



GOOD  
HEART,  
GOOD  
MIND

# *Good Heart, Good Mind*

THE PRACTICE  
OF THE  
TEN PERFECTIONS

*Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*  
(*Geoffrey DeGraff*)

#### **COPYRIGHT 2020 ṬHĀNISSARO BHIKKHU**

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities.

#### **QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS BOOK MAY BE ADDRESSED TO**

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

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at [dhammatalks.org](http://dhammatalks.org).

#### **PRINTED COPY**

A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

## *Preface*

In April of 2019, members of Le Refuge, a Buddhist group located near Marseilles, invited me to lead a ten-day retreat on the topic of the ten perfections (*pāramī*): giving, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, endurance, truth, determination, goodwill, and equanimity. In February of this year, members of Sociedade Vipassanā de Meditação of Brasília asked me to lead a ten-day retreat on the same topic.

The perfections are a set of qualities traditionally associated with the path of the bodhisatta—the Buddha-to-be—in his quest for the timeless happiness of awakening through the course of many lifetimes. Because these perfections are drawn from the Jātaka tales, stories of the Buddha’s previous lives, and because the bodhisatta is often portrayed as a layperson in those tales, the perfections provide an excellent framework for understanding how to give meaningful and satisfying purpose to everyday lay life. They show how to approach duties, responsibilities, and challenges in a way that’s conducive both to genuine goodness and to genuine happiness. As they develop, they foster qualities both of a good mind—wise in understanding cause and effect—and a good heart: purposeful, well-intentioned, and strong.

The talks of each retreat were presented in two series: a series of talks on the ten perfections, primarily in the evenings, plus a series of morning talks, largely on practical issues arising in meditation and topics related to the practical application of the perfections. Every afternoon, there was a period for questions and answers concerning issues arising from the talks and from the retreatants’ experiences in meditation.

The present book is based on the talks from both retreats. In some cases, I have used transcripts of the talks from the French retreat; in others, transcripts from the Brazilian retreat; and in still others, an amalgam of the two. I have also included some of the questions and answers from the Q&A periods from both retreats, placed immediately after the talks to which they seem most clearly related. The talks, questions, and answers have been edited and expanded so as to make their coverage

of the main topics of the retreats more complete than I was able to manage on the spot.

The talks draw on suttas, or discourses, from the Pāli Canon and on the writings and talks of the ajaans, or teachers, of the Thai forest tradition, in which I was trained. For people unfamiliar with the Canon, I have added passages from the discourses at the back of the book to flesh out some of the points made in the talks. These are followed by a glossary of Pāli terms.

For people unfamiliar with the Thai forest tradition, you should know that it is a meditation tradition founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Ajaan Sao Kantasīlo and Ajaan Mun Bhūridatto. The ajaans mentioned in the talks trained under Ajaan Mun. Of these, Ajaan Fuang Jotiko and Ajaan Suwat Suvaco were my teachers. Ajaan Fuang, although he spent some time training directly under Ajaan Mun, spent more time training under one of Ajaan Mun's students, Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo.

Many people have helped with the preparation of this book. In particular, I would like to thank the people of Le Refuge and the Sociedade Vipassanā de Meditação who made the retreats possible; my interpreters, Khamano Bhikkhu (Than Lionel) in France and Katatto Bhikkhu (Than Saulo) in Brazil; Philippe and Watthani Cortey-Dumont, who hosted my entire stay in France; and members of the Karuṇā Group, who hosted my stay in and around Brasília. Here at Metta, the monks at the monastery helped in preparing the manuscript, as did Addie Onsanit, Christopher James, Virginia Lawrence, Anita Basu, Irfan Pirbhai, and Isabella Trauttmansdorff. Any mistakes in the book, of course, are my own responsibility.

*Thānissaro Bhikkhu*  
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

METTA FOREST MONASTERY  
AUGUST, 2020



DAY ONE  
EVENING

## *Introduction*

Good evening and welcome to our retreat on the ten perfections. It's always a pleasure to come and meditate with you here, and I hope the retreat is helpful for you all.

The ten perfections are a list of teachings that provide focus for living everyday life in a way that has meaning and purpose, at the same time developing the path to awakening. This emphasis on purpose is in line with the nature of the mind itself, which is purposeful. To be happy, the mind requires a good purpose. The perfections pose questions that force you to reflect on what kind of purpose you already live for, and whether you might do better to aim at something higher.

The questions they ask are:

What kind of happiness do you want to set as a goal in your life?

Is your current behavior actually taking you there or somewhere else?

If it's taking you somewhere else, what do you need to change?

The answer given by the ten perfections to these questions is that true happiness can be gained through human action, but it lies in a dimension beyond the confines of space, time, and change. It's the best possible goal. In some cases, it can be attained in this life, but in others it may take two lifetimes or many more. So, the perfections ask you to take the attitude of a marathon runner. Pace yourself and be ready for the long term so that you don't give up before you've arrived at the goal.

All of the Buddha's teachings—his Dhamma—are goal-oriented. This is reflected in the fact that the word *Dhamma* is often paired with the word *attha*, which means “meaning,” “purpose,” “benefit,” or “goal.” All of these meanings of *attha* are connected. To know the meaning of the Dhamma is not just a matter of interpreting its words in terms of other words. You also have to know its purpose: how the teaching is supposed to be acted on, and where it's supposed to lead you when you act on it correctly. In fact, you won't really know the fullness of the meaning of the Dhamma until you've had a direct experience of the goal. To reach that experience,

you have to ask, with regard to every teaching: “What is this teaching *for*? How do I act on it correctly? And when I do, where will it take me?” Then act accordingly.

To understand the goal of the ten perfections, we should first look at two approaches to life that the Buddha did *not* take, because sometimes they are falsely attributed to him.

The first is that there is nothing to attain, that we should reject the desire for something better than what we presently experience as unrealistic, and instead find contentment in accepting things as they already are.

A while back, I was watching an interview in which a Dhamma teacher was saying just that: that happiness lies in simply relaxing and accepting things as they are, with the realization that they cannot be changed. The woman who was interviewing the teacher said, “But isn’t this defeatist and pessimistic?” And the teacher said, “Only if you think about it.”

Now, the Buddha was not defeatist, and there are no images in the Canon of relaxing your way to awakening. All of its images are of search, struggle, and mastering skills. As the Buddha said, the path is a path of victory. “Unexcelled victory in battle,” he called it. And he certainly didn’t say *not* to think. We end desire not through resignation, but by using our discernment to strategize, to find a path to a happiness so complete that there’s no more need for desire. It’s found, not by lowering your standards, but by finding good standards and then raising them. To do that, you have to expand your imagination as to what you are able to do.

The second approach that the Buddha didn’t take was the materialist approach, claiming that the death of the body is the end of consciousness, so that we have to find our goal solely in this life. This perspective might lead us to find meaning in creating a better society where people can live a moral life, with all its anxieties and vulnerabilities. This, however, does not solve the major problem in life, which is that we’re driven first by our hungers. We live by feeding on one another.

One of the images that occurred to the Buddha before he began his quest for awakening was of many fish in a stream. The stream is drying up, and the fish are fighting one another over that last little bit of water, yet even the fish who succeed in pushing the others out of the way are going to end up dying anyhow. If this were all there was to life, it would be pretty depressing.

The problem with the relaxed, accepting approach and the materialist approach is that both see suffering as a necessary part of life that simply has to be accepted. This is precisely what the Buddha did *not* accept. He aspired to freedom from suffering and from the need to feed.

The materialist view also differs from the Buddha's approach in that it starts with an assumption about the relationship between body and mind—that the body comes prior to the mind—and from there draws some conclusions about what we can do and know. The Buddha's approach was the other way around. He started by mastering skills that allowed him to do and know more than he had ever done and known before: putting an end to suffering and realizing a timeless happiness. Then—in the course of mastering those skills—he made some radical discoveries about how the body and mind are related.

One of his discoveries was that consciousness does not need a body to survive. Consciousness and craving feed on one another in such a way that they can keep each other going beyond the death of the body, from lifetime to lifetime, indefinitely. This was not an idea that the Buddha had simply picked up from Indian culture. There were many materialists in ancient India. So, in teaching rebirth, he was not adopting, without thinking, an idea universally accepted in his culture. It was a hotly debated issue in his time.

He also discovered that actions have results that lead beyond this life, and the results follow the pattern of cause and effect based on the quality of the intention behind the act. Because intentions come from the mind, this puts the mind first.

Here it's important to note that the word for *mind* in Pāli, *citta*, can also mean *heart*. In other words, we're looking at the mind/heart both as something that thinks and understands, and as something that desires. From the Buddha's perspective, these two functions are not totally separate. Our thoughts are shaped by our desires, and our desires by our thoughts. In particular, the act of forming an intention uses both sides of the mind/heart. Each intention is based on a desire to attain a goal, informed by our understanding of what is possible and how, given what's possible, it can best be attained.

The practice of developing the perfections is one where we train our mind to be good so that it has a correct understanding of cause and effect, and of how to use cause and effect to attain a wise goal. We also train our heart to be good, both in the sense of desiring a well-being that causes no harm, and in the sense of having the strength to carry through with that desire. Then we combine that good mind and good heart to produce intentional actions that are skillful and coherent, leading to the best possible goal: a happiness that has no need to feed. Only then can we be truly harmless and safe.

The Buddha discovered that this goal is possible and he presented it as a challenge: Do you want to live life without trying to see whether it's true? He says



that we have a potential power in our hands. Don't you want to see how far it can take you toward awakening to the end of suffering?

The perfections we'll be discussing in the course of this retreat are qualities of heart and mind needed to arrive at that awakening. If we desire true happiness, their development should take priority in our lives, requiring that we trade short-term comfort for long-term happiness.

The ten perfections are these: giving, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, endurance or patience, truth, determination, goodwill, and equanimity. You'll notice that these are qualities both of a good mind and of a good heart. We try to bring wise understanding to the desires of the heart so that, as they work together, they can shape intentions that are noble and good.

These qualities are also strengths, and many of them are listed in the suttas as treasures. They teach us to regard the challenges of life not as obstacles, but as opportunities to make our hearts and minds wealthy and strong.

The role and importance of the perfections is reflected in the Pāli word for perfection: *pāramī*. It can either mean "foremost," *para*, or it can be related to "to the other side," *param*. In other words, the ten perfections take priority for anyone who is aiming to go beyond suffering, to find unbinding or true freedom on the other side of the flood of birth and death.

The purpose of this retreat will be to provide some understanding of the perfections and to give an opportunity to put them into practice through meditation. We ask that, for the duration of the retreat, you take as a working hypothesis the Buddha's understanding of the mind that underlies his teaching of the perfections. This will give you an opportunity to look at your life from the perspective that this understanding provides.

Basically, the Buddha's perspective is that if we train the mind and heart to be truly good, we will also be truly happy. Happiness and goodness, when they're genuine, go naturally together. The Buddha's insight here is very different from the perspective of contemporary culture, which says that true happiness isn't possible. "Buy our goods instead," they say. "Content yourself with what we can sell you." There are also many currents in our society saying that being truly good is neither possible nor wise. So, by adopting the perfections, we free ourselves from the cynical attitude we see so prevalent around us.

As for the organization of the retreat: In the evening we'll have talks on the ten perfections. The morning talks will be primarily practical talks on meditation and

other issues related to the perfections. However, because there are ten perfections and only eight nights, some of the perfections will be allocated to the mornings. We'll also have opportunities for questions and answers. But because there are way too many people to just raise your hands, we'll have slips of paper for you to write your questions on and a bowl for you to put the questions in. We will answer the questions as the schedule allows.

Given the way that the retreat is organized, there are a couple of perfections that won't come until the end of the retreat, but it's good to talk about them briefly now. For example, equanimity and endurance: We have lots of people in this room, and I understand we're going to get a lot of rain this week. So, we'll have plenty of opportunities to practice endurance and equanimity. Many of the ajaans in Thailand have said of Westerners that endurance and equanimity are our weak points. Here's our chance to prove them wrong.

Another perfection worth noting as we begin is the perfection of renunciation. It, too, won't be discussed for several days, but it's precisely the perfection under which meditation comes. So, we're going to start meditating right now in order to give you some practical basis for understanding the discussions of renunciation and also the relationship of meditation to the other perfections as we come to them.

## GUIDED MEDITATION

Close your eyes; get in position. Spread thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is a wish for true happiness. The Buddha connected it with discernment. He said that any time you have ill will for someone else, it's a sign of wrong view. And because the teaching is all about finding true happiness, goodwill underlies all the perfections.

So, start with goodwill for yourself. Tell yourself, "May I be truly happy." Think for a minute about what that means. Happiness doesn't simply come from the wish. It comes from our actions. So, when you're wishing goodwill for yourself, you're telling yourself, "May I understand the causes for true happiness, and may I be willing and able to act on them."

Then spread the same thought to others. Start with people who are close to your heart: your family, your very close friends. May they find true happiness, too.

Then spread those thoughts out in ever-widening circles: to people you know well and like, to people you like even though you don't know them so well, to people you're more neutral about, and to people you don't like. Remember that goodwill in this case means that if these people have been behaving in very bad ways, you're

wishing that they learn how to change their ways for the better—which is something you can wish for everyone without any hypocrisy.

Spread thoughts of goodwill to people you don't even know. And not just people—living beings of all kinds: east, west, north, south, above, and below, out to infinity. May we all find true happiness in our hearts.

Now bring your thoughts to the breath. The word “breath” in this context doesn't mean just the air coming in and out of the lungs. It also means the flow of energy in the body, which exists on many levels, the most obvious being the energy that allows the breath to come in and go out.

So, take a couple of good, long, deep in-and-out breaths and notice where you feel the energy of the breath most prominently in the body. If long breathing feels good, you can keep up that rhythm. If it doesn't feel good, you can change. You can experiment to see what kind of breathing feels best for the body right now: long or short, fast or slow, deep or shallow, heavy or light, coarse or refined.

If your mind leaves the breath to follow another thought, drop that thought and you'll find yourself right back at the breath. If the mind wanders off 10 times or 100 times, drop those thoughts 10 times or 100 times. Don't get discouraged. Each time you come back to the breath, reward yourself with a breath that feels particularly gratifying. That way, the mind will be more and more inclined to want to come back. If there are any pains anywhere in the body, don't focus on them. Instead, focus on the parts of the body that you *can* make comfortable with the breathing.

Now, as the breath gets comfortable, there will sometimes be a tendency to leave the breath to focus on the sense of comfort, in which case you lose the basis for your concentration. So, to counteract that tendency, as soon as the breath gets comfortable, the next step is to breathe in and out aware of the entire body. And a good way to work up to that full-body awareness is to go through the body, section by section, to notice how the breathing feels in different parts of the body.

Start down around the navel. Locate that part of the body in your awareness. Watch it for a while to see how it feels as you breathe in and breathe out. Notice what kind of breathing feels good right there. If you notice any tension or tightness in that part of the body, allow it to relax, so that no new tension builds up as you breathe in, and you don't hold on to any tension as you breathe out.

Now move your attention over to the right, to the lower right-hand corner of the abdomen and follow the same steps there.

One, locate that part of the body in your awareness. Two, watch it for a while as you breathe in and breathe out to see what kind of breathing feels good there. And three, if there's any sense of tension or tightness there, allow it to relax.

Now move your attention over to the left, to the lower left-hand corner of the abdomen, and follow the same three steps there.

Now bring your attention up to the solar plexus, right at the tip of the breastbone, and follow the same three steps there.

Now bring your attention over to the right, to the right flank.

And then to the left, to the left flank.

Then bring your attention to the middle of the chest. Try to be especially sensitive to how the breath energy feels around the heart, and breathe in a way that feels soothing there.

Now bring your attention to the right, to the place where the chest and the shoulder meet.

And then to the same spot on the left.

Now bring your attention to the base of the throat.

Now bring your attention to the middle of the head. As you breathe in and out, think of the breath energy coming in and out of the head from all directions, not only through the nose, but also through the eyes, the ears, in from the back of the head, down from the top of the head, going deep, deep, deep into the brain, gently dissolving away any patterns of tension you may feel anywhere in the head: around the jaws, around the forehead, around the eyes, at the back of the neck.

Now bring your attention to the base of the neck, right at the base of the skull. As you breathe in, think of the breath energy entering there from the back and spreading down through the neck, down the shoulders, the arms, out to the tips of the fingers. As you breathe out, think of it radiating out from all those parts of the body into the air.

As you get more sensitive to these parts of the body, if you see that one side is holding more tension than the other, relax that side and try to keep it relaxed, all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out-.

As blatant patterns of tension begin to relax in these parts of the body, try to become more sensitive to subtler patterns of tension that were obscured by the more blatant ones. Allow even the slightest tension that you can detect to relax.

Now, keeping your attention focused on the back of the neck, this time as you breathe in, think of the energy entering there and then going down both sides of the

spine all the way down to the tailbone. Then, as you breathe out, think of it radiating out from the entire spine into the air. Again, if you notice that there's more tension in one side of the back than the other, allow that side to relax. And try to keep becoming more and more sensitive even to the slightest patterns of tension in this part of the body. When you sense them, allow them to relax.

Now bring your attention down to the tailbone. As you breathe in, think of the energy entering there and going down through the hips, the legs, to the tips of the toes. And then as you breathe out, think of the energy radiating out from all those parts of the body into the air. And again, if there's more tension in one side of the body than the other, allow that side to relax. And keep it relaxed, all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out-. As you're staying here, try to become sensitive to ever more subtle patterns of tension so that you can dissolve those away, too.

That completes one cycle in the survey of the body. If you were meditating on your own, you could go through the body as many times as you like. But for the time being, find one spot where it seems most congenial to focus your attention. Focus your attention there and then, from that spot, let your awareness fill the entire body, so that you're aware of the whole body as you breathe in, the whole body as you breathe out.

The range of your awareness may have the tendency to shrink, especially on the out-breath. So, each time you breathe in, remind yourself, "Whole body." Each time you breathe out, "Whole body." Allow the breath to find whatever rhythm feels comfortable. There's nothing else you have to do right now, nothing else you have to think about. Just try to maintain this sense of centered but broad awareness. It's healing for the body, healing for the mind, and it provides a good basis for insight to arise. But for the moment, don't worry about insights. Simply try to make this foundation as solid as you can.

[Meditation]

Before you leave meditation, think thoughts of goodwill once more. Think of whatever sense of peace or well-being you've felt during the past session and dedicate it to others: either to specific people who you know who are suffering right now or to all living beings in all directions. May we all find peace and well-being in our hearts.

And with that thought, you can open your eyes.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Could you give the Pāli term for each perfection?

**A:** *Dāna* is giving, *sīla* is virtue, *nekkhama* is renunciation, *paññā* is discernment, *virīya* is persistence, *khanti* is endurance or patience, *sacca* is truth, *adhiṭṭhāna* is determination, *mettā* is goodwill, and *upekkhā* is equanimity.

**Q:** What is the relationship between the perfections and kamma?

**A:** They're qualities of mind that will determine whether you will make good kamma or bad kamma—in other words, good or bad intentional actions. Everything in the Buddha's teachings except for nibbāna is related to kamma.

**Q:** You touched on something about the relationship between renunciation and meditation. It sounds very important, but you didn't explain it. Can you explain more about that?

**A:** When you get the mind into concentration, you have to put aside all of your interest in sensual thinking. That's precisely what renunciation is. When the Buddha's talking about sensuality, he's not talking about sensual pleasures. He's talking about our fascination with thinking about sensual pleasures. For example, you may be thinking that when our evening session is over you can go into the nearby town and get some ice cream. Your fascination with thinking about the ice cream: That's the sensuality. The ice cream itself is not sensuality. Only if you drop that kind of thinking can you get the mind into right concentration. At the same time, the only way to overcome sensuality is to provide the mind with a better, non-sensual pleasure, and the concentration is precisely what provides that pleasure. That's how renunciation and concentration practice are related to each other.

**Q:** There are practice lineages of meditation that tell you to keep the eyes half-open when you meditate in order to not separate yourself from the world, in light of the fact that our life and our activities take place within the world with our eyes open.

