwat led small group interviews in the afternoon and then met with all the gathered retreatants in the evening, either to give a Dhamma talk or to answer questions. Larry, meanwhile, led individual interviews in the mornings and afternoons. Sadly, the taping of Ajaan Suwat's teachings was rather haphazard. None of the afternoon sessions were taped, and as for the evening sessions, there were days when both the Thai and the English were recorded; other days when only the English was; and other days, nothing. Thus our record of the retreat is fairly haphazard and incomplete.

Still, what was recorded is extremely valuable, as this sort of opportunity — for a Thai ajaan to speak directly to Westerners in their own environment, and for them to ask him questions — is rare. A number of Ajaan Suwat's students have transcribed the Thai portion of the tapes, and this translation is taken from that transcription. I haven't gone back to listen to the English passages on the tapes — which are available for anyone who is interested — partly out of embarrassment at my own shortcomings as an interpreter, but also because I wanted to present the retreat as it sounded to Ajaan Suwat himself: what he heard in the questions as they were translated to him, and what points he was trying to get across.

Although the aim of the retreat was to teach meditation, there were a few instances in which the discussion got off the track into political and social issues.

For the sake of unity, I have deleted these passages from this printed edition. Anyone interested may find them in the Internet version of these transcripts, available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).

A few of the teachings Ajaan Suwat gave during the retreat are etched indelibly in my memory and yet didn't make it onto the tapes, so I'd like to record them here. One was the comment he made to me after the second day of the retreat, on how grim the retreatants were in their approach to the meditation. He admired their dedication, but was worried that they weren't finding any joy in the practice. He attributed this to their coming directly to meditation without having first gained the sense of joyful confidence in the Buddha's teachings and in themselves that can come with a good foundation in generosity and morality. His attempts to lighten the mood of the retreat are obvious in his talks.

Two exchanges in the question and answer sessions also have remained vividly in my mind. One was from an afternoon session. A man new to the practice commented, "You guys would have a good religion here with this Buddhism if only you had a God. That way people would have some sense of support in their practice when things aren't going well." Ajaan Suwat responded, "If there were a God who could arrange that, by my taking a mouthful of food, all the beings in the world would become full, I'd bow down to that God. But I haven't yet found anyone like that."

The second exchange was during an evening session. A woman who had sat several retreats complained to the effect: "I'm finding myself frustrated in my practice of meditation. Now that I've gotten started, I can't turn back, and yet I don't seem to be getting anywhere." Ajaan Suwat's simple response: "Where are you trying to go?"

After a brief moment of silence, the woman laughed and said she was satisfied with the answer.

I hope that the talks and discussions translated here will provide satisfaction for you, the reader, as well.

*Thānissaro Bhikkhu*

METTA FOREST MONASTERY  
OCTOBER, 1999

This edition of *Fistful of Sand* also includes the talk, "The Strategy of a Peaceful Mind," and the collection of Ajaan Suwat's talks, *The Light of Discernment*, that was printed in his honor after his death on April 5, 2002.

*Thānissaro Bhikkhu*

MAY, 2011

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## THE SKILLFUL HEART

WE'VE ALL COME HERE through a sense of conviction, intent on studying and practicing the Dhamma that will bring happiness and fulfillment to our hearts. We should understand that the Dhamma taught by the Lord Buddha doesn't lie anywhere far away. As the Canon says, skillful and unskillful dhammas arise right here in the heart. If we want to study the Dhamma, we have to study our own heart. When we're well acquainted with the heart, we'll be well acquainted with the Dhamma. When we're well acquainted with the Dhamma, we'll be well acquainted with the heart.

There are times when the heart is in bad shape. Bad mental qualities get mixed up with it, making it even worse, making us suffer both in body and mind. These bad mental qualities are said to be "unskillful" (*akusala*). The Buddha teaches us to study these qualities so that we can abandon them.

There are other times when the heart is in good shape: at ease with a sense of wellbeing. We feel at ease whether we're sitting or lying down, whether we're alone or associating with our friends and relatives. When the heart gains a sense of ease in this way, it's said to be staying with the Dhamma. In other words, skillful (*kusala*) mental qualities have appeared in the heart. The skillful heart is what gives us happiness. This is why the Buddha taught us to develop these skillful qualities, to give rise to them within ourselves.

If you were to list these skillful qualities, there would be lots of them. But even though there are lots of them, they all arise in our one heart. So if we want to know and see the Dhamma, we have to develop mindfulness and alertness, keeping watch over our heart. If the heart isn't at peace, if it's distracted and turbulent, we should realize that, at that moment, the heart is out of shape. Unskillful qualities have arisen within it. So we should try to be mindful and alert to put it back into good shape. We have to keep watch over the heart to see whether, at this moment in time, it's in good shape or bad.

If we see that the heart isn't yet in satisfactory shape, we should let go of our unskillful preoccupations and make ourselves mindful of what's good. We want to be happy, so we don't want the things that will make us suffer. We should try to put the mind into good shape, convinced in the practice of the Dhamma that will develop our mindfulness. We have to look after the heart so that it's confident and content in our practice. We should remind ourselves that in following this practice we're following in line with the Buddha: one who knows, who sees, an arahant free from defilement, released from suffering in the cycle of death and rebirth. The fact that we're practicing in line with the Dhamma taught by the

Buddha means that we're studying in an institution of highest learning, with the Buddha as our foremost teacher.

So be mindful to keep your heart in good shape. Be mindful of your meditation word, *buddho*. Or if you want, you can focus on the in-and-out breath. When the breath comes in, keep your mind at ease. When it goes out, keep your mind at ease. Don't be tense, don't force things, don't get caught up in any desire to know or see beyond reasonable bounds. If we give rise to this kind of desire, this kind of defilement, it'll distract the heart. So we should be careful to be mindful, to look after the mind, to meditate well. Simply be mindful of the breath. When the breath comes in, let it come in with ease. When it goes out, let it go out with ease. Let the mind be at ease, too. If anything comes along to disturb you, don't get involved with it. Just keep that sense of ease going. If your mindfulness can keep maintaining your sense of contentment, your sense of confidence in the practice, the mind will separate from its outside preoccupations and gather into a sense of stillness. There will be a sense of lightness. Comfort. A feeling of contentment with that comfort.

If it so happens that while we're trying to maintain that sense of ease in the heart, disturbances come in to interfere, making the mind distracted and restless, we should remember that we don't have to look for that lost sense of ease anywhere else. Remember: wherever there's restlessness is where there is stillness. We have to be alert to the preoccupations that have put the mind out of shape. We don't want them, so we shouldn't pay them any attention. We should try to remember the good preoccupations that have given us a sense of peace and calm in the past. When we can put the mind at ease in this way, the things disturbing that ease will disappear right there, right where the bad preoccupation was.

This is like darkness: no matter how long the darkness has reigned, when we realize that it's darkness and that we want light, we don't have to look anywhere else. If we have a lantern, then as soon as we've lit it, light will appear right where there was darkness before. We don't have to look anywhere else. The darkness will disappear right there where there's light. In the same way, when the mind isn't at peace, we don't have to look for peace anywhere else. Restlessness comes from an unskillful preoccupation; peace, from a skillful preoccupation right in the same place.

When we've developed a good preoccupation that puts the mind at peace, we should look after it and maintain it well. As long as this sort of preoccupation is in charge of the heart, the heart will maintain its sense of ease. So we don't have to look for goodness anywhere else, for that would simply distract and deceive the heart. We have to keep looking at our own heart, to see if it's in good shape yet or not. Everyone has a heart, and every heart has skillful and unskillful qualities. So use the quality of *dhamma-vicaya*, your powers of discriminating analysis, to

observe the heart, this sense of awareness right here within yourself.

While you're sitting here listening, focus your attention exclusively on your own heart. The sound of the talk will come into the heart of its own accord. You don't have to focus your attention outside on the sound, or to analyze what's being said. Establish your mindfulness right at the heart. When the person speaking mentions this or that quality, the awareness of that quality will arise right in your own heart. If it doesn't arise immediately, then give rise to it. Say, for example, that the mind is in bad shape. When the person speaking mentions goodness, try to give rise to a good mood within the heart. Make yourself confident, content in the practice. Arouse your efforts to give rise to knowledge of things you've never before known, to attain things you've never before attained, to see the subtle things you've never before seen, step by step within your own mind.

During his lifetime, the Buddha taught the Dhamma fully knowing the capabilities of his listeners, aware of the level of their intelligence and potential, and of which aspect of the Dhamma they'd understand most easily. He then would teach them that Dhamma. As for his listeners, they would focus their attention on their own hearts and minds, and would understand in line with the practices they had done in the past. When the corresponding qualities appeared in their own hearts, they were able to know in line with the truth appearing within them. When the Dhamma appeared in their hearts, they experienced peace and calm, or gained an understanding into the truths that the Buddha taught.

For example, when he taught about stress and suffering, his listeners focused on the stress and suffering in their own hearts. They tried to understand to the point where they saw that things couldn't be otherwise than what the Buddha taught. They really saw suffering and stress. When the Buddha taught that the flaw called the origination of stress should be abandoned, they saw the suffering that comes from craving. They saw how these things are always related. Whenever craving arises, suffering always follows in its wake.

As a result, they made an effort totally to abandon the origination of stress. The more they were able to abandon craving, the weaker their suffering grew. When they were able to cut craving totally away, suffering and stress totally disappeared. They then knew clearly in line with the truth. The state of their minds didn't deteriorate or fall away, because they had entered into the truth. They had listened to the Dhamma and focused on their own minds in the proper way, so that they could see the basic principles of the truth with their own mindfulness and discernment.

As for those whose mental faculties weren't yet fully strong, who had developed their faculties only to a moderate level, even though they didn't reach the Dhamma while they were sitting there listening to it, the Buddha taught the noble eightfold path for them to put into practice. This enabled them to gain

knowledge and understanding step by step, to the point where their mindfulness and discernment were strong enough to bring them to the Dhamma at a later point, in line with the merit and potential they had developed on their own.

As for us: even though we may not reach the Dhamma while listening to it, the Buddha laid down the path to the cessation of stress for us to develop by putting it into practice. This path is nothing other than the noble path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right activity, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Having taught about the right path that we should develop, he also taught about the wrong path that should be avoided. In other words, he taught us:

to abandon wrong view  
and to develop right view;  
to abandon wrong resolve  
and to develop right resolve;  
to abandon wrong speech  
and to develop right speech;  
to abandon wrong activity  
and to develop right activity;  
to abandon wrong livelihood  
and to develop right livelihood;  
to abandon wrong effort  
and to develop right effort;  
to abandon wrong mindfulness  
and to develop right mindfulness;  
to abandon wrong concentration  
and to develop right concentration.

For this reason, we should acquaint ourselves with both the right path and the wrong path. What sort of view ranks as the wrong view we should abandon? Wrong view starts with views about the body, or physical form in general. If we view physical form in line with what the Buddha taught — that *rūpaṃ aniccaṃ*, physical form is inconstant; *rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ*, physical form is stressful; *rūpaṃ anattā*, physical form is not-self — that's called right view. But if we see physical form as constant — or try to make it constant — that's wrong view, and runs counter to the Buddha's teachings. In other words, if we see that *rūpaṃ niccaṃ*, physical form is constant; *rūpaṃ sukhaṃ*, physical form — the body — is easeful; *rūpaṃ attā*, physical form is our self or really our own, that's wrong view.

If we really look at the body in line with its truth, we'll see that it really is inconstant. From the moment it's born we can easily see the changes it undergoes. It ages and wears down every day. This inconstancy is why we have to keep

struggling under the desire to make it constant and lasting. The nature of the body is that it's always lacking one thing or another — like a water tank that's continually leaking: we have to keep adding water to it to keep it from running dry; if we forget to add water, it'll dry out for sure. In the same way, the body is genuinely inconstant, genuinely stressful. If it were constant, we wouldn't have to struggle, we wouldn't have to keep looking for things to keep it going; we wouldn't have to work. The reason we work for money is so that we can nourish this body, which is continually wasting away. The Buddha saw clearly that this work and struggle is stressful, that it's intimately tied up with the inconstancy of the body. Wherever there's inconstancy, there's stress. And because of that stressfulness, it's inconstant. These qualities are dependent on each other.

When we've contemplated so that we see this truth, then we see the Dhamma. We have right view. The more the mind understands stress and suffering, the more it can grow still and let down its burdens. Its greed will decrease. Its anger will decrease. Its delusion about physical form will decrease. Its burdens will decrease. This will make it brighter and more peaceful: a skillful mental state arising in such a way that we can see it clearly when we contemplate the events appearing in the mind in line with their truth.

When the Buddha explained right view, he started with stress and suffering: *jātipi dukkhā* — birth is stressful; *jarāpi dukkhā* — aging is stressful; *marañampi dukkhaṃ* — death is stressful. These are truths found within each and every one of us — every person, every living being. Whether or not we study the matter, this is the way things are in actuality, ever since who knows when. For hundreds and thousands of years in the past, wherever there has been birth, there has had to be aging, illness, and death in its wake. The same thing is true in the present and even on into the future: every person who takes birth will have to meet with these things.

This teaching is the genuine truth. It will never change into anything else. No matter how many hundreds or thousands of people will be born, they will all have to meet with illness, will all have to age, will all have to die, each and every one of them. Not one of them will remain. No matter what knowledge they attain, what weapons they invent, they won't be able to win out over this genuine truth. So once we've developed right view in this way, we have to eliminate our defilements — in other words, our intoxication with our youth, our intoxication with being free from disease, our intoxication with being alive. We'll then be able to behave in a way that will be to our own true benefit as long as we are still alive.

As we develop mindfulness in contemplating the body in and of itself, seeing its true nature and developing right view, our heart will get more and more convinced of this reality, and will grow farther and farther away from wrong view. We'll be able to develop right view more continually. This is the path that will lead

us to attain the Dhamma, the ultimate peace.

As we develop right view, then right resolve will be no problem, because our resolve to meditate so as to develop right view is, in and of itself, right resolve: the resolve to see the Dhamma, to know the Dhamma, in line with the truth that appears in our own body, beginning with the truth of stress and suffering. Our body is composed of birth: As soon as there's birth, there has to be suffering. We suffer because of birth. Hunger, desire, intense heat and cold: all of these things come from birth. And no matter how carefully and adequately we look after the body, it has to keep on aging and wasting away. No matter how much we plead with it, it won't listen to us. It just keeps on aging.

And on top of that, it has all kinds of diseases. If you really look at the body, you'll see that diseases can arise at any time at all. It's a home for diseases. It has eyes, and so there are eye diseases. It has ears, and so there are ear diseases. It has a nose, and so there are nose diseases. It has a tongue, and so there are tongue diseases. Diseases can arise in each and every one of its parts. This is a genuine truth — which is why there are doctors and hospitals in every country. All people of all races have to depend on medicine. Even the person telling you this has diseases, just like everyone else. When we look to really see the truth, we'll see that the Buddha's teachings aren't in the least bit mistaken: they're right here in each and every one of us.

If we develop our minds properly in line with the truth so that its views are right, our restlessness and distraction will grow calm. We'll see that the greed we've felt in the past has served no real purpose. When anger arises toward other people, we'll see that it serves no real purpose, that it's nothing but stress and suffering. We'll see that our only way out is to make the mind still: this is the way to true happiness. We'll gain disenchantment, seeing — given the true nature of things — that what we've busied ourselves with has served us no real purpose. It's tired us out to no real purpose, created difficulties to no real purpose, and has left us with nothing at all that we can truly call our own. Think about all the things you've sought and amassed from your birth up to the present moment: is there anything there that you can really depend on? Anything you can really call your own? Nothing at all. None of those things can really help you. They may help you a bit, but not enough to give you any real happiness.

So I ask that you all work at developing right view. Meditate on the four frames of reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*) so as to develop discernment. As you meditate — sitting, standing, walking, and lying down — stay mindful of the body, which is filled with inconstancy. No matter where you look, it's inconstant. It's also full of stress. Wherever you look, you see that diseases and pains can arise at any time. It can age at any time. There's no part of it that's totally free of aches and pains. If you don't believe me, take a sharp spike and stab any part of the body, and you'll

see that it hurts wherever you stab. You can see clearly in line with the truth that the whole body is stressful.

As for *buddho*, the awareness in the mind, it'll be aware that what's really important is not the body: it's the mind. When you see the drawbacks and stresses of the body, then discernment, clarity, and calm will arise in the heart, freeing it from its burdens and karma debts related to the body. In this way we let go of our heavy burden: *nicchāto parinibbuto*, free from hunger, totally unbound, reaching a bliss and peace that is lasting.

So I ask all of you — who have conviction, who want peace, who want happiness in your day-to-day life — to develop mindfulness, to develop right view. Look at the body in and of itself. The body in and of itself is mentioned in the Great Frames of Reference Discourse (*Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta*), but it's not in the words. It's not there in the book. It's right here. When we practice, we don't have to recite the words. We look right at our own body, at what's already here. Mindfulness is something we already have; all we need to do is apply it to the body. If we're not mindful of the body, then it's not right mindfulness. When we're mindful of the body, there's our mindfulness: the mindfulness that will enable us to practice, that will enable us to know. If we keep observing the body, we're sure to see what's here.

The more we observe, the more proficient we'll become. We'll understand clearly and correctly. The more clearly we see, the more effort — right effort — we'll put into knowing and seeing even more fully. Right mindfulness will be more continually mindful; and right concentration, more firmly established. Right speech and right activity will follow in their wake. So develop right view in your hearts by developing the frames of reference. Keep track of the body in and of itself, train in line with the truth, by day and by night, whether you're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down.

When you practice correctly, no one with any true wisdom will be able to take issue with you, for you're focused on the genuine truth: the inconstancy, the stress and suffering, all four of the four noble truths that can be seen right here in this body. These things can't be seen anywhere else. If we really develop right view with regard to these things, results will arise within us. When results arise, the nature of the mind is that it will know on its own. It won't have to be told. All that's necessary is that you practice rightly. Begin trying from this moment on. Don't get distracted by this person saying that or that person saying this. There's nowhere else you have to look. The evidence is your own body. How inconstant it is, you'll know for yourself. It won't lie to you. How stressful it is — how many diseases, aches, and pains — you'll know for yourself. It won't lie to you. The truth is always there for you to see.

Practicing to see in line with the truth in this way is called seeing the Dhamma,

the nature of reality in and of itself. We'll come to see the truth all the way through and gain release from suffering and stress. So keep at it. When you gain any understandings of any sort, we can discuss them as they arise, step by step, until you gain genuine release from suffering and stress.

But this will be enough for now.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

*Question:* I understand that Tibetan monks use visualization when they meditate. Have you ever used visualization in your meditation?

*Ajaan Suwat:* Visualization of what?

*Question:* I'm not really sure. Maybe of the unattractiveness of the body?

*Ajaan Suwat:* Visualization, if it's done in the proper way, can be useful. If it's done in the wrong way, it can lead to delusion. The process of visualization, in the language of the Dhamma, is called *sañkhāra*, or fabrication. The Buddha taught us to be wise to the true nature of fabrication, that it's inconstant and undependable. When we know this truth, we don't get attached to the things that arise. When knowledge arises and we don't get attached to it, then we don't get deluded by it. That's when it can be useful.

One of the principles of the Dhamma is that if you visualize anything in your meditation, you should visualize only things lying within you, so that you see physical fabrication in the body and mental fabrication in the mind in line with their true nature. For example: at present you're not yet old, but you're taught to visualize yourself as growing old in the same way you've seen other people grow old. Remind yourself that as the years pass, you'll have to age in just the same way. Aging is stressful. Your eyes won't be able to see as clearly as when you were young. Your ears won't be able to hear in the same way as when you were young. It'll be painful to sit down, to stand, to walk. There will be all kinds of obstacles. So now, before you grow old, you should accelerate your efforts at developing goodness so that it will be a refuge for the heart when old age comes. In other words, accelerate your efforts at practicing the Dhamma and training the mind to find peace.