**A:** When you meditate, you can have your eyes open, half-opened, or closed: It doesn't make any difference. Do whatever seems best for keeping your mind both calm and awake. However, it's good to remember that when you meditate, you *are* taking time out from the world—because you have a problem that the world cannot solve, and only you can solve it for yourself. That's the problem of the unnecessary suffering you cause for yourself. This is a problem that happens in a part of your



awareness that no one else can know directly. In other words, no one else can experience your suffering.

The solution to this problem comes from qualities that lie within your mind, again, in the part that no one else can know. So, allow yourself to have some time out from the world so that you can focus your attention fully on the problem you need to solve. If the world keeps pushing in, you have to push back. And watch out for meditation lineages that tell you that your fulfillment will happen within the world, because they won't condone your spending the time you need to solve the problem that you have to solve. If you don't solve it, you'll keep on suffering, and that suffering will spill out onto others as well.

**Q:** Is the Buddhist path the same for everyone?

**A:** Everyone will have to develop the same perfections. Some people will have to work harder on some perfections than others. And some people, in addition to gaining awakening, will develop other psychic abilities as well. But the path to awakening itself is always the same.

**Q:** How should one find the purpose of one's life?

**A:** Fortunately, *you* are the person who can decide what your purpose is going to be. In other words, it's not a pre-ordained purpose you have to find. It's a purpose you choose. In the Buddhist cosmology, there's no one in charge. There's no one assigning a purpose to other beings, which means that you're free to choose what you think is the best goal in your life. Now, your past kamma may make it difficult to attain that goal in this lifetime, but if the goal is good, don't let that discourage you. Just because a path of practice is easy doesn't mean that it takes you where you want to go. And just because a path has obstacles doesn't mean that you shouldn't try to follow it.

**Q:** An awareness that is freed from the body and its cravings: Is that awakening?

**A:** There are states of mind where we're not aware of the body and we don't see any cravings, but it is possible for the cravings to be there, simply that they're not showing themselves. They've gone underground. That's not a state of awakening. Awakening is a mind where the possibility of craving has been uprooted.

DAY TWO  
MORNING

## *An Overview*

This morning I'd like to give an overview of the ten perfections.

As you remember, the perfections are these: giving, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, endurance, truth, determination, goodwill, and equanimity. This list does not come from the original suttas. Individual perfections are taught in the suttas, often to monks and laypeople, but the list as a whole comes from a later period, probably just before the Canon was closed, about two or three hundred years after the Buddha passed away.

The list is associated with the Jātaka tales, which are tales of the Buddha's lifetimes prior to his last one. In these tales, he's usually a layperson, which is why the perfections are useful guides for reflecting on how to live lay life in a way that leads to awakening. There are a few Jātaka tales in the early parts of the Canon but, over time, more and more tales were added to the original ones. As different schools of Buddhism began to develop, each added a separate collection of Jātaka tales to its version of the Canon.

As a result, there are different collections of Jātakas from the different early schools of Buddhism. These, in turn, resulted in different lists of the perfections. One school, called the Sarvāstivādins, listed six perfections, a list that was later adopted by the Mahāyāna: giving, virtue, endurance, persistence, jhāna (mental absorption), and discernment.

In all the early schools, many pan-Indian tales with well-known heroes were added to the Jātakas. For example, Rama is included as a previous lifetime of the Buddha. This was perhaps to help Buddhist converts sense that, in adopting Buddhism, they were not abandoning the good elements of their cultural heritage. If this had happened in France, they might have included the story of d'Artagnan. Had it happened in the British Isles, they probably would have included Robin Hood and King Arthur. So, as you can imagine, it's quite an eclectic group of tales.

Still, even though the Jātaka tales may not represent actual lives of the Buddha, they do reflect the values of the people who collected them—people trained in the

values that the Buddha taught.

While the different schools were compiling their collections, they asked themselves, “What can we learn about the Buddha’s path of practice from these tales? What are the qualities that he developed in each case?” These are the questions that led to the list of the perfections. Now, as you’ll find, the individual perfections in each of the two main lists are also found in the arahant path as defined in various suttas. The question then arose, what is the relationship of the Buddha’s path to the arahant’s path? Was the difference quantitative or qualitative? “Quantitative,” here, means that arahants developed the same perfections as the Buddha, but the Buddha simply developed more of each. “Qualitative” means that the perfections for the Buddha were actually of a different type.

The Theravāda and other early schools decided that the difference was quantitative. The Mahāyāna, which came later, decided that it was qualitative, specifically in the case of discernment. The discernment developed by the Buddha, they said, was radically different from the discernment developed by the arahants. Instead of discernment into how things arise and pass away, which would be the arahant’s discernment, the Mahāyāna schools taught that the ultimate discernment—the Buddha’s perfection of discernment—was that things don’t really arise or pass away. This difference informed all the rest of the Mahāyāna perfections.

Even within the Theravāda, there are some differences between the Dhamma as taught in the Jātaka tales and as taught in the suttas. For instance, discernment in the Jātakas is more a matter of cleverness than of right view. But the Jātakas do share with the suttas the idea that discernment should be strategic.

There is also the issue that the actions of the bodhisatta—the future Buddha as portrayed in the Jātakas—are not always a reliable guide to good behavior. Sometimes he kills, sometimes he steals, sometimes he has illicit sex, sometimes he drinks, although he never lies—and we’ll come back to that point later when we discuss virtue. The Theravāda interpretation of the Jātakas explains these ethical lapses by saying that because he wasn’t yet awakened, he still didn’t fully understand the Dhamma. In English, we’d say that he was still learning the ropes.

There’s also an issue in that the perfections are never explained in the Jātakas. They simply say that the Buddha-to-be had these qualities, but they rarely explain how or why a particular tale exhibits a particular perfection. This is why, for the purpose of this retreat, we’re going to be looking at the individual perfections—what they are and how they’re developed—as they’re explained in the suttas and also in the teachings of some of the forest ajaans.

There's one other problematic feature of the list: There's no clear progression from one perfection to the next. So, to bring the list into line with a list the Buddha did teach—and to give an organic unity to the discussion—we'll organize the perfections under the framework of what the Buddha called the four determinations. This means that we'll be looking at all ten perfections under the framework provided by one of the perfections, which is determination.

The four determinations are these:

- not to neglect discernment,
- to guard the truth,
- to be devoted to relinquishment, and
- to train for calm.

If you place the ten perfections under these four categories,

- under discernment you would have discernment and goodwill,
- under truth: truth, virtue, and persistence,
- under relinquishment: giving and renunciation, and
- under calm: endurance and equanimity.

This placement is somewhat arbitrary, in that some of the perfections could fit under a variety of categories. Equanimity and renunciation, for instance, can also be seen as aspects of discernment. Virtue is taught in the Canon as a form of giving: the gift of safety. However, the fact that these perfections could fit under a number of categories simply underlines the point that there is an organic unity to the practice of the perfections and that each perfection contains elements of the others.

This is the first point emphasized by this way of organizing the material: Each perfection contains elements of the others.

The second point is that, as with every determination, all of the perfections grow from an act of will. This is in line with the Buddha's observation that all phenomena are rooted in desire. We have to *want* the perfections for them to come true. They are qualities of the heart and mind that we can choose to develop consistently to pursue the goal we've chosen, which is awakening.

It's important that we realize that we're always making choices and that they matter. Awakening is not the inevitable result of our true nature, nor is it our entitlement. We have the potentials for the perfections in our hearts and minds, but we also have the potential for their opposites. There are some times when goodwill, for example, comes naturally, but there are other times when ill will is equally—or even more—natural. All you have to do is look at the behavior of little children, and

you can see that both goodwill and ill will are very natural—which means that if we want these perfections to develop, we have to make the choice to develop them, and we have to stick with that choice to go beyond what’s natural to something better than natural.

This is why, when we discuss the perfections, we will start each discussion by identifying the desire that underlies our determination to develop that perfection as part of our quest for awakening.

Determination is basically a focused desire. It’s an attempt to bring our random desires into some kind of order, to give priority to some over others, so that our conflicting desires don’t work at cross-purposes and get in the way of what we really want.

That’s the second point.

The third point is that the perfections begin with discernment. The reason we don’t get what we desire in life, even though experience is rooted in desire, is because our desires are ignorant of how cause and effect really work. They don’t know which causes are skillful—leading to genuinely good results—and which ones are not. So, for desires to lead to happiness, they have to be guided by right view and right resolve—the first two factors of the noble eightfold path. You have to see that it is possible and worthwhile to develop each perfection. This requires the ability to imagine that true happiness is possible and that you’re capable of attaining it. At the same time, discernment gives guidance in how to bring these perfections about. For example, goodwill, generosity, and persistence are qualities with which we’re already familiar, but they have to be informed by discernment if they’re going to become genuine skills. That’s why discernment has to come first.

However, in actual practice, we’ll also find that, as we develop the other perfections, our discernment develops further as well. In other words, the perfections develop reciprocally. They help one another along. Discernment gives guidance to the other perfections, at the same time that the act of developing the other perfections helps to make our discernment more penetrating and precise. For example, you don’t really know the truth of right view until you’ve followed through with right resolve and mastered the appropriate tasks assigned by right view. You don’t really know the truth of craving until you’ve learned how to abandon it. You don’t know the truth of the path until you’ve developed it to see that, yes, it really does lead to the end of suffering.

This type of knowledge brings together the two meanings of the Pāli word *attha*. *Attha* can mean the meaning of a word or teaching—how it can be translated into

other words—but it also means the goal to which a teaching is aimed. As I’ve already noted, both meanings apply to the Dhamma at the same time, in the sense that you don’t really know the meaning of the Dhamma until you’ve had at least some experience of the goal to which it leads.

This means that discernment has to begin with conviction. In other words, the teaching sounds good, it makes good sense, but you don’t really *know* how true it is until you’ve reaped the rewards of the path. That kind of confirmed knowledge comes only with the practice. And to practice the perfections, you have to be convinced that they’re at least worth a try. The proof of these teachings lies in developing them and enjoying the results they yield. That’s when you’ll see for yourself that by giving priority to the perfections—not only as you meditate, but also as you fulfill the duties in your daily life, in your family and at work—they really are beneficial to you and to the people around you.

So, try to keep in mind the three lessons taught by the way we’re organizing the discussion of the perfections:

- Each perfection contains the others.
- They all require focused desire in order to develop.
- In each case, they have to be informed by discernment in order to lead to awakening. In other words, to get the most out of developing each perfection, you have to understand what it is and how it fits in with the others. But for your understanding to be fully developed, it has to learn from the process of developing the others.

If we think of understanding as a quality of the mind, and the desire to find true happiness as a quality of the heart, we can see that the perfections show us how the development of the heart and mind together can lead to a happiness that’s genuinely satisfying—a happiness that’s good for you and for the people around you.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Is it good to regard the ten perfections as new members of the committee of the mind?

**A:** Actually, they already are members of the committee, simply that they may be weak at the moment. What you’re trying to do as you develop them is to take these weak members and train them so they have more power in the committee. This is your strategy for going beyond the perfections towards awakening.



**Q:** What is the difference between relinquishment and renunciation?

**A:** “Relinquishment” is the word we use to translate the Pāli term *cāga*. Renunciation we use for *nekkhama*. The terms in English are very similar, but the Pāli terms are different.

*Cāga* basically means giving up either a thing or an attitude: You can give up a desire; you can give up a defilement; you can give up your BMW. Each of these actions would be a form of relinquishment. *Nekkhamā* means specifically giving up thoughts of sensuality. Sensuality is not so much a matter of sensual pleasures as it is your fascination with thinking about sensual pleasures. We tend to be more attached to our thoughts and plans about sensual pleasures than we are to the pleasures themselves.

For instance, suppose you decide to sneak out tonight to get some pizza in town. You could sit here for the rest of the day thinking about what kind of pizza you want. When you get to town, it turns out the pizza restaurant is closed. But that doesn’t matter. Other restaurants are open, and you can go for the pleasure of some other sort of food instead. However, if I were to say that for the next five hours you cannot think about pizza at all, we would have a rebellion. Once you decide that you want to think about something, you tend to be very attached to your freedom to think those thoughts. But, as the Buddha said, this kind of thinking tends to weaken the mind. When you tell yourself, “I’ll be happy only if the conditions are this, this, this, and this,” you’re like a hothouse plant: Your happiness can survive only under certain controlled conditions—conditions that could change and go out of control at any time. When we’re practicing meditation, this kind of thinking is one of the first things we have to put aside. If you can substitute those thoughts with the skills of meditation, then you can use those skills to make yourself happy in any situation.

**Q:** In the ten perfections, there is the perfection of virtue. What kind of virtue is this?

**A:** Essentially, the virtue of restraint or of avoiding harm to others and to yourself. This means no killing, no stealing, no illicit sex, no lying, and no taking of intoxicants. This kind of virtue is paired with the perfection of generosity, in which you actively go out of your way to be helpful to others.

**Q:** Of the four brahmavihāras—*mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, *upekkhā*—two of them, *mettā*, goodwill, and *upekkhā*, equanimity, are also perfections. Why are compassion, *karuṇā*, and empathetic joy, *muditā*, not perfections?

**A:** Because compassion and empathetic joy actually come under *mettā*, or goodwill. Goodwill is a wish that all beings be happy. Compassion is what your goodwill feels when you see that someone is suffering. Empathetic joy is what your goodwill feels when you see that someone already is happy and you want that person to continue in that happiness. So, in actuality, all four brahmavihāras are included in the perfections.

**Q:** To which perfection does the practice of bowing belong?

**A:** It belongs to the perfection of giving. You give respect, because it's in an atmosphere of respect that you're most likely to learn. When you bow down, it's not a sign that you're going to obey the person you're bowing to. It's simply a sign of respect and of a willingness to learn.

**Q:** *Sati*, or mindfulness, appears in many parts of the 37 Wings to Awakening. How does it fit into the ten perfections?

**A:** *Sati* is a faculty of the memory, your active memory: what you keep in mind as you're acting on a particular problem. Right sati has two functions in the path. In its first function, it applies to all parts of the path and works together with right view and with right effort to develop the path. With every factor of the path, you try to have the right view as to what is skillful and what is unskillful. Then right mindfulness (or right sati) remembers what is skillful and what is unskillful, how to deal with skillful qualities in order to develop them and how to deal with unskillful qualities so that you can abandon them. Right effort is what actually does the work of developing and abandoning.

In a similar way, sati functions in relationship to every one of the perfections: You have to remember what the perfections are, the fact that you should develop them, and whatever lessons you've learned from the past in how to develop them and to abandon their opposites.

The other function of sati is its specific role in giving rise to right concentration. In this case, sati would be a part of the perfection of renunciation.

**Q:** Considering that mindfulness means keeping something in mind, how do we use mindfulness in a skillful way to develop the ten perfections?

**A:** You have to keep in mind the desire that you want to develop these ten perfections, so that when you meet up with challenges in your life you remember to tell yourself, "This is nothing to get upset about. This is an opportunity to develop the perfections." In fact, there's a Thai saying: "No obstacles, no perfections." Let

that thought give you encouragement. Then, as you've been able to develop a perfection well in that situation, you hold that skill in mind for the next time you're faced with a similar challenge.

Remember, too, that all of the perfections are a form of determination, and with every determination, you have to keep remembering it as contrary desires come up in the mind. It's in this way that the development of the perfections is a form of mindfulness.

**Q:** What is the common thread among all ten perfections that allows you to apply them in daily life?

**A:** The common thread is that you always have to think about the long-term consequences of what you're doing, and to remember that the most important aspect of any activity is what qualities it develops in your own mind. For instance, suppose you're at work. Your boss has said something really stupid and infuriating. You have to ask yourself, "What would be the best thing for me to say right now that would give the best long-term results?" Now, you may be able to think of a very clever, sarcastic reply, but then you have to ask yourself, "If I let this out of my mouth, what will happen? What kind of person will I become? What kinds of qualities will I be developing?" That's a simple example.

So, think about the long-term consequences of what you're doing—and we're talking really long-term: throughout this lifetime and into future ones. That's the perspective that the perfections provide.

Another example would be one that actually comes from the life of one of my students when I was in Thailand. He kept wanting to go into the forest. He said, "Here in the monastery there are too many distractions." And that was a forest monastery! Finally, he got into the forest, and his meditation was miserable. Fortunately, he was able to realize, "Well, at least I'm developing the perfection of patience and endurance." Remembering that purpose can carry you through a lot of difficulties.

EVENING

## *Determination*

As I said this morning, the perfection that will provide the framework for our discussion during the retreat is the perfection of determination. This is in line with

the Buddha's observation that all phenomena are rooted in desire. The aim of desire is to gain pleasure, happiness, and ease, and to avoid suffering and pain. In other words, it starts with discontent. You don't like the pain from which you may be suffering, and you're dissatisfied with the pleasure you're experiencing. You want something better.

Now, it's true that desire can be a cause for suffering, but it can also function as part of the path to the end of suffering. Or to put it in different terms, there's a type of discontent that causes suffering, but there's also a type of discontent that motivates the path. The desire and discontent that motivate the path are the ones we'll be focusing on this evening.

There are so many pleasures in life and so many pains that it's impossible to gain all pleasures and avoid all pains. At the same time, some pleasures, when you pursue them, make it impossible to gain other pleasures. For example, if you want to be respected by admirable people while you also want to have four or five affairs, you'll have to give up one of those two desires. It's like planting different plants in your garden: Some plants grow well together; others don't. If you plant eucalyptus trees in your garden, they'll kill everything else.

This means that we have to choose which desires are worth following and which ones are not. This, in turn, requires negotiating among our desires to choose which pleasures are better left unattained and which pains have to be endured. In making this negotiation, we decide on the basis of the reasons or rationales that the mind offers for each desire. This means that the desires are not pure id (i.e., raw, brute craving). To succeed in this negotiation that constantly occurs in the mind, each desire has to have some element of reason. Some of the reasons may not be all that skillful, but there is a reason for every desire. This is why reason can be used to negotiate and choose among the desires.

Choosing among things always involves a trade: Something has to be abandoned to gain something else, ideally of higher quality. Now, because all desires aim at happiness but are based on different ideas of what happiness is and how it's best attained, our discernment concerning the nature of true happiness has the potential to succeed in bringing some order and consistency into our desires. After all, they all have a common goal. But for your discernment to succeed, it has to present a consistent picture of what long-term happiness is and to present that picture in an attractive way.

The Buddha himself said his awakening depended on two qualities inherent in a strong desire. One was discontent with whatever skills are not yet good enough for

fully reaching the goal. In other words, you're not going to content yourself with anything less. The second quality is an unwillingness to give up, whatever the hardships, until you've reached your aim.

Now, discontent is present in all desire, but the Buddha focused his discontent specifically on the level of skill in his actions. As long as his actions hadn't yet arrived at true happiness, he would try to develop his skills even further. As for the effort he had to put in, it would require relinquishing certain things, which meant that he also needed to develop endurance and equanimity.

The name for this kind of focused desire is determination. Determination is an overarching desire that tries to bring some order to our other desires so that they can work together in achieving a deeply desired goal. When we discuss the perfection of truth, we'll see the Buddha's explanation for how this kind of desire or determination becomes focused on awakening.

But in short, the explanation is this: When we meet with a person whose actions inspire confidence, we spend time with that person, listen to that person's Dhamma, and contemplate it until we see that it makes sense. That person's words and example show that the Dhamma opens new possibilities in life, and points to potentials within ourselves that we may not have suspected before. When we find those possibilities attractive, and realize that we have to develop those potentials, that's when we give rise to the desire to follow the Dhamma.

What that person will teach is that we have to face the fact of death, and to think about what we'll have remaining when death comes. He or she also teaches us that it is possible to find a path of happiness that doesn't die.

Now, remember the four determinations that we mentioned this morning:

- not to neglect discernment,
- to guard the truth,
- to be devoted to relinquishment, and
- to train for calm.

Let's talk about each of these four.

We'll start with **discernment**. Even though all the things that we experience begin with desire, we don't always get the desired results. Either we follow unskillful desires, we follow unskillful methods, or we can't motivate ourselves to stick with skillful desires and skillful methods when we meet with obstacles. In order to attain a true happiness, we need discernment to help bring some order to our desires. This will enable us to choose a wise goal, to judge the means by which we bring that goal

about, and to motivate ourselves to follow those means in spite of obstacles. In this way, discernment has to give guidance to the remaining determinations.

In the Buddha's teachings, discernment has an aspect both of the head and of the heart, and both aspects aim at long-term happiness.

The head aspect has to do with a calculation: understanding cause and effect, and figuring out how to use the principles of cause and effect to find a happiness that's worth the effort needed to attain it. When the Buddha gave his shortest explanation of what his awakening was about, it was a statement of a principle of cause and effect. It explains how there is a pattern to cause and effect, but it's not deterministic. There is some freedom of choice. We'll discuss more of this point tomorrow evening.

As for the heart aspect of discernment, it focuses on a happiness that doesn't change—and so never gets disturbed—and also on a happiness that causes no harm. There's a part of the mind that wants to have long-term rest. As the Buddha said, there is no happiness other than peace. Now, we might want to argue with that, pointing out the many kinds of happiness that are not very peaceful at all. We also tend to think that happiness requires variety: goat cheese today, blue cheese tomorrow. But this is basically because what we get in our normal pleasures is not really satisfactory. What the heart really wants is something where, when you get it, you don't need anything else. We've been taught that such a happiness is impossible, so we should try to satisfy ourselves with a variety of sensual pleasures, but the beginning of real discernment in the Buddhist sense is allowing for the possibility that, with the proper training, a totally satisfactory and blameless happiness is possible after all.

Now, as we bring discernment to our lives, we have to combine these two aspects of discernment, the head and the heart. Your head has to train the heart to be willing to admit the patterns of cause and effect so that it doesn't act only on its impulses and so that its efforts don't go to waste in useless actions. It also has to train the heart to realize that simply having skillful intentions is not enough. The heart has to be resilient enough to make those intentions become realities. This means that, for the heart to be really good, it also has to be strong. This is reflected in the list of perfections themselves: Goodwill has to be backed up with truth, endurance, and persistence if it's going to be developed as a perfection. At the same time, your heart has to train your head to use its intelligence in looking for a happiness that's reliable and harmless.

This is why discernment in the Buddha's path is both a matter of right view and right resolve. Right resolve is the determination to act for the sake of true happiness



in line with what our intelligence accepts as working hypotheses about cause and effect. *“Not to neglect discernment” means to keep remembering this long-term perspective provided by discernment as we make our decisions in daily life.* The big problem here is that we can often stumble over our hungers because both our head and our heart often get overturned by our gut.

I’ll tell you a story. There’s a sea creature called a sea squirt. It’s a little tiny thing, basically a little digestive tract and a little brain. After it’s born, it’ll flow through the ocean in line with the sea currents. When it lands in what it thinks is a good spot, it’ll settle down and spend the rest of its life there. And the first thing it does once it has found its spot is to digest its brain. It spends the rest of its life as a mindless digestive tract.

A lot of human beings are like this: Our appetites consume our intelligence. The first duty of discernment is to not let our brain get digested by our stomach so that it can teach the heart that our short-term pleasure can often get in the way of long-term happiness, and so that it can motivate both the heart and the mind to want the long-term.

As the Buddha said, the question that lies at the beginning of discernment is “What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?” The wisdom here lies in seeing that our actions are needed in order to lead to happiness, that long-term happiness is possible, and that long-term is better than short-term.

There’s a passage in the Dhammapada saying that if a wise person sees a long-term happiness that comes from abandoning a short-term happiness, the wise person will abandon the short-term for the sake of the long-term. A British translator of the Dhammapada said that this could not possibly be the meaning of this passage: It’s too obvious. Well, it may be obvious, but how many people actually live this way? This is why the Buddha has to keep reminding us of this.

When I was taking the Dhamma exams in Thailand, one of the exams each year involved writing a short Dhamma talk in which you quoted a passage from the Buddha’s teachings. They had provided a textbook full of Dhamma passages, and all the little novices were memorizing page after page after page of these passages. Now, memorization was not my strong point—and especially not in a language not my own—so I figured I needed a few passages I could use no matter what the topic assigned for the Dhamma talk. This was one of the ones I chose, and it took me through three years of Dhamma exams—which gives you an idea of how important this principle is.

However, simply reminding yourself that long-term happiness is better than short-term happiness is not enough. Discernment also has to make long-term happiness attractive to motivate you to want to do the things that you don't like doing but will lead to long-term happiness, and to abstain from things that you like doing but will lead to long-term harm.

Discernment, for this reason, has to be strategic. This can be seen in the guidance that it gives to the other determinations.

For example, the determination on **truth**: Once you've set your heart and mind on a goal, there are things you will have to do that you may not like doing. As we will see when we discuss the perfection of truth, "truth" has many meanings. But its most important meaning in relationship to determination is being true to yourself: making it a point of honor to follow through with what needs to be done and not letting your hungers deceive you into following desires that are at cross purposes with developing the perfections.

The problem is that when we set awakening as a goal, it's a truth we haven't seen for ourselves. We need conviction that long-term happiness is possible and that it can be attained through our actions. This conviction requires an act of imagination to overcome our laziness when the actions that are required by the path seem too hard.

Now, right view gives us some working hypotheses to overcome this ignorance. This is why it's called right *view* rather than right *knowledge*. In other words, you don't really know that right view is true until you've gained awakening. Still, you adopt it as a working hypothesis because you find that it's reasonable and attractive, and it puts you in a position of power in your life so that you're not simply a victim of circumstances.

Right view is not so much a view about the true nature of things. It's a view about how skillful and unskillful actions can truly bring about good or bad results.

Right resolve then builds on this understanding. It gives you attitudes to develop about which actions and ways of thinking are in line with right view for the sake of the best results. In this way, by following right view and right resolve in our actions, we maintain the truth of our original determination and also the truth of our character. *This is how we "guard the truth."*

The third determination is **relinquishment**, and here there's a similar problem. There are things that we have to abandon if we want to achieve the goal, and the trick here is to see that relinquishment is not a deprivation. It's a trade. Right view

and right resolve teach us that through developing the skills of giving and renunciation, we're trading up.

Our problem in modern society is that we all want to win at chess and yet keep all our pieces. So, one of the lessons of determination is that you have to be willing to give up certain things to get what you want. *To be "devoted to relinquishment" means that we keep making skillful trades willingly.*

The fourth determination is **calm**. Right view and right resolve work together to give us the right perspective, the long-term perspective that helps keep the mind calm while we're doing what we may not like doing and refraining from things that we *would* like to do. This perspective helps us to see that we're accomplishing something of value. It also helps us to reassure ourselves that we have the strength within us to keep going. It helps us to see the value of endurance and equanimity, in that they make our goodness—and our happiness—independent of conditions around us. It also enables us to see that the challenges and setbacks of life are actually opportunities to develop perfections of our character. This gives us strength in facing difficulties and even joy in taking on challenges. In fact, in the Buddhist analysis of how mind states develop in meditation, calm follows from joy. So, we try to take joy in meeting these challenges.

At the same time, calm functions not only as part of the path to our goal. It's also an aspect of the goal to which we aim. We want a goal that's truly satisfying, one in which the mind can find genuine rest.

So, when we keep the mind calm on the path so that we have the stamina to pursue the path until we find the true peace of the goal, that's how we *"train only for calm."*

Now, you can see that in all of these cases, discernment provides the right perspective that helps us to take the long view. This perspective also nurtures the strengths enabling us to sustain that long-term view as we choose our actions from day to day, in line with our determination to reach what we most desire: unconditional happiness.

We'll continue this discussion tomorrow night.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** The practice of the Dhamma sometimes seems paradoxical. We're told to aim high as we practice meditation, in other words to aim at awakening, but at the same time, we're also advised to practice the meditation as if it were a gift, something that

we give without expecting anything in return. It's difficult to know how to combine these instructions.

**A:** Aim high. Expect something in return. That's why we're meditating. However, if you're thinking only about what you're going to get at the end of the retreat, you're not going to be focusing on the job at hand. Think about it this way: You're driving on a road that leads to a mountain and you want to reach the mountain. But if you spend all your time watching the mountain, you drive off the road. The way to reach your goal is to focus on the road. Just check your rear-view mirror every now and then to make sure that the mountain is not behind you.

**Q:** Of the ten pāramīs, it seems to me that only determination doesn't develop on its own. Is this the consequence of kamma?

**A:** None of the perfections develop on their own. They all have to be developed. In some cases, an individual person may have developed a lot of these perfections in the past, but you can't totally depend on your past actions to carry you through. That would encourage laziness, which is an anti-perfection. Everybody has the chance to develop all of the perfections in this lifetime. So, work on them now.

**Q:** What is the difference between *chanda*, which can mean desire or wish, and *lobha*, which can mean desire or greed?

**A:** *Chanda* can cover any kind of desire, skillful or unskillful. In fact, *chanda* is part of the factor of right effort and it's also one of the bases for concentration. There's a sutta where a brahman comes to see Ven. Ānanda and asks, "What is the goal that you practice for?" And Ānanda says, "Well, one of the goals is to put an end to desire." And the brahman asks, "So, what is the path to the end of desire?" Ānanda replies, "A part of it is concentration based on desire." The brahman says, "Now, wait a minute. That's impossible. How can you use desire to end desire?" Ānanda replies, "Let me question you first. Before you came here to this monastery, did you have a desire to come here?" "Yes." "And now that you're here, do you still have that desire?" "No." Ānanda then says, "In the same way, you use desire to motivate yourself to act in a way that leads you to the point where you don't need the desire anymore."

As for *lobha*, that's greed, basically greed for things or relationships. The Buddha says that this is unskillful if it goes beyond the bounds of propriety. It is possible to have greed for things within reason, but it becomes unskillful if you have to steal or lie or do something unskillful in order to get that thing.

**Q:** What, for you, is happiness? The response will help to rectify my tendency to think of happiness as the MacGuffin of Buddhism. MacGuffin is a concept developed by Alfred Hitchcock to characterize the motor of the action in a film without one being made aware of what that motor or what that action is.

**A:** We talk about happiness but we never define it. The Buddha himself never defined happiness. And I think there's a good reason for that. He talks about training the mind to get rid of suffering and to find true happiness, but he never defines "mind," he never defines "suffering," and he never defines "happiness." All he defines is the training, and he does that in lots of detail. This is because as you follow the training, your concepts of mind, suffering, and happiness are going to develop.

To focus on happiness: In the beginning, you're aware simply of the happiness of sensual pleasures. When you see the stress in that pleasure and the drawbacks it entails, you try to develop the happiness of concentration. As this happiness makes you more sensitive to subtler levels of suffering and stress, you begin to detect the stress even in the happiness of concentration itself, so you look for what's better than that, something less stressful. That would be the happiness of nibbāna, the happiness of a mind with no limits at all. It's totally free and totally peaceful. Unbound. That's the happiness for which we're practicing.

DAY THREE  
MORNING

## *Pain*

The topic this morning is pain. Pain is not one of the perfections. It is, however, a problem that everybody in the room is experiencing. If you understand how to deal with your pains, it'll be easier to understand the Buddha's teachings on discernment and right view. That's because the teachings on right view deal specifically with how we create unnecessary suffering around pain, and how—if we can learn how to avoid fabricating ignorant thoughts and perceptions around pain—it'll cause no suffering in the mind.

The first thing that you have to understand about pain is that some of it comes from your actions in the past—such as the way you've been using your body, the way you've been feeding it, the extent to which you have or haven't been exercising it—but some of the causes for the pain are things you're doing right now. These are things you can change, and in some cases changing what you're doing can make the pain go away. But even if you can't make the pain go away, there's the question of the extent to which you have to suffer from the pain even when it's present. Because what we're aiming at is a state of mind that can be present to the inevitable facts of aging, illness, and death and yet still not suffer. So, the first line of business right now as we meditate is to learn how not to suffer around pain.

The ways to deal with pain are directly related to the Buddha's instructions on how to use the breath as a topic for understanding feelings. There are four steps altogether.

The first step is to breathe in and out sensitive to rapture—and here the word “rapture,” *pīti*, can also mean fullness or refreshment.

The second step is to breathe in and out sensitive to pleasure or ease.

The third is to breathe in and out sensitive to mental fabrication, which means feelings and perceptions. The feelings here are feeling tones of pleasure, pain, or neither pain nor pleasure. Perceptions are the images or words you hold in mind by which you identify and label things. So, as I said, the third step is to be sensitive to these processes of mental fabrication.



The fourth step is to breathe in and out calming these mental fabrications.

Now, of the various forest ajaans, Ajaan Lee gives the most detailed instructions on the first two steps, and Ajaan Maha Boowa gives the most detailed instructions on the last two. Let's look at what they have to say.

With regard to breathing in and out sensitive to rapture, Ajaan Lee recommends, when there are pains in the body, not to focus on the pains immediately. Focus instead on the parts of the body that you can make comfortable and refreshing with the breath.

As you try to give rise to feelings of rapture, it's good to think of the different meanings of the Pāli term for rapture, *pīti*. When we translate it as "rapture," it sounds like we're trying to experience ecstasies, like Saint Theresa. In some cases, it actually can be that strong, but the term *pīti* can also mean refreshment or a sense of fullness, and for most people, that's how we first experience this quality.

So, how do you breathe in and out sensitive to refreshment or fullness? One quick exercise is to find a spot in the body that's especially sensitive—it might be the back of the hands, right at the diaphragm, or in the middle of the chest—and pay attention to that spot very carefully as you breathe in and breathe out. If there's any sense of tension at all in that spot, disperse the tension. If you feel like you're squeezing the breath out as you breathe out at that spot, stop the sensation of squeezing so that that spot can stay full even as you're breathing out. If there's any sense of pinching the breath or tensing up between the in-breath and the out-breath, allow the breath to dissolve that sense of pinching or tensing.

As you get so that you can maintain this sense of fullness while you breathe in and breathe out, and it feels pleasant, you can then think of the fullness and the pleasure spreading to the different parts of the body. You spread those feelings together with the breath energy. Now, we've already had some questions about what this breath energy is and how you sense it. Try another quick exercise. Hold your hand out in front of your body and keep your eyes closed. The sensations that let you know your hand is there: Those are breath sensations.

Now, sometimes as you breathe in and breathe out, there will be a sense of movement in the breath energy in different parts of the body. Other times, it will be still, but either way, it's an energy. Hold that perception in mind. That's the perception you'll use in order to spread the breath energy, together with the fullness and pleasure, throughout the body.

There are different perceptions you can hold in mind to help you feel the sense of the breath energy moving. For instance, you can think of the body as being like a

sponge: As you breathe in and out, the breath comes in and out through all the pores of the sponge. Another perception is that there's a column of energy going down the middle of the body, and as you breathe in, energy comes in from the outside and goes into the column of energy, and as you breathe out, it goes out of the body in all directions from that column of energy. As you hold in mind the possibility that breath energy can do this, you will begin to sense that, yes, there is a movement.

Even though you use images to induce this sensitivity, that doesn't mean that the energy is imaginary. It's like telling a child that the world is round. As far as the child is concerned, the world doesn't look round, so he has to imagine it as round. But as the child grows up, he begins to realize that, yes, the world is round. If you're going to fly the quickest route from, say, Paris to Los Angeles, you have to fly over Greenland. If the world were flat, that wouldn't work. But because the world is round, that's the way you have to fly to save time. In the same way, you use your imagination to allow yourself to think that the breath energy does flow, and then as you get more and more sensitive to the body, you begin to realize that it actually does.

As you spread the comfortable sense of fullness along with the breath energy, you may run into pains. As I said, Ajaan Lee recommends that you not focus directly on the pain quite yet. Instead, keep your focus on the parts of the body where you can make the breath energy comfortable. This way, you give the mind a good foundation or a safe place to stay.

Then, when you feel secure in that good breath energy—accompanied by a sense of pleasure and fullness—the next step is to think of the energy radiating from the comfortable spot and going through the pain.

For instance, suppose you have a pain in your knee. Ajaan Lee recommends imagining the breath energy going down the leg and not stopping at the knee, but going through the knee and out the foot. If you think of the energy stopping right at the pain, that'll reinforce the sense of tension around the pain, which is part of the problem. Maybe, when we were children, we sensed the breath energy moving through the body, and we were afraid that if it went through the pain it would spread the pain, so we subconsciously tensed up around the pain to stop it. But that actually makes the pain worse. So, to repeat, if there's a pain in the knee, think of the breath energy going through the pain in the knee and then out the foot.

In some cases, you'll find that the pain will actually go away. That's a sign that the pain was caused by something you're doing right now. In other cases, though, the

pain will still be there, which is a sign that the pain is caused by something that you did before you sat here or simply by the fact that your body is not yet used to this posture. If you're new to the meditation posture, there will inevitably be a period in which there's pain in the legs as the blood is being blocked or being squeezed out of the part where the legs are folded. This forces the blood out of the main arteries into the capillaries. It's as if there were a traffic jam on a main road, and the traffic has to go down through the small streets, where it gets even more jammed.

The difference with your body, though, is that if you keep forcing the blood through those capillaries by sitting in this posture again and again, the capillaries will eventually begin to expand. In other words, you're turning them into new arteries. Streets can't do this, but blood vessels can. If you have some patience with these kinds of pain, eventually they will go away over time as your body gets more adapted to the meditation posture.

You'll notice that a large factor in making use of feelings of rapture and pleasure lies in the perceptions you bring to them, such as the image of the sponge or the column of energy, or of the energy being able to flow in different places and different directions. The same principle applies to feelings of pain. Your perceptions of pain play a huge role in the impact it has on the mind.

This brings us to the third and fourth steps in the tetrad, getting sensitive to mental fabrication and calming it. To sensitize yourself to how perceptions of pain may be affecting your mind, Ajaan Maha Boowa recommends that you ask questions about how you perceive the pain. For example, he says, suppose there's a pain in your hip: Is the pain the same thing as the hip? Or are there two different kinds of sensations in the same place? In other words, the sensation of the body is one thing and the sensation of the pain is something else. Now, your rational mind knows that these are two separate things, but all too often in our direct experience of the pain, something in the mind says that the pain and the body have become one and the same thing. The pain has invaded the body, and you're trying to push it out.

So here, to calm the perception, you have to change it. The body and the pain are two separate things even though they're in the same spot. The sensations of the body are the four elementary physical properties of earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (warmth), and wind (energy), but the sensation of pain is none of these things. It's as if it's on a different frequency. We can make a comparison with radio waves going through the air. You put a radio in one spot, you adjust the dial to one frequency, and you get one station. If you adjust it to another frequency, there's another station. You don't have to move the radio to a different spot to get a different station,

because the waves are all in the same place, and yet you can separate them out because their frequencies are different, and you've got something that can detect the difference. See if you can do the same thing with the sensations of the pain and sensations of the body in that one spot.

Another perception that might be playing a role in your experience of pain comes from the notion that we have to be responsible for our pains. In other words, right now you think you've got to warn the next moment in the future that there's a pain right here. To correct that tendency, tell yourself, "I don't have to tell the future. The future will find out on its own." Otherwise, you use perceptions to keep sending a message from one moment to the next to the next, which stitches the pains together, adding to the pain and suffering.

A similar problem is when you're sitting with some pain and you keep telling yourself, "I've been sitting with this pain for the past 15 minutes and the session's going to last for another 25 minutes." That's 40 minutes of pain placed on top of one moment, and then, of course, the present moment will break down.

And here Ajaan Lee has a good image for problems of this sort: You're plowing a field, and next to the plow you've attached a big bag. As the dirt falls off the plow, you put it in the bag. Of course, you're going to get weighed down. So, simply get rid of the bag and let the pain fall off at the first moment. You don't have to feel responsible for it; you don't have to keep a record of it. Just stay with the sensation in the present moment.