One of the ten recollections (*anussati*) taught by the Buddha is recollection of death. When you see other people dying, other animals dying, you should reflect on the fact that you will have to die just like everyone else. Repeat the word *maraṇaṃ, maraṇaṃ* (death, death) in the mind and look at yourself: you're going to have to die for sure. As you reflect *maraṇaṃ, maraṇaṃ*, it may happen that as your mind grows still, a vision of your own death will appear within you. If your mindfulness is good and you have your wits about you, then the more clearly you see death in this way, the more the mind will grow still with an even greater sense of wellbeing. As you watch death clearly, seeing the body decay, concentration grows even stronger. If you visualize death so that you can see it clearly, you'll

realize that there's nothing to be gained by growing attached to the body. When you see the truth in this way, you'll see that your past greed for things served no real purpose. The anger you've felt in the past: what purpose did it serve? You'll see that greed, anger, and delusion are stressful and serve no purpose — for ultimately, we'll have to let go of everything that comes along with them. You'll see that this sense of peace and ease in the mind is what serves a real purpose. When the mind is at peace in this way, it doesn't want anything else. All it wants is peace, and that's enough.

I'll tell you a story. It's time you listened to something light for a change, so that you won't be so tense and grim. It's important that you first let yourself relax. Once Ajaan Funn, my teacher, was wandering through the forest in Baan Phyy district, Udorn Thani province, and stopped to spend the night not far from a certain village. He saw that it was a congenial place and so stayed on there to practice meditation. A woman living in the village would often come in the morning to give him alms, and then again in the evening to hear his Dhamma talks. Ajaan Funn taught her to meditate, something she had never done before. It so happened that she was afraid of ghosts. Wherever she went, she was afraid of ghosts, and so she never went anywhere alone. Especially at night, she was really afraid. When Ajaan Funn taught her to meditate, she didn't want to, because she was afraid that she'd see a corpse or a ghost. On following days, Ajaan Funn asked her how her meditation was going, and she couldn't answer him because she hadn't meditated. After a while she began to feel embarrassed: "He keeps teaching me to meditate and yet all I do is hold onto my fear of ghosts." So she decided, "Whatever may happen, I'm going to meditate." So she started to meditate.

At first she simply focused on repeating the word *buddho* as she watched her breath come in and out. As her mind began to relax, it began to drift a bit and a vision arose: she saw a corpse lying stretched out in front of her. When she saw the corpse, she began to feel afraid. Then the corpse moved in so that it was lying on her lap. With the corpse on her lap, she couldn't get up to run away. And that's when she remembered her *buddho*. She wanted *buddho* to come and help her. So she kept thinking, *buddho, buddho*, more and more intensely. As she was doing this, one part of her mind was afraid, the other part kept recollecting *buddho, buddho*, until the corpse disappeared from her lap and turned into herself. That was when she had a vision of her chest bursting wide open. Her heart was bright, very bright. In the brightness of her heart she could see all kinds of things. She could see what other people were thinking, what animals were thinking. She knew all kinds of things and felt really amazed. From that point on her fear of ghosts disappeared. Her heart grew peaceful and at ease.

The next day she went to see Ajaan Funn. Ajaan Funn was sick with a fever, but he forced himself to get up to greet her and give her a Dhamma talk, as he had

on previous days, just as if he wasn't sick at all. After the talk, she immediately said to him, "Than Ajaan, your heart isn't bright and blooming at all. It looks withered and dry. You must be very sick." Ajaan Funn was surprised: "How does she know the state of my mind?" But he had noticed that her manner was different from what it had been on previous days. She was very composed and polite. She had bowed down very politely; her words had been gentle and very respectful. When she commented on his heart that way, he wondered, "Does she really know the state of my mind?" So when she returned to the village, he forced himself to sit and meditate to the point where the fever broke and went away. His heart grew peaceful, bright, and at ease. The next day, when the time came that the woman would come, he decided to play sick in order to test her. When she arrived, he didn't get up to greet her and stayed lying down as if he was sick. After she bowed down, she sat to meditate for a moment, and then said, "Why, your lotus" — meaning his heart — "your lotus is really blooming!" That was when Ajaan Funn realized that she was really meditating well.

From that point on, she could come in the evening without the slightest fear of ghosts or spirits. And she continued to meditate well. Her mind never deteriorated. To tell the truth, she had never studied in school and didn't know much of the Dhamma, but because of her respect for Ajaan Funn, when he taught her to meditate she followed his instructions. Whether it was because of her past merit or what, I don't know, but she gained peace of mind, developed her discernment, and was able to know her own heart and the hearts of other people. So those of you who have come here to meditate: don't underestimate yourselves, thinking that you won't gain anything or come to any insights. Don't be so sure! If you keep up your efforts and practice correctly, it might very well happen that you'll gain insight. If things come together properly, the day will come when you know, when you see the Dhamma. It could very well happen.

So keep up your efforts. After the retreat is over, when you go back home, keep using your mindfulness to keep watch over yourself. In your comings and goings, keep training your mindfulness as you do while you're here, as a means of maintaining the state of your mind through practicing restraint of the senses. This will develop your mindfulness and give it power. That way, you'll find that things go more smoothly when the time comes to train the mind to be still.

Are there any other questions?

*Question:* I'm finding that my mind is beginning to settle down somewhat in my meditation, and I'm surprised at the sense of comfort and ease that comes when it does settle down.

*Ajaan Suwat:* A sense of ease arises when there's peace and calm. Stress and

suffering arise when there's no peace and calm. These things always go together. You can observe in yourself that whenever the mind isn't at peace, when there's a lot of disturbance and turmoil, there's a lot of stress and suffering as well. When there's only a little disturbance, there's only a little stress and suffering. When there's a lot of peace, there's a lot of ease. If you're observant, you'll notice that wherever there's peace, there's also a sense of comfort and ease.

You can compare it to a nation at peace, with no war, no strife, no conflicts, no crime. That nation will have the sense of ease that comes with being at peace. If a family lives in harmony, with no quarreling, that family will have the sense of ease that comes with being at peace. If the body is free from disease, strong enough to be used for whatever work you want to do, it's called a body at peace, and has the sense of ease that comes with being at peace. If the mind isn't disturbed by the defilements that would put it into a turmoil, it's at peace in line with its nature. Even nibbāna is peace — a peace that lasts and can never be disturbed. That's why nibbāna is the ultimate ease.

*Question:* When I meditate and see the changes in my body and mind, there seems to be one part of the mind that's simply the observer, which doesn't change along with the things it watches. When I catch sight of this observer, this sense of awareness, what should I do next?

*Ajaan Suwat:* One part of the mind is fabrication. As for this sense of awareness itself, this is very important. We should try to know fabrications in line with their true nature. These things are inconstant, and so we should know their inconstancy. These things change and grow. When they appear, we should know that they're appearing. When they disappear, we should know that they're disappearing. When we know the appearing and disappearing of fabrications, we'll realize: before we didn't understand fabrications, which was why we felt desire for them. We thought they would make us happy. But fabrications are inconstant. They arise and change in this way and so serve no real purpose at all. We've struggled to acquire them for a long, long time, but have never gained enough happiness from them to satisfy our wants. But when we train the mind so that our sense of awareness knows in this way, we gain a sense of peace, happiness, satisfaction. This sense of happiness doesn't involve any struggle, doesn't depend on anyone else at all. When we experience this sense of peace and ease, we'll gain discernment and insight. We'll see the sense of peace and ease coming when our discernment is wise to the nature of fabrications and can cleanse the mind so that it feels no greed for fabrications. The mind then becomes clean and pure.

*Question:* Is this sense of awareness the self? Here we're taught that there is no self, and so I'm confused.

*Ajaan Suwat:* Don't be in a hurry to label this sense of awareness self or not-self. The discernment that makes us aware of every aspect of fabrication will tell us on its own in line with the truth. It's the same as when you fix food. As you're fixing it, don't ask what the taste is like or where it resides. At that moment you can't tell where the taste is. But once you've fixed it and eaten it, you'll know the taste and where it lies. In the same way, this issue of self and not-self is very refined. When you've practiced until you've reached that level, it'll be clear to you in the same way that the taste of food is clear to you when it touches your tongue. You know immediately, for the nature of these things is to know on their own.

Our job at present is to know the process of fabrication as it appears in the body and mind. We shouldn't let ourselves be deluded by the fabrications of the body. We should know their true nature. The same holds true with the mental fabrications, issues of good and bad, that affect the mind: we shouldn't be deluded by them, shouldn't fall for them. When we're wise to them and can't be fooled by them, we'll gain the discernment that puts an end to suffering and stress because we're no longer misled by what fabrication keeps telling us.

For instance, when the eye sees a beautiful form, a form that we've liked in the past, we tend to fall for it. We want it. This greed of ours creates a disturbance, defiles the mind all over again. When the ear hears a beautiful sound we've liked, that we've fallen for in the past, the process of fabrication will make us like it again. Greed arises, desire arises, the mind gets disturbed all over again. When a good smell comes into the nose, we fall for it. When the tongue touches a flavor we like, we fall for it again. When our mindfulness and alertness aren't up on what's happening, we like these things. We fall for them. We search for them. This is what gives rise to craving in the mind: the origination of suffering and stress. And so we suffer.

For this reason, our discernment has to be fully aware of this aspect of fabrication as well. Once discernment is trained, then when we see a form, hear a sound, smell an aroma, taste a flavor, we can recall that these things are fabrications. They're inconstant. When fabrication is inconstant, the pleasure that comes from fabrication is undependable. We shouldn't get carried away by the pleasures that come from those fabrications. Otherwise, when they change, we'll keep experiencing pain again and again until those fabrications have disappeared. When they disappear, we struggle to gain them again, come into conflict with other people again, fall out with them, quarrel with them, develop animosities, develop bad kamma with them — all because we've fallen for fabrications. So we have to reflect on the fact that fabrications are inconstant. We shouldn't latch onto them, grow attached to them, or fall for them so much.

*Question:* Just now while I was meditating I had this feeling that the body was simply sitting there on its own, breathing all on its own, and the mind seemed to be something separate. It separated out for a moment, and then came back into the body. When the mind separates out in this way, is it the first step in contemplating the body?

*Ajaan Suwat:* There wasn't any pain, was there?

*Question:* No, no pain at all. It was as if the body didn't have to rely on the mind. It kept breathing on its own, while the mind was something separate.

*Ajaan Suwat:* That's because your mindfulness was good. You weren't holding onto the body. You were able to let go, so that feelings weren't making contact with the mind. This is the way it always is with a quiet mind. A quiet mind like this is a really good thing to have. This is why monks out meditating in the forest, when they grow sick, don't suffer, and can instead find a great deal of bliss. They take their illness as a means of developing mindfulness, reminding themselves that it's not-self, and so they shouldn't latch onto it. The mind is the mind; the feeling is not-self. When you repeat the notion, not-self, not-self, and then investigate the feeling, taking it apart, you can keep investigating until the mind grows quiet and at ease, with no suffering at all. The body grows light. The mind grows light, with a great deal of happiness. You begin to marvel and gain conviction in the practice, because you've seen a happiness that has arisen from within your very own heart. Suffering stops, even though the body may still be sick.

So we should keep making an effort at training the mind, using various techniques to look after it so that it'll settle down and be still. That way we'll gain the strength that will help us when pain and discomfort arise in the heart. We'll have our hideout — for when we stay with this sense of stillness, we'll have an excellent hideout from danger.

When meditators go wandering through the forest, their teachers usually have them stay in places that are scary. If there's a place where tigers are known to frequent, the teachers will have their students go stay there. There are cases where meditators have gained mindfulness, gained concentration, gained rapture and ease, all from their fear of being eaten by tigers. But you have to be brave. Even though you may be afraid, you have to be brave at the same time. If you're simply afraid and run away instead of meditating, it won't accomplish anything. There are quite a few meditation masters who, when they heard tigers closing in on them at night, grew so afraid that they couldn't bear it. There was no way for them to escape, because it was nighttime, and they were staying in a place where ....

(End of tape)

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

.... In the frames of reference that we're practicing, we're taught to reflect on the food we eat, the other necessities of life we use, to see that they're simply things for us to depend on for a short while. Don't grow attached to them. You can choose the things you buy and store up for your use, but the mind should keep reflecting that they fall under the three characteristics. They're uncertain. When we want to use these things for our benefit, we should look after them but we shouldn't let ourselves suffer when they deteriorate and change.

*Question:* Sometimes, when I'm meditating to relax and settle the mind, the desire for results gets in the way. What should I do to keep my intention pure so that desire doesn't become an obstacle?

*Ajaan Suwat:* This desire is a form of craving. It really is an obstacle. Craving is something the Buddha taught us to abandon. If the desire serves a purpose, you should go ahead and desire. But if it doesn't, you should focus on what will get results. In other words, you should act without desire. Even when there's no desire, you can still act. You want to gain awareness, of course, so the task in front of you is to focus your awareness on a single object. When your meditation object appears to your awareness, you should focus on staying there with it in a single spot. As you stay there longer and longer, the mind will grow still and refined, all on its own. That's because stillness comes from being mindful — simply from being mindful without lapses of forgetfulness — and not from desire.

Tell yourself: this is a task you have to do with mindfulness, discernment, and correct awareness. You don't have to depend on desire. When you do the work correctly, the results will come on their own.

*Question:* When doubts arise in the mind, are they of any help in the practice?

*Ajaan Suwat:* As long as the level of discernment called *nāṇa-dassana* — knowledge and vision — hasn't yet arisen within us, we're all bound to have doubts. But if we simply sit there doubting, it doesn't serve any purpose. When doubts arise, we should study and practice so as to give rise to knowledge. If we can't give rise to knowledge on our own, we should go ask those who know, teachers with correct knowledge. If we practice correctly, the things we wonder about will appear, and that will be the end of our doubts. For instance, the questions you're asking are all an affair of doubt. When you get a correct answer, you gain knowledge that helps unravel your doubts — and in this way doubts

serve a purpose, in that getting answers to your questions can resolve your doubts on some levels.

(After a series of questions on political issues)

*Ajaan Suwat:* The issues of the monks' life are very subtle. The Buddha laid down rules forbidding us from even talking about these things, so I'd rather not go into these matters in detail. My main concern is what I can do so that you can depend on yourselves to attain peace and happiness of mind. That's what concerns me: how each of us can learn how to depend on ourselves, so that our minds are solid and don't waver in line with events, so that we can look after ourselves in a way allowing us to escape the dangers of the sufferings arising within us. Every person has suffering, and every person is only one person. There's nobody who's two. If each of us looks after our one person, without oppressing anyone or harming anyone, there would be no problems. The problem is that we don't look after ourselves, and expect help to come from outside. That means that we abandon our responsibilities, and that's why there's injustice in the world — oppression, corruption, inequality. If every person were to listen to the Buddha's teachings and be responsible for him or herself, we'd see that everyone else is just like us. If we curse them, they'll curse us back. If we show them respect, they'll show us respect in return. This is why we shouldn't oppress them or harm them. We should treat them with justice, because if there are things that we don't like having done to us and yet we go do them to other people, it creates dangers for ourselves. When we can see these dangers, we should look after our own behavior. Then these dangers won't exist. This is the basic principle at which the Buddha's teachings aim. And this is why monks aren't involved with worldly affairs. We have to study this principle until we understand it, and that way there will be no oppression.

*Question:* I have two questions about rebirth. The first is: what is it that gets reborn?

*Ajaan Suwat:* When you were born, do you know what it was that got born?

*Question:* No.

*Ajaan Suwat:* If you don't know, how is it that you were still able to be born? What led you to be born?

(A moment of dead silence)

*Question:* My second question has to do with channeling spirits. There seem to

be a lot of people in America who are interested in contacting spirits, to the point where books have been written, giving advice on how to get in touch with spirits in this way. What does Buddhism have to say about this?

*Ajaan Suwat:* Buddhism for the most part teaches us to be mindful so as to get in touch with ourselves. This is because the unawareness (avijjā) that gives rise to fabrication and suffering is an unawareness concerning our own minds, and it lies within our own minds, too. So Buddhism teaches us to learn about our own minds, and not to get involved with spirits or people who channel spirits, because that sort of thing doesn't serve any purpose, can't help us give rise to the awareness that will put an end to our defilements.

*Question:* When I leave meditation and go walking outside or have work to do, I sometimes have to use a lot of thought. How can I be mindful and think at the same time? Where should I focus mindfulness? What techniques do you recommend?

*Ajaan Suwat:* When we begin meditating we want mindfulness so that it'll keep our body and mind still and at peace, but the body has to keep changing positions — sitting, walking, lying down. The way to practice, given in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, is that when we sit, we're alert to how we're sitting. When we walk, we're alert to the fact that we're walking, and we walk in a composed way. Don't let the mind be mindful of anything outside its proper bounds. Keep it within bounds, i.e., within the body. Be alert to the way you step, place your foot, all your various movements. If you can stay aware of these things, you're on the right path.

Or if you don't focus on the body, focus on the mind. Be alert to whatever mood or preoccupation is arising in the present. Love? Hatred? Is it focused on visual objects? Tastes? The past? The future? Then notice which preoccupations serve no purpose, and tell yourself not to focus on things that serve no purpose. Focus only on things that do serve a purpose. When the mind settles down, be alert to the fact. Give yourself a sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and peace in the present. When you do this, you're practicing in line with the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta as a way of training your mind to gain concentration. Then when you sit in meditation, focus the mind on more refined levels of stillness — for the sitting posture allows you to be less concerned about keeping the body in position. When you're standing or walking, you have to pay more attention to maintaining your posture.

*Question:* I've had some practice in developing good will and compassion, but I don't know how to develop empathetic joy. Do you have any suggestions?

*Ajaan Suwat:* Empathetic joy is a feeling of happiness at the good fortune of others. When other people are happy or gain wealth, we wish them well. We aren't jealous or envious of them. This is a quality we develop to get rid of the defilement of envy. When other people gain good fortune, we practice feeling happy for them. If we suffer from the defilement of envy, we can't stand to see other people doing well in life. We get jealous because we feel we're better than they are. This is why the Buddha taught us to develop empathetic joy.

*Question:* Is there any technique for developing empathetic joy?

*Ajaan Suwat:* The technique is to spread this thought to people in general: "If anyone is suffering, may they experience happiness. As for people experiencing happiness, may they maintain that happiness. May they not be deprived of the good fortune they've gained, the wealth they've gained, the status they've gained, the praise they've gained, the happiness they've gained. May their happiness increase." We're not jealous of their happiness and we don't try to compete with them in underhanded ways. The Buddha's purpose in teaching empathetic joy is so that our minds won't be consumed with envy over other people's good fortune. When we feel no envy toward others and can train our hearts to reach stillness using this theme as our preoccupation, then we've completed our training in empathetic joy. The phrase we repeat when we chant every day — "May all living beings not be deprived of the good fortune they have attained" — that's empathetic joy.

*Question:* When I meditate on my breath, I notice that at the end of the in-breath there's a brief rest. The same thing happens at the end of the out-breath. As time passes, this momentary rest grows longer and longer, and is very comfortable. Is this the right way to practice?

*Ajaan Suwat:* When we're mindful, we get to see things we've never seen before, we experience things we've never experienced before, in a way that we'll never forget. A mind that has never experienced peace and stillness will come to experience peace and stillness. A mind that's never been aware will come to be aware. This is part of correctly following the right path: you begin by getting the mind to enter a subtle level of concentration. You should continue what you're doing, but don't get complacent. If your concentration isn't yet solid, it can deteriorate. So you should tend to the mind that's at stillness and keep it there. Remember how you got it there. Keep practicing continually, and you'll find that there are even more refined levels of the still mind. There are levels even more refined and pleasurable than this. So don't content yourself with stopping just

there. See if you can make the stillness and sense of comfort even more refined.