Ajaan Maha Boowa notes that you can also ask yourself if the pain has a bad intention toward you. Your rational mind knows that the pain itself has no awareness, so it can't have any intention to hurt you at all, but that perception may be lying around in your mind, the result of something you may have assumed about pain when you were a child, and it can still have an effect. So, try to bring it up into your conscious awareness by asking this question: "Does the pain mean to hurt me?" Then reason with any part of the mind that says, "Yes."

Another series of questions you can ask about your perception of pain is this: "Is the pain one solid thing? Does it have a shape in your imagination or is it simply different moments of pain arising and passing away?" If you look very carefully, you see that it is made up of individual moments. So, try to drop the perception that the pain is solid or has a shape.

Then you look at those moments of pain and ask yourself: "As they appear, are they coming at me or are they going away?" If you have the perception they're coming at you, that will make you suffer more from the pain. But if you can hold in

mind the perception that as soon as they appear they're going away, you'll suffer a lot less.

Once, when I was in Singapore, I was taken to see a Chinese doctor to treat my back. He had me lie down on my stomach, and then he rubbed some oil in my back, at first gently, but then more and more roughly. Then he took out two bamboo sections that had been cut so that they were like whisks, and then he started beating on my back. My first thought was, "What bad kamma did I do to deserve this?" But because I couldn't speak Chinese, I couldn't ask him how much longer the treatment was going to last. So, I told myself I'd have to change my perceptions around the pain. I realized that if I could see the pains, as soon as they appeared, as going away from me instead of coming at me, I suffered a lot less. It's like sitting on a truck facing backwards. As you go down the road, as soon as anything appears in your range of vision, it's already going away from you. This perception can help make you suffer a lot less from the pain.

Another question Ajaan Maha Boowa recommends asking is, "Where is the sharpest point of the pain?" Then try to track it down. Or ask yourself, as you breathe in, "Which direction is the breath coming from as it goes through the pain? Can I switch the directions?" See what that does. The important thing, though, is that you show that you're not afraid of the pain. You'll find that even if you don't change the direction of the breath, the spot of the most intense part of the pain keeps shifting around. This teaches you two lessons. One is that the pain is not as solid as you thought it was. The second is that as long as you keep at the questions about how you perceive the pain, the mind becomes a moving target. When you're a moving target, it's harder for the pain to hit you. If you just sit there and suffer from the pain, complaining to yourself about it, then you're an easy target to hit. But if you make it your purpose to understand the pain, then you're going to suffer a lot less from it.

This is precisely what the Buddha has you do. He says your duty with regard to pain is not just to endure it, and it's not to make it go away. The duty is to comprehend it. You comprehend it by asking questions and being curious about it.

This requires that you be fearless of the pain, which requires in turn that you have a good foundation inside. This is why we first work to make the breath comfortable so that when the pain gets too intense for us, we know we have a comfortable place to retreat to. But as the Buddha said, if you really comprehend the suffering that you create around the pain, then you'll find that you can locate the cause of suffering and abandon the cause. And the cause will be in the mind: right around the perceptions

you have around the pain. When you find the mental act that causes the mind to suffer around the pain, you can drop it. That way, even though the pain may still be there, you don't have to suffer from it. That's the duty with regard to right view.

Ajaan Fuang told me a story about when he was a young monk. He was suffering from severe headaches that went on for months at a time. He tried Chinese medicine, Western medicine, Thai medicine: Nothing worked. Sometimes the headaches were so bad that younger monks arranged to stay with him at night to help look after him. One night, he woke up in the middle of the night. He sat up, and all the other monks were fast asleep. His first thought was, "Who's looking after whom here?" But he thought, "Well, I'm not going to get any help from them." So, he decided to meditate and he realized he had been trying to get rid of the headache, when the duty with regard to pain is to try to comprehend it. He focused on comprehending it and, as he told me, he got some of the most important insights in his meditation.

One of the insights you gain by trying to comprehend pain in this way is seeing the extent to which you're making choices in the present moment that you normally are not aware of. In other words, the present moment is not simply given to you from the past. You're also shaping it in the present moment as well. You come to see that if you shape it with ignorance, it's going to cause suffering. If you shape it with knowledge, it becomes part of the path to the end of suffering. We suffer not because of our past kamma but because of our present kamma: what we're doing right now. If you can see your present kamma clearly, you can get rid of the suffering with which you're weighing your own mind down. And that's the only suffering that places a weight on the mind.

One day, when a group of us were sitting at the monastery in California, Ajaan Suwat—my other teacher—pointed to the mountain across the valley and asked, "That mountain: Is it heavy?" Now you know, when an ajaan asks a question like this, it's a trick question. So, nobody answered. He finally said, "Only if you try to pick it up is it going to be heavy. If you don't try to pick it up, it may be heavy in and of itself, but it's not heavy on you, and that's all that matters." In the same way, the suffering that we cause in the present moment is like picking up the mountain. If you stop creating that suffering, the other pains and disappointments in the world will not impinge on the mind. They may be heavy in and of themselves, but they're not heavy on you. And that's all you're responsible for.

So, it's important that you not be afraid of pain. But if you're just getting started in meditation, don't overdo your endurance. Don't try to force your endurance too

much. If the pain is so intense that you can't focus on the breath, then very mindfully change your position. But if you find that you can stay with the breath in spite of the pain, then use the breath to create that foundation you need in order to understand the pain. And maybe you'll gain some important insights of your own.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** In your instructions for meditation you advise us to imagine that we can breathe from the top of the head. I recoil greatly from this type of image. It's a suggestion, isn't it? Isn't it an illusion? After all, when you meditate, don't you see reality face-to-face? Thank you for your response.

**A:** Often, before you see something, you have to imagine that it's possible. The reason I have you imagine these things is related to the fact that the way you perceive your body will have an impact on what you can actually do with your body. If you feel that there is no possibility that energy can flow in your head, then you will feel that there is nothing that you can do with the energy in your head. When I tell you that you can imagine that the energy can flow through the head, this opens up the possibility of doing something with that energy that's already there. I say this just to open your mind to the possibility of something that is already there, so that you can do something skillful with the energy.

You can make a comparison with the ozone hole over Antarctica. For years, satellites were sending information about the ozone hole, but the computer program that analyzed the data threw out the information coming from the satellites, because the people who wrote the program couldn't imagine that an ozone hole was possible. Only when they allowed themselves to imagine it could they accept the data.

**Q:** Could you say a little bit more about the topic of rapture?

**A:** The word rapture in Pāli, *pīti*, can mean refreshment and can also mean fullness. Some people experience it as a sense of intense satisfaction, just being in the present moment and not wanting anything else. In some cases, it'll have some very strong manifestations. Some people find that their body starts moving. Some people feel that energy is flowing over the body in waves. Other people experience it in a much gentler form.

As you're meditating, if you find that it's getting too intense, find a spot in the body where the energy is milder and focus your attention there. Then let the sense of fullness go away. You might think of allowing it to spread out in all directions, with

nothing to contain it. You might think of it going out the palms of your hands or the soles of your feet. It is a sign that the mind is settling down, but if you want to let your concentration get stronger, you have to get past that to a state of deep calm.

**Q:** On my very first retreat, on the second day I had a very strong experience of *pīti*, or rapture. In subsequent retreats it has gotten weaker, as has my concentration. I know I shouldn't have expectations and I thought that I didn't, but now I wonder if I'm doing something wrong in my meditation.

**A:** The intensity of the *pīti* is not a measure of your concentration. It's like drinking a glass of water. If you've been walking across a desert for three days and you drink a glass of water, the intensity of the experience will be very strong. But if you've been drinking water every day and you drink another glass of water, it's not that intense. So, maybe your body doesn't need the *pīti* so much now. The important thing is not to measure your concentration by the *pīti*. Otherwise, you may tend to underestimate your concentration and then you throw it away, and so it won't have an opportunity to develop.

When I was a young meditator, I thought a good meditation required having visions. I wasn't having any visions, so I didn't think I had any concentration. As a result, I didn't nurture what concentration I had. I kept looking for something else. But once I realized that visions were not necessary, I learned to appreciate the concentration I had. When you appreciate it, you tend to it, and it has an opportunity to develop.

**Q:** Sometimes during meditation, my body seems to move on its own, in a circling movement. Is it normal? What should I do? Thank you.

**A:** This is a manifestation of rapture, and it is normal. When it happens, don't encourage it, but don't discourage it, either. Stay focused on your breath. The movement will give more energy to the body as needed and then it should stop on its own.

**Q:** I've been told that in vipassanā meditation, we should observe every sensation that occurs in the body and not control anything. If I'm controlling the rhythm of breathing in different parts of the body, isn't that the opposite of what vipassanā meditation tells me to do? Could you say something about the sensation of electrical discharge in the body? Thank you.

**A:** There are two questions here. The easier one is the electrical discharge. As you open up the breath channels in the body, every now and then, when a blockage gets



opened up, there will be a sense of an electric discharge. That's nothing to be worried about.

Now about vipassanā: The object of vipassanā is to gain dispassion toward the fabrications with which we shape the present moment. There are two different ways of approaching vipassanā. One is just to try not to fabricate anything in the present moment. The other is to very consciously fabricate the present moment so that you can see the extent to which the present moment is fabricated, and the limitations on how far you can create pleasure and happiness through your fabrications.

In my experience, the problem with the first approach is that when you tell yourself not to control the present moment, a lot of the fabrication goes underground where you deny its existence. Also, when something really disturbing comes up in the present moment, you have no tools for alleviating it. We're taking the second approach here because it does make you more sensitive to what you're doing and it teaches you skills that you can use when something really disturbing does occur. If you look at the Buddha's instructions on breath meditation—which are instructions on how to develop tranquility and vipassanā together—you'll find that they involve consciously fabricating the breath in many different ways.

EVENING

## *Discernment*

Tonight's talk is on the perfection of discernment. For the Buddha, discernment starts when we honor our desire for true happiness. This means that discernment starts when we have genuine goodwill for ourselves. So, in tonight's discussion, I want you to keep in mind that when we discuss right view, the right response to right view has to be motivated by goodwill.

Right view has two main levels—mundane and transcendent—and with each level of right view I will keep referring to the question: If you have goodwill for yourself, how would you best respond to what right view tells you on this level? The inclusion of goodwill in the discussion of discernment here follows the fact that the discernment factors of the noble eightfold path include not only right view, but also right resolve. And goodwill is one of the ways in which right resolve is expressed.

The role of goodwill in discernment starts with the questions that the Buddha says lie at the beginning of discernment: "What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness? What, when I do it, will lead to long-term harm and

suffering?” The discernment or wisdom here lies in realizing (1) there is such a thing as long-term happiness, (2) it’s better than short-term, and (3) happiness comes from our actions, so we have to understand the pattern by which actions lead to results. These questions provide the context for right view both on its mundane and on its transcendent levels. Right view on both levels gives further guidance to our desires for true happiness.

Notice that right view here deals with the nature of *actions* and not the nature of *things*. Sometimes we hear that we’re attached, say, to this clock because we think it has an inherent essence. Actually, though, we’re attached to it because we think that holding on to it will give us pleasure, and that it’s worth the effort to hold on to it—even if we know full well that it has no inherent essence. If we figure that it doesn’t give us any pleasure anymore, or that it’s not worth the effort, we throw it away, even if we think that it does have inherent essence. The issue then comes down not so much to the nature of things outside, but to the question of which actions we think are worth doing.

On the level of **mundane right view**, the two big issues are kamma and rebirth.

The lesson that comes from the Buddha’s teachings on *kamma* is that your actions come from your intentions, your intentions come from your mind, so your mind is the factor that shapes your life. This influence can come from the mind’s actions in the past or from its actions in the present moment or from the two combined. The mind is not just a by-product of physical processes. The mind is in charge. It is proactive and purposeful. In other words, it doesn’t simply respond to stimuli. It actually goes out looking for happiness. What we learn from mundane right view is which actions are skillful, actually leading to happiness, and which are unskillful, leading to suffering. If you bring goodwill to this knowledge, you have to remind yourself that if you desire true happiness, you have to develop honorable qualities of the mind that are harmless. The task of developing these honorable qualities is thus something eminently worth doing. Those are the lessons from the teaching on kamma.

The lessons from the teaching on *rebirth* are that consciousness as a process can survive the death of the body, and that the results of your actions can influence what you will experience in your future rebirths. This fact must be taken into consideration when you plan a course of action as to what’s worth doing. Some people say, “I don’t want to hear about future rebirths. I want to focus only on what I’m doing right now in my daily life.” In fact, though, you can’t separate the two issues. The decisions you’re making in your daily life will have an impact on your

future lives, and this fact has to be taken into consideration when you're trying to decide what's worth doing right now.

Now, there are many things that will have to be abandoned at death, but certain qualities that are developed in the mind, whether good or bad, can carry over to future lives. If you bring goodwill to this knowledge, you realize that your life will be well spent if you devote it to developing the good qualities in your heart and mind that will carry over to the future.

There's a story that relates to my family life. When I was a teenager, my family built a house. We hired an architect and played a large role in designing the house. My father was a carpenter, so he did some of the physical work on the house, too. He was very proud of the house. Several years later, we had to move, so we sold the house. Then, many years after that, my father said one day, "Let's go see the old house." We discovered that the new owners had changed a lot of the details and didn't seem to be taking good care of the house. My father was not pleased.

As we were driving back home, he said, "You know, I have nothing to point to as an accomplishment in my life." When I was young, he was a farmer, growing potatoes, and the government came and said, "You have to throw your potatoes away, otherwise the price of potatoes will fall too low." After two years of this, we had to sell the farm. My father became a government worker, and he worked his way up the bureaucratic ladder until he was on the National Water Resources Council, which did a lot of work on water conservation. Then, Reagan became president and abolished the Water Resources Council, so my father took early retirement. After telling me all this again that afternoon, he concluded by saying that he had nothing to show for in his life.

I had two thoughts on hearing his story. One was, "Don't *I* count for something?" The second thought was a reflection: If you try to make the meaning of your life dependent on things outside, it's going to lead to disappointment because so many things outside are beyond your control. But if you can devote your life to developing good qualities of the mind, no one else can take those away from you. They'll be yours for a long time to come. Your efforts in this area are never wasted, so those qualities are clearly worth the effort that goes into developing them. They are accomplishments that can give solid meaning to life.

That's a lesson of mundane right view.

**Transcendent right view** gives further lessons as to what's worth doing and what's not. Transcendent right view is expressed in the four noble truths.

Let's look at each of the truths one by one.

The *first noble truth* is that suffering is something we do. It doesn't simply happen to us: We cling. Now, the word "to cling" in Pāli also means to feed. We suffer because of our feeding habits. Of course, "feeding" here doesn't refer just to physical feeding; it also refers to mental and emotional feeding. In fact, our mental and emotional feeding are our most direct form of suffering, but any feeding habit is going to involve suffering.

This means that suffering is an active, not a passive, verb. We're not just victims on the receiving end of suffering. We're actually out there creating our suffering. If we had goodwill for ourselves, we would try to end this clinging. And in order to do that, we have to comprehend it. We have to understand how we go out and hold on to things, how we keep clinging to things, and why.

The lesson from the *second noble truth* is that the suffering comes from unskillful desires rather than from events or conditions outside. In other words, things outside can be pretty bad, but there's no need for us to suffer from them. If you had goodwill for yourself, you would learn how to abandon your unskillful desires. This includes your craving for sensuality, which, as we've already explained, is your fascination with planning and fantasizing about sensual pleasures. This is why renunciation is one of the perfections.

The *third noble truth* is that a total end of suffering is possible through abandoning the cause. There is a state of mind that does not have to feed because it is totally independent, free from conditions. In the Buddha's terminology, it's "unfabricated." And it's true happiness, the ultimate happiness. Now this, of course, sets the bar for happiness very high. It presents a challenge. Basically, the Buddha asks: Are we going to content ourselves with sensual pleasures? Are we going to accept the messages of advertisers? They say that we're going to be happy if we buy their product, and they've learned how to use our own desires against us.

Do you know the soft drink called Sprite? Did they have the Sprite commercial here that said, "Obey your thirst"? Are you going to content yourself with what your thirst orders you to do? Or are you going to honor your desire for true happiness? These questions require that we expand our imagination to include true happiness as a possibility. If you have goodwill for yourself, you'll decide not to rest until you've realized that happiness for yourself.

The *fourth noble truth* is the path of practice, which involves virtue, concentration, and discernment—which, you will notice, are three of the perfections, if we count concentration as coming under renunciation. If you have

goodwill for yourself, you're going to develop these factors, which will require truth, endurance, persistence, and equanimity. This is why these are perfections as well.

Now, to develop the path requires a certain kind of passion, a passion for the practice. It requires a certain provisional clinging: You have to hold on to the practice for it to work. That type of clinging will be a necessary part of the practice. The Buddha gives the image of a raft. As you're crossing the river, you have to hold on to the raft to get to the other side. When you get to the other side, then you can let go of the raft. Everybody likes to focus on letting go of the raft on the other side, and sometimes people like to make a show of letting go before they get there. But that doesn't work. You have to bind together the raft from whatever is available to you, and then you hold on to it until it's gotten you to safety.

The role of passion in motivating a path that will lead to the end of passion means that the path has to be a strategic one. And because some clinging is involved in developing the path, there will be some suffering in the practice. Anyone who has sat for an hour will know that mastering concentration involves some physical pain and mental discomfort. But this is suffering with a purpose, unlike the suffering caused by unskillful actions. This means that although we're pursuing an unfabricated goal, we have to use fabrications to get there, because you can't use *nibbāna* to attain *nibbāna*. This may be one of the reasons that the Buddha uses the image of a raft—something pieced together from branches and twigs on this side of the river—rather than of a *nibbāna* yacht coming to take you across the river. We don't have to wait for a magical boat made of jewel-bearing trees that will take us effortlessly across the river—because there is no such boat. We have to fabricate the path from what we've got.

And notice that each of these four noble truths entails a duty: to comprehend suffering, to abandon the cause of suffering, to realize the cessation of suffering, and to develop the path. This is why right resolve is part of discernment, because you need resolve to perform and fulfill those duties. The Buddha doesn't force these duties on you, but if you have goodwill for yourself, you'll take them on of your own accord.

Notice also the role of cause and effect on both levels of right view. Suffering has a cause; the path to the end of suffering will lead to the end of suffering. The cause of suffering now is the same as it was when the Buddha was teaching; the path to the end of suffering is also the same. This means that the consequences of your search for happiness are determined by patterns of cause and effect that are constant. You can't simply say, "I like my path better than the Buddha's path, so I'll follow the path I

prefer.” Or rather, you *can* say that, but there is no guarantee that your path will get the same results as the Buddha’s. When we say that his path is a noble path, one of the meanings is that it applies to everyone. If something’s required by a noble path, and you have goodwill for yourself, you have to do it.

The Buddha gives an example of trying to get milk out of a cow. If you try twisting the horn, you’re not going to get any milk. You can try twisting more and more energetically, but you still don’t get any milk, and the cow will probably kick you. Now, you may decide, “Okay, I should stop doing this,” and when you do, you may come to the conclusion, “Hey, not putting in any effort is much nicer than making an effort.” But you still don’t get the milk. The more useful course of action is to find the right part of the cow to pull on. You test a few different places, and you finally find that when you pull on the udder, you get the milk.

In the same way, the Buddha said that if you adopt the wrong path, no matter how much effort you put into it, you’re not going to get the results. This is why the different factors of the path are called right: They actually give results, and the relationship to the path and its results is always consistent.

However, even though the pattern of cause and effect is always the same, it *does* provide some room for choice in the present moment. That’s actually part of the pattern: The present moment is not totally determined by the past. Your past actions provide you with the raw materials for fashioning the present moment and then, through your present intentions, you turn that raw material into your actual experience of the present moment. Your present intentions may often be conditioned by your past actions, but they don’t have to be. With every present moment, you are free to make a skillful choice. This is why, when we meditate, we focus on the present moment to see exactly how we’re fashioning the present moment from the raw material of our past actions. We’re not sitting in the present moment simply to enjoy the present moment. We’re trying to understand how we’re putting it together in an unskillful way, and how we can learn to do it more skillfully.

This is where the Buddha’s teachings on fabrication come in. He says there are three kinds: bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication, and mental fabrication. Bodily fabrication is the way you breathe. Verbal fabrication is how you talk to yourself, and then mental fabrication corresponds to feelings and perceptions.

When you’re practicing concentration, you’re engaging in all three of these fabrications: (1) The in-and-out breath is what you’re focusing on. (2) You talk to yourself about how you can bring the mind to the breath, how to make the breath more comfortable, and how to spread and maintain that sense of comfort

throughout the body. (3) To maintain and spread those feelings of pleasure, you need a certain perception of the breath to help keep the mind focused on it and to aid in getting the best use out of the pleasure.

As you develop the concentration using these three kinds of fabrication, you become more sensitive as to how you're engaging in them in the rest of your life as well. For example, when you're angry, you breathe in a certain uncomfortable way, you tend to talk to yourself in ways that aggravate the anger, and you also have a perception in mind that the person you're angry at is a monster or a fool. Now, if you want to continue the anger, you continue with those kinds of fabrications. But if you have goodwill for yourself and you want to get beyond the anger, you have to change them—and you can.

At the same time, you find that if you want to develop the perfections, you'll have to fabricate them as well. For this reason, we'll be talking about the role of these three fabrications as we continue our discussion of each of the perfections.

Now, the question sometimes comes up: Is the search for long-term happiness a selfish use of your discernment? And the answer is No. There are four reasons for that answer.

The first is that long-term happiness requires you to develop qualities of goodwill, compassion, generosity, and harmlessness. No stingy or abusive person has ever gotten to nibbāna.

The second reason is that if we go through life dissatisfied with our happiness, we tend to get frustrated and to take our frustration out on other people. At the monastery, we have a lot of hummingbirds. Hummingbirds feed off of nectar, usually the nectar from flowers, but they'll also feed off of a mixture of sugar, water, and a pinch of salt. If we fill a feeder with sugar water, the hummingbirds will come to feed. We've been feeding them for many years. We have four large feeders, and most of the time we keep the feeders full. Every now and then, though, we forget. The feeders go empty, yet when the feeders are empty, the hummingbirds don't attack us. They attack one another, as if to say, "*You're* the reason why there's no more nectar."

As I watch the hummingbirds, I think of human beings. When things get bad, people attack one another, whether those other people are the real cause of the problem or not. If you can find a satisfactory happiness, and especially one that doesn't require feeding, you'll have no reason to attack anyone.

The third reason why the search for true happiness isn't selfish is that we suffer because we cling and feed on things. As long as this feeding isn't addressed, it's going

to taint all of our efforts to be unselfish. Years back, I heard a famous Dhamma teacher say that he didn't want to live in a world where no one was suffering because he'd have no opportunity to be compassionate. Think about that for a minute. You need other people to suffer in order for you to be happy? It sounds unselfish on the surface, but it's not. That's the third reason.

The fourth reason is that you can't be responsible for other people's actions. In other words, you can't go through life making other people happy, because their happiness will depend on what *they* do. So, you focus on where you are responsible, on your own actions, and in that way, you give a good example to others. If they're willing to follow the example, that's how they become happy.

When we think about the fact that discernment is a skillful strategy, we realize that we need some guidance from others on how to act strategically to achieve the desired goal. At the same time, we have to develop our own powers of perception to see these things for ourselves. This is why the Buddha says there are three levels of discernment:

- the discernment that comes from listening or reading,
- the discernment that comes from thinking, and
- the discernment that comes from developing qualities in your mind.

Ajaan Lee gives a good analogy for how these three levels interact. Say you want to learn how to weave a basket. The teacher can teach you how to weave, but the teacher can't make your basket good. You have to follow the teacher's instructions, but that won't be enough to make a beautiful basket. You also have to look at your own work: how you weave the basket, and the basket that results. If the basket doesn't look good, you have to think about what you can do to improve it. You keep observing and analyzing your actions and their results, and thinking about ways of improving your actions. Ultimately, the discernment becomes yours as you learn through practice how to develop skill in your own actions and how to consistently make beautiful baskets.

So, as I said last night, your discernment will give you some guidance as you develop the other perfections. But at the same time, as you develop the perfections, your discernment will become deeper and more profound. That way, what began as the Buddha's discernment actually becomes yours.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** What exactly is dual thinking and how can one benefit from it?



**A:** Dual thinking is when you see the differences between two things, and you can pass judgment as to which one is better than the other. Now, some people think that dualistic thinking is bad, but there are a lot of areas in life where dual thinking is necessary. When you see that suffering is different from not suffering, the question is, “How do I stop suffering?” To do that, you have to begin seeing the difference between cause and effect, along with the difference between what’s skillful and what’s unskillful. That kind of dual thinking is very useful.

**Q:** The Buddha told us not to believe in things without verifying them for ourselves. We can see the results of our actions in this life, but as for the results of our actions in future lives, how can we believe them when we can’t verify them?

**A:** In this case, the Buddha would advise you to use what is called a pragmatic proof, which is that if you didn’t believe in the results of your kamma in future lives, how would you tend to act? If you *did* believe in the results of your kamma in future lives, how would you tend to act? Which belief would give rise to better actions?

In America, they have clubs that get together on the theme: Suppose that you only had one more year to live, how would you change the way you live your life? Some people find that it makes them much more heedful and responsible, and helps them cut away activities that merely clutter up their lives to no purpose. Several times, I’ve proposed that they have clubs on another theme, which is: Suppose you really believed in kamma and rebirth. How would you act? A person who attended a class at which I mentioned this idea one time told me a year later that he was really resistant to it, and so he asked himself why. He came to the realization that if he believed in kamma and rebirth, he’d have to act in a much more responsible way. That’s what’s called a pragmatic proof.

**Q:** Is there any scientific evidence for rebirth?

**A:** No. Is there any scientific evidence for no rebirth? No. But just because you can’t prove the issue scientifically either way doesn’t mean that you should be agnostic about it. Every time you act, you have to calculate whether the effort put into it will be worth the results obtained. And when you calculate the results, you have to go on an assumption: How far into the future will those results go? You can’t simply say, “I don’t know,” and leave it at that. You have to decide to take a position. The Buddha’s simply telling you that, based on his experience, and the experience of other noble ones, you’d be wise to assume that your actions will give results based on the quality of your intentions, and that those actions can keep giving results over many lifetimes. The Buddha never tried to prove rebirth but, as I said, he did offer a

pragmatic proof: that if you believe in rebirth and you believe that your actions will have an impact on how you're reborn, you'll tend to act in a much more skillful way than if you don't believe those things. In other words, it's a good working hypothesis to take on. Now, you will find at awakening that you confirm the truth of these hypotheses, but until then, you have to go by the pragmatic proof.

**Q:** The five aggregates (*khandhas*) disband at the moment of death. So, what is the support for kamma to pass from life to life?

**A:** It's important to realize that the five aggregates are not the definition of what you are. In fact, the Buddha never defines what you are. He says the question, "What am I?" is a question that you should put aside. And as for how kamma gets transmitted from one life to the next, the Buddha said that's one of those questions that, if you pursue them, drive you crazy. So, all you have to know is that kamma can pass from life to life, and try to make the best kamma you can.

**Q:** What, in the view of the forest tradition, is rebirth and what actually is being reborn into a new life?

**A:** Rebirth happens on many levels. The process by which you create states of becoming—*bhava*—in your mind right now is the same process that will take you from this body to another body when this body dies. Basically, the process of becoming is that you start with a desire, then you get in touch with the world in which that desire might be relevant, and then you take on an identity in that world. Birth is when you move into that identity in that world. Now, the "world" here may be a world in your mind, but it can also be an outside world. The process is the same in both cases.

As for the question of *what* gets reborn, that was another one of the questions the Buddha never answered. It's like asking: When you go from one dream to another, what moved from the first dream to the second dream? The question doesn't make sense. The question that *is* important, though, is: How does that movement come about? It's the important question because that's something you're doing and something you can learn not to do. Or, if you have to do it, you can learn how to do it skillfully.

**Q:** In Buddhism is there a god who controls kamma?

**A:** No, everybody in the Buddhist universe is controlled by kamma, even the gods.

**Q:** Could you please explain the wheel of saṃsāra? What comes before and what comes after?

**A:** Saṃsāra is not really a wheel. It's a process of wandering on through states of becoming that the mind keeps creating. As the Buddha said, you cannot even conceive of the beginning point to the process, and the process is not going to end until you stop doing it. That's what nibbāna is: You stop doing the process.

**Q:** Is there still consciousness after parinibbāna?

**A:** Yes, but it's a consciousness that's not related to any of the six senses.

**Q:** Dear Than Ajaan, I consider myself a Buddhist, yet I have little interest in going all the way. Despite considerable suffering in the past and now, I sometimes feel that a good rebirth would be okay. There is much in everyday life that provides meaning and contentment, and I try to do those things informed by Buddhist ideas and practice. I'm very interested in meditation, finding a deep, safe, inner refuge, but I'm not interested in nibbāna. So, can I consider myself a Buddhist really? Am I a pretender, a fraud? Do I want to have my cake and eat it, too? Deep thanks.

**A:** You can consider Buddhism as being like a table full of food and you're free to take what you want. But I've noticed that the person asking this question is like 99% of most Buddhists, who are offered both processed cheese and real cheese on the table but want to take only the processed cheese. So, it's perfectly fine to take whatever you find good from Buddhism, but don't close your mind to nibbāna. You might want to give real cheese a try some time.

**Q:** The second question: Are all forms of everyday happiness a zero-sum process? I feel that there are several happinesses we have that don't take away from anybody else's happiness: for example, the joy I feel in my children, which is unconditional.

And the third question is: Not all pleasures are bad. Look at the effect it has on the mind. If it's not unskillful, okay. So, if I don't overindulge or sensualize, and if I approach activities of work, relationship, arts, science, music, sports, etc., treating them skillfully, what's wrong with that? Especially with respect to sexual relations: If done with respect, not harming—i.e., with skillful means— isn't it a good complement to the pleasures of jhāna?

**A:** Do you have a plant in France that has roots that are very invasive to other plants and foundations of buildings? Fig trees? Bamboo? You can see where I'm going. You can have your pleasures as long as you're trying to not harm anybody. And some of these sensual pleasures actually are okay in combination with jhāna,

but some of them are like fig trees and bamboo. If you plant bamboo right next to your house, the roots can eventually destroy the house. Or to return to the image of the buffet table, if you fill yourself up with processed cheese, there's no room for the real cheese.

**Q:** As you get old, you lose your illusions, you lose your taste for a lot of things, and it's very peaceful. Is there a point to cultivating disenchantment for these things so that you don't verge on sadness?

**A:** A large part of wisdom lies in realizing that the things you no longer have a taste for were not really worth that much to begin with. The things that require you to be young in order to be capable of doing them are not necessarily all that good for you to be doing anyhow.

One of the purposes of contemplating dispassion is so that you can prepare yourself to think in these ways when old age comes. Most people I know feel that they're getting old too early. I, for example, keep telling myself I'm too young to be old. But the body changes and it doesn't ask permission to do so. So, it's good to think about aging ahead of time. When you can think in this way, it helps clear your mind so that you can focus on what's really of value: your ability to squeeze as much goodness out of your body and mind as you can, even as the body is beginning to fall apart.

DAY FOUR  
MORNING

## *Goodwill*

This morning we'll discuss mettā, which we translate as goodwill. This is the second perfection coming under the section on discernment. It provides the heart side to what is usually seen as a "head" perfection.

Notice: We translate mettā as "goodwill" and not as "love" or "loving-kindness." Pāli has another word for love, which is *pema*, as in Pema Chödrön. The Buddha warns against love because love involves partiality. As he says, there are cases where love can give rise to love, but it can also give rise to hatred. Hatred can give rise to love, and hatred can give rise to hatred.

For example, suppose you love Bernard. If someone does something nice to Bernard, you're going to like or love that person. If someone mistreats Bernard, you're going to hate that person. Now, suppose you hate Bernard. If someone does something nice for him, you're going to hate that person. If someone does something nasty to Bernard, you're going to love that person. So, as the Buddha said, you can't really trust love as a basis for social engagement because love is a way of feeding on the other person, and it can lead to factionalism and divisiveness.

One of the reasons why mettā is often translated as love or loving-kindness is because there's a passage in the Canon—it's in passage [§11] in the readings—describing the love of a mother for her child. "As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child, even so, one should cultivate the heart limitlessly with regard to all beings." Sometimes that passage is translated to say that you should love everyone the same way a mother would love her child—which is a nice sentiment, but totally impossible.

What the passage is actually saying is that you should protect your *goodwill* for all beings in the same way that a mother would protect her only child. In other words, even if other people are mistreating you, you should protect your goodwill for those people. Even if they're going to kill you, you still protect your goodwill. Remember the passage in the readings about how you're being pinned down by bandits and they're sawing off your limbs. The Buddha says that you should still have goodwill

for them. Otherwise, if you allow yourself to feel ill will for them, it'll lead to a miserable rebirth, fixated on thoughts of revenge. This is what the image of the mother means. You protect your goodwill for everyone, even risking your life to do so, despite whatever they may be doing, as a way of protecting yourself.

Now, goodwill is an expression of discernment. As I said, it's the heart side of what's usually regarded as a "head" quality. In terms of the factors of the noble eightfold path, it's a part of right resolve, one of the discernment factors. Right resolve is based on the understanding that it's perfectly fine to want true happiness, but if you want your happiness to be true, it cannot depend on the suffering of others. This understanding is what underlies the desire for goodwill: Because you want a happiness that lasts, you have to be determined to extend goodwill to others and to yourself so that you won't do anything in your pursuit of happiness that will cause harm. You want to be skillful in all your interactions with other beings, regardless of whether those beings are good in your eyes or bad.

At the same time, you also realize that true happiness is something that will have to come from within, which means that your true happiness doesn't conflict with anyone else's. This is why a wish for true happiness can be an unlimited attitude, one you can extend to all beings. Love creates divisions, but goodwill can erase divisions. You understand that true happiness is a good goal for you and for all beings, and so you learn how to focus your desire on the causes of that happiness: the perfections. In that way, every perfection is an expression of goodwill.

To understand goodwill—to have right view about goodwill—it's important to understand its relationship to kamma.

- The first lesson from the teaching of kamma is its explanation of what it means to wish others well. For people to be happy, they have to act skillfully. So, when you extend goodwill to others, you hope that they will understand the causes for true happiness and be willing and able to act on them. In other words, you're not simply wishing them to be happy, whatever they're doing right now. After all, they may be doing some very unskillful things.

I once had a student from San Francisco who was having problems with her landlord. The landlord was going to sell the property and wanted all of the renters to lie about the rent that they were paying, and my student didn't know what to do. She told me, "Well, I've been spreading goodwill to him and imagining him with a beautiful house and a swimming pool and many girlfriends." I said, "No, no, no, no. You don't understand goodwill. First get together with the other renters and then go as a group to talk to the landlord. Spread thoughts of goodwill to him by figuring

out what you can do so that he won't make you lie. After all, not getting you to lie would be for his long-term welfare and happiness." In other words, goodwill is not a magic wand to make people happy and prosperous. You're thinking, "What can I do to help these people act more skillfully?" If they're really set on doing unskillful things, you think, "What can I do to help these people have a change of heart?" That's the first lesson that kamma gives to goodwill.

- The second lesson concerns what's involved in creating a mind state of goodwill in yourself. Unlimited goodwill is not an innate feature of the mind. It's simply one of the possibilities that exist in the mind, together with many unskillful possibilities. As the Buddha once said, the mind is more variegated than the animal kingdom. Just think of all the different kinds of animals there are on land, in the ocean, in the air: Your mind is capable of more variety than even that. It's also capable of changing its direction faster than anything else. This is why the Buddha speaks of goodwill as a determination: something you make up your mind to pursue continuously.

He also talks about goodwill as a kind of mindfulness, something you have to consciously keep in mind. Otherwise—because it's not innate—it's very easy to forget. You can be sitting and doing mettā for a week, "May all beings be happy, may all beings be happy." Then you get out in your car and somebody cuts right in front of you, "And may this being go to hell!" You've got to keep reminding yourself that goodwill is an attitude you have to bring to every encounter with others.

Here it's good to remember the three kinds of fabrication we talked about last night: bodily, verbal, and mental. Bodily fabrication is the breath, verbal fabrication is how you talk to yourself, and mental fabrication covers the perceptions you hold in mind, together with the feelings you create with the other fabrications. Now, to create an attitude of goodwill, you have to use all three kinds of fabrication. Breathe in a way that feels good in the body, and then talk to yourself about why you need to have goodwill for this other person. Then hold in mind a perception that this will actually be good for you and the other person, too. This will help to develop a feeling of pleasure associated with goodwill.

For example, if your boss is doing something stupid, breathe calmly, and then think about the good things the boss has done in the past, to erase any perception you may have that the boss is a monster or a fool. Hold that perception in mind.

Something in your mind may rebel, asking, "Why think about this person's good aspects when he's doing something so horrible right now?" The antidote for that attitude is a perception—a mental fabrication—that the Buddha recommends calling to mind: It's as if you're walking through a desert. You're hot, tired, trembling

with thirst, and you come across a small footprint of a cow that has a little bit of water in it. You realize if you tried to use your hand to scoop it up, you'd make the water muddy. So, the only way to drink the water is to get down on all fours and slurp it up.

Now, this is not a very dignified posture. You would not want someone to come along with an iPhone and take a picture of you and post it on Instagram. However, you need the water, so you don't worry about the dignity. In the same way, you need to think about the goodness of other people, even if it seems beneath you, because you need their goodness in order to nourish *your* goodness. That's a good perception to hold in mind, making it easier to think about the goodness of other people for the sake of your own goodness.

Otherwise, you become like the two dogs in a cartoon I saw once in *The New Yorker*. They're female dogs—they're wearing make-up and lipstick—and they're sitting at a bar drinking cocktails. Both have very mean and cynical expressions on their faces, and one of them is saying, "They're all sons of bitches." The point there is that if everybody is a son of a bitch, then you're going to be a son of a bitch or a bitch yourself. So, for the sake of your own goodness, you try to think of the goodness of other people.

These are some ways in which you use the three kinds of fabrication to create and maintain an attitude of goodwill.

- The third lesson that kamma teaches about goodwill concerns the reasons for why you need it. Its function is to guarantee the skillfulness of your actions. You want to make sure that your goodness is not dependent on the goodness of others. Only when it is independent can you trust it. It should also not be dependent on thoughts about whether other beings deserve your goodwill or not. It depends more on the fact that *you* need your goodwill, to protect yourself from doing unskillful things. This is why the Buddha talks about goodwill as a kind of restraint. We usually think of goodwill as something open and wide, without limits, but it does place certain restraints on what we do, say, and think, so that we don't do unskillful things that will harm ourselves or others.

Another reason why you need goodwill is that it helps to mitigate the effects of your past kamma. The Buddha has an image—another good perception to hold in mind—that your past bad kamma is like a large lump of salt. If you put that lump of salt into a small cup of water, you wouldn't be able to drink the water. However, if you put it into a large river of water, you could still drink the water. The cup of water stands for a mind that has very limited goodwill for others, whereas the river stands



for a mind of unlimited goodwill. As the Buddha said, if your mind is unlimited, then even though past bad kamma will give its results, you hardly experience them at all.

- The teaching on kamma also teaches you about the karmic consequences of developing goodwill, as in one of the passages given in the readings: “You sleep easily; you wake easily; you dream no evil dreams; you are dear to human beings, dear to non-human beings; the devas protect you; neither fire, poison nor weapons can touch you; you gain concentration quickly; your complexion is bright; you die unconfused; and if you penetrate to no higher attainment, then you are headed for the brahmā worlds.” Doesn’t sound bad.

- Another lesson coming from the teaching on kamma is how goodwill is best expressed in your actions. It’s not necessarily best expressed through tenderness. In Thai, they have the concept of what they call high-level mettā, which is often attributed to the ajaans when they do or say something that you don’t like but is good for you. Sometimes they can be quite sharp, but it’s for your own good.