It's like walking up the stairs to your house. The stairs have five steps: the five levels of *jhāna*. The first time the mind reaches a subtle level of stillness is the first step. When you haven't yet started climbing the stairs, you should content yourself with getting to the first step. But when you've reached the first step, you shouldn't content yourself simply with the fact that you've gotten up off the ground and stop right there — for the first step isn't your house. So you should remind yourself of the fact that it's not your house, you haven't yet reached shelter, and then look for the second step. When you've reached the second step, you should remind yourself that you still haven't reached shelter, so you have to take the next step.

In the same way, when you've reached a subtle level of stillness and experienced just this level of pleasure and ease, you should ponder this ease to see that it's not yet constant. It can still change. There are still higher levels of ease. Today you've gotten this far; the next step will be to keep moving up until you reach genuine ease.

What I've explained so far should be enough for today. Talking a lot can get you confused, for you're still new to this training. Your memory can handle only so much. Like students just beginning their studies: if they study a lot of advanced material and stuff it into their brains, it won't all stay there.

It's the same when we practice meditation. Your mindfulness and discernment can take only so much. Listen to just a little bit and then put it into practice, so as to strengthen your mindfulness and discernment, so as to strengthen your concentration. In that way you'll be able to take in more refined levels of Dhamma. At this stage I want you to stop listening and to go back to look at your mind: is it willing to accept the training? Is it able to follow it? Or is it still stubborn? If the mind isn't yet willing to accept and follow the training, reason with it until it is. Get the mind to reach what you've been hearing about, so that it sees the results clearly within itself. Your knowledge on this level isn't knowledge from the mind. It's knowledge from concepts. As for the mind, it hasn't yet taken these things in. If, when you meditate, you find that your mind is still restless and distracted, unwilling to do what you want it to do, that's a sign that it hasn't yet accepted the teachings. So you have to reason with it over and over again.

If, on the other hand, you can remember only one concept but can train the mind so that it can take in the truth of that concept, then learning about concepts serves a purpose. If the mind isn't willing to take in the truth of that concept, then knowing concepts doesn't serve any purpose.

So I'll ask to stop today's question-and-answer session here.

## INCONSTANCY

*Question:* I was wondering if you could explain inconstancy and the emptiness of the mind.

*Ajaan Suwat:* Inconstancy is one of the three characteristics, a teaching on the level of insight and discernment.

The word inconstancy (*anicca*), for the most part, is used in connection with fabrications (*saṅkhāra*): *saṅkhāra aniccā* — fabrications are inconstant. The word “fabrications” here carries a very broad meaning on the level of theoretical Dhamma, but in terms of the practice for giving rise to discernment, “fabrications” means the body and mind. So while you listen to this talk on inconstancy, focus your attention on your own body, for it’s something easy to know and to see. Then I’ll explain the changes and inconstancy in it.

What is the purpose of studying inconstancy? This is something we should look into. Studying inconstancy has many benefits. In particular, the Buddha taught us to be mindful of the body, mindful of the fact that once the body is born it has to keep changing day in and day out. The happiness and pleasures we get from the body on a daily basis are inconstant. If they were constant, we wouldn’t have to look for happiness and pleasure anywhere else. But the fact is that the pleasure we have, as soon as we’ve experienced it for a while, gives out — regardless of what kind of pleasure it is. This is why the Buddha says it’s inconstant: it requires us to stir ourselves to search, to store things up.

The things we stir ourselves to search for: if we gain things that are good, that we like, we get possessive. And when there are things we love and like, other people like them, too. Many people who see what we have will want it as well. This gives rise to competition, to cheating and swindling, as people try to get what they want. From this comes hatred, animosity, and vengeance. This shows the inconstancy within the body, the constant changes in the happiness we want. The mind suffers negative impacts from the pleasure and pain that are such a confusing turmoil within it.

When we realize this truth, the Buddha taught us to develop the discernment needed to comprehend it. And he laid down another principle: *natthi santi paraṃ sukhaṃ* — there is no happiness higher than peace. The peace here is peace in the Dhamma, the peace that comes from practicing the Dhamma. He pointed out that peace is the highest happiness and showed us the path to that peace, which we’re practicing right now: developing tranquility and insight, exercising restraint over our words and deeds, and training our mind.

So we should turn in to look at ourselves. When we understand that the body and the pleasures we experience are inconstant, the mind state that used to feel attachment, that used to deceive itself into thinking that it was in possession of happiness.... We try to change things so that our pleasure will be constant. We don't see the drawbacks of the suffering we've been through. Delusion and misunderstanding thus arise in the mind that hasn't seen the peace offering a happiness more subtle and refined than what we're generally used to. This is why we have to depend on the Dhamma, depend on our conviction in the Buddha. If we look at the fabrications that the Buddha said are inconstant and stressful, we'll see that what he said is really true. The pleasures we've experienced don't really suffice. We have to study, to look for knowledge, to find a refuge more dependable than what we've known. This is why we have to depend on the teachings of the Buddha. When we've heard them, we train our minds to be still, to let go. We have to give ourselves the opportunity to make our minds empty and still.

When we say the mind is empty, that means that it's disengaged. It's not restless and distracted. It doesn't have a lot of preoccupations. The same as when we do demanding work: if we keep at it a lot, the body gets tired. When it's tired, we disengage it from the work. We sit down or lie down to rest. When it has rested at normalcy, the tiredness goes away. We regain our strength. When we've regained our strength, we can resume our work. We see that working uses up energy. When our energy is used up, resting gathers energy. The resting is part of the pleasure and ease that comes when the body is "empty": in other words, disengaged from its work.

It's the same with the mind. We look for happiness all the time because we want precisely this sense of ease. When the mind isn't empty and disengaged, we keep looking. We should train the mind to be still. When the mind is still, here in this sense of awareness itself, it's empty and disengaged. It's not thinking about anything. It's empty through its stillness. But we can't keep it empty and still like this all the time. We still have our aggregates (khandha) of clinging. We still have our eyes, and the mind wants to see things. We still have our ears, nose, tongue, and body. There are still sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. We still have feelings of pleasure and pain. These things are always disturbing us. So this is why the Buddha teaches us, once we've gotten the mind to settle down and be still, to contemplate the inconstancy of the body. That way we'll come to understand that the body is really inconstant and stressful. As long as we're still attached to the body as "me" or "mine", we'll have to suffer from aging, illness, and death at all times.

So we should let go of these things and hold onto the Dhamma, making the mind still. That way we'll give rise to stillness and ease. We'll see that the body is inconstant, aging and wasting away; that stress and suffering arise because of this

inconstancy. Ultimately the whole body falls apart. When it falls apart, what is it like? It grows putrid and decays. It doesn't belong to anyone. This is why the Buddha taught us to *yathā-bhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ*: to see things as they are with right discernment, to let them go, to have no attachment to the aggregates, not to view them as self. When this is the case, the mind won't feel any greed, for it sees that greed serves no purpose. When we've seen this truth, the angers we've felt in the past will grow weaker. Knowledge will arise in the place of our past delusions. When the mind contemplates and develops discernment to the point where it's able once and for all to make itself pure, totally abandoning the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion — or passion, aversion, and delusion — then that's called a mind truly empty: empty of defilement, empty of greed, anger, and delusion, because it's no longer carrying anything around. If you carry things, they're heavy. They defile the mind. If you don't hold on and carry them, the mind is empty. Pure. It doesn't have to look for anything ever again.

This emptiness of the mind comes from our understanding inconstancy. So if you aspire to this emptiness, you should contemplate inconstancy to see it clearly, to make your discernment alert and wise to the truth. The mind — whose defilements depend on inconstant things to give rise to greed, anger, and delusion — won't be able to give rise to them any more, because it's grown disenchanting. It doesn't want them. It will grow empty and enter into stillness. The mind is empty because its defilements are gone.

To summarize: the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self exist only in the mind with defilements. When the mind has the discernment to kill off the defilements for good, there's nothing inconstant, stressful, or not-self within it. That's why it's empty. As for our minds, at present they're not empty because they haven't been able to chase the defilements all out. Even though we're able to develop mindfulness and meditate to the point where we experience stillness and ease, that's only a little bit of temporary emptiness. As soon as mindfulness lapses, things come in to disturb us all over again. That's because we're not empty of defilement.

The ultimate defilement is unawareness. Every defilement, whether blatant, moderate, or subtle, has unawareness mixed in with it. This is why the Buddha taught us to train our minds to give rise to awareness, the opponent of unawareness. Whichever side is stronger will win out and hold power over the mind. If awareness wins out, the defilements have no place to stay. If unawareness wins out, there's no peace and ease. No purity. The mind isn't empty. Stress and suffering arise.

To know the unawareness already in the mind is awfully difficult. It's like using darkness to illuminate darkness: you can't see anything. Or like two blind people leading each other along: they'll have a hard time escaping from dangers and

reaching their goal. This is why we have to depend on people with good eyes: in other words, mindfulness and discernment. These are the crucial factors that will lead us to the end of the path.

An example of how we can put mindfulness to use: suppose we aren't yet acquainted with *anicca*. We don't know where it is. When we hear that *anicca* refers to the inconstancy of the five aggregates, beginning with physical form, we apply mindfulness to keeping these things in mind, to see if they really are inconstant. Or suppose we feel that we gain pleasure from holding onto the body as our self; we keep on providing for it and fixing it, so that we don't see its stress and inconstancy. In this way we've gone astray from the Buddha's teachings. So we use mindfulness to keep the body in mind. For example, we're mindful of hair. Is our hair constant? Does it always stay the same, or not? Think of the first strand of hair that grew on your head. It was cut off long ago. The hair we have now is new hair. It keeps changing. The first strand of hair no longer serves us any purpose. We don't even know where it's gone. This is one way of contemplating inconstancy.

As for *anattā*, or not-self: the hair that, in the past, we thought was ours — where is it now? If we think in this way we'll come to understand the teaching on not-self. If we contemplate the things that the Buddha said are not-self, we'll see that what he said is absolutely true. We'll see the truth, and our own mind is what sees the truth in line with what the Buddha said: our body doesn't have any essence; it just keeps sloughing away. And as for what he said about the body's being unclean: when it dies, no one can dress it up to make it really clean. As soon as it falls down dead, everyone detests it. When we reflect more and more profoundly on this, the mind will come to accept that what the Buddha taught is the genuine truth. When the mind accepts this, its ignorance will gradually disappear. Discernment — knowledge in line with the Buddha's teachings — will gradually take shape in our minds.

So when the mind contemplates hair profoundly until it knows the truth and its ignorance disappears, knowledge — beginning with knowledge about the true nature of our hair — will arise. The unawareness with which we clung to the hair as us or ours, seeing it as beautiful, dressing it up with perfumes, making it lovely and attractive: we'll see that all that was an act of self-delusion. If the true nature of these things was really good, we wouldn't have to do any of that, for it would already be good. It's because it's not good that we have to make it good. That's one way in which our own views have deluded us. The Buddha told us to know the truth of this matter so that the mind will be able to let go. When the mind lets go, all its defilements lighten and disappear because our views are right. Defilements arise because of wrong views, because of ignorance or unawareness of the truth. Ignorance gives rise to delusion and mistaken assumptions, which turn into wrong

views. This is why we have to make an effort to give rise to awareness.

For example, suppose we aren't aware that the hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones in our body are composed of the properties of earth, water, wind, and fire. Actually, this physical form of ours is nothing more than the four properties. The water property includes all the liquid parts of the body, such as bile, phlegm, lymph, mucus, urine, blood, fat, oil. The earth property includes all the hard and solid parts, such as hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, etc. The wind property includes the breath, the breath energy in the stomach, the energy that rises up in the body, the energy that goes down, the energy that flows all over the body. The fire property includes the warmth that keeps the body from decaying, the warmth that helps with the digestion, and the warmth that keeps the body alive at the right temperature. Altogether, the body is nothing but these four properties. When we don't realize this, that's called unawareness. We aren't acquainted with the body, the aggregates. When we learn about this, awareness can begin to arise.

This is why we're taught to contemplate the parts of the body: *kesā*, hair of the head; *lomā*, hair of the body; *nakhā*, nails; *dantā*, teeth; *taco*, skin. New monks are taught these things from the very day of their ordination so that they can eliminate unawareness and give rise to awareness through the light of mindfulness and discernment. I ask that you develop a lot of mindfulness and discernment in this area so that your minds will reach the emptiness and freedom you want.

Discernment here means the awareness that comes from studying the five aggregates. No other knowledge can destroy this defilement of unawareness. So when you want to destroy the defilement of unawareness, you have to carefully study the five aggregates, beginning with the body, until you see the four noble truths right here in the five aggregates. Actually, the five aggregates are things whose true nature is well within our power to study and know. First there's the aggregate of form, or the physical body. Then there are the mental aggregates: feeling, perception, mental fabrications, and consciousness. These are things we can know. We have to study and practice so that we can know all four of these mental aggregates in line with their true nature. Each of these aggregates covers a lot of aspects. For instance, physical form: *yañkiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgata-paccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā* — there are all kinds of forms that can fool and delude us: internal and external; blatant and subtle; past, present, and future. But when insight arises in full strength, it'll show us the way to see without much difficulty. All that's needed is that you first start with the basic meditation themes, such as the hair of the head, and see them clearly in line with their nature. Then discernment will gradually arise.

Do you understand this? You can say that the Dhamma is subtle, but you can also say that it's right here within us, within our own bodies. All the things I've

discussed here: when you haven't yet put them into practice but would like to see these truths, you shouldn't let mindfulness wander outside the body. Contemplate things in line with their true nature. Don't let prejudice get in the way. Remind yourself that this is the Dhamma.

That's enough explanation for now. When you study things but don't put them into practice, your knowledge doesn't get you anywhere. So now that you know the path, I'd like you to focus your intention on practicing a lot. I'll ask to stop here so that you can put your knowledge into practice and benefit from it.

May you all meet with wellbeing.

## “THIS BODY OF MINE”

WHEN MEDITATORS’ MINDS have reached genuine happiness in the Dhamma through their mindfulness and discernment, clearly seeing the four noble truths, none of them — not one — will revert to looking for happiness in the world or in material things. That’s because happiness in the Dhamma is a lasting happiness: solid, refined, and genuinely pure. If you compare worldly happiness with the happiness of the Dhamma, you’ll see that there’s not even the least real happiness to it. It offers nothing but stress, nothing but drawbacks. So why do we think it’s happiness? Because we’re burning with pain. We look to worldly happiness and pleasures to relieve the pain, which then goes away for a while but then comes back again.

For instance, the Buddha said that birth is stress, but ordinary people regard it as something happy. We don’t see the stress and pain involved. Yet once the mind has reached the happiness of the Dhamma, it can see that birth is really stressful, just as the Buddha said. The reason we have to look after ourselves, take care of ourselves, and still can’t find any peace, is because these things that have been born come to disturb us. We sit down and get some pleasure and ease from sitting down, but after a while it becomes painful. We say that it’s pleasant to lie down, but that’s true only at the very beginning. After we’ve lain down for a long time, it begins to get unpleasant. So we have to keep changing postures in order to gain pleasure. We look for this thing or that, but as soon as we’ve gained just a little pleasure from them, stress and pain come in their wake. If we have a family and home to live pleasantly together, there are only little pleasures, which have us fooled and deceived, while there are hundreds and thousands of unpleasant things. The happiness and pleasure that come from external things, material things, is never enough. It keeps wearing away, wearing away, and wearing us out, to no purpose at all. This is why those who have reached the Dhamma don’t return to this world so filled with sorrows and turmoil.

And this is why I want you to put an effort into meditating, contemplating in line with the Dhamma. Even if you aren’t yet convinced of the Dhamma, at least take the teachings of the Buddha as your working principles. For example, when the Buddha teaches about the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, we should train our minds to see in line with what he said. Give him a try. For example, he says that this body of ours is filled with all sorts of unclean things. We may not agree, but at least give it a try to see what happens when you look at things in line with what he says. He says it’s not clean. *Atthi imasmiṃ kāye* — in this body there is: hair of the head, and it’s not clean; hair of the body, and it’s

unclean; nails, and they're not clean. Don't be in a hurry to reject the Buddha's teachings. Take a look to see whether these things really are unclean or not. When the mind focuses on these things more and more steadily, and begins to feel quiet and at ease, the truth of these things will gradually appear more and more clearly. Conviction in the Dhamma, in the practice, will arise. Energy will arise as we want to see more. As this awareness grows greater, the mind will grow more luminous and still. This is the way of the practice. When you go back home, remember this simple principle: practice meditation by observing your body, observing your mind.

Use your mindfulness to keep track of the body in and of itself, so as to know it in line with its truth. If you don't look at the body, then look at the mind in and of itself. When you observe the movements of the body and mind, the pleasures and pains that arise so often, you'll develop awareness and skill. You'll learn how to handle things in line with the Buddha's teachings. You'll gain the discernment that sees and knows the truth. You'll see things more and more clearly. The more clearly you see things, the stronger and quieter the mind will grow. You'll see the body as stressful and unclean, but you'll have to look after the mind, keeping yourself wise to the fact that the stress and uncleanliness are an affair of the body, not of the mind.

The body has been unclean all along. We've lived with it all this time, so there's no need to be afraid of seeing these things, no need to reject them. We should contemplate the body so as to give rise to a sense of chastened dispassion. When you let go of the body, let go in a discerning way. Don't let go in a way in which delusion and misunderstanding overcome the mind. Don't get disgusted with the body so that the mind becomes restless and agitated and stops meditating. That kind of dislike is wrong. When we look at things we don't like — such as the inconstancy, the stressfulness, and the unattractiveness of the body — remember that they're part of the noble truths. The Buddha said that they're very beneficial. Contemplating the unattractiveness of the body is very beneficial because it serves an important purpose. If we see the body properly in this way, it helps the mind grow still with a sense of disenchantment. And that's what will cure our delusions and misunderstandings. This is why, when ordaining a monk, the very first step is to teach him the five meditation themes — kesā, hair of the head; lomā, hair of the body; nakhā, nails; dantā, teeth; taco, skin — as a way of developing discernment and knowledge of the truth.

So hold onto these themes and keep contemplating them, regardless of whether the mind is still or not. Whenever you have any free time, contemplate them. You can contemplate them even while you're working. Contemplate them until you get down to the minute details in a way that gives rise to a sense of stillness and ease.

It's similar to when we do physical work. We get wages for each hour we work. The more hours we work, the higher our pay. But if you get greedy and keep working without rest, then the body wears out, the mind grows weak, and you can't work any more. So you have to rest and eat to regain the strength of your body and nerves. Even though you don't get paid for the time you rest, you're willing to take the loss for the sake of your strength of body and mind, so that you can contend with the work after you've rested.

It's the same when you meditate: if you just keep contemplating and investigating, it won't be long before the mind gets restless and agitated. So you have to bring the mind to stillness to avoid its getting restless. If it gets restless, it'll have no peace. It'll get all tied up in knots and will grow weary of the meditation. So contemplate for a while until you can sense that the mind wants to stop and rest; then focus back on the in-and-out breath or anything else that will serve as a gathering point for the mind. Gradually let go of your contemplation, gradually let the mind settle down, so as to gain strength from the sense of pleasure and ease that come in this way. Don't worry about how long you should stay there. Even though the mind doesn't seem to be gaining any knowledge, don't worry about it. It's as when you're resting from physical labor: even though your boss doesn't give you anything for the hour you rest, you're willing for the sake of gaining energy — in this case, strength of mind.

This is why the noble disciples constantly practice concentration, constantly get the mind to settle down. After they've contemplated to the point where the mind gets weary, they let the mind grow still. After it's had enough stillness, they go back to their contemplation. This is how we should practice. If we practice in this way, the mind will gain energy and strength, will gain discernment to the end point of all suffering and stress, seeing things for what they actually are. The question asked the other day — how to practice when you go back home — was a very good question. The answer is: keep looking after your mind in the way I've described here. Practice exercising your own mindfulness and discernment.

## KARMA

*Question:* You've spoken of the five topics that should be contemplated every day: that we're subject to aging, subject to illness, subject to death, subject to separation from the things and people we love, and that we're the owners of our karma. This fifth topic is the most difficult of the five to understand. I was wondering if you could explain karma, and in particular the role of mindfulness at the moment of death.

*Ajaan Suwat:* Listen carefully. I'm going to explain karma in line with the principles of the Buddha's Awakening. When the Buddha explained karma, he did so in line with one of the knowledges he attained on the night of his Awakening: recollection of past lives. In becoming the Buddha, it wasn't the case that he had been born only once and had practiced only one lifetime before attaining Awakening. He had been developing his goodness, his perfections, for many lifetimes. That was how he had been able to build up his discernment continually over the course of time to the point where he could awaken to the subtle Dhamma so hard for anyone to recollect, so hard for anyone to awaken to. He had been developing his mindfulness until it was fully powerful, his discernment until it was fully powerful, so that he could come to know the truth. For this reason, our understanding of karma has to depend both on our study and on our practice, training our own minds as the Buddha did so as to gain discernment step by step.

When the Buddha spoke about karma after his Awakening to the truth, he was referring to action. There's physical karma, i.e., the actions of the body; verbal karma, the actions of speech; and mental karma, the actions of the mind. All human beings, all living beings, experience good things and bad, pleasure and pain, from karma — their own actions.

Karma is something very subtle. When you ask about rebirth and how you'll experience pleasure and pain in future lives, you should first study karma in your present life, your actions in your present life. Understand your actions in the present life clearly. Once you understand them, once you know the truth of action in the present, then when you train the mind further you'll gradually come to the end of your doubts. There's no one who has ever resolved doubts about rebirth simply through reading or hearing the spoken word. Even among those who've practiced a long time: if their discernment isn't up to the task, they'll still have their same old doubts. The texts tell us that doubt is ended only with the attainment of the first of the noble paths, called stream entry. Stream-enterers have cut away three defilements: self-identity views, doubt, and attachment to

habits and practices. When the discernment of the noble path arises, knowledge of birth and death, rebirth and redeath, arises together with it. As for our current level of discernment: if we want to know about these things, we need to do the preliminary work. We need to study the nature of action in the present. So today I won't speak of future lifetimes. I'll teach about the three kinds of action — physical action, verbal action, and mental action — in the present.

These three kinds of action are divided into two sorts: good and bad. Bad actions give rise to suffering. Good actions give rise to good results: happiness, prosperity, mindfulness, and discernment, both in the present and on into future days, future months, future years.

Bad actions are called unskillful karma. The Buddha taught that we should abandon this kind of karma. In the area of physical action, that includes tormenting and killing living beings, whether large or small. This kind of action is unskillful because it lacks good will and compassion. All living beings love their life. If we kill them, it's unskillful because we have no compassion, no pity, no regard for their lives. This is why the Buddha told us not to do it. If we kill other human beings, we get punished in the present both by the civil law and by the Dhamma.

These three things — killing, stealing, and illicit sex — are all called unskillful physical karma. We should contemplate them to see why the Buddha told us not to do them. When we've contemplated them, we'll see that they really aren't good things to do because we wouldn't want anyone to do them to us. For example, the wealth that we've earned is something we're possessive of. It's something we want to use as we like. If someone were to steal it from us or cheat us out of it, then even if that person used to be our friend, that's the end of the friendship. We can't live with that person any longer. We're sure to have a quarrel and a falling out. That person might even have to go to jail for the theft. This is crude karma, the kind whose results are visible in the immediate present.

The same holds true with the third precept. Once we've decided to get married, to live with another person, then if that person cheats on us, think of how much suffering there will be for both sides. People who want peace or who are established in morality won't praise the other person as being a good person. All of these things are unskillful physical actions that the Buddha taught us to abandon.

As for verbal karma, there are four kinds of unskillful action: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter. And in the area of mental karma, there are three: greed, ill will, and wrong views.

Whoever does any of these ten kinds of unskillful actions — the three kinds of unskillful physical karma, the four kinds of unskillful verbal karma, and the three

kinds of unskillful mental karma — is an unskillful person. This is why we're taught that we're the owners of our actions. If we act in these mistaken ways, we become mistaken people. We're the ones who are defiled by those actions: no one else is defiled by what we do. This is why we're taught to reflect every day that we're the owner of our actions. If we do something bad, we become bad people and we have to reap the bad results, the suffering that arises from that action. That's why we're taught that we're the heirs to our actions. If we don't abandon those actions, if we keep doing them often, the results of those actions will follow us wherever we go. There's no way we can be regarded as good people. This is why we're taught that we're followed by our actions. Wherever we go, if we don't give up that kind of behavior we'll be mistrusted by society.

The reason the Buddha has us reflect on these things — that we're the owners of our actions, heirs to our actions, followed by our actions — is so that we'll pay attention to our actions every day, so that we'll see them clearly for what they are. If we don't clearly see the nature and results of our actions, we should contemplate them further. Why does killing result in suffering? When a person kills, why is that person a bad person? The same holds true with stealing and illicit sex. If we examine these actions carefully, making our minds impartial and fair, we'll see that these actions really are bad. They really result in suffering. We'll see for ourselves in line with what the Buddha taught. We don't have to look at anyone else. We just look at ourselves. If we see that what we're doing isn't good, then when other people do the same things, the same holds true for them. Whoever does these things is a bad person. If a lot of people do these things, then there's trouble for a lot of people. If everyone in the world were to do these things, the whole world would be troubled. The peace and happiness the world does experience comes totally from the good actions of good people.

The ten things we've been talking about are karma on the unskillful side, but there are also ten kinds of skillful karma — three physical, four verbal, and three mental — in just the same way. These are the actions that bring us happiness and prosperity. In terms of the three kinds of skillful physical karma, we use our discernment and compassion to consider things. We have compassion for animals that are about to be killed. If we see something belonging to someone else that we'd like, we have compassion for them so that we wouldn't want to steal that thing or cheat the other person out of it. If we see an opportunity for some illicit sex, we reflect on the fact that we're already married and should have only one heart, one love. We should have compassion for the person we live with. If we cheat on that person, we'll create suffering for him or her. Having only one heart, one love, is meritorious, for it allows us to live together for life. So if we learn to abandon the pleasures that come from taking life, stealing, and illicit sex, we benefit. We become good people. Society doesn't mistrust us. The society of good

people recognizes us as good people, as clean people, pure in body because our virtues are pure. This is where purity comes from.

To save time, I'll condense the remainder of the discussion. The ten kinds of skillful actions are the opposite of the ten kinds of unskillful ones. In terms of the three kinds of skillful physical karma, we abstain from the three kinds of unskillful karma. We resolve not to do them, and we follow through absolutely in line with that resolve. The same holds for the four kinds of skillful verbal karma. We resolve firmly not to lie, not to engage in divisive speech, in harsh speech, or idle chatter. We also resolve not to be greedy, not to feel ill will for anyone, and to straighten out our views — i.e., to hold to the principle of karma, seeing that if we do good, we'll become good; if we do bad, we'll become bad. When we see things in this way, our views are right in line with the truth.

Unskillful actions come from the mind's being affected by the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion. People kill and steal out of greed, engage in illicit sex out of greed, steal or kill out of anger. Sometimes they engage in illicit sex out of anger, as a way of getting even. Sometimes they do these things out of delusion, as when they're tricked into doing them along with other people. That's why these three defilements — greed, anger, and delusion — are so important. And this is why we develop mindfulness, so that we'll see how these three defilements are the root of unskillfulness. If they arise, they can cause us to misbehave in various ways, to engage in unskillful karma. So when they arise, we have to use our discernment to hold them in check.

As for skillful mental states, when we understand how unskillfulness comes from these three defilements — when we've heard these teachings and considered them on our own — the mind comes to feel shame at the idea of misbehaving in any of those ways. It realizes why they shouldn't be done. It also develops a sense of compunction, realizing that if we do those things, we'll become bad people. Our friends — anyone who knows us — will criticize us, won't want to associate with us, will despise us. When we feel this kind of dread, we can abandon those things.

So when our discernment reaches the stage where we have this sense of shame and compunction, when we resolve not to do wrong in terms of our physical, verbal, and mental karma, then skillful mental states have arisen within us. These states will then lead us to do all sorts of good. We'll feel compassion for others. We'll want to help them. This in turn becomes one of our perfections, causing other people, other beings, to love us in return. The happiness that comes from this goodness is called merit (*puñña*). When we have a sense of shame and compunction, we exercise restraint over our physical actions so that we don't do anything wrong. This means that our body is pure. We exercise restraint over our speech, not breaking our precepts, and in this way our speech is pure. We exercise restraint over the mind, and in this way our mind is pure. When we exercise

restraint and don't do anything wrong, we'll know for ourselves that we're good people — good because what we do is good.

As for the good things that come from doing good: our friends will love us, people trust us, we pose no threat to anyone anywhere. People are happy to welcome us into their society. When we act in this way, we're not mistrusted wherever we go. Thus, when we do good, that good karma is ours. We'll be skillful people. If other people do good, that good karma is theirs. As for people who don't restrain themselves in this way, they don't have a share in that goodness. This is why the Buddha said that we're the owners of our actions.

If we do good, we'll experience good results. If we keep doing good, that goodness will keep following us wherever we go. For example, if a monk observes his precepts, exercises restraint over his words and deeds in Thailand, the people there recognize him as a good person. When he comes to America, we see that he's a good person who poses no danger to us. The same holds true with us. If we behave in a skillful way, we're good people. If we go to Thailand, the people there will welcome us. Wherever we go, people will welcome us. It's when we do evil that people want to keep us out.

So we can see clearly in line with what the Buddha said: living beings are what they are in line with their actions. If we do good, we're good people and experience happiness. Society welcomes us. We help bring pleasure to the world. When we see the good we've done, we'll feel happy with ourselves. Esteem for ourselves. We can guarantee our own purity. Wherever we go, we can go with confidence, for there are no hidden weak points in our behavior or hearts. We're not afraid of being found out for anything, for we have nothing to hide. It's because of our purity that we can be confident and brave. Wherever we go, we know that good people will welcome us.

Moreover, we can help them become better people, too. They can take us as an example, and in this way we serve a beneficial purpose. The activities of good people are much more beneficial than those of people who aren't good. This is because their minds tend toward self-sacrifice for the sake of the world, the sake of the common good. In this way they win honor, praise, wealth, and happiness. Society spreads their name far and wide for the goodness they've done.

Now that you've heard about the pleasure and pain that come in the present from good and bad karma we've done, do you understand what I've said? Do you agree?

*Question:* What about when you're about to die? What's the influence of the karma you've done? And what's the role of mindfulness at that point?

*Ajaan Suwat:* I'm not yet talking about death. I'm talking about the present to

make sure that we first understand the present.

Mindfulness at the point of death, though, is related to present karma. It's a form of skillful karma. If we've done good, then our mindfulness will have the strength to recollect the goodness we've done.

Normally, when people are about to die, two kinds of signs can appear. The first is a karma-sign (*kamma-nimitta*), dealing with actions they've done in the past. If a person has done evil, then there may be a sign making him relive that action. When I was a child, there was a man in the village who had slaughtered a lot of cattle. When he was about to die, he started screaming and sounded just like a cow being slaughtered. This is called a sign of unskillful karma. The person relives the karma he did, although this time it's being done to him: in the case of the man who slaughtered cattle, he sees someone coming to kill him. When that sort of vision appears, the mind will fall in line with it and be reborn in a state of deprivation to suffer the consequences of its evil deeds.

The second kind of sign is a destination-sign (*gati-nimitta*). You see where you're going. You may see hell, the realm of the hungry ghosts — everywhere you look you see things corresponding to the bad things you've done. If you die at that point, the mind will go to that sort of destination.

Enough of these bad things. Let's talk about some good ones, all right?

If you've done good things and skillful things, then when you're about to die ... Especially if you've practiced meditation and attained jhāna, then when you're about to die the mind can enter one of the rūpa jhānas and be reborn on the level of the rūpa brahmās. If you've attained any of the arūpa jhānas, then you can enter jhāna and reach the levels of the arūpa brahmās, in line with the mind's strength.

As for more ordinary levels of skillfulness — called *kāmāvacara-kusala*, skillfulness on the sensual level — as when you practice generosity, observe the precepts, and meditate, abstaining from the ten forms of unskillful karma we've mentioned: when you're about to die, a karma-sign will arise and you'll remember meditating in the past. You'll find yourself meditating again, being mindful, gaining the same sense of ease you had before. The mind then holds onto its concentration and experiences rebirth in a pleasurable direction in one of the good destinations.

Or you may remember the happiness you felt in doing good — paying respect to the Buddha, lighting candles and incense, giving donations in one way or another. You may get a karma-sign that you're doing those things again together with your friends, in the same way as we're meditating together here: paying respect to the Buddha, sitting in meditation, doing walking meditation. If you pass away at that moment, the mind will experience birth in one of the good destinations. In this way, whatever actions you did in the course of your life will

appear to you — as if you’re doing them again — as you’re about die.

As for the good destination-signs, you may see gold and silver palaces, riches, things that delight you and give you pleasure, things corresponding to the skillful things you’ve done. If you die at that point, you’ll go to a good destination.

There’s a story in the *Dhammapada Commentary* about a very virtuous lay disciple who liked to listen to the Dhamma and made a practice of generosity, virtue, and meditation. As he grew older and was on his deathbed, he asked his children to invite some monks to come recite some suttas to him. As the monks were chanting — most likely the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the *Girimānanda Sutta*, or the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* — devas from all the various directions came with their royal chariots to take the lay disciple back to their different heavens. This one said, “Come with me.” That one said, “No, come with me.” So the devas started fighting over him.

The lay disciple, seeing this, said, “Stop!” As soon as he said that, the monks — who didn’t see the devas — stopped chanting and went back to their monastery. Soon after, the layman asked his children, “What happened to all the monks?” The children answered, “Well, you told them to stop, so they stopped chanting and went back to the monastery.” “No,” the lay disciple said, “I didn’t tell them to stop. I told the devas to stop fighting.” The children didn’t believe him that any devas had come. All they could think was that he was losing his mind. He insisted, though, that the devas had come to welcome him to their heavens. “If you don’t believe me, take that garland and throw it in the air.” So they threw the garland in the air, and it caught on the edge of one of the devas’ chariots as it was about to leave. The children didn’t see the chariot, all they could see was the garland whizzing through the air. The only person who could see the devas was their father.

This is one of the rewards of acting skillfully, or serving a useful purpose in life. When you’re about to die, the devas come to take you to their heavens. They want you to join them — for there’s happiness in living with wise people, in associating with people who are good.

In short, the three types of skillfulness that lead to a good destination are *dānamaya*, generosity, helping other people to live in pleasure and happiness; *sīlamaya*, virtue, observing the five precepts and ten forms of skillful action; and *bhāvanāmaya*, meditation, developing the mind. I ask that you have conviction in meditation, that you set your minds on doing it. Whether or not your minds settle down doesn’t really matter. Even if you don’t gain release from suffering in this lifetime, you’re developing good habits that will act as supporting conditions in future lifetimes. The reward of your meditation is that you’ll be mindful, discerning, and intelligent. You’ll live long and feel mental wellbeing. If you get to hear the Dhamma in the future, you’ll more easily gain Awakening. These are

some of the rewards of meditating.

So don't let yourselves grow weary of the meditation. Don't tell yourselves that you don't get anything from doing it. At the very least, you gain skillfulness on the sensual level; you develop awareness, understanding, and intelligence as supporting conditions for your future happiness, both in this life and on into the next.

That's enough explanation for now. May each and every one of you meet with peace and prosperity.

## FISTFUL OF SAND

THE BUDDHA TAUGHT nothing but the truth. If something wasn't true, he wouldn't say it. He taught the Dhamma in such a way that anyone who contemplated it could confirm what he was saying. If there were things that other people, on consideration, couldn't see or know, he wouldn't teach them or lay them down as rules. This is why his teachings are *sanditthiko*, visible here and now. If people who listen to them practice correctly in line with them, they can see the truth of his every word for themselves. This way they can develop self-confidence.

Once, when the Buddha had come to a river, he picked up a fistful of sand and asked the monks who were following him, "Which is greater, this fistful of sand or the sand in all the rivers and oceans?" The monks answered, "The sand in the Blessed One's fist is a small amount, lord. The sand in all the rivers and oceans is far more."

The Buddha then responded, "In the same way, monks, those things that I have known with direct knowledge but have not taught are like the sand in all the rivers and oceans. The things I have taught are like this fistful of sand."

Any teaching that was true but wouldn't serve a purpose — in other words, things that his listeners couldn't confirm for themselves — the Buddha wouldn't teach. And he wouldn't deceive the world by teaching anything useless or untrue. He taught only the genuine truth that his listeners could understand and confirm for themselves through the practice.

I've explained quite a lot already. When there's a lot of speaking, there's simply a lot of breath. My hope is that you all will learn from listening, in line with your mindfulness, and then take what you've learned and put it into practice so that it will serve a purpose. Even though it may not be much, my hope is that it's enough to serve a purpose.

You've sacrificed a lot — your work, all kinds of things — in coming here to practice. Coming together like this doesn't happen easily. Our interpreter has sacrificed his time, too, inspired by his sense that you want to practice. The organizer, Larry Rosenberg, has given a lot of his time and energy to the arrangements that have enabled us to come together to practice, out of a similar desire: the desire that all of you learn and practice the correct way to lead your lives, so that you'll reach purity in line with the principles of the Buddha's teachings — the same teachings he taught his disciples in the past, so that they too were able to reach purity. The teachings of the Buddha are still with us. Those of us in the present should listen to them and put them into practice so as to serve a

purpose, just like the people in the past. That way we'll find happiness and prosperity in our lives.

So I ask that you remember what you've learned here, contemplate it, and put it into practice so that all of you — each and every one — will benefit in line with your aims.

That's enough for now, so I'll ask to stop here.

*The  
Light of  
Discernment*

## BLATANTLY CLEAR IN THE HEART

WE'VE ALL COME with a sense of conviction, intent on studying and practicing the Dhamma so as to train our minds, so that the Dhamma will appear within our minds and give them refuge. Even though the Dhamma is always present, it hasn't yet become the property of the heart and mind. As long as the Dhamma is simply the property of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, it's a Dhamma that isn't genuine, a Dhamma that isn't pure, a Dhamma that isn't polished, a Dhamma that can get in the way of our seeing the truth. It can let us get deceived by the preoccupations created by the process of fabrication from things the eye sees, the ear hears, and so on. After all, the knowledge that comes from what the eye sees or the ear hears: almost everyone has eyes and ears. If the knowledge that comes just from these things were enough to give rise to the most significant benefit of the Dhamma, then everyone would have already experienced that significant wellbeing. They would have experienced a happiness that's genuine, certain, and complete. This is because all living beings with eyes can see, all those with ears can hear, all those with a nose, tongue, and body can know through these things. But to know the skillful Dhamma taught by the Buddha requires more than just eyes and ears. It requires mindfulness — the ability to keep something in mind — along with a mind equipped with the right views that have come from training in the right principles of the Buddha's teachings.

This is because the Buddha's teachings are the well-taught Dhamma that people throughout the world have acknowledged as right and complete, leading to peace, leading to happiness, leading to mental, verbal, and physical actions that are masterful, seamless, with nothing lacking. Even the devas have acknowledged that the Buddha's Dhamma is well taught. Countless people with confidence in the Dhamma, practicing it earnestly, have attained the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna. They've gained release from suffering through the principles of the Dhamma that they've studied and trained themselves in. All of us here are people of discernment just like them, so we should take hold of these things and make them our heart's possession in a full and complete way, just like them. We shouldn't content ourselves simply with hearing about or learning about the Dhamma, for our knowledge on that level can still be deceived, can still change, so that our hearts can become uncertain and unsure, so that we can make mistakes, putting the heart in a position where it suffers from the impact of the things it sees or hears, or from the wrong decisions it makes.

We've made these mistakes and suffered from these things countless times already. This is a fact we can't deny. This is why we can't win out over our moods

and preoccupations as we would like to. We see the defects in our hearts — in our thoughts, words, and deeds — which is why we can't maintain our peace of mind as consistently as we'd like to.