I’ll give you an example. As my concentration was getting better when I was practicing with Ajaan Fuang, he would say things to try to get me worked up. He knew where my buttons were. At first, I was upset: “I’m trying to keep my concentration going, and here he is destroying it.” But then I finally realized what was happening, so I told myself, “No matter what he says, I’m not going to let it get me upset.” One evening I was talking with him. He had asked me to translate one of Ajaan Lee’s books, and I happened to tell him that I had finished it that afternoon. Instead of saying that was good, he said, “That’s your business, and none of mine.” Fortunately, my mind was in good shape and the words just went right past me. I said to myself as they went by, “That was pretty nasty,” but my vacuum cleaner was turned off, so I didn’t suck them in. Then the next thing he said was, “Good, in that case, we’ll find someone to print the book.” I passed the test. So, sometimes mettā can be very harsh but it still is conducive to well-being.

- Finally, the teaching on kamma requires that the way you live be in keeping with thoughts of unlimited goodwill. The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta talks about the prerequisites for mettā: that you be content with few things, that you are easy to instruct and easy to support, and that you have few duties. Now for monks, what this means is you don’t have a lot of building projects. Otherwise, everyone who comes into the monastery becomes a target for your desire to contribute to the building project. It’s like the Shackleton expedition. When they were coming back from the Antarctic, they stopped at an island and they had no food, which meant

that every penguin that walked onto the island was going to become a meal. I think about that image every time I go to a monastery where they have a building project that they're promoting aggressively.

So, you have to live your life in a way that really is harmless and unburdensome to other beings if you want your mettā to be sincere. This is how the perfection of mettā connects with the perfections of truth, virtue, and persistence. Goodwill is also nourishment for all the other perfections. If you develop a mind state where you realize you have no ill will for anyone, it gives you a sense of strength and nourishment, and as the Buddha says, it provides protection for you in all directions, into the past and into the future.

What this requires, though, is that when you're developing goodwill, you don't simply think over and over again, "May so-and-so be happy, may they be happy, may they be happy." You also have to think, "Is there anyone out there for whom I cannot have genuine goodwill? Why can I not feel goodwill for this person?" If they're misbehaving, genuine goodwill means that you're wishing that they will have a change of heart: that they'll change their ways and behave more skillfully.

Now, is there anyone out there who you would like to see suffer before they change their ways? If there is, ask yourself, "Okay, why? What are you feeding on?" It's usually a sense of revenge. And even though they say revenge is sweet, it's miserable food. It would actually be better for the world if the other person did not suffer, because when people suffer, they rarely tell themselves, "Ah, this is the result of my misbehavior. I should change my ways." They usually take it out on other people, like the hummingbirds I talked about last night. So, for the sake of your happiness and for the sake of everyone's happiness, you want to be able to express thoughts of goodwill even to very difficult people. By working through your ill will in this way, you can get to a place where you can genuinely feel goodwill for everyone in all directions. And you'll be protected in all directions as well.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Goodwill is often associated with esteem or affection for somebody, which sometimes may be difficult and sometimes even false. If you explain goodwill as a wish for a person to behave better for that person's own well-being, it's a lot easier to have goodwill, but doesn't this put some restraint on what the meaning of mettā is?

**A:** Mettā basically means goodwill. There *will* be some people for whom your affection is naturally stronger, but can you really have that kind of strong affection

for everybody? Remember you have to have mettā for snakes and spiders and devious public figures. It's hard to feel affection in cases like that.

**Q:** Mettā is said to be like the love of a mother for her only child. But a mother's love for her child can be very undependable. There are many mothers who don't love their children. Motherly love is not written into our genes.

**A:** As I said, there is that image in the Canon of a mother protecting her only child, but the image is not describing mettā itself. The Buddha uses the image to describe how you look after your own goodwill. Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, you should protect your goodwill for all beings in the same way. So, the Buddha's not saying that mettā is like the love of a mother for her child, he's simply saying that you have to protect it in all circumstances, even in very difficult ones. As you pointed out, there are lots of mothers who don't love their children. And as I also noted, when the Buddha's talking about love, he uses another word. The Pāli word is *pema*, which he says is an emotion you cannot trust because love can turn into hatred very easily.

So, as you say, mettā is not written into our genes. We develop mettā by thinking about how, if our happiness depends on the suffering of other beings, that happiness is not going to last. We have to take their well-being into consideration.

Secondly, if you have ill will for other people, it's going to be very easy for you to mistreat them. That's why, to protect yourself from your own unskillful actions, you have to learn how to develop goodwill for everyone. Here, goodwill means wishing, "May these beings be happy." And remember, they'll find happiness through being skillful in their own actions. So, basically, you're wishing, "May they learn how to be skillful in their actions," and that you would be happy to help them in that quest. With those thoughts in mind, you can develop goodwill.

There's a passage in the Canon that those of you who were in earlier retreats will probably remember. King Pasenadi is in his private apartment with one of his queens, Queen Mallikā, and in a tender moment he turns to her and says, "Is there anyone you love more than yourself?" You know what he's thinking—like a typical man: that she's going to say, "Yes, your majesty, I love you more than I love myself." But this is the Pāli Canon, and Queen Mallikā is no fool. She says, "No, there's nobody I love more than myself. And how about you? Is there anybody you love more than yourself?" And the king has to admit: No, there isn't. That's the end of that scene.

The king then goes to see the Buddha and reports their conversation. The Buddha responds, “You know, she’s right. You could search the entire world and you would never find anyone you love more than yourself. Similarly, everyone else loves themselves just that fiercely.” But then the Buddha’s conclusion is not that it’s a dog-eat-dog world and you should just grab whatever you want whenever you can. Instead, he says, “If you really love yourself, then you should never harm anybody else or get them to do harm.” The reason, as I said earlier, is that if your happiness depends on their suffering, it’s not going to last. Therefore, when you realize that goodwill is in your own best interest, it’s a lot easier to develop thoughts of goodwill.

**Q:** Does the act of mettā create an intention? And if so, for whom?

**A:** The idea of having goodwill for all beings is in and of itself an intention, and it’s your intention. You’re the one who immediately benefits from that. But if you act on that intention, other beings will benefit, too.

**Q:** For many people, happiness lies in having someone near and dear to them: their children, their grandchildren. It’s difficult and perhaps not very wise to tell them that their true happiness lies somewhere else and that they’re suffering from an illusion.

**A:** Never tell anyone they’re suffering from an illusion, okay? Especially if that’s where their happiness lies. You might indirectly try to let them know that they have to develop another source of happiness as well. For instance, in addition to having children and grandchildren, they can also learn how to meditate and develop an internal source of well-being. Or they could also find happiness through being generous or virtuous. This way, you help provide them with an alternative basis for happiness in case something ever happens to their children or grandchildren. When you do this, what you’re telling them is actually an extra gift. Instead of trying to take away the happiness they already have, you try to provide them with an alternative basis.

**Q:** For our goodness and the goodness of others, is it always necessary to accept and not say anything?

**A:** No, no, no, no, no.

**Q:** Can one express one’s feelings, for instance, when one has been wounded?

**A:** Yes. The question lies in learning how to express your feelings in a skillful way. Ask yourself, “What is the best thing to say? When is the best opportunity to say

it?” You can say as much as you think is really necessary and with a good cause. The important thing is that you not speak simply out of the force of your emotion. And the second point is always to try to show respect for other people when you’re criticizing them.

They conducted a psychological experiment years back in which they took couples, hooked them up with machines, and covered them with sensors to measure such things as their heart rate and sweat rate. Then they took a short video of them as they discussed a topic that was a minor irritation in the relationship. As it turned out, they didn’t use the heart rate or sweat rate measurements at all. As was the case with many psychological experiments, the sensors were a distraction. Instead, they took the videos and they slowed them down, looking for the micro-expressions that would flit over the couples’ faces as they talked. What they discovered was that they could tell with pretty good accuracy which relationships would last and which relationships would not—which is kind of scary. If there was any micro-expression of contempt for the other person, the relationship was not going to last. So, the important thing when you criticize someone else is that you try to do it with an attitude of respect for that person. In that way, the message you’re trying to get across will probably be more happily received.

**Q:** How can we develop the skill of sending thoughts of kindness and love from the bottom of our heart for those who have hurt us, instead of just using the rational action of the mind? Thank you.

**A:** You have to start with the rational action. Just keep reminding yourself that you do not gain any benefit by seeing other people suffer. Remember what goodwill means, which is, “May this person understand the causes for true happiness and be willing and able to act on those causes.” In other words, you’re wishing that that person would learn how to behave in a skillful and harmless manner. Is there anyone out there for whom you cannot think that thought? In other words, is there anyone you would like to see suffer first before they become skillful? Now, in some cases, part of your heart may say, “Yes.” You have to ask that part, “What do you gain from seeing that person suffer?” And the correct answer is, nothing really. Basically, you have to reason with your heart until the heart is willing to believe that, yes, it really would be better to see this person become more skillful, and that you’re willing to give up the satisfaction of getting some revenge—because revenge is sweet, and we know that sweets are not good for you.

**Q:** Could you please explain the phrase, “May I understand the causes for true happiness and be willing and able to act on them.” How can I know the causes for my happiness? And how can I act on those causes?

**A:** You begin with a general principle that true happiness has to be a happiness that does not cause any harm, either to yourself or to others. So, you look around: Is there anyone whose happiness is not causing any harm? Then you ask that person for advice. For example, you might take the Buddha’s advice. He says that true happiness comes from generosity, virtue, and developing universal goodwill. Now, this answer makes sense because you don’t harm anyone with generosity or with virtue or with universal goodwill, and yet it’s possible to be happy doing these things. So, you try developing these practices within yourself. When you see the results arising, that’s when you know for yourself.

**Q:** Does mettā actually act on other people or beings? If so, what’s the mechanism?

**A:** In some cases, yes, it does act on other people. It’s as if your mind is a radio transmitter and other people are like radios. Sometimes the radio transmitter is very weak and sometimes it’s strong. Sometimes other people have their radios turned on; sometimes they don’t. As for the mechanism: Think about light. Light is waves, but nobody knows waves of what. We don’t really know how light works, but we can still use it. In the same way, you don’t have to know how mettā works in order to get good use out of it.

**Q:** What is animosity?

**A:** Animosity is the desire to get revenge. To be free of animosity means two things: One, no one has any thoughts of getting revenge against you, and, two, you have no thoughts of getting revenge against other people.

**Q:** I feel selfish and I don’t know love, even for my relatives. What can I do to awaken love for others, a love that is universal and disinterested?

**A:** When you meditate, spend some time thinking about how much your current position in life depends on other people—the people who taught you how to speak, the people who taught you all the different types of knowledge you use, the work of all the people who keep society going—until it really hits home that you are dependent on many, many, many other people. Then you can ask yourself, “What am I doing to pay them back?” Maybe some sense of gratitude will come, and from gratitude, a sense of goodwill.

You've answered my question about selfishness and love, advising me to meditate upon them. What are the steps for performing this kind of meditation, and what's the difference between that and meditating by focusing on the breath?

**A:** This is a kind of meditation in which you're actively using your analytical mind. In this case, you should try thinking about the areas in which you should be grateful to others for the help you've received. Start with the fact that if you didn't have parents, you wouldn't be here. If you didn't have teachers, there would be a great deal you wouldn't know. Then think of all the people who you've never met whose work you've depended on. In other words, you start with people who are close to you and then you cast your thoughts out further and further away. Then you come back to the present moment, realizing that the people you depend on are all around you.

**Q:** In spreading thoughts of mettā to politicians who are harming people—I won't name names—I find that I don't really care about their happiness. I just want them to stop causing harm. Is that wrong?

**A:** There's nothing wrong with it at all. But try to have some compassion for those politicians. If they really are harming people, they're creating a lot of bad kamma for themselves. They're really deluded. And who knows, maybe someday in the future, you may be a politician, too, and it would be good for your populace to have compassion for you.

**Q:** Can I spread mettā to a situation in the past or for a difficult situation that I anticipate in the future?

**A:** You don't spread mettā to situations, you spread mettā to beings. So, with regard to the situation in the past, spread goodwill to all the beings who were involved in that situation, wherever they are now. As for a difficult situation in the future, spread thoughts of goodwill to all the people who will be involved.

**Q:** Is it valid to send mettā to a person no longer in this world, one to whom I felt resentment and who had resentment toward me?

**A:** This is a very good practice to do. It's one way of bringing your own mind to some peace. You have to remember that when people die, they don't go out of existence. They get born again. So, they're always there someplace for you to spread mettā to. Now, whether that person rejoices in your mettā or not, that's that person's business. But if you can spread goodwill to someone you used to resent, that takes a huge burden off of your mind.

**Q:** Sending mettā to a friend who has died: Does the mettā get to them even though that person has been reborn as a turtle or a plant?

**A:** People don't get reborn as plants, but it is possible for them to become turtles. So, yes, it is possible for the turtle to receive the thoughts of mettā and to benefit from them. There are many stories in the forest tradition of the ajaans sending mettā to animals of different kinds and of the animals responding to them in appropriate ways.

**Q:** I've heard in previous talks and Dhamma teachings that emotions such as love for parents and friends are attachments. Should they be changed for impersonal love? Would that be a price to pay for awakening?

**A:** You will always have your love for your parents and friends, and the Buddha says that you have a special debt of gratitude to your parents, so they always will be special to you. It's simply that as you practice, your idea of how you can best help them will develop. For instance, getting them more interested in meditation, getting them interested in being generous: You come to realize that that's the best way to express your love and repay your debt to your parents and to your friends.

## EVENING

### *Truth*

Tonight, we start our discussion of the second set of perfections, coming under the heading of truth. And we start with the perfection of truth itself.

We all desire truth, but we don't start out with a disinterested desire for true information or truth in the abstract. Our desire for truth starts with our most basic response to pain, which, as the Buddha noted, is twofold: One, we're bewildered as to why it's happening. Two, we search for someone who might know how to put an end to the pain.

Think of a baby suffering from the sharp pains of indigestion. It has no idea what's happening. All it knows is that it wants someone to come and help get rid of the pain. As we grow older, we gain more understanding, largely from what we've learned from other people, as to how to deal with pain. But our basic response is still the same: Why does there have to be pain to begin with? And is there anyone who can help us with the more complicated sufferings, not only of the body but also of the mind?



Our desire for truth comes from this combination of bewilderment and search. We'd like to find the reality of a true happiness, untainted by pain, a happiness that doesn't disappoint us. From that desire, we search for people who are true in having done what it takes to gain genuine knowledge about how to put an end to pain, and who are willing to give us true information about what they've learned. As we mature, we want to *be* true in following the path set out by that true information. In other words, we turn our desire for truth into a determination to be true. This gives us three kinds of truth—the truth of a reality, the truth of perceptions and statements, and the truth of a person—all of which come under the perfection of truth.

This is reflected in the fact that the Pāli word for truth, *sacca*, has the same three meanings. First, there's truth as a quality of the person. To begin with, a true person is someone who is honest and accountable: someone who realizes that actions have consequences, and is willing to take responsibility for what he or she has done. This was one of the qualities that the Buddha said he looked for in a student. As he said, "Bring me an observant person who is honest and no deceiver, and I will teach that person the Dhamma." At the same time, a true person—motivated by the desire to put an end to suffering—will earnestly stick with the path to that goal, despite any hardships it may entail.

A person who is true in these ways will want to look for a teacher who is also true in these ways. If you're earnest in wanting to put an end to suffering, you'll want someone who has earnestly followed the path, and is truly reliable in judging the results of his or her own practice. People of integrity are most confident when they're associating with other people of integrity.

This kind of truth—in which you are a true person: honest, reliable, accountable, and earnest—is a quality that is held to across the board throughout the practice.

The word "truth" can also apply to perceptions and to statements. In other words, you perceive Philippe as Philippe. That's a true perception. You say, "Philippe is wearing a blue-grey jacket right now." That, too, is also a truth: the truth of a statement.

Then there's truth of a reality. For instance, whether or not we perceive this bowl as a bowl, it exists on its own and—at least for now—it has its own reality in existing as an object. In the Buddha's teachings, this point particularly applies to nibbāna, which is a reality that's always true.

So, there are three kinds of truth: the truth of a person, the truth of a perception or a statement, and the truth of a reality in and of itself.

The Buddha's teachings contain a paradox around the issue of truth. On the one hand, truth is one of the perfections, and guarding the truth is one of the determinations. On the other hand, we're sometimes told to learn how not to cling to our views of the truth. So, the question is: how to combine these two teachings in practice.

The paradox can be resolved when we note that these teachings apply to different aspects of truth. The issue of not clinging to truths applies primarily, one, to our perceptions and statements, and two, to the need to let go of all clings, even clinging to the truth, in order to attain the truth of the ultimate fact of nibbāna at the end of the path.

With regard to perceptions and statements, you always try to make them true, but you have to realize that perceptions and statements have their limitations. Sometimes our perceptions can seem true when they're not. Some statements may be true for some situations, but not for other situations. You always try to perceive and tell the truth, but there's always the possibility that your perceptions—and the statements based on them—may be wrong. So, you have to realize that these truths have their limitations. This is why, when you decide to act on views you've formulated or picked up from others, you have to be careful to test them in your actions to see how true they actually are. In addition, you'll find that there are some levels of the practice where one statement or set of instructions is true and useful, and another level of the practice where it's no longer useful. On that level, you have to let that particular truth go.

As for letting go of all clinging to truth, regardless of the type, that comes only at the end of the practice. As long as there's the slightest amount of clinging in the mind, it can't reach the highest level of freedom. But to get to the point where we can let go of all truths, we have to deal skillfully with truths in the meantime.

To explain how we do that, the Buddha distinguishes truths in another way, based on the verb that's appropriate for dealing with different kinds of truth: the truth

- as something you perceive;
- as something you tell;
- as something you guard;
- as something you awaken to and, in awakening to it, you go beyond it.

Perceiving, of course, relates to truths as perceptions. Telling relates to truths as statements. Guarding relates to how you recognize the sources and reasons for your

perceptions and statements. But, as we'll see, awakening to the truth involves all four kinds of truths—truths of a person, of perceptions, of statements, and the truths of facts or realities in and of themselves—before you let go of them all.

Let's look in more detail at these four ways of relating to the truth.

- First, perceiving a truth: As a meditator, you try to make your perceptions as accurate as possible. This is especially important in mindfulness practice because you want to recognize what's happening in the mind and in the body as it's actually happening. For instance, you want to be able to recognize a hindrance as a hindrance. If something skillful arises in the mind, you want to perceive it as skillful. In that way, you can act appropriately with regard to such things as they happen. This is where truth as a perfection differs from truth as one of the virtues in the five precepts. When you're telling the truth in line with the precepts, all you have to do is say, "This is how I perceive things." If it turns out that the perception is wrong, you haven't lied and you've maintained your virtue. But as you're trying to develop the perfection of truth, you have to put your best effort to make sure your perceptions really are accurate.

- The second verb in your relationship to truth is that it's something you tell. Here, the Buddha particularly emphasizes being accountable, in other words, truthful in how you report your own behavior, as when he was teaching his son Rāhula how to be observant and truthful. You may know the story. The Buddha comes to see Rāhula when the latter is a seven-year-old novice. Rāhula sets out a jar of water and a dipper, and the Buddha washes his feet with the water in the dipper. You get the impression that Rāhula may have told a lie that day, because that's the very first thing the Buddha mentions to Rāhula: lying. He leaves a little bit of water in the dipper, shows it to Rāhula, and says, "Do you see how little water there is in this dipper?" Rāhula says, "Yes." The Buddha says, "That's how little goodness there is in a person who tells a deliberate lie and feels no shame." Then the Buddha throws the water away and says, "Do you see how that water has been thrown away?" Rāhula says, "Yes." The Buddha says, "That's what happens to the goodness of a person who tells a deliberate lie with no sense of shame. It gets thrown away." Then he shows him the dipper. "Do you see how empty this dipper is?" Rāhula says, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And the Buddha says, "That's how empty you are of goodness if you tell a deliberate lie with no sense of shame."