So try to make use of the mind's skillful qualities. What are those qualities? You already know them: virtue, concentration, and discernment. Maintain them so that they become clear and blatant in the heart. Come to see clearly what sufferings virtue can drive out of the heart, what obstacles to happiness and peace it can drive out of the heart — to see what sorts of benefits it can bring.

Ask yourself: if you didn't observe this or that precept, what would appear in your physical or verbal actions? A life composed of those actions: in what direction would it pull you? This is something you have to see clearly, you know. If you're a Buddhist meditator, you're a student of the Buddha, one who knows — not one who is stupid! The Buddha was never heedless or careless with life. He never let time go to waste. You should make up your mind that, aside from when you sleep, you want your every movement to serve a purpose you can depend on. You should live with awareness, with right views. You shouldn't get infatuated with things coming in by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body. We've all been using these things for the purpose of delusion for a long time — it's not that we've just started using them for that purpose recently. So are we going to follow along in the same way forever? This is an area where we should take responsibility and come to our senses, to straighten ourselves out.

We have to look after our words and deeds so that they're perfectly blatant to us. This is called keeping the precepts in line with the principle, *sīlena sugatim yanti*: it's through virtue that beings go to the good destinations. The Buddha didn't say this without firm evidence, or simply as propaganda for people to believe or put into practice in a deluded way. He said this through right discernment. Those who practice have to understand with right discernment in just the same way so as to conform to the principle of *uju-paṭipanno*, those who practice straight in line with the Dhamma. If you're the sort of person who simply believes what people say, right when they're right, wrong when they're wrong, then you can still be deceived. You need to develop the mind to a solid level, seeing the Dhamma in a way that's blatant, clear, and informed. That's when you'll be undeceivable.

That's virtue.

As for concentration, you have to see clearly what suffering it drives out of the heart, what benefits it brings. This is something you have to learn and understand so that you'll really know. If you understand concentration, it'll bring its benefits to you. It'll make the mind genuinely clear, bright, and pure, because mindfulness will remember to choose only good preoccupations for the mind. Discernment will contemplate them and drive out from the mind any lack of stillness or peace.

Discernment on the level of concentration practice — when concentration has fostered a sense of wellbeing and seclusion in the mind — will drive out any disturbance that used to cause stress for the mind. It will see the dangers and drawbacks of those disturbances. This sort of discernment will arise when we've practiced concentration correctly to the point of giving rise to peace and wellbeing.

Conviction will arise when we see these results clearly in the mind. We won't have any doubts. We won't have to ask anyone what concentration is like, what a still mind is like, what the rewards of concentration are. We won't have to ask, for the mind knows. It has entered into these things. This is what happens when we really practice, using our mindfulness and persistence, using our discernment correctly, so as to serve a true purpose.

Meditation is simply a matter of looking at what's in the heart and mind, for all good and evil come from the mind. They're fabricated by the mind. When we use right views to look at the mind, when we keep right mindfulness right at the mind, when we apply right effort continually in our mindfulness without lapse, the mind will have to be firmly established in right concentration and won't go anywhere else. That's when we'll see how much rightness is arising right there. When we don't lose focus or look anywhere else, when we keep on trying to be continuous in our gaze — in the same way we read a book — we'll be able to see the entire story of what's going on. If we forget and go looking elsewhere, we'll lose whole chunks of the story. We won't be able to connect the beginning with the end. It won't have any shape.

But when the mind stays firmly in place, it'll enter concentration. The word "concentration" means the firm stillness that comes from training the mind with our Dhamma theme. For example, *buddho*: we have to stay right with the word *buddho*. Our effort is devoted to keeping *buddho* in mind. Don't let it slip away to other things. Keep your efforts focused right there. Keep your mindfulness gathered right there. Don't let it forget and go elsewhere. When you keep trying to do this, the counterfeit things in the mind — the defilements that deceive us — won't be able to arise, for mindfulness is all there, so the defilements can't establish themselves, can't deceive us. This is because of the power of the mindfulness, concentration, and discernment that our mind has gathered together to chase away the enemies of our stillness, the enemies of our happiness and wellbeing. We used to see these enemies as our friends and benefactors. But once we've studied the Buddha's teachings, we realize that they're nothing but defilements.

Defilements don't have any substance to them. What do they come from? From the mind. They're shadows of the mind that dwell in the mind. When in any mental moment there's a thought that goes contrary to the Dhamma, that gives

rise to no true knowledge or intelligence, that brings us danger and suffering: that thought is called a defilement. Thoughts of this sort don't come from anywhere else. Of course, there are aspects of defilement that take their inspiration from outside the mind, but we shouldn't trace them back in that direction, or send attention outside in that direction. We're here simply for the sake of stillness, for the sake of concentration. We have to focus right here in front of us. We don't have to want to know anything else — for example, where the defilements come from, how they can arise, or where they stay. It's the same as when we come down with a sudden lethal disease. If we waste time asking the doctor where his medicine comes from or what it contains, we could easily die first. We have to trust the doctor and take the medicine as he prescribes it, in line with the principles he has used with good results in the past.

In the same way, when we're training the mind to be still, we don't have to track down where things come from. We have to abstain from our desire to track things down, to know in ways that will distract us from our stillness. When you want to center the mind on *buddho*, you only have to be aware of *buddho*. Don't let your awareness slip away. Have the mind hold onto *buddho* as its refuge at all times. That's your task, the task you have to do. The same holds true when you're focusing on the breath, or whatever the focus of your meditation. They're all Dhamma themes. How is the breath a Dhamma theme? It's a physical dhamma — the breath or wind element here in the body. Without the breath, the body wouldn't last.

This isn't something we have to explain, because we're already aware of it. We understand it rightly. We don't have to contemplate the ways in which the breath is important. We simply use the breath to train the mind. We're not here to train the breath. We use the breath to make the mind still, which is why we don't have to analyze the body in any other way. When we want the mind to be still, to settle down and rest, or when we want mindfulness to work with full agility in overcoming delusion, we have to exercise mindfulness fully in the duty at hand. When our effort is right, our mindfulness is right, and our concentration is right, then they give crucial strength to the skillfulness of the mind, so that it has the power and authority it needs to drive away the demons of defilement: i.e., its own lack of skill and intelligence, its delusions, its tendency to float along after the preoccupations that deceive it, thinking that it gains true happiness through the help of things outside. Actually, those things endanger the mind. Why? Because they're nothing but fabrications that are inconstant. There's nothing constant about them at all. Visual forms are inconstant, sounds are inconstant, all those phenomena are inconstant. They're the Dhamma of Māra, come to deceive us.

But even when we understand this, we shouldn't yet go thinking about them. Only when we've developed enough strength of mind to contend with them

should we go out and fight with them. When our mindfulness isn't yet firmly based in concentration, we can't fight them off. We're sure to get demolished by them. We've been demolished by them many, many times before, because our base of operations — our concentration — isn't solid enough. We keep losing out to the enemy. Do you want to keep on losing out? When are you going to gather your forces? In other words, when are you going to make your conviction solid, your persistence solid, your mindfulness, concentration, and discernment all solid? These are the forces that will overcome the things that have been deceiving the mind as they like.

So I ask that we all be earnest in watching over this mind of ours. As we're taught, *cittarū dantarū sukhāvaharū*: the mind when trained brings happiness. The Buddha has already done this, has already succeeded in gaining this happiness. His many noble disciples have succeeded in the same way, providing evidence for the truth of what he has taught.

When we train ourselves so that our foundation is solid, we'll have our own evidence, the Dhamma that appears blatantly in our heart. We'll gain confidence, accepting the fact that the Buddha's Dhamma is well taught. We'll no longer have any doubts, because it will have become blatant in the heart. It's not simply that we've heard other people teach it or seen it in books. The evidence has appeared clearly in the heart that has accepted the truth within it. The mind will become solid in a way that no defilement will be able to deceive.

So I ask that we all practice truly. When we practice truly, the truth will truly appear to us. Practice so that these things appear clearly. When we've made virtue blatantly clear, concentration blatantly clear, and discernment blatantly clear, where will any ignorance or craving be able to fabricate more states of being or birth for us? We'll have had enough. We won't want anything more. There won't be any more craving, because we've gained a sense of the word, "enough." This is how we reach enough — not by struggling to amass material things. The world has tried to reach "enough" in that way for a long time now, but there's never been enough of those things. So turn around and watch over your mind so that it all becomes blatantly clear.

Now that you've heard this, try to remember it. You can always put it to use, from this day forward. The Buddha's teachings have never grown old or worn. They're always brand new, which is why we can put them to use at all times, in all places. When we always keep them in mind, we'll have a safe and secure refuge, an auspicious refuge. Whoever attains this refuge will gain release from all suffering and stress.

## STRAIGHTENING OUT YOUR VIEWS

WHEN WE MEDITATE, we're training the mind, for we hold the mind to be very important. But training the mind is really difficult if we don't develop the right character habits. We have to depend on refined inner qualities for the training really to go straight to the heart, because the heart itself is subtle and sensitive. We have to make our character meticulous, pliant, tractable, respectful, inoffensive. We have to be willing to follow the example already set by someone who knows, who's already taken the path, who — on examination — we've found to be above us in terms of his training in mindfulness and discernment, above us in terms of the purity of his actions. Who is this person? The Buddha — someone to whom no one else can legitimately be compared. We can't legitimately compare our views and opinions with him, for he is someone who truly trained himself, who sacrificed everything, with no thought for his survival.

The fact that we're still left hanging on in *samsāra* after this long, long time is all because of our character habits. It's because of our character habits that we keep missing the path, falling off the path, straying away from the path all the time. It's because of our habit of finding excuses for ourselves that we aren't willing to follow the path set out by the Buddha. What sort of path has he set out for our actions? What sort has he set out for our words? For our mind? He set out standards for us to respect, to obey, to put into practice. Sages have said that the Buddha's path is an easy one to follow correctly, for it creates no dangers. It doesn't require that we do anything hurtful or hard.

We have to examine the Buddha's teachings to see if they're worthy of obedience or not, to see if they're worthy to be followed or not. Do they have any defects that we should try to avoid, that we shouldn't accept? Can we find any inconsistencies in the Buddha that would justify our giving more credence to our own opinions, that would justify our disobeying his teachings? And what do we have that's so special? When you look carefully, you can't find anything to fault him with. So what harm would it do to listen to him and to obey his teachings?

We have to study to see where our own defects lie. It's as if we're going on a journey. Our body may be in good shape, but if the workings of our car are defective they can take us right off the road. So we have to meditate to examine the workings of our car, in other words, the preoccupations that we create in the mind and that act as views. The Buddha gave a great deal of importance to the issue of views, for our views can make us defective. When our views are defective, they can make our virtues defective. They can make our practice defective, taking us off the path. Our views get defective when the mind is infected with delusion.

There's very little alertness. There may be a lot of knowledge, a lot of information, but very little alertness. We may think that we're knowledgeable, that we're intelligent, but we don't know that our views are defective. Only those who know, who've gotten past this stage, can recognize what's defective in our views.

So we have to make a point of training the aspect of our character related to our views, to practice making our views straight (*ditth'uju-kamma*). Only then will we free ourselves from defective views and replace them with impeccable ones. In order to do this, we have to be scrupulous in being observant. And we have to be scrupulous in reflecting on our past actions, both the things we've done right and the things we've done wrong. For the most part, we don't observe our actions carefully. We make the same mistakes over and over again. We cause ourselves suffering but don't take it to heart to prevent it from happening again. This is why we keep spinning around endlessly in the cycles of *samsāra*. We keep making mistakes but we don't recognize them as mistakes. We do things right from time to time but don't recognize why they're right. So everything gets all confused.

But if we train ourselves to be observant, to keep cleansing the heart so that we won't repeat our mistakes a second time, won't cause ourselves to suffer in that way a second time, we'll be able to make choices that really benefit us. When we look at our past beliefs and actions, and then compare them with the actions of those who are wise, we'll see which things are useless and we'll stop doing them. But if we don't let go of our old views, we won't be able to stop doing the things we should stop. We won't be able to give up the things we should give up. As long as we hold onto our old views, the same old sufferings will keep shadowing us. We'll never be able to find the path leading to the end of suffering.

This is why the noble eightfold path begins with *sammā-ditthi*, or right view. Right view correctly describes things right around us — within and without us — that have always been that way from time immemorial. So when you see the Dhamma — the truth of things as they already are — you'll be willing to let go of your old opinions and follow the path taught by the Buddha. For the Buddha taught these truths so that we could study and know the genuine truth. It doesn't hurt to believe the Buddha. It can only help us. His Awakening was for the benefit and happiness of the beings of the world, for the purification of the beings of the world who have the wisdom and discernment to follow the path that he followed. The arising of a Buddha leads to suffering only for those whose pride prevents them from following his path. They're the only ones who don't benefit from his Awakening.

We should be open and honest with ourselves about our pride, our views. We shouldn't hide them from ourselves. We should bring them out and flush them out. Don't keep feeding them. For the most part, they're not the sort of friends who will help make us bright, clean, and pure. Don't go thinking that the ideas we

like will necessarily help make us bright, clean, and pure. We should pry them out, unfurl them, clean them out so that all our defective views can be cut away. When we're free of defective views, we'll be left with impeccable views, views that are a treasure in terms of our thinking. When our views are impeccable, our virtues will be impeccable. And when our virtues form a good, solid foundation, training the mind becomes easy and free from difficulties.

The problem right now is that our views run contrary to the truth and are always ready to make false assumptions. We see stressful things as pleasurable, short things as long, things that should be done as things not to be done. We see things that are filthy, that should be straightened out to put them in line with the truth, and we simply leave them as they are, at odds with the truth. So how can we hope to gain release from suffering? How can we hope to reach purity?

The mind is something subtle and sensitive, easily misled by subtle misunderstandings, to say nothing of blatant ones. This is why the Buddha set out a training regime for our character habits, to make us compliant and respectful toward the truth, even in the smallest matters, seeing danger in even the slightest faults. In other words, he pointed out even the slightest faults that we should avoid, should abandon, but we feel that we can't do without them. We don't see them as faults. This means we don't see the frightening dangers that will arise from our own wrong actions. So we're audacious in doing what's wrong. As for the things the Buddha told us to do, we're not willing to do them, not willing to follow him, all because of our views and our pride. This is why we can't reach the stream to nibbāna.

If we want to practice so as to abandon our pride, so as to enter the stream to the transcendent, we have to straighten out our views — in particular, self-identity views (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*). These are the very first door. If we can't straighten out these sorts of wrong views, we won't be able to find the door through the wall that separates us from the Deathless. We'll simply circle around the outside perimeter. No matter how many lifetimes we practice, we'll just keep walking around the perimeter of the wall if we can't straighten out these views. So we should train ourselves to examine our many subtle views in all their elaborations. We should give rise to conviction that's stronger than what we already have. We should make our respect stronger than what it already is, and be willing to follow the Buddha's instructions. When he says to renounce something, we should renounce it, even if it means putting our life on the line, even if it means dying. Only then will we come out victorious, making an opening in the wall of our views. If we're not willing to make that level of sacrifice, there's no way we'll succeed.

So remember this: if we're not willing to make that level of sacrifice, there's no way we'll succeed. If you want to get through the final wall so as to gain total release from dying and birth, you have to stop circling around the outside

perimeter like this. If you keep acting the way you are, you'll never gain release from suffering and stress. So try to be observant, try to evaluate the preoccupations that lie buried in your heart. What are the obstacles, the defilements, you have to undo so that you can come out victorious? If you can't overcome them using one method, try other methods until you can. Don't let them become "you." Don't let them become your self, making you engage in I-making and my-making and self-identity views.

Once there are self-identity views, the stupidity of the mind will lead to uncertainty (*vicikicchā*), so that you can't come to any clear and genuine conclusions. You'll grasp at external things — this is what's called "grasping at habits and practices" (*śīlabhata-parāmāsa*) — like the Jains in the time of the Buddha, who thought they would succeed in gaining release through external practices, without training the mind to give rise to discernment. They felt that if they followed their practices, external forces would come and save them, some god would come and save them. But the purity of our external actions is something only we can know. As the Buddha taught, there's no one else who can come and save us. Only we can save ourselves. There's no god greater than the help we give ourselves.

So don't let yourself be misled. Vanquish your wrong views so that you can be genuinely compliant toward the Buddha, genuinely believing in his teachings with genuine respect.

Keep on meditating.

## RIGHT ATTITUDE

WHEN WE MEDITATE, we let go of our present preoccupations. Normally the mind is always preoccupied with the various objects that the eye sees, the ear hears, the nose smells, the tongue tastes, and the body comes into contact with. But when we want peace of mind, we have to see these objects as coarse and gross. We try to let go of things that are gross, things that are sensual. We focus instead on things that are more refined and of more lasting value, step by step.

We keep on getting the mind to gather in stillness, keep on letting go of everything else. It's like when we go to sleep: we have to let go of distracting thoughts, we have to stop thinking, have to cut those things away if we're going to sleep in comfort. As long as the mind is in a turmoil over those things and can't let them go, it won't be able to fall asleep. It'll have no sense of ease, won't gain any strength. Even more so when we meditate: we have to cut away all our other preoccupations, let them all go, leaving only *buddho*.

Adjust your attitude so that you can find a sense of ease at the same time you're repeating *buddho* to yourself. Don't let yourself get bored or tired of the meditation. How do you develop a sense of ease? Through your conviction in what you're doing. No matter what the job, if you can do it with a sense of conviction, a sense of respect for your work, you can keep at it continuously. Even if the sun is beating down and you're all tired and worn out, you can keep on doing it. If you do it with a sense of desire (*chanda*) for the results, a sense of persistence (*viriya*), intentness (*citta*), and circumspection (*vimañsā*), you can keep on doing it without getting tired. When you do your work with this attitude, you can keep at it always.

This is why our teachers were able to live with a sense of contentment even when they were out in the mountain wilds. They put effort into their meditation with a sense of ease and wellbeing in the peace of mind they were able to maintain through restraining the mind with mindfulness. If their hearts were already inclined to stillness and seclusion, then as soon as the mind had developed its foundation, they were able to keep it going without any difficulties. It became automatic, and they were able to experience a sense of wellbeing — the stillness, the fullness, the brightness of the mind.

So adjusting the mind properly in this way is something very important for anyone who wants peace of mind. Keep reminding yourself to develop an attitude of conviction, and this will give energy and encouragement to your efforts. If your conviction, persistence, and mindfulness are strong, you'll be able to win out over any restless, anxious, sleepy, or lazy states of mind. You'll be able to win out over these things through the qualities of mind you develop.

The qualities of mind we're developing are like strategic weapons. We develop mindfulness. We develop alertness. We pick out our one object of meditation — “This is what I'm going to fasten on” — and then we both keep it in mind and stay aware of it. When we refuse to let go of it, when we hold on tight to a single object, it becomes the quality called singleness of preoccupation. When this singleness of mind arises, it can cut through restlessness, cut through anxiety. It includes both mindfulness and persistence, and can keep the mind firmly gathered in one place.

When this singleness of mind arises, it turns into firm concentration. The mind gets more refined and can let go of everything else, step by step. This singleness is the refined part that holds through all the levels of right concentration. In the first level you have to have singleness of preoccupation in charge. Even though there's also directed thought, evaluation, rapture, and pleasure, singleness of preoccupation has to be there. Directed thought and evaluation are the coarser parts of the concentration. You'll know as the mind gets more refined because it lets go of them, leaving just singleness of preoccupation, rapture, and pleasure. Rapture is the coarsest of these three, so you let go of it, leaving just pleasure and singleness of preoccupation. Pleasure is the coarser of these two, so you let go of it, leaving just singleness of preoccupation and equanimity.