Then, after having established the importance of being truthful, the Buddha teaches the importance of being observant. In other words, he's teaching Rāhula to be the ideal student: honest and observant. He says, "You should look at your

actions as you would look at yourself in a mirror. Before you do something, ask yourself what you expect the consequences will be. If you foresee any harm, don't do the action. If you don't foresee any harm, go ahead and do it. While you're doing the action, see what actual results are coming about. If you see that you're causing harm, stop. If you don't see any harm, go ahead and continue with the action. After the action is done, look at the long-term results of the action. If you see that you caused harm, go talk it over with someone who is more advanced on the path so that you can get some idea of what you might do the next time around to avoid causing harm. But if you don't see that you caused any harm, you can take joy in the fact that your practice is improving, and continue on the path day and night."

The important point here is that if you find that you've made a mistake, you talk it over with somebody, because this is how you learn. This is why we have the Saṅgha as a container for the practice, and why the Buddha said that having admirable friends is necessary for the practice. The only way you can take advantage of having that admirable friend is to be truthful in reporting your mistakes. If you hide your mistakes from other people, you start hiding them from yourself.

This is another aspect of truth—truth in telling statements—that the Buddha says to hold to, all the way along the path.

- The third verb that indicates how to relate to truth is that you should "guard" the truth. This has two meanings in the suttas.

In [MN 140](#)—the sutta that lists the four determinations—guarding the truth means attaining the truth of nibbāna and, by extension, everything you do along the path to reach that attainment. [MN 95](#), however, breaks the path to nibbāna down into several steps related to the truth, with only the first step called "guarding the truth." By that, it means that you're very clear about where you get your perceptions and statements. As the Buddha said, sometimes we get our ideas simply from our own conviction or preferences. For example, you go online. If you like left-leaning cartoonists, you'll go to the left-leaning cartoonists. If you like right-wing cartoonists, you'll go to the right-wing cartoonists. You pick up their ideas because you like them. Sometimes you pick up an idea because you believe in a tradition; sometimes you reason through an idea and if it fits with things you already believe, you adopt it because it strikes you as reasonable.

Now, none of these approaches are adequate bases for knowing whether something is really true or not. This is one of the areas where you have to learn how not to be attached to your views. When you hold a particular view as a basis for your actions, you have to ask yourself, "Where did I get this view? Why did I accept it?"

As you examine this issue, you begin to realize that many of the things you thought you knew are actually based on liking or belief. So, as you practice, it's always important to keep this fact in mind, because you have to remember that there are a lot of things you don't know about in the practice and in the world.

This doesn't mean that you should take no position on things you don't fully know. After all, to practice, you need to make assumptions and adopt working hypotheses about the nature and power of action in order to motivate yourself and to direct your practice, even though you don't yet fully know the nature and power of action. You have to ask yourself, "What views are useful to adopt, and for what reason? And how can I train myself to develop true knowledge about these issues? Where do I start?"

One place to start is to learn how to observe the impact on your mind of adopting a particular view: what it will lead you to do. But here there's a problem, because all too often we're not very familiar even with our own minds. This is why we have to meditate: to learn how to observe when the mind is creating suffering and when it's not. You look for the truth of suffering and all the other noble truths as facts in and of themselves. That's how you move from guarding the truth to awakening to the truth.

- In [MN 95](#), the Buddha describes many stages in the process of how you awaken to the truth.

You start by entering into what we would call a true relationship. You have to find a true person to be your teacher. How do you find a true person? You observe the person closely and ask yourself three questions: First, does this person have the sort of greed, aversion, or delusion that would make him claim to know something he doesn't know? Second, does this person ever tell someone else to do something that would not be in that other person's best interest? Third, is the Dhamma taught by this person the type that would require an observant person to realize it?

To find someone who passes that test requires, of course, that you have some truth in yourself, because as the Buddha says, true people can recognize true people, but a person who is not true can't tell who's true and who's not. This places a lot of responsibility on you.

In this way, awakening to the truth starts with being a true person and looking for another true person to teach you.

Once you believe you've found such a person, then you enter into a true relationship with him or her. Listen to the Dhamma that that person teaches—using perceptions and statements—and then think it over until you decide that it seems

beneficial and makes sense. That will give rise to a desire to practice. This is the desire you nurture to develop all the perfections, and this is how it's nurtured: By finding an honest person whose Dhamma seems beneficial and makes sense.

The actual practice starts with your looking at your behavior and comparing it to the Dhamma. Wherever your behavior does not measure up, you try to bring it up to standard. This is a principle that the Buddha calls practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. In other words, you change your behavior to fit in with the Dhamma instead of trying to change the Dhamma to fit your preferences. This moves from the truth of statements and perceptions to the truth of a person.

Being true in this way will often require doing some things that you don't like doing, and also relinquishing some things that you'd prefer to hold on to. As a true person, when you see that something needs to be done, you really do it. If something needs to be given up, you really give it up.

This is something that the Buddha himself said was one of his own characteristics: Once he'd given something up, he really gave it up and would never pick it up again. You probably know the story. The Buddha left many hints for Ven. Ānanda to invite him to continue living for a longer time, but Ānanda kept missing the hints, until finally the Buddha decided, "Okay, I'm going to give up my will to live longer." There was an earthquake, so Ānanda came to see the Buddha and asked, "Why the earthquake?" And the Buddha informed him, "I've given up my will to live longer." Ānanda said, "Could you please change your mind and decide to live longer?" The Buddha replied, "If there's something I've given up, I've really given it up. I can't take it back."

So, you awaken to the truth by being true in giving up the things that need to be given up, and in doing the things that need to be done. You follow the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, and in that way you arrive at the truth of the end of suffering.

At this point, the Dhamma you've attained is a reality. It's no longer statements; it's no longer perceptions. Nibbāna is a truth in and of itself. It's a fact. Once you've arrived there, you can let go of all the right views and other things that you developed leading up to that point that got you there. In fact, you *have* to let them go. Otherwise, you can't reach the full awakening that comes from having no clinging at all.

So, when we're told not to be attached to views, it has two meanings. One is realizing that many of the statements and perceptions you assume to be true are based on your preferences and on information that may or may not be true. Those

are areas where you have to maintain a measure of detachment from your views. Even with your right views, you have to realize that there may be things that you don't yet really know—especially about when and how they should be applied. Your right views still have to be tested by trying to develop all the factors of the path until, by following them, you arrive at the reality of the end of suffering.

There's an example in the Canon. A man once came to see the Buddha and was very impressed. He went back and told a friend, "You know, that Buddha: He really is awakened." The friend said, "Why do you think that?" And the man said, "Well, I see these people coming to argue with the Buddha, and even before they open their mouths they get converted. It's like coming across large elephant footprints in a forest and knowing, 'This must be a bull elephant.'" Impressed, the friend responded, "Gee, I'd really like to meet the Buddha some day."

He goes to see the Buddha and tells him what the first man said. The Buddha says, "Actually, that's not the right use of the elephant footprint simile." Then he explained the proper use of the simile, saying, "Suppose an experienced elephant hunter goes into the forest. He wants a bull elephant because he needs a big bull elephant to do some heavy work. He sees some big elephant footprints, but because he's an experienced hunter, he doesn't immediately jump to the conclusion that these must be the footprints of a big bull elephant. Why is that? Because sometimes there are dwarf females with big feet. But the prints look likely, so he follows them. He sees some scratch marks up in the trees. But still he doesn't jump to the conclusion that these must be scratch marks left by the tusks of a big bull elephant. Why is that? Sometimes there are tall females with tusks. Still, the marks look likely, so he follows them. Finally he comes across a big clearing, and there in the clearing is a big bull elephant. That's when he knows he's got the elephant he wants."

"So," the Buddha says, "in the same way, when you're practicing and you gain the different levels of concentration, it's like seeing the footprints of the elephant. Even if you gain different psychic powers, they're like scratch marks on the trees. Only when you have a direct experience of the deathless do you know that you've got the bull elephant you want." In other words, only when you gain your first taste of awakening do you know for sure that the Buddha was truly awakened, that awakening is really a fact, and that the perceptions and statements the Buddha employed to teach about awakening and how to get there are really true.

What this means is that, as we're practicing, we're going by the strength of our conviction. This conviction becomes knowledge only with awakening. So, as long as we're still on the path, we should always be open to the fact that there is more to

learn. As I said earlier, this is why right views are called right *views*, rather than right knowledge. We remember that they're working hypotheses we adopt for the sake of the practice, but we don't yet know them for sure. This is one way in which we're not attached to our views. They seem to make sense and they're worth putting into practice because of the good actions they inspire, but we realize that there's always more to learn. We adopt them for the sake of our own happiness, so there's no need for us to impose them on others.

Only when you've attained awakening do you have the reality. At that point, perceptions and statements don't have that much importance to you, because you've found the true fact they were aiming at. And to fully experience that truth, you have to let go of the views that got you there. In fact, you have to be careful not to cling even to the reality of awakening if you want to fully attain it. You have to let go of everything. But don't worry, you won't be left adrift. The reality of awakening isn't something that has to be fabricated or maintained. You don't have to cling to it to keep it going. It's there on its own, independent of conditions, to be experienced only when the mind is totally free of clinging. This is the second way in which you have to learn not to cling to the truth.

But as we practice, even though we should always be willing to admit that there's more for us to learn, we have to work with a sense that there is a right and a wrong way of practicing, and a right and a wrong way of understanding the practice. In other words, you can't say, "I'm just going to be beyond views and not have any opinions." You have to remember that the Buddha's truths have an *attha*, a purpose, and you need to use each truth for the purpose for which it was intended if you want to get the most out of it.

In simple terms, this means you need to know how a truth is to be used in giving guidance in what is correct to do and what's not correct to do. At the same time, you also have to be true in being willing to keep looking at the results of your actions and to learn from them, to admit a mistake when you've caused harm.

One way in which this is particularly important is that some truths may be useful for certain parts of the practice but not useful for others. For example, we may have heard that the teachings on the three characteristics talk about how things are inconstant, stressful, and not-self. First, though, it's important to know that the Buddha never called these three "characteristics." He called them "perceptions," and the important point about them as perceptions is knowing when to apply them and when not.



For example, when you're practicing the precepts, you don't say, "Oh, my actions are inconstant, stressful, and not-self, so I don't have to be responsible." You have to hold on to the precepts. You apply the perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self to the things that would induce you to break the precepts. Similarly, when you practice concentration: You're trying to give rise to a state of mind that's constant, easeful, and is under your control, which means that you're actually fighting against the three perceptions. You apply the three perceptions only to things that would pull you out of concentration, things like sensual desire and ill will. Only after you've totally developed the path do you apply these perceptions to everything, to let go of everything—including the three perceptions themselves.

This fits in with what the Buddha said about his own statements, which is that they would always be true. However, even if something was true but not beneficial, he wouldn't talk about it. And even if it was true and beneficial but it was not the right time, he wouldn't talk about it. In the same way, when we're applying his teachings, we have to ask, "Is this true? Is it beneficial for me? And is this the right time for me?" If you apply these standards to the teachings, that's one of the ways in which you guard the truth and develop the perfection of truth at the same time. That will help you to awaken to the truth, which is not about perceptions, not about words, but is an independent reality in and of itself.

Now, that reality is always there, regardless of whether we find it or not. Similarly, the statements and perceptions have their truth regardless of how clearly we realize that truth. Where we make a difference is in always telling the truth, always trying to perceive the truth, and in always being true: earnest and accountable. The more true we are in applying ourselves to the practice and observing the results, adjusting our actions to make them more and more harmless, the closer we come to understanding the truth of the Buddha's perceptions and statements, and the closer we come to the reality we want: unconditioned happiness. If we don't want to *be* true in our actions and in observing their results, we won't know who else is true, we won't be able to test the truth of their statements—and we may be content to let them lie to us when they tell us that the path to true happiness doesn't require effort, honesty, or strong powers of self-observation. Remember that in testing the teachings, you're also testing yourself. And the more true you are with yourself, the more likely you are to find the truth in the teaching.

To summarize, of all the forms of truth, the most important ones to hold on to are to tell the truth and to be true. Those forms of truth will enable us to know the other forms of truth, and to reach the genuine reality of unconditioned happiness.

When we find that happiness—and only then—our desire for truth will be fully satisfied.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Your teaching says in a simple way that I need to develop good qualities so as to be able to recognize bad qualities in an instructor or someone else, with which I totally agree. On the other side, I've heard that if I identify bad qualities in other people, it means that I must have these bad qualities in myself and I should work on that, with which I partially agree.

**A:** That's not always the case. If you used to kill and then you stop killing, you can still identify who's killing, and the same applies to other qualities in the mind. It's not the case that we're not allowed to judge people. We have to be able to pass some judgment on whom we can trust and whom we cannot trust. We're not passing final judgment on the person, but we do have to judge whether this is a person we can trust or not. As the Buddha said, the most important external factor in making progress in the Dhamma is admirable friendship, so you have to be able to judge who's an admirable friend and who's not. There's an article called "The Power of Judgment" on the website [dhammatalks.org](http://dhammatalks.org) that deals with this issue in detail.

**Q:** The last words of the teaching on *sacca*, or truth, lead me back to a question I often have, which is: The choices I make about my spiritual path, the strategies I apply—are they appropriate? Are they judicious? Since the truth can be valid on some levels and not valid on other levels of the path, am I simply following my preferences? Of course, it depends on discernment, but are there also other qualities? It's been mentioned that one has to know where one is on the path in order to practice in accordance with that level, but it's not so easy to be clear on this subject. As Ajaan Chah would say, "It is sure but not certain." Of course, it has to do with the views that we have about ourselves and the profound intentions concerning others. It seems to me that on such a matter, a mistaken evaluation can have heavy consequences.

**A:** There are two qualities that help protect you on the path, and those are the two qualities that, as I said, the Buddha looked for in any student: one, that you be observant; and two, that you be honest. Now, this also includes being honest with yourself. And as I mentioned in the discussion of the Buddha's teachings to Rāhula, what's important is that you test any teaching by putting it into practice. You look at your intentions for adopting the teaching, and then you also look at the results that

come about when you put it into practice. As long as you're operating on what you see as good intentions and you apply this training in being more honest with looking at your intentions and at the results of your actions, that will help keep you on the path.

Think of Ajaan Mun as an example. He was off in the forest alone. Sometimes, while meditating, he would have visions of devas coming to him with teachings. If he had believed everything they said, he would have gone crazy. As he told his students, no matter who or what the teaching comes from, what matters is: If you put it to the test, what happens as a result? That way of testing the teachings was what got him on the right path and kept him there. So, your own honesty about your intentions and the results of your actions is what protects you.

DAY FIVE  
MORNING

## *Virtue*

The Pāli term for virtue, *sīla*, can also mean morality, precept, or habit. Here the perfection of virtue is a matter of developing the moral virtue of restraint. As we pointed out at the very beginning, one of the insights that come from discernment is that all things are rooted in desire. The desire that underlies virtue is the desire to exercise restraint over your unskillful intentions, both as a kindness to yourself and as a kindness to others.

This kind of virtue is related to the five precepts. Sometimes, when referring to the precepts, the Buddha would replace the word *sīla* with *sikkhāpada*, which literally means “training rule.” The precepts are training rules that you take on for the purpose of reaching the goal—abstaining from activities that would harm the mind or get in the way of the goal—in the same way that an athlete would undertake training rules as part of his or her regimen: abstaining from certain foods and activities that would harm the strength and fitness of the body.

The fact that these are rules for the purpose of training carries some important implications. They are not meant to be rules for creating a perfectly harmless world. They’re meant instead to cover only the range of actions for which you are directly responsible: what you do and what you tell others to do. If you’re very careful in these areas, that’s good enough for the purpose of training the mind to get out of the world entirely.

Now, the precepts are very short: no killing, no stealing, no illicit sex, no lying, no taking of intoxicants. Period. No ifs, ands, or buts. In other words, these are precepts that, once you’ve chosen to take them, you try to follow at all times, in all cases. At the same time, you don’t tell anyone else to break them, and you don’t express approval when other people have broken them.

Sometimes you hear people complaining that they don’t like the idea of short rules like this and that they’d prefer to have virtue expressed in more general principles—such as kindness or gentleness—but for the purpose of training, it’s really good to have rules that are clear-cut because they draw clear lines between

what should and shouldn't be done. If the lines are not clear, it's very easy to make excuses for making exceptions. Unskillful desires can come in and change the precept to something else. You find that when you train children, if you provide them with very clear-cut rules, the children are much happier because they can have a clear sense of what's right and what's wrong. And you know that if you're following the rules, there's a sense of self-esteem that comes from your ability to stick with the rules.

A couple of the precepts require special explanation. For instance, the precept against illicit sex basically refers to having sex with minors, having sex with someone who is married to somebody else or in a committed relationship, or having sex with someone who's taken a vow of celibacy. If you're already in a committed relationship and you go outside the relationship, that would also be breaking the precept as well.

Then there's the precept against lying. "Lying" here is defined as misrepresenting the truth. It doesn't cover all forms of wrong speech, because wrong speech also includes divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter. Divisive speech is anything said with the intention of breaking friends apart or of preventing a relationship from developing. Harsh speech is when you say something with the intention of hurting someone's feelings. Idle speech is when you say something without really knowing what your intention is. You just open your mouth and see what comes out.

The reason there's no precept against those three kinds of wrong speech is that there are actually some cases where they can be skillful. For instance, with divisive speech: Suppose you know that Mr. A is a very harmful person and he's beginning to get interested in having a relationship with Miss B. It might be a good idea to warn Miss B about Mr. A. It's because of examples like this that there's no absolute precept against divisive speech. Similarly with harsh speech: There are some cases where you have to use strong terms to say something very critical of other people for their own good, in order to get their attention. That's why there's no precept against harsh speech. As for idle chatter, every social situation requires a little social grease to keep things going smoothly, so you speak about things that help put everyone in a good mood. Just make sure that you don't put too much grease in the machine, because that can gum up the works.

So, those are the five precepts. As I said earlier, there's a certain amount of self-esteem that comes when you can follow these rules, but these are not rules just for the sake of rules. They really are for your benefit.

By following the five precepts, we're embodying what we've learned from the perfections of discernment, truth, and goodwill. At the same time, we provide the

conditions for strengthening the perfections of renunciation—in the practice of concentration—and discernment.

To begin with, in line with the primacy that right view gives to your intentions, the precepts focus your attention directly on your intentions in action. That's because you can break a precept only intentionally. For example, if you happen to walk down the middle of the room here and step on a bug unintentionally, you're not breaking a precept. It's only if you see the bug and deliberately squash it, that's when you break the precept. The difference has to do with the state of your mind. Basically, the precepts are taught for helping you to train your intentions. If you notice the desire to break the precept, you realize, "I've overstepped the bounds of what's skillful." This is why training in virtue is a good exercise for observing your mind in action.

The precepts also apply the distinction between skillful and unskillful to all of our actions. When you know something is against a precept, you realize, "I may want to do this, but if I look at it from a more objective perspective, it's unskillful. It'll cause long-term suffering, so I'll stop."

In practicing the precepts, we're also exercising what right view tells us about our freedom to choose our actions. For instance, you may be tempted to say or do something wrong, but you realize, "I'm free to say no." And in exercising that freedom, you develop something of value in yourself.

I'll give you an example from the monks' precepts. One of the precepts for the monks is that if someone comes and asks a monk where something should be given, the monk should say, "Give where you feel inspired or where you feel it would be well used." Several years ago, I had a student whose mother was going to give a gift of two million dollars to a Buddhist center. He called me up and asked, "What can I tell her so that she'll give the money to the monastery?" I said, "Tell her to give where she feels inspired and where she feels it would be well used." So, she gave it to another organization. I told myself, "I now have a precept that's worth more than two million dollars."

So, you have to remember that your virtue is something of value and it lies in exercising your freedom to say no to something that might be tempting. Notice here that freedom is not an issue of simply being free to do what you want to do. It means being free to do what you know will lead to good long-term results.

These, then, are some of the lessons of right view that are taught with the practice of virtue.

As for the perfection of truth, remember, last night we talked about truth as a quality of the person. When you decide that you're going to stick with these training rules in all situations with no exceptions, you're putting your long-term well-being ahead of short-term unskillful pleasures. When you can stick with this decision, day in and day out, you develop your truth as a person.

As for the perfection of goodwill, virtue is an expression of goodwill for others and for yourself. In terms of others, as the Buddha said, if you hold to the precepts in all situations, you're giving universal safety to all beings. Now, this doesn't mean that you're protecting them from all dangers. Instead, it means that no one anywhere will be subject to these dangers coming from you. When you give this kind of universal safety to others, you have a share in universal safety yourself. Another way in which the precepts are helpful to others is that if you take on a precept, it's not just that you decide that you're not going to break the precepts. It also means that you're not going to tell anyone else to break the precepts, and you're not going to condone other people breaking the precepts. In this way, you're also protecting other people, in that you're not getting them to do something unskillful, which means that you're not trying to persuade them to take on bad kamma.

It's interesting to note that, from the Buddha's point of view, benefiting others means getting them to follow the precepts, whereas benefiting yourself means that *you* follow the precepts. The point here seems to be that we are agents, choosing how we act, and that by getting others to follow the precepts, you show respect for their role as agents and try to get them to exercise that role in a way that will lead most directly to their long-term benefit. In the same way, when you follow the precepts, you respect your role as an agent and try to exercise it skillfully.

This means that you're expressing goodwill for yourself as you follow the precepts.

The Buddha says that the long-term benefits of observing the precepts can be experienced both in the present life and in future lives. If you conduct your life in a virtuous way, your wealth tends to be more solid; you have a good reputation for being a reliable person; if you go to a meeting of people, you can expect that people won't rightly accuse you of misbehavior; and you die unconfused. When people approach death and recall ways in which they've been harmful in their behavior, they tend to fall either into extreme sorrow or denial. This is actually one of the reasons for dementia as people get older. They don't want to think about the past, they don't want to think about the future, and so their minds just wander off.

Now, the Buddha does recognize there are times when following the precepts can lead to certain kinds of losses in daily life, in terms of wealth, health or relatives. Say, for instance, that you have a relative who wants you to lie in a court case. In a situation like that, the Buddha would say not to lie, because loss in terms of your relative is a minor issue, whereas loss of your virtue is a major one.

There was an interesting story in the news a couple of years back. A young Iranian man was murdered, and the murderer was caught and sentenced to death. Apparently, in Islamic law, if the parents of someone who has been murdered are still alive, they have the right to choose whether or not the death sentence will be carried out. Originally, the parents were going to go for revenge. But then the mother started having dreams in which the son came to her and said, “Please, Mom, don’t go for revenge.” The mother did not want to have that dream, but it kept coming back again and again.

So, on the day of the execution, the murderer is sitting there with a noose around his neck. The mother goes up, she slaps him as hard as she can, takes off the noose, and then walks away. Afterwards, when she was interviewed, she said she felt a tremendous and unexpected sense of peace and relief, so she was glad she had listened to the dream.

These examples show some of the benefits in this lifetime of following the precepts. There are also benefits in terms of future lifetimes. The Buddha says that if you don’t kill, when you’re reborn you’ll tend to have a longer lifetime. If you don’t steal, your things will tend not to be stolen. If you avoid illicit sex, you won’t be subject to rivalry and revenge. If you don’t tell lies, people will tend not to lie to you. And if you don’t take intoxicants—which include wine—then you will tend not to be crazy in the next lifetime.

The Buddha didn’t go into further detail on that last point.

These are some of the ways in which the practice of the precepts develops the perfection of goodwill in your dealings with others—and with yourself.

As for the perfection of renunciation, following the precepts helps to develop qualities of mind that you will need in the practice of concentration, which builds on the practice of right mindfulness.

To begin with, following the precepts makes it easier to be mindful in general. (And remember here that mindfulness means the ability to remember what was done and said long ago, and to keep that memory in mind.) When you look back and you see that you haven’t harmed anyone with your actions, it’s a lot easier for your memory to go back further into the past, and then you can learn lessons from



the past much more easily. If you've been harming others and breaking the precepts, the mind will tend to put up a wall so that you won't remember that harm, and that will get in the way of your mindfulness.

Also, as you're practicing in line with the precepts, you're developing your mindfulness, alertness, and ardency, which are the three qualities that you need in practicing right mindfulness and right concentration. In terms of mindfulness, you have to remember that you've taken the precepts. This is often a problem for people who have just begun taking the precepts. They start doing something and say, "Whoops! I took a precept against that." So, you have to keep these precepts in mind.

Secondly, you have to be alert to what you're doing.

Ardency is involved when, if it's difficult to follow the precept, you make the extra effort to make sure that you stick with it.

When I was new to taking the precepts, I happened to go back to my childhood home to visit my relatives. We were staying in a cabin near the seashore, and one afternoon one of my cousins said, "You know, Grandpa used to like to go clamming not far from here, and then he'd make clam chowder. Let's go clamming." So, five or six of us went out to go clamming. I was digging down in the sand under some shallow water and I found a clam. As I started to pick it up, I realized, "Whoops! I have a precept against doing this." So, I put the clam back down on the sand and went off someplace else, pretending to search for clams elsewhere. In the meantime, one of my cousins went to the spot where I had been and found the clam right on top of the sand and said, "Here's a clam! We can take it." Another cousin said, "No, if the clam is on top of the sand, that means it's dead. Leave it." So, I saved the clam's life in spite of myself. That was a lesson in how much more mindfulness and alertness I needed to develop.

Following the precepts also gives you practice in the kind of restraint you're going to need to get the mind into concentration and to keep it there. You're going to have to learn how to say no to yourself when distractions come into the mind, and the precepts give you good practice in learning to say no to yourself effectively in daily life. As my teacher used to say, "If you can't control your mouth, there's no way you can control your mind."

The precepts, then, are good practice for the skills you're going to need as you develop mindfulness and concentration, which are directly connected to the perfection of renunciation.

They're also a practice for further developing the perfection of discernment, in that you have to use your ingenuity to stick to the precepts in ways that don't lead to unfortunate circumstances. For instance, if you take the precept against killing, you have to figure out, "How am I going to arrange my house so that I don't have to kill pests? How do I live in such a way that I don't attract termites? How do I live in a way that I don't attract ants? And if the ants do come in, how do I get rid of them without killing them?" This develops your discernment. Similarly, if you have some information that you know that some people might abuse, how do you prevent that information from getting to them without lying? As you figure this out, it's good training in discernment.

In these ways, the practice of following the precepts is an expression of right view, an expression of goodwill, and an expression of truth. It helps to develop the perfections of renunciation and discernment.

And it gives rise to a sense of self-esteem that you're able to live in a way that causes no harm to anybody at all. I don't know if this is an issue here, but in America we have a problem where psychologists have been so insistent about the need for children to learn self-esteem that children now receive inflated grades to make them feel good, and teachers put gold stars on their papers, saying, "Rock Star." The result is that we now have plenty of people with high self-esteem but with no substance to back it up. However, one of the ways to foster genuine self-esteem backed up by real substance is through developing virtue. And this works not only for children. It's also important for adults, because we're judged by so many things in life that are out of our control and that have nothing to do with the skillfulness of our choices, as when we're judged by our beauty, our cleverness, our wealth, or our social position. But if we can learn how to judge ourselves by our virtue, our self-esteem can be based on the genuine skillfulness of our own actions and our own choices. This puts the power for our self-esteem and self-respect into our hands.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** The presentations of generosity, virtue, and the precepts often mention the benefits that will come to the person who is generous, to the person who is virtuous, leading to the attainment of awakening. But it sounds like playing by the principle of the ends justifying the means, even though here the means are good for others. This seems to be a little bit selfish. In the Jātakas, one sees the future Buddha develop all of these qualities, but how does he develop generosity and goodness without knowing that there would necessarily be any attainment of awakening?

**A:** When the means are really good for yourself and for others, they don't need to be justified. Still, they require effort, and if you're going to stick with that effort, you have to see that it's worthwhile. A good way of motivating yourself to stick with the path of goodness is to remember that it will also lead to happiness.

One of the basic principles of Buddhism is that when you really do good, you benefit and other people benefit as well. The practice of these virtues is designed to make you see that, yes, there is a way that you can make other people happy that makes you happy, too. In other words, as you help them, you're helping yourself; when you help yourself, you're helping them. That's the kind of goodness and happiness you want to look for. Remember, the Buddha never asks us to deny our desire for happiness. He simply points out how to find happiness in a way that's wise and compassionate, both toward ourselves and toward others.

There's a sutta where the Buddha lists four kinds of people, and they go in this descending order: the person who benefits himself and benefits others, the person who benefits himself but does not benefit others, one who benefits others but doesn't benefit himself, and the person who doesn't benefit either himself or others. It's interesting the way the way number 2 and number 3 are ranked. The person who benefits himself and not others is listed higher than the person who benefits others without benefiting himself. The basic principle is that if you don't know how to benefit yourself, you can't really benefit others properly.

At the same time, it's good to remember that if you're not benefiting from your practice, it's going to be hard for you to continue with it. In the bodhisatta's case, he wasn't sure about the correct path to follow, but he definitely was looking for results. That's what his quest was all about: all the actions he did in the hope that they would lead to a happiness that doesn't age, grow ill, or die. Because you can't use that deathless happiness to arrive at a deathless happiness, you have to practice with a clear sense of ends and means.

**Q:** Do the five precepts belong to all the different traditions of Buddhism? And is their interpretation different?

**A:** You find them in all the Buddhist traditions, but there are some differences in the interpretation. The major difference is that in some traditions, they say not to break them at all, and in other traditions they say if you have a compassionate motive, you can go ahead and break them. We belong to the tradition that says not to break them.

**Q:** On the subject of the precept about lying: It doesn't count as a lie if it avoids useless suffering. Isn't that right?

**A:** Any misrepresentation of the truth counts as a lie. Even if you do it for what you think is a kind or sympathetic purpose, it still counts as a lie, and it still breaks the precept. If you feel that a certain truth is going to cause suffering for someone, you don't misrepresent the truth. Instead, you try to change the subject. If they're really insistent and want to know, only then do you tell them. When I teach in America and the topic of lying comes up, this issue always arises—that there must be some conditions where it's okay to lie. When I was teaching in Massachusetts, the scenario given to me was, “What if I'm filling out my tax forms?” In California, the question is, “What if your friend is wearing an ugly dress and asks, ‘How do I look?’” But in both cases the answer is: You can't lie. When filling out the tax form, you fill out the tax form correctly. As for your friend, you think to yourself, “This dress is better than if she were naked. So, yes, it's fine.”

**Q:** What about social lies like Santa Claus? Do we break one of the precepts if we spread them?

**A:** Yes. When I was four years old, I thought it would be nice to leave some milk and cookies for Santa Claus, so I placed them on a plate on the mantle of the fireplace in the house. The next morning, there was a note from Santa Claus, thanking me for the cookies and milk, but it was in my mother's handwriting, which I recognized as hers. I don't know whether I was more upset that there was no Santa Claus or that my mother would lie to me. So, it's best not to spread lies, because when the little child finds out, he or she is going to feel betrayed.

**Q:** I have lots of problems around the first precept. First of all, I have a hornet hive in the roof of my house. My neighbors, who have a small daughter, want me to have it destroyed. Is it necessary to save the life of the hornets and risk being responsibility for the possible death of a little girl?

**A:** My experience has been that there are ways that you can remove nests like this without killing the hornets. You have to look around to find the people who can do that. We had that problem with killer bees in our guesthouse at the monastery. It took a while, but we were able to find someone who was able to remove the bees without killing them. So, taking a precept like this means that you have to go a little bit more out of your way to find ways of solving the problems without breaking the precept.

**Q:** Second question: What about the uses of antibiotics?

**A:** The precept against killing covers only things that you can see with the naked eye. Things that are too small to be seen don't count under the precept. There are medicines allowed in the Vinaya that do have an antibiotic effect. As for parasites in the body that are large enough to see, there are medicines that allow them to come out of the body without killing the parasite. Basically, they make the parasite faint. When it faints, it lets go and comes out of the body.

**Q:** The next question is: What about abortion?

**A:** In the Buddha's time, abortion was legal. He didn't campaign to make it illegal, but he didn't condone it. So, as part of observing the precept, you would not commit an abortion, and you would not advise other people to have an abortion.

**Q:** What about this precept of not killing in relationship to mosquitoes that carry dengue and zika, etc.?

**A:** I'm always amazed at how few places in Brazil have screens on their windows. Because no matter how many mosquitoes you kill, more will come. It's like those horror movies: You know—you kill one zombie, and then a hundred zombies come in its place. In Thailand, they tried to get rid of mosquitoes with an eradication program, and they discovered that the mosquitoes quickly developed a resistance to the insecticide. So, the best way to deal with this type of problem is to realize that we have to live in a world with mosquitoes and do our best to protect ourselves from them by creating safe spaces, for example, by putting screens on windows and finding mosquito repellents that will drive the mosquitoes away without killing them.

I speak of these issues with experience. I've had malaria twice, but I still say: Don't kill mosquitoes.

**Q:** The precept against killing is often translated into adopting a vegetarian diet. Is this necessary? Aren't you also killing these poor vegetables, stripping their skin off while they're still alive and boiling them?

**A:** For the monks, our rule is that we're not allowed to eat meat if we either know or suspect that it was killed for the purpose of feeding us. The precept against killing is specifically against either killing something on your own or telling someone else to kill. Now, if you want to take the precept further and adopt a vegetarian diet, that's perfectly fine. But the precept doesn't require it. Just make sure that when you go to a seafood restaurant and they have a fish tank with live fish, don't choose any of the live fish.

As for vegetables, they don't come under the concept of sentient being—they don't feel pain—so the precept doesn't cover them.

We've received several questions on the issue of the relationship between the first precept and a vegetarian or non-vegetarian diet. You have to remember that the precept is a training rule. It's not a principle for trying to create a perfect society or a perfect world. Its purpose is to focus you on the things that you are directly responsible for doing.

Also, it doesn't guarantee that, if you abide by the precept, you're not going to have any bad kamma. In other words, the precept is phrased in such a way that eating meat does not go against the precept, but you still have the kamma of eating the flesh of the animal that had to die for that.

This is one of the reasons why monks have a reflection every day on the food they eat, which is that they're incurring a debt and only through the practice can they get beyond that debt. You take the time to reflect on the fact that simply having a body requires that you place a burden on many other beings, which gives you a good motivation for trying to find a happiness that doesn't need to feed. One of Ajaan Lee's reflections is that when you're about to die, the spirits of all the animals whose bodies you ate are going to come thronging around, asking for some merit. If you don't have any merit to give them, they'll take you with them. But if you have lots of merit to dedicate to them, they'll be happy to take your merit instead.

**Q:** You said that eating meat does not break the precept against killing. How can you say that the consumer of the meat does not play any role in supporting the killing of the cow? How can this not be breaking the precept?

**A:** It's not the case that eating meat does not support the killing of the cow. It does play a role in supporting that, but the precepts cover only two things: One is what you do yourself, and the other is what you give the order to do. That's all that's covered by any of the precepts. Beyond that, if you feel inspired not to support the cow-killing industry, then don't eat meat. But that goes beyond the precept. We're not trying to create an ideal society with the precepts. We're trying to focus directly on what we're doing so that our own personal behavior is conducive to getting the mind into concentration and then gaining the insight so that we don't have to come back to this process that needs to keep on eating. Only when you train the mind to the point where it doesn't need to feed can it can be really pure.

**Q:** We had a long question from a mother with a 14-year-old child who wanted to be a vegetarian. The child did not like the fact that his mother was not a

vegetarian and was giving her many, many, many reasons for becoming vegetarian. No matter how she would argue with him, he wouldn't listen to her reasoning. She wanted to know how I would reason with the kid.

**A:** I would basically say, "If you're providing the food for the family, then you have the right to have a say in what kind of food is being fixed. Until you reach that point, the mother is the one making the decisions."

**Q:** From the point of view of kamma and the precepts, what should we think about euthanasia, putting an end to the suffering of a domestic animal, rather than prolonging life unreasonably?

**A:** There is no need to prolong life unreasonably in order to stick by the precept. This means that it's not against the precept to pull the plug on a life-extension machine. If the body cannot survive on its own, its death is not an act of killing.

However, euthanasia would be against the precept. Most of our feelings around euthanasia come from the belief that the animal has only one life and if it dies, then it's not going to suffer after death. From the Buddhist point of view, though, the animal after death will go on to another life, and you have no idea how much suffering there's going to be in that next life. What you do know is whether or not you've made the choice to kill the animal. So, from the point of view of the precepts, the best thing is to give the animal some painkiller and try to keep it in as pain-free a condition as possible. Let nature take its course.

**Q:** Second question: If someone who's close to me is sick and asks me to accompany him or her to Switzerland or Belgium to have an assisted suicide, would it be a breaking of the precepts?

**A:** It wouldn't be a breaking of the precepts, but still it's taking a person to a place where you know he or she is going to be killed. So, it would be best to let your friend know your feelings about the whole issue. If the friend still wants you to go, you could still go and not break the precepts. However, in the time of the Buddha, there were people who actually did assisted suicide, where they would hire someone to stab them to death. According to the monastic code, having someone else do that is even worse kamma than simply committing suicide yourself because you're getting that person to take on the bad kamma of having killed you.

**Q:** Is there a difference in kamma between a person who dies from a natural death such as a heart attack, etc., or a person who commits suicide?

**A:** Dying of a natural cause is the result of past kamma, whereas a suicide is based on a decision you make now. When you're dying a natural death, you're simply receiving the results of past kamma, whereas if you commit suicide, you're creating new bad kamma.

**Q:** The next question: Is there a difference between the kamma of someone who commits suicide due to an event in life such as a disappointment in love or the loss of a job, as opposed to someone who commits suicide when suffering from a mental depression or anxiety?

**A:** It's hard to measure the karmic consequences of a particular act, because in each case they're going to depend on many other actions in that person's life. I have a friend who is a psychic. All her life, she's had to deal with a lot of spirits of people who've passed away. And in every case of a suicide, she says, there's always what she called the "Oh shit!" moment, with a lot of regret. So, whenever possible, if you can discourage someone from committing suicide, you've done that person a big favor.

**Q:** Why do the precepts ask us not to watch shows?

**A:** This is only for the eight precepts, which are basically the five precepts augmented with the factor of sense restraint. For example, when you don't watch shows, that's putting a little more restraint over your eyes. Not listening to music puts some restraint on your ears. Not wearing perfumes and garlands puts some restraint on your nose. Not eating after noon puts some restraint on your tongue. And not lying down on luxurious beds puts some restraint on your body. Most people take these precepts only occasionally. Traditionally, in Theravāda countries—and this is a tradition that goes back to the Pāli Canon—some people choose to take the eight precepts on the uposatha days. These days correspond to the full moon, new moon, and half moons. Taking these days off to practice the eight precepts and listen to the Dhamma provides a good context for practicing meditation.

**Q:** Reflecting on the fact that suffering comes from internal causes in the mind makes me reflect on the fact that not all professions are conducive to developing mindfulness and virtue. Please clarify.

**A:** There is such a thing as wrong livelihood: a livelihood based on breaking the precepts, a livelihood based on developing unskillful qualities in your own mind or one in which you're trying to give rise to unskillful qualities in the minds of others. So, if you realize that your livelihood is wrong livelihood, it might be a good idea to change if you can. There was a cartoon in the magazine *The New Yorker* in the



United States where two men were carrying a corpse, and the corpse had its feet stuck in cement—in other words, these were criminals taking a corpse to throw into the river. And one of the men is saying, “I wish there were another way to make a living.” There *are* other ways.

**Q:** In the readings on virtue, there’s a sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya 8:40, which talks about the kamma generated by certain kinds of actions. What happens if the mind changes and no longer does that kind of action? Will it still have to be responsible for the opposite kamma that was generated in the past?

**A:** The results of past kamma will be there, but