When the mind has a sense of steady equanimity, firm and unwavering ... If you want to call it tender, it's tender in that it doesn't put up any resistance to the Dhamma, doesn't resist the truth of things as they are. It doesn't dispute. It's willing to accept that truth. But if you want to call it tough, it's tough in that it's firm and unwavering. Normally, when things are soft and tender they waver and move when they're struck by anything. But when the mind is tender in this way, it becomes tough instead. No one can fool it. It doesn't waver, it's not affected by anything. This is the nature of the mind in concentration. Why doesn't it waver? Because it's seen the truth. It's full. It's not hungry in any way that could make it waver, that could let it get tempted. It doesn't want anything else. We human beings: when we have a sense of enough, we're free.

For this reason, meditators need a solid theme that they can hold to. If you don't know or haven't studied much Dhamma, you can simply remember in brief that this body of ours is Dhamma. Every part of it is Dhamma. Conventional Dhammas, formulated Dhammas, all the way up to absolute Dhammas all can be found in this body. So we should pay attention to the body as it's actually present right here. When we know our own body, we won't have any doubts about other people, other bodies. So to give strength to the mind, we should repeat to ourselves any of the meditation themes dealing with the body so that the mind will settle down and come to rest.

If repeating *buddho, buddho* is too refined for you — if you can't find anything

to hold to, or don't know where to focus — you can focus on the breath. It's blatant enough for you to fix your attention on it — when it comes in, you know it's coming in; when it goes out, you know it's going out. Or if that's too refined, you can focus on the 32 parts of the body. If you want to focus on hair of the head, repeat *kesā, kesā* (hair of the head, hair of the head) to yourself. You've seen head hairs, you can remember them, so fix the memory in your mind and then repeat *kesā, kesā*. For hair of the body, you can repeat *lomā, lomā*, and so on. Repeat the names of any of the 32 parts until your awareness gathers in with the repetition and settles down into stillness.

If you want, you can focus on any one of the bones. Repeat *aṭṭhi, aṭṭhi*. Where is the bone you're focusing on? It's really right there. What kinds of features does it have? It really has them — after all, you've seen bones before. You can remember what the big bones and little bones are like. So call them to mind, focus on them, and repeat their names so as to build a firm foundation for concentration and mindfulness in the mind.

Once your foundation is firm and steady from the practice of repetition, you move on to investigation, to insight meditation. You analyze these things to see them as *aniccāṃ*, or inconstant. Why does the Buddha say they're inconstant? We want them to be constant. We don't want them to change. The Buddha teaches us to let go of them, but we can't let them go — because our views run contrary to the Dhamma. That's why we can't let go.

The word “let go” here means that we don't hold onto them. Even though we still live with them, we just live with them, nothing more. Even though we make use of these things, we simply use them, nothing more. Even though we make the body move, it's just movement. You have to keep this understanding in mind so that wrong views don't overwhelm you. So that delusion doesn't overwhelm you. As long as these things exist, we make use of them. After all, they're here to use. The Buddha and his noble disciples all made use of these things without any thought of their being anything other than what they are — that they might be constant, that they might give rise to true pleasure, that they might be “us” or “ours.” We use these things in line with our duties as long as they're here for us to use. When they change into something else, they change in line with their duties, in line with the laws of the Dhamma.

The Buddha thus taught us to familiarize ourselves with what's normal in life: aging is normal, illness is normal, death is normal, separation from the people and things we love is normal. When we analyze them, we realize that they're all going to have to leave us. They won't stay with us forever. When even these five khandhas that we're looking after all the time aren't really ours, how can our children really be ours? How can our parents really be ours? How can our possessions really be ours? They're all *anattā*: not-self.

We train and exercise our minds in this way until they're adept in the same way that we memorize our lessons in school. Once they're firmly imbedded in the mind, the mind won't go against the truth of the Dhamma. It will believe the truth of the Dhamma, be inclined to follow the truth of the Dhamma. It won't suffer, for it follows in line with the laws of truth. When we don't struggle against the truth of the Dhamma, there won't be any sorrow or distress when things change, for we've come to know and accept the truth.

So all we have to do is come and know the truth. It doesn't lie far away. The things that will cure our sufferings, the most important things that will help us cross over birth and becoming, all come simply from making our knowledge of what's truly here firm and unwavering so that it can push the mind, lift the mind, over and above any influences that might come to make an impact on it — so that it will gain release from defilement, release from sorrow, release from distress. The meditation we're practicing here is simply for the purpose of knowing the truth as it actually is. As long as we haven't yet reached it, we won't see it. When we don't see it, all we know about it is news: what we've read in books or heard on tapes or heard our teachers describe. That's simply news. The mind hasn't seen it. The ears have simply received it, the eyes have simply taken it in from books, but they're simply passive receptors, holding it as labels and memories, that's all.

The "reaching" has to be done by the heart. The heart is what reaches the truth. And once the heart has reached it, you don't have to worry. It'll be the heart's own treasure. So we have to train the heart to be intelligent, so that it will gain true happiness, true release from danger, from suffering and stress. Practice so that your mind reaches it, so that it will see it. At the moment, it hasn't gotten there yet. So far, it's all only in your ears and eyes.

So we all have to put our hearts into the meditation. Focus on what's truly here so that the heart will reach the truth — the noble truths. Whatever suffering or stress is here in your body and mind is all part of the *dukkha sacca*, the noble truth of stress. Whatever delusion, passion, or delight that depends on delusion — however much, whatever the object, within or without — is all *samudaya sacca*, the noble truth of the origination of stress. All the things that we like, that give rise to desire to the point of clinging: when we get them, we latch onto them. When we lose them, we look for them again. When we don't have them, we suffer. This is what makes the mind travel through all the levels of being, great and small.

In the teaching on dependent co-arising, the Buddha said that it all comes from not knowing. We don't discern contact, don't discern feeling, don't discern craving, don't discern clinging, don't discern becoming, don't discern birth: all of this is called *avijjā*, or unawareness. So do you discern these things yet, or not? When sights strike the eye, day in and day out: is your mindfulness ready to handle them or not? Is your discernment up on the tricks of the defilements or

not? If not, you have to be observant, to gather and restrict all your attention to what's right here, for when defilements arise, they arise right here. If discernment is to see the defilements to the point of giving rise to right view, it'll have to see and know right here.

If we gather and restrict our attention to what's right here, we're sure to know and see. If we want to be mindful and alert, we can't do it anywhere else. Remember this point well, and put it into practice. When these words are spoken you hear them, but when you get up you forget them. Then when the time comes to meditate again, you don't know what to pick as your theme of practice. You forget everything, throw it all away. So there's nothing but "you" — no Dhamma to know, no Dhamma to see, no Dhamma to put into practice. It's all "you" and "yours": your body, and when the body is yours, feelings are yours, perceptions are yours, thought constructs are yours, consciousness is yours. So you get possessive of what's yours, and there's nothing left to be Dhamma. That's why your practice doesn't progress.

All progress has to come from a point of "one." Once "one" is firmly established, then there can be "two" and "three." If "one" is lacking, everything else will be lacking. Actually, when we separate things out, there is no "two" or "three." When we don't lump things together, there's only "one." Even groups of ten or twenty people are all made up of one person — that one person, this one person, that one person over there.

So in our practice we first have to establish "one" — this body of ours. What's here in the body? We have mental events and physical phenomena: that's two. Then there's feeling: pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain: that's three. When we separate things out, there's lots of them, but it's all this one person, this one lump sitting here encased in skin. But when you analyze things out, you have hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin ... Here it's already a lot. Then you can analyze the eye, consciousness, forms. It's a lot of things, but all one thing: one mass of suffering and stress. Nothing else. Just know this one thing until it's all clear. You don't have to know a lot of things, just this one body. Once you really see the truth, the mind will let go of its burdens. We suffer because we keep piling things on — "That's us, that's ours, that's them, that's theirs" — through the power of attachment, clinging to things, not wanting them to change. When the mind starts meditating by mentally repeating its theme, it can let things go for a while. You hold onto *buddho* or any of the other themes. You don't take refuge in the body. You take refuge in *buddho*, *buddho*, until the mind settles down. That gives you a greater sense of wellbeing than you could get from these other things.

When you can let go even of this level of wellbeing, you'll reach the real *buddha*. That's where there's purity, that's where there's true wellbeing, with no more need to go swimming through birth and death, no more need to torment

yourself by having to sit and meditate like this again — because there will be nothing to torment, nothing to meditate on any more. When you let go of everything, there are no more issues.

So we meditate to give rise to the discernment that sees the drawbacks of things and lets go of them all. That's when there are no more burdens, no more kamma. It sounds easy, but you have to let go of everything. If you haven't let go of everything, there's more kamma to do, more work to do. So we're taught *cāgo* — renunciation; *paṭinissaggo* — relinquishment; *mutti* — release; *anālayo* — no place for the defilements to dwell.

So. Keep on meditating.

## DISENCHANTMENT

WE'LL NOW START MEDITATING, just as we've been doing every day. We have to look at this as an important opportunity. Even though our practice hasn't yet reached the Dhamma to our satisfaction, at the very least it's a beginning, an important beginning, in gathering the strength of the mind so that our mindfulness, concentration, and discernment will become healthy and mature. We should try to gather these qualities together so that they can reinforce one another in washing away the stains, the defilements, in our minds — for when defilements arise, they don't lead to peace, purity, or respite for the mind. Just the opposite: they lead to suffering, unrest, and disturbance. They block any discernment that would know or see the Dhamma. There's no defilement that encourages us to practice the Dhamma, to know or see the Dhamma. They simply get in the way of our practice.

So whatever mental state gets in the way of our practice we should regard as a defilement — for defilements don't come floating along on their own. They have to depend on the mind. Any mental state that's sleepy or lazy, any mental state that's restless, angry, or irritable: these are all defilements. They're mental states under the influence of defilement, overcome by defilement.

If any of these mental states arise within us, we should be aware of them. When the mind is sleepy, we should get it to keep *buddho* in mind so that it will wake up and shake off its sleepiness. When the mind is restless and irritable, we should use our discernment to reflect on things to see that these states of mind serve no purpose. Then we should quickly turn back to our concentration practice, planting the mind firmly in our meditation theme, not letting the mind get restless and distracted again.

We focus the mind on being aware of its meditation word, *buddho* — what's aware, what's awake. We keep it in mind as if it were a post planted firmly in the ground. Don't let the mind wander from the foundation post on which you've focused. But whatever your focus, don't let your focus be tense. You have to keep the mind in a good mood while it's focused. Do this with an attitude of mindfulness and discernment, not one of delusion, wanting to know this or to see that or to force things to fall in line with your thoughts. If that's the way you meditate, your mood will grow tense and you won't be able to meditate for long. In no time at all you'll start getting irritable.

So if you want to meditate for a long time, you have to be neutral, with equanimity as your foundation. If you want knowledge, focus firmly on what you're already aware of. Keep your mind firmly in place. Find an approach that

will help you stay focused without slipping away. For example, make an effort to keep your mind firmly intent and apply your powers of observation and evaluation to the basis of your *buddho*. All of these things have to be brought together at the same spot, along with whatever thinking you need to do so that mindfulness won't lapse, letting unskillful outside issues come barging in, or leaving an opening for internal preoccupations to arise in the heart, or letting yourself get disturbed by thoughts of the past — things you knew or saw or said or did earlier today, or many days, many months, many years ago. You have to focus exclusively on the present.

If you've taken *buddho* as your meditation theme, keep coming back to it over and over again. *Buddho* stands for awareness. If you can maintain awareness without lapse, this will make an important difference. If you've taken the breath as your theme, you have to be aware each time the breath comes in and out. You can't let yourself wander off. You have to take nothing but the breath as the focal point for mindfulness. The same principles hold in either case. You do the same things, the only difference is the theme of your awareness.

Why does the Buddha teach us to focus on the breath? Because we don't have to look for it, don't have to guess about it, don't have to think it into being. It's a present phenomenon. There's no such thing as a past breath or a future breath. There's simply the breath coming in and out in the present. That's why it's appropriate for exercising our mindfulness, for gathering our mindfulness and awareness in a single place, for firmly establishing concentration.

So you can focus on either theme — whichever one you've already meditated on and found that mindfulness can quickly get established without lapsing and can quickly produce a sense of stillness and peace. Set that theme up as your foundation. When you're starting out, focus on keeping that theme in mind.

Once the mind has had enough stillness, if you simply want it to become more still, the mind will get into a state where it isn't doing any work because it's not distracted in any way. If this happens, you have to start contemplating. In the foundations of mindfulness we're taught to contemplate the various aspects of the body in and of themselves. We don't have to contemplate anything else. If you want to contemplate from the angle of inconstancy, it's here in this body. If you want to contemplate from the angle of stress, it's here in this body. You can contemplate it from any angle at all. If you want to contemplate from the angle of eliminating passion and craving, you can look at things that are dirty and disgusting — and you find that they fill the body. This is something requiring you to use your own intelligence. Whatever angle you use, you have to look into things so that they get more subtle and refined. Contemplate them again and again until you see things clearly in a way that gives rise to *nibbidā*, or disenchantment, so that you aren't deluded into latching onto things and giving them meanings the

way you used to.

Turn over a new mind, turning your views into new views. You no longer want your old mistaken views. Turning from your old views, give rise to right views. Turning from your old ways of thinking, give rise to right resolves — to see the body as repulsive and unattractive. This is *nekkhamma-saṅkappa*, the resolve for renunciation, the resolve to escape from sensual passion. We don't go thinking in other directions or roaming off in other directions. We try to go in the direction of escaping from the view that the body is beautiful. What the eye sees of the body is just the outer skin. It's never seen the filthy things inside. Even though it may have seen them from time to time, as when someone dies in an accident or when a patient is opened for surgery, there's something in the mind that keeps us from taking it to heart and giving rise to discernment. There's something that keeps us from contemplating things down to a level more subtle than what the eye sees. We see these things and then pass right over them. We don't get to a level profound enough to give rise to disenchantment.

So contemplate the body. If the mind has developed a strong enough foundation, it shouldn't stay stuck just at the level of stillness. But if you haven't yet reached that level of stillness, you can't skip over it. You first have to make the mind still, because a firm foundation of stillness is absolutely essential. If you try to contemplate before the mind has grown still, you'll give rise to knowledge that lasts only as long as you're in meditation. When you leave meditation and the mind is no longer firm, your new understandings will disappear. Your old understandings will come back, just as if you had never meditated. Whatever way you've been deluded in the past, that's how you'll be deluded again. Whatever views you've had before won't change into anything else. Whatever ways you've thought, you'll end up deluded just as before as long as your new ways of thinking aren't based on a foundation of stillness.

This is why stillness is so essential. We have to get the mind to gain strength from stillness and then let it contemplate the body in and of itself in terms of its 32 parts. You can choose any one of the parts, focusing on it until it's clear. Or you can focus on the parts in sets of five. When you reach the liquid parts, you can focus on them in sets of six, for there are twelve of them in all. You can contemplate them back and forth — if your mindfulness hasn't yet been exercised to the point where it's firm, contemplate these things back and forth just as a preceptor teaches a new ordinand: *kesā, lomā, nakhā, dantā, taco* (hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin), and then turning them around to *taco, dantā, nakhā, lomā, kesā*. Then you can go onto the next set of five — *maṅsam, nhārū, atthī, atthimiñjarī, vakkam* (muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen). This is called contemplating them in sets of five.

This is how we start out exercising mindfulness. If, while you're practicing

mindfulness in this way, a visual image of any of these five parts appears, catch hold of it and contemplate it so that it grows deeper and more refined. Contemplate it until you can divide the body into its parts, seeing that each part is just like this. Get so that you know the body inside and out, realizing that other living beings are just like this, too. If you're looking to see what's unclean, you'll find it here. If you're looking to see what's not-self, you'll find it here. Turn these things over in your mind and question yourself as to whether they're constant. What kind of pleasure is there in these things? Is it worthwhile or not? Focus on these issues often, look at them often until you're adept, and the mind will finally be willing to accept the truth, changing from its old wrong ways of seeing things, and seeing them instead in line with the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha.

When your views change often in this way, the mind will experience a new kind of stillness and peace. It will turn away from the fevers of the fires of passion, aversion, and delusion; and turn into mindfulness, concentration, and discernment instead. Its knowledge and views will become clear. It will no longer waver. It will become brave and no longer afraid in the way it used to be — for it has come to know the truth: that nothing gets pained aside from the aggregates; nothing dies aside from the elements. The mind gets firmly planted. It can meditate with a snug sense of confidence, with no fear of pain or illness or anything at all. You can separate things out all the way down. Even if death were to come at that point, you'd be content, for even though death hasn't yet come, these things have separated out of their own accord. You've contemplated them and seen them for what they are, each and every one.

So I ask that we all have firm principles in our contemplation. Be genuine in doing it — don't just go through the motions — for all these things are genuine. If we don't meditate, defilements will inhabit our thoughts, deceiving us so that we don't see things as they genuinely are. If we depend just on our eyes, they can fool us. The eye can see only the outside of things. It sees skin, and the skin can be made up to deceive us. It sees hair of the head, and hair can be made up to deceive us. It sees hair of the body — things like eyebrows and beards, which can be dressed to deceive us. It sees fingernails and toenails, which can be made up to deceive us. It sees teeth, which can be treated to deceive us, so that we make all sorts of assumptions about them. The eye has no discernment. It lets us get deceived — but it isn't what does the deceiving. The mind is what deceives itself. Once it deceives itself, it makes all sorts of assumptions about itself and falls for itself. When it makes itself suffer in this way, there's no help for it. This is the genuine truth. Know clearly that the mind is what deceives itself. When it doesn't have a refuge, it can deceive itself all the time.

So we have to develop qualities that the mind can hold to and take refuge in, so that defilements won't be able to keep on deceiving it. Look so that you can see

more deeply through things. Try to analyze things to see what's not genuine, what's dressed and disguised. Then as soon as you look at anything, you'll see what's fake and made up. You'll know: "The real thing doesn't have this color, this smell, this shape." You'll see how things are always changing. This is called having the qualities of the Dhamma as your refuge, as something to hold to as you look, hear, smell, taste, and make contact with things. You'll have the qualities that know and see things as they actually are — so they won't be able to deceive you. You won't be able to deceive yourself, for you'd be ashamed to. The heart grows disenchanted with itself, with its old ways — and why would it want to deceive itself any more? It's seen that it doesn't gain any benefit from that kind of behavior.

Instead, you'll see how it really benefits from its new views. They make the mind still. Clear. Set free with a sense of wellbeing. All its heavy old burdens fall away. It has no greed for gaining a lot of things, for there's no more indulging. It doesn't use anything to indulge itself. All it needs is the four necessities to keep life going — that's enough. It doesn't have to invest in anything. It finds its happiness and wellbeing in the stillness that comes from meditating. The things around it that it used to fall for and build up into ignorance without realizing it: when it focuses on really knowing these things, its delusions disband. Ignorance disappears. The mind gains knowledge from these things in line with what they actually are. It wises up and doesn't fall for these things as it used to, doesn't misunderstand them as it used to.

And that's the end of its problems.

## A HOME FOR THE MIND

...“KNOWING THE DHAMMA” means knowing the truth. Where does the Dhamma lie? Not far off at all. Where are *rūpa-dhammas* (physical phenomena)? Are there any physical phenomena within us? Are any *nāma-dhammas* (mental phenomena) within us? They’re both within us, but we don’t know how to read them, to decipher them, because we haven’t yet studied them. Or even when we have tried to study them, we still can’t decipher them in line with the standards set by the Buddha. So let’s try to decipher our body, our actions in thought, word, and deed. Our actions don’t lie anywhere else. They show themselves in the activity of the body. So we use the body in line with the Dhamma, abstaining from the activities that defile it: killing, stealing, engaging in illicit sex. When we abstain from these things, we’ve begun practicing the Dhamma. We abstain from telling lies, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, from idle chatter. When we’re mindful to show restraint in what we say, we won’t encounter any dangers coming from our speech. There are no dangers when we practice in line with the Buddha’s way.

As for the mind, we cleanse it by meditating. We use mindfulness to look after the heart, to make sure it doesn’t get involved in anything defiling or unclean. We keep it cheerful, blooming and bright in its meditation, in investigating the Dhamma, knowing the Dhamma, seeing the Dhamma, until it settles down in the stillness that we’ve developed and kept composed. We keep it blooming and bright. Wherever you go, this is how you should practice. Make your composure continuous. The mind will then gain strength, so that it can let go of its external preoccupations and stay focused exclusively within: at peace and at ease, bright and clear, staying right here.

Then when you want to gain discernment, you can investigate. Focus mindfulness on keeping the body in mind, and then investigate it. This is called *dhamma-vicaya*, investigating phenomena. You investigate the physical phenomena in the body to see them in line with the four noble truths. You look at the arising of physical phenomena right here. You look at the aging, the illness, the death of phenomena right here within you. If you really look for it, you’ll see that the body is full of death.

How do we see death when the body is still breathing and able to walk around? We can see it if our discernment is subtle and precise. The Buddha saw death with every in-and-out breath, so why can’t we? He once asked Ven. Ānanda how often he paid attention to death in the course of a day, and Ānanda answered, “One hundred times.” The Buddha’s response was: “You’re still too complacent. You

should pay attention to death with every in-and-out breath.” What kind of death can you look at with every in-and-out breath? Whatever fades away, ends, and disappears: that’s death. As for the death of the whole body, that comes closer every day, closer with each in-and-out breath. This runs down, that wears out. We have to keep creating things to replace what gets worn out. And whatever we create keeps wearing out, too.

So we should keep track of the wearing out — what’s called *vaya-dhamma*, degeneration. The Buddha saw this with every moment. This is the sort of seeing that allows us to see the noble truth that birth is stressful, aging is stressful. There’s no ease in aging. Look so that you see this clearly. Pain and illness are stressful, death is stressful, all the affairs that come with birth create hardships, turmoil, and stress.

When you investigate in line with the Buddha’s Dhamma, you’ll see the truth for yourself in every way just as the Buddha did. For it’s all right here. You’ll gain discernment and intelligence, no longer deluded into grasping hold of suffering and making it your self, no longer grasping hold of inconstant things and making them your self. Whatever’s inconstant, leave it as inconstant and don’t make it you. Whatever’s stressful, leave it as stressful and don’t make it you. There’s no you in any of those things. When you aim your investigation in the direction of seeing this clearly, the mind will let go and attain peace, inner solitude, free from clinging.

It’s as when we carry something heavy on our shoulder. We know it’s heavy because it’s weighing on our shoulder. But when we put it down, it’s no longer heavy on us. In the same way, when we see that birth is stressful, aging is stressful, illness is stressful, death is stressful, then we should examine those things as they arise to see that they’re not us. Then we’ll be able to let them go. We should look after our mind to make sure that it doesn’t give rise to the assumption that any of those things are us or ours, or that they lie within us. Those things are just objects, elements, and we leave them at that. Stress then has no owner on the receiving end. It’s just like when you put down a burden: there’s nothing heavy about it at all.

So stress is nothing more than things coming together to make contact. Suppose that we have a big hunk of limestone. When we lift it up, it’s heavy. But if we burn it in a fire, pound it into dust, and the wind blows it away, then where’s the heaviness? It’s nowhere at all. Before, when the limestone was still in the ground, they had to use explosives to get it out. It was so heavy that they needed cranes to lift it up. But now that it’s pulverized, the heaviness is gone.

It’s the same with suffering and stress. If we investigate them down to the details, so that we can see them clearly for what they truly are, there’s no self there at all. We get down to the basic elements of experience, and we see that they’re

not our self in the least little bit. If we look at the hair of the head, it's not self. Fingernails and toenails are not self. Look at every part of the body in detail. Or look at its elementary properties. Exactly where are you in any of those things? There's no you in there at all.

The same is true when you look at feelings. There's no you in there at all. There's simply contact, the contact of objects against the senses, that's all. If you let go so the mind can come to rest, none of these things will touch it in a way that weighs on it. Only deluded people grab hold of these things, which is why they feel weighed down. If we let them go, we don't feel weighed down at all.

When we let go of the aggregates (*khandhas*), they're not stressful. But we don't know how to let them go because of birth. Like the mental state you've given rise to here: you've created it so that it will take birth. Once you've given rise to it, then — unless you're given a good reason — there's no way you'll be willing to let it go. It's the same as when someone suddenly comes to chase us out of our home. Who would be willing to go? We'd go only if we were offered a better place to stay — a safer, more comfortable place to stay. If we were offered such a place, who would be willing to stay? If we had a better place to go, we could abandon our old home with no problem. In the same way, if we're going to let go of the blatant aggregates, we need a better place to stay, a home for the mind: a state of concentration. Just like the Buddha and his noble disciples: when they let go of the blatant aggregates, they entered cessation, they entered *jhāna*. When they fully let go of all aggregates, they entered *nibbāna*.

We, however, don't yet have anything else to depend on, which is why we can't let go. We first have to create a refuge for ourselves. At the very least, we should try to keep *buddho, buddho*, in mind. When we really reach *buddho* — when the mind is really a mind awake — then we can depend on it.

At the moment, though, we haven't reached the mind awake. We've reached nothing but the demons of defilement, and they keep haunting us. We're embroiled with nothing but demons; we lie under their power. For instance, *maccu-māra*: the demon of death, whose followers — aging and illness — we fear so much. *Kilesa-māra*: delusions and defilements. These are all demons. *Khandha-māra*: our attachments to the five aggregates are all demons. *Abhisankhāra-māra*: the thoughts we create, good or bad, are all demons if we fall for them — meritorious creations, demeritorious creations, imperturbable creations. These are the subtle demons, the demons that bedeviled the Buddha on the way to Awakening, dressing themselves up as this and that. If we're going to let go of these things, we first need something better to hold onto. At the very least we need *jhāna*, levels of mental stillness more refined than what we have at present.

So we should all try to give rise to the refined levels of peace and ease I've

mentioned here. When we get disenchanted with turmoil, we can enter a state of stillness. When we get disenchanted with defilement, we can cleanse the heart and make it bright with the Dhamma. We'll have our home in the Dhamma, in concentration. The heart can then delight, with rapture and ease as its food. We'll have no desire for coarse food. When we let go of the blatant aggregates, we enter the Brahmā level of refined rapture and ease.

Even the sensual devas don't eat coarse food like ours. As for the Brahmās, they're even clearer than that, more radiant within themselves. Their jhāna is pure, and their concentration radiant. The food of this concentration is the rapture and ease they experience. Even here on the human level, when we gain rapture from concentration, we feel full and happy. If we abandon the blatant aggregates, leaving just the mind in its attainment of concentration, imagine how much pleasure and ease there will be. We'll no longer have to be involved in these heavy burdens of ours. We won't have to worry about the five or the eight precepts because we'll be in a pure state of jhāna with no thought of getting stuck on anything defiling. The mind will be bright.

When you understand this, focus back on your heart. Examine it carefully. Be intent on practicing heedfully, and you'll meet with prosperity and ease.

## RIGHT CONCENTRATION

IN GENERAL TERMS, right concentration means establishing the mind rightly. On one level, this can apply to all the factors of the path. You have to start out by setting the mind on right view. In other words, you use your discernment to gather together all the Dhamma you've heard. Then when you set the mind on right resolve, that's also a way of establishing it rightly. Then you set it on right speech, speaking only things that are right. You set it on right activity, examining your activities and then forcing yourself, watching over yourself, to keep your activities firmly in line with what's right. As for right livelihood, you set your mind on providing for your livelihood exclusively in a right way. You're firm in not making a livelihood in ways that are wrong, not acting in ways that are wrong, not speaking in ways that are corrupt and wrong. You won't make any effort in ways that go off the path, you won't be mindful in ways that lie outside the path. You'll keep being mindful in ways that stay on the path. You make this vow to yourself as a firm determination. This is one level of establishing the mind rightly.

But what I want to talk about today is right concentration in the area of meditation: in other words, right meditation, both in the area of tranquility meditation and in the area of insight meditation. You use the techniques of tranquility meditation to bring the mind to stillness. When you make the mind still, firm in skillful qualities, that's one aspect of right concentration. If the mind isn't firmly established in skillful qualities, it can't grow still. If unskillful qualities arise in the mind, it can't settle down and enter concentration. This is why, when the Buddha describes the mind entering concentration, he says, "*Vivicceva kāmehi*": quite secluded from sensual preoccupations. The mind isn't involved, doesn't incline itself toward sights that will give rise to infatuation and desire. It doesn't incline itself toward sounds that it likes, toward aromas, tastes, or tactile sensations for which it feels infatuation through the power of desire. At the same time, it doesn't incline itself toward desire for those things. Before the mind can settle into concentration, it has to let go of these five types of preoccupations. This is called *vivicceva kāmehi*, quite secluded from sensual preoccupations.

*Vivicca akusalehi dhammehi*: quite secluded from the unskillful qualities called the five hindrances. For example, the first hindrance is sensual desire. When you sit in meditation and a defilement arises in the mind, when you think of something and feel desire for an internal or an external form, when you get infatuated with the things you've seen and known in the past, that's called sensual desire.

Or if you think of something that makes you dissatisfied to the point of feeling

ill will for certain people or objects, that's the hindrance of ill will. Things from the past that upset you suddenly arise again in the present, barge their way in to obstruct the stillness of your mind. When the mind gets upset in this way, that's an unskillful mental state acting as an obstacle to concentration.

Or sloth and torpor: a sense of laziness and inattentiveness when the mind isn't intent on its work and so lets go out of laziness and carelessness. It gets drowsy so that it can't be intent on its meditation. You sit here thinking *buddho, buddho*, but instead of focusing the mind to get it firmly established so that it can gain knowledge and understanding from its *buddho*, you throw *buddho* away to go play with something else. As awareness gets more refined, you get drowsy and fall asleep or else let delusion overcome the mind. This is an unskillful mental state called sloth and torpor.

Then there's restlessness and anxiety, when mindfulness isn't keeping control over things, and the mind follows its preoccupations as they shoot out to things you like and don't like. The normal state of people's minds is that, when mindfulness isn't in charge, the mind can't sit still. It's bound to keep thinking about 108 different kinds of things. So when you're practicing concentration you have to exercise restraint, you have to be careful that the mind doesn't get scattered about. You have to be mindful of the present and alert to the present, too. When you try to keep *buddho* in mind, you have to be alert at the same time to watch over your *buddho*. Or if you're going to be mindful of the parts of the body — like hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin — you should focus on only one part at a time, making sure that you're both mindful and alert to your mindfulness, to make sure you don't go being mindful of other things. That's how you can cut off restlessness and anxiety.

As you keep being mindful of the same thing for a long time, the body will gradually calm down and relax. The preoccupations of the mind will calm down, too, so that the mind can grow still. It grows still because you keep it under control. You weaken its unruliness — as when you pull fuel away from a burning fire. As you keep pulling away the fuel, the fire gradually grows weaker and weaker. And what's the fuel for the mind's unruliness? Forgetfulness. Inattentiveness. This inattentiveness is the fuel both for restlessness and anxiety and for sloth and torpor. When you keep mindfulness and alertness in charge, you cut away forgetfulness and inattentiveness. As these forms of delusion are subdued, they lose their power. They gradually disband, leaving nothing but awareness of *buddho* or whatever your meditation object is. As you keep looking after your meditation object firmly, without growing inattentive, restlessness will disappear. Drowsiness will disappear. The mind will get firmly established in right concentration.

This is how you enter right concentration. You have to depend on both

mindfulness and alertness together. Right concentration can't simply arise on its own. It needs supporting factors. The first seven factors of the path are the supports for right concentration, or its requisites, the things it needs to depend on. It needs right view, right resolve, right speech, right activity, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness. As you keep developing the beginning factors of the path, concentration becomes more and more refined, step by step. When the mind is trained and suffused with these qualities, it's able to let go of sensual preoccupations, able to let go of unskillful mental qualities. *Vivicca kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi*. When it's secluded from sensual preoccupations, secluded from unskillful qualities, it can enter concentration. It experiences stillness, rapture, pleasure, singleness of preoccupation. Both body and mind feel light.

In the first stage, the mind isn't totally refined because it still has directed thought and evaluation in the factors of its concentration. If your mindfulness is in good shape and can keep its object in mind without pulling away, if your effort is right and alertness keeps watching over things, the coarser parts of your concentration will drop away and the mind will grow more refined step by step. Directed thought and evaluation — the coarser parts — will drop away because they can't follow into that more refined stage. All that's left is rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation. As you keep on meditating without let-up, things keep growing more refined step by step. Rapture, which is coarser than pleasure, will drop away, leaving the pleasure. Pleasure is coarser than equanimity. As you keep contemplating while the mind grows more refined, the pleasure will disappear, leaving just equanimity. As long as there's still pleasure, equanimity can't arise. As long as the mind is still feeding off pleasure, it's still engaged with something coarse. But as you keep up your persistent effort until you see that this pleasure still comes under the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, that it's part of the aggregate of feeling, the mind will let go of that coarser aspect and settle down with equanimity. Even though equanimity, too, is part of the feeling aggregate, it's a feeling refined enough to cleanse the mind to the point where it can give rise to knowledge of refined levels of Dhamma.

When the mind reaches this level, it's firm and unwavering because it's totally neutral. It doesn't waver when the eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an aroma, the tongue tastes a flavor, the body feels a tactile sensation, or an idea comes to the mind. None of these things can make the mind waver when it's in the factors of *jhāna*. It maintains a high level of purity. This is right concentration.

We should all develop tranquility meditation, which can give temporary respite from suffering and stress. But in a state like this, you simply have mindfulness in charge. Discernment is still too weak to uproot the most refined

levels of defilement and obsessions (*anusaya*). Thus, for our right concentration to be complete, we're taught not to get carried away with the sense of pleasure it brings. When the mind has been still for an appropriate amount of time, we should then apply the mind to contemplating the five aggregates, for these aggregates are the basis for insight meditation. You can't develop insight meditation outside of the five aggregates — the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, thought-fabrications, and consciousness — for these aggregates lie right within us. They're right next to us, with us at all times.

So. How do you develop the aggregate of form as a basis for insight meditation? You have to see it clearly in line with its truth that form is inconstant. This is how you begin. As you develop insight meditation, you have to contemplate down to the details. What is form? Form covers hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, and all the four great elements that we can touch and see. As for subsidiary forms, they can't be seen with the eye, but they can be touched, and they depend on the four great elements. For example, sound is a type of form, a type of subsidiary form. Aromas, flavors, tactile sensations are subsidiary forms that depend on the four great elements. The sensory powers of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are subsidiary forms — they're physical events, not mental events, you know. Then there are masculinity and femininity, which fashion the body to be male or female, and create differences in male and female voices, manners, and other characteristics. Then there's the heart, and then *viññati-rūpa*, which allows for the body to move, for speech to be spoken.

So the Buddha taught that we should contemplate form in all its aspects so as to gain the insight enabling us to withdraw all our clinging assumptions that they're us or ours. How does this happen? When we contemplate, we'll see that *yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atitānāgata-paccuppannaṃ*: all form — past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near — is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. It all lies under the three characteristics. When we remember this, that's called *pariyatti-dhamma*, the Dhamma of study. When we actually take things apart and contemplate them one by one to the point where we gain true knowledge and vision, that's called the practice of insight meditation, the discernment arising in line with the way things actually are.

This is a short explanation of insight meditation, focused just on the aggregate of form. As for feeling — the pleasures, pains, and feelings of neither pleasure nor pain within us — once we've truly seen form, we'll see that the same things apply to feeling. It's inconstant. When it's inconstant, it'll have to make us undergo suffering and stress because of that inconstancy. We'll be piling suffering on top of suffering. Actually, there's no reason why the mind should suffer from these things, but we still manage to make ourselves suffer because of them. Even though they're not-self, there's suffering because we don't know. There's inconstancy

because we don't know. Unless we develop insight meditation to see clearly and know truly, we won't be able to destroy the subtle, latent tendency of ignorance, the latent tendency of becoming, the latent tendency of sensuality within ourselves.

But if we're able to develop insight meditation to the point where we see form clearly in terms of the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, then disenchantment will arise. When the latent tendencies of ignorance and becoming are destroyed, the latent tendency of sensuality will have no place to stand. There's nothing it can fabricate, for there's no delusion. When ignorance disbands, fabrications disband. When fabrications disband, all the suffering that depends on fabrication will have to disband as well.

This is why we should practice meditation in line with the factors of the noble eightfold path as set down by the Buddha. To condense it even further, there are three trainings: virtue, concentration, and discernment. Virtue — exercising restraint over our words and deeds — is part of the path. Tranquility meditation and insight meditation come under concentration. So virtue, concentration, and discernment cover the path. Or if you want to condense things even further, there are physical phenomena and mental phenomena — i.e., the body and mind. When we correctly understand the characteristics of the body, we'll see into the ways the body and mind are interrelated. Then we'll be able to separate them out. We'll see what's not-self and what isn't not-self. Things in and of themselves aren't not-self, for they each have an in-and-of-themselves. It's not the case that there's nothing there at all. If there were nothing there at all, how would there be contact? Think about it. Take the fire element: who could destroy it? Even though it's not-self, it's got an in-and-of-itself. The same holds true with the other elements. In other words, these things still exist, simply that there's no more clinging.

So I ask that you understand this and then put it correctly into practice so as to meet with happiness and progress.

That's enough explanation for now. Keep on meditating until the time is up.

## TO COMPREHEND SUFFERING

**SURVEY YOUR BODY.** Survey your mind. You've been practicing meditation continuously, so even if your mind isn't yet quiet, even though it hasn't reached a level of concentration as solid as you'd like it to be, meditation is still a skillful activity in terms of developing conviction, developing persistence. At the very least it will give results on the sensory level, making you an intelligent person, at the same time developing the perfections of your character on into the future. So try not to get discouraged. Don't let yourself think that you haven't seen any results from your meditation. When you come right down to it, what do you want from your meditation? You meditate to make the mind quiet, and the mind becomes quiet from letting go. That's what the meditation is: letting go. If you meditate in order to "get" something, that's craving, the cause of suffering. Meditation isn't an affair of craving. The Dhamma is already here, so all we have to do is study it so that we'll know the truth. The truth isn't something new. It's something that's been here from time immemorial.

All the Buddhas of the past have awakened to this very same Dhamma, this very same truth. Even though the cosmos has changed from one aeon to another, the Dhamma hasn't changed along with the cosmos. No matter which aeon a particular Buddha was born in, he awakened to the same old truth. He taught the same old truth. The same Dhamma, the same truth, is always right here all the time. It's simply that we don't recognize it. We haven't studied it down to its elemental properties. All I ask is that you be intent on studying it. The truth is always the truth. It's always present.

The truth the Buddha taught starts with the principle that stress-and-suffering is a truth. Do you have any stress and suffering? Examine yourself carefully. Is there any stress and suffering within you? Or is there none at all? As long as there's suffering within you, the truth of the noble truths taught by the Buddha is still there. When you're mindful to keep your eye on the suffering appearing within you, you're studying the truth in line with what it actually is.

But in addition to pointing out the truth of suffering, the Buddha also taught the path to the end of suffering. This, too, is a truth. The Buddha has guaranteed that when we develop it in full measure, we'll gain release from stress and suffering. It's not the case that suffering is the only truth, that we have to lie buried in stress and suffering. The Buddha found a way out of suffering, like an intelligent doctor who not only understands diseases but also knows a miraculous medicine to cure them.

This is why the truth of the path is so important, for many, many people who

have put it into practice have gotten results. The truth of the path is something we put into practice to gain release from suffering — as we chanted just now:

*Ye dukkhaṃ nappajānāti,*  
Those who don't discern suffering,  
*Atho dukkhassa sambhavaṃ*  
suffering's cause ...  
*Tañca maggaṃ na jānāti*  
who don't understand the path,  
*Dukkhūpasamaḡāmināṃ*  
the way to the stilling of suffering ...  
*Te ve jāti-jarūpagā*  
they'll return to birth and aging again.

If we don't comprehend suffering and the way to the end of suffering, we'll have to experience birth, aging, and death, which are the causes not only of suffering but also of the craving leading to more suffering.

We should take joy in the fact that we have all the noble truths we need. We have suffering, and the path to the end of suffering doesn't lie far away. When we look into the texts, we find that the Buddha and his noble disciples didn't practice anything far away. They purified the actions of their bodies and minds. They did this by knowing their own bodies and minds in line with what they actually were. When we don't know our own bodies and minds as they actually are, that's a cause of suffering. When we practice knowing our own bodies, our own minds, as they actually are, that's the path to release from suffering. Aside from this, there's no path at all.

We already have a body. We already have a mind — this knowing property. So we take this knowing property and put it to use by studying the body in line with its three characteristics: *aniccatā*, inconstancy; *dukkhatā*, stressfulness; and *anattatā*, not-selfness. Inconstancy and stressfulness lie on the side of suffering and its cause. We have to study things that are inconstant in order to see who they are, who's responsible for them, who really owns them. This issue of inconstancy is really important. *Rūpaṃ aniccaṃ*: form is inconstant. Who owns the form? *Rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ*: form is stressful. Who's on the receiving end of the stress? Stress is something that has to depend on causes and conditions in order to arise. It doesn't come on its own. Just like sound: we have to depend on contact in order to hear it. If there's no contact, we won't know where there's any sound. In the same way, stress depends on contact. If there's no contact, we won't know where there's any stress. If stress and suffering were able to burn us all on their own, the Buddha would never have been able to gain release from them. There would be no

way for us to practice, for no matter what, suffering would keep on burning us all on its own. But the fact of the matter is that when we practice, we can gain relief from suffering, because suffering isn't built into the mind, it's not built into this knowing property. It has to depend on contact through the sense media in order for it to arise.

This is why sages study the truth. As when we chant:

*Ayaṃ kho me kāyo,*

This body of mine,

*Uddhaṃ pādatalā*

from the soles of the feet on up,

*Adho kesamatthakā*

from the crown of the head on down,

*Taca-pariyanto*

surrounded by skin.

Within this body we have all five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, thought-fabrications, and consciousness. Form is the coarsest of the aggregates, for we can touch it with our hand and see it with our eyes. As for feeling, perception, thought-fabrications, and consciousness, they're mental phenomena. Even though we can't touch them with the body, we can still know them and experience them. For instance, we constantly have feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. Perception: we remember things and label them. Thought-fabrication creates thoughts, and consciousness notices things. We all notice things, label them, fabricate thoughts about them, and experience pleasure and pain because of them.

The primary issue is the form of the body. The Buddha taught us to study it in order to know the noble truths in both form and mental phenomena. When he taught that birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering, he was referring to the birth, aging, and death right here at the form where the five aggregates meet — this form we already have. And yet most of us don't like to reflect on the truth of these things. We think that birth is pleasurable. We get pleasure and stress all confused. It's because we don't realize the truth of these things that we don't search for a way out. The Buddha, however, knew this truth, which was why he practiced contemplating it. He tested to see if birth is pleasurable by noticing if the mind could stay quiet with birth: "Are there any pains? Anything disturbing the mind? And what's paining and disturbing the mind aside from the birth, the arising of things?" It's because of the birth of the body that we have to keep finding food for it, requisites to keep it going. Greed, anger, and delusion arise because of birth. And once there's birth, there's aging, deterioration, wearing down, wearing

down all the time. Whatever we get runs out, runs out every day, wears down every day.

The Buddha awakened to the truth that birth isn't pleasurable at all. The only pleasure is when, if we get hungry, we eat enough to make the hunger go away for a little while. But soon we get hungry again. When we get hot out in the sun, we take cover in the shade to cool down a bit, but then we start feeling hot again. When we get tired, we rest. But then if we lie down for a long time, we start feeling stiff. If we walk for a long time, we get weary. When this is the way things are, the mind can't find any peace or rest. It gets disturbed and gives rise to defilement because of birth. And that's not the end of it. Once birth takes place, it's followed by aging and deterioration. No matter how much you look after the body, it won't stay with you. In the end, it all falls apart. And once it dies, there's no one who can stay in charge of it. If we come to our senses only at that point, and realize only when it's already dead that it has to die, it's too late to do anything about it.

But if we gain conviction in these truths now in the present before death comes, we won't be complacent about our youth or life. If we can be mindful at all times that death is inevitable, that — even though we may be as strong as a bull elephant — a disease could come along at any time and oppress us to the point where we can't even sit up, can't do anything to help ourselves: when we realize this, we're said not to be complacent in our health. Then we can act in ways truly benefiting ourselves, providing us with the refuge we'll need when we can no longer take refuge in our youth, health, or life. Wherever you look in the body you see it wearing down. Wherever you look you see diseases. Wherever you look you see things that are unclean. Nothing at all in the body is really strong or lasting. When you see this clearly, you'll no longer be fooled into clinging to it. You can analyze the body into its parts and see that they're all inconstant, stressful, and not-self. When you develop clear insight into not-self, you'll be able to shake free of stress and inconstancy. That's because inconstancy is a not-self affair; stress is a not-self affair. They're not our affairs. So what do we hope to gain by letting ourselves struggle and get defiled over them?

This is why the noble ones, when they see these truths, call them the dangers in the cycles of *samsāra*. You have to understand what's meant by the term, "cycle." There's the cycle of defilement, the cycle of action, and the cycle of the results of action.

The cycle of defilement is the ignorance that makes the mind stupid and defiled. These defilements are the cause of stress, suffering, and danger.

Then there's the cycle of action. Any actions we do under the influence of defilement keep us spinning in the cycle, acting sometimes in skillful ways, sometimes in unskillful ones. Even skillful actions can lead to delusion, you know. When we experience good sights, sounds, status, or wealth as a result of our

skillful actions, we can turn unskillful, careless, and complacent, because we get deluded into investing our sense of self in those things. When they start changing against our desires, we grow frustrated and start acting in evil ways. When they leave us, we act in unskillful ways. This causes the cycle of action in terms of both our physical and verbal acts.

When we act in ways that are unskillful, this causes the cycle of results to be painful. When we experience this pain and suffering, the mind becomes defiled. Our vision gets obscured because the suffering overcomes us. This gives rise to anger as well as to greed for the things we want, and this starts the cycle of defilement again.

For this reason, if we can comprehend suffering as part of this cycle, we can block the cycle of defilement that would give rise to new cycles of action and results. So let's study the truth of suffering so that we can cut these cycles through discernment in the form of right view, which is a factor of the noble path. Let's foster and strengthen the path by knowing the suffering in birth, aging, illness, and death. When we comprehend suffering for what it actually is, we don't have to worry about the cause of suffering, for how can it arise when we see the drawbacks of its results? Once true knowledge has arisen, how can ignorance arise?

It's as when we're in the darkness. If we try to run around tearing down the darkness, it can't be torn down. If we try to run around snatching away the darkness, it can't be snatched away. The darkness can't be dispersed by us. It has to be dispersed by light. When we light a fire, the darkness disappears on its own. The same with ignorance: it can't be dispersed through our thinking. It has to be dispersed through clear-seeing discernment. Once we give rise to discernment, the cause of suffering disappears on its own, without our having to get involved with it.

So try to give rise to clear-seeing discernment in full measure, and you'll gain release from suffering without a doubt. Be really intent.

That's enough for now. Keep on meditating.

## THE STRATEGY OF A PEACEFUL MIND

PEACE MEANS LETTING GO of mental objects so that nothing comes in to disturb the mind. All that's left is a nature devoid of fabrication. Even the *nibbāna* we want to reach is nothing other than a peace not fabricated by conditions. As for the peace we develop through various techniques by which the mind gathers into concentration, or gathers into stillness, that's the peace of the mind gathering in. It stops fabricating. It stops holding onto the aggregates.

We should view this sort of peace, in which we let go of the aggregates, as a strategy. When the mind isn't at peace, that's because it doesn't let go. It holds onto things as its self or belonging to its self. As a result, it suffers. It feels stress. The mind takes its stance in form, in feelings, in perceptions, in consciousness. It seizes hold of these things, but these things are inconstant. When they change, they lead to disappointment. The mind then thrashes around and piles on more stress and suffering. So we have to view peace as our strategy — the peace we try to give rise to — seeing it as a high level of happiness. As for any lack of peace, we should view that as suffering. The mind lacks peace because defilements disturb it. This happens because the mind isn't skillful, and the mind isn't skillful because of delusion.

So we focus on peace and on the stress of disturbance as our strategies. Peace we regard as the goal for which we're practicing. Stress we use as an object of contemplation, as a means for destroying delusion, intoxication, heedlessness, our hankering for things. The strategy by which we can bring the mind to peace requires that we see the stress and drawbacks inherent in the aggregates. As long as we keep hankering after the aggregates, as long as we're deluded by sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas found in the aggregates, the peace we want can't last, for these things are inconstant. This inconstancy is what leads to the stress and suffering we see all around us. We take our stance in forms that are inconstant. Or you could say that we seize hold of forms that are inconstant. We live in forms that are inconstant. We take a stance in feeling. We seize hold of feeling.

Why do we seize hold of it? Because we've fabricated it into being from having seized hold of feeling in the past. The cause from the past becomes the effect in the present. To let go of the feeling in the present, we have to examine things until we see the inconstancy, the stress in form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness. Then the mind won't be deluded. This is our path. This is the right view that fosters discernment. In this way, stress is the means for developing knowledge and vision. If there weren't any stress or suffering, what would we take

as our focus? Actually, stress and suffering are already there, so why don't we see them for what they are? Because we haven't heard the Dhamma — or we have heard it, but we've listened in an aimless way, with no truth in our listening, our awareness, our actions.

So we have to be certain, earnest, and true in our heart. After all, suffering is an earnest truth. If we just play at contemplation, simply letting things happen on their own, that's not meditation. It gives us no proof, doesn't develop the mind. If you're going to focus on anything, focus on it so that you comprehend it, so that you see its truth, so that you can grow disenchanted with stress and suffering, and can abandon the origination of stress and suffering in line with its truth. Don't just go through the motions.

When I went to stay with Ajaan Mun, the first thing he spoke about was this: being truthful, earnest. He said, "You've ordained in earnestness. You didn't ordain in play. You ordained with conviction, and did it properly with the Sangha and your preceptor admitting you to the community of monks. Everything was done in line with the Buddha's instructions. So you have your guarantee that you're a genuine monk on the conventional level. But your status as a monk isn't yet complete. You need to be earnest in your practice, to complete all three parts of the Triple Training — heightened virtue, heightened mind, heightened discernment — until you gain true knowledge of what the Buddha taught. You have to practice all the way to the end, so that you can gain true knowledge, through proper discernment, of the noble truths."

Stress, for instance, is a noble truth. It's right there in front of you. Why don't you become disenchanted with it? Because you don't see it, don't see the cause from which it comes. Or when you see the cause, you don't see its connection to stress. Why is that? Because delusion gets in the way. You see pretty sights, hear lovely sounds, smell nice aromas, taste good flavors, and then you fall for them. You get carried away and grasp after them, thinking that you've acquired something. As for the things you don't yet have, you want to acquire them. Once you acquire them, you fall for them and get all attached and entangled. This is the origination of suffering. When these things are inconstant, they stop being peaceful. They become a turmoil because they're inconstant all the time.

Have you ever acquired anything that's constant and lasting? Has anyone ever acquired anything that's constant and lasting? When you acquire money, a home, a car, a boat, whatever — a child or a grandchild — are these things constant? Stable? Do they make the mind constant and stable?

You have to contemplate suffering and stress down to the details and see all the way through. Don't just go through the motions. Focus on sights and sounds in general — everything inside or outside where the mind takes up residence. They're all just like our body — they're all based on form. Hair of the head is a

form, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin — every part — the bones. If you took the bones out, how could the rest of the body stay? Even when you don't take them out, they're going to go on their own. Every part is going to fall away. They won't stay together like this forever. Whatever you acquire — good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant — you have to investigate it. Ask yourself: All these things that you hold onto, that you love and delight in, that you have to keep caring for, from fear of hunger, heat, cold, difficulties, pains, and illnesses, all these things that you've been caring for all along: What have you gained from them? All you've got to show is that you can't meditate and bring the mind to peace, radiance, or purity, all because you're so possessive of these things.

What I'm saying here is a truth that's true for everyone. Each of these words applies to each one of us. This is the truth. It's what the Buddha said when he was summarizing the basic principle of suffering and stress.

So we should use suffering and stress as our tool in destroying the origination of suffering, so that we won't be deluded by craving. If we don't make use of suffering and stress, there's no other way we can destroy it. We'll keep falling for it, delighting in it. But if we see how things are inconstant and stressful, we won't fall for craving any longer. We'll see how we've been taking birth and dying, dying and taking birth, endlessly, all because we see this thing as delicious, that as delicious, this as sweet-smelling, that as sweet-smelling, this as soft, that as soft. All of this is the origination of stress. We're deluded about these things, we get infatuated with them. We don't get infatuated with suffering. As long as we're infatuated with these things, there's inconstancy, instability, separation, leading to sorrow and despair, always searching for more. What does this all come from? We have to look for both the cause and the effect, to see how they're connected, if we want to know. That's when we'll be discerning, when we gain knowledge and vision, seeing the long course.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma so as to broaden our mindfulness and discernment, so that it can encompass more than just what's right in our face. For instance, he has us contemplate that we're subject to aging, subject to illness, subject to death. Even though we're not yet old, he has us contemplate aging so as to prepare ourselves for the fact that this is the way things will have to go. We're not yet ill, we're not yet dead, but we have to contemplate these things every day. This is what it means to be heedful, prepared.

Once we see this truth, we won't want to give rise to anything unskillful in the mind. We won't be greedy, angry, or deluded, for what do we gain from being greedy? Nothing but stress. What do we gain from being angry? Nothing but stress. What do we gain from being deluded? Nothing but stress. When we see this, we'll be able to live without greed, anger, or delusion, caring for the body just enough to keep it going, just enough to develop the discernment that will enable

us to see the truth. This will put an end to the burden of falling for the cycle of death and rebirth without end. Once we cast off this burden, we won't have to concern ourselves with these things any longer.

We hear that nibbāna is happiness, so we want to go there. We hear that meditating brings happiness, so we want to meditate — but we do it without any skillful strategies. We need skillful strategies in our listening, skillful strategies in focusing our awareness, skillful strategies in our practice. Everything requires strategies, intelligence, mindfulness and discernment within the mind.

The intelligence of the mind is something really powerful, you know. It's nothing to sneeze at. But for the most part, we don't apply that power inside. We apply it outside, to material things. Whatever we put our minds to, we can accomplish. We can build all kinds of things, but we devote our power just to things outside, to solving external problems. As a result, we stay deluded about ourselves. We don't really look at ourselves. The Buddha was the first to really turn around and look at himself. He didn't build external power. He didn't claim to be special. He simply turned around to look at the mind, asking himself, "If the mind is really special, why does it have to depend on other things? Why does it have to keep building up other things? Those things are inconstant, so when they change, what's left? It's all a waste of energy."

All you have to do is turn around and straighten out the mind so that it doesn't fall for its fabricating. You don't have to go building anything, fabricating anything. When you see through the process of fabricating, you put an end to it. That's called the unfabricated. Nibbāna is the unfabricated. No conditions can fabricate it or dress it up at all. It comes from turning around to know the heart, without fabricating or seizing hold of anything outside.

This is the truth. If we don't reach this state of truth, we'll just keep on circling around. You have to know what disbands and ceases in nibbāna. You have to know what you're still deluded about that keeps getting in the way. So be intent on your meditation.

Peace of mind is a strategy that we use to test the truth within ourselves. We see that when the mind lets go of the aggregates, it's happy. If you don't yet believe this, you can give it a try. When you sit in concentration, try letting go. Tell yourself that you're not going to carry these aggregates around; you're not going to get riled up about them. Whatever pains there may be, you don't have to pay them any mind. Pay attention to *buddho*, or whatever your meditation topic may be, until there's nothing left but the property of knowing. And then keep watching, watching, watching, letting go of anything else that comes along until the mind settles down and is peaceful. A sense of ease and pleasure will appear as your evidence: You've been able to let go of the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, and fabrication. As long as you're not involved with them, the mind is peaceful

and at ease. But as soon as you get involved with them, the mind is immediately in a turmoil. This is your strategy for seeing stress, for knowing stress. When the mind isn't peaceful, that's stress. As soon as we see this, we'll grow disenchanted. Whatever comes to disturb the mind, there's stress in the process of fabrication, which is conditioned by ignorance.

So we should focus on studying the mind, developing the mind. Once you've brought the mind to peace, you should use that peace as a strategy to contemplate stress so as to disband it. See the connection between stress and lack of peace in the mind, along with their relationship to form, to the aggregates, to the origination of stress. See how the origination of stress is related to the eye seeing forms, the ear hearing sounds, the nose smelling aromas, the tongue tasting flavors. When craving arises, this is where it's going to arise, right here at these things, but the only way to see this is through meditation. If you don't meditate, you won't know. The way to know is through the strategy of finding a peaceful place and making the mind peaceful. That's how you'll gain release from suffering and stress.

Now that you understand this, focus on making the mind peaceful as a strategy for eliminating the stress and disturbance. Be circumspect in using your discernment.

Keep on meditating until the end of the hour.

## GLOSSARY

**Ajaan:** Teacher; mentor. This is a Thai term derived from the Pali, *ācariya*.

**Anusaya:** Latent tendency; obsession. There are seven altogether: sensual passion, resistance, views, uncertainty, conceit, passion for becoming, and ignorance.

**Anussati:** Recollection as a meditation exercise. The Ten Recollections are: recollection of the Buddha, recollection of the Dhamma, recollection of the Saṅgha, recollection of virtue, recollection of generosity, recollection of the qualities that make one a deva, mindfulness of death, mindfulness of the in-and-out breath, mindfulness immersed in the body, and recollection of the peace of nibbāna.

**Arahant:** A person whose heart is free of passion, aversion, and delusion, and who is thus not destined for further rebirth. An epithet for the Buddha and his highest level of noble disciples.

**Brahmā:** A deva of the non-sensual heavens of form (*rūpa*) or formlessness (*arūpa*).

**Buddho:** Awake. An epithet of the Buddha.

**Deva:** A “shining one.” An inhabitant of terrestrial or celestial levels of sensual pleasure.

**Dhamma (dharma):** (1) The teaching of the Buddha. (2) Phenomenon, event. (3) Mental quality, mental event. (4) The dimension at which the Buddha’s teachings are aimed: *nibbāna*.

**Jhāna (dhyāna):** Meditative absorption in a single mental object or sensation. If the object is physical, such as the breath, the absorption is termed *rūpa jhāna*. If not (as when absorbed in a sense of boundless space or consciousness), the absorption is termed *arūpa jhāna*.

**Kamma (karma):** Intentional action that leads to further states of becoming.

**Khandha (skandha):** Aggregate; heap; group. Physical and mental components of the personality and of sensory experience in general: *rūpa* (form, physical phenomenon); *vedanā* (feeling); *saññā* (perception, mental label); *saṅkhāra* (thought-fabrication); and *viññāṇa* (consciousness).

**Māra:** Demon; death; temptation personified. Anything, within or without, that acts as an obstacle to the practice.

**Nibbāna (nirvāṇa):** Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from mental defilement and the round of rebirth. As this term is used to denote also the

extinguishing of fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burning fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound.)

***Puñña***: Merit; worth; the inner sense of wellbeing that comes from acting rightly or well.

***Samsāra***: The process of wandering on through states of becoming and birth, both on the micro level — in the thought-worlds of the mind — and on the macro level, from one lifetime to another.

***Saṅkhāra***: Fabrication. This can denote anything fabricated or fashioned by conditions — in which case it covers all five *khandhas* — or more narrowly, the fourth *khandha*: thought-fabrication within the mind.

***Sutta***: Discourse.

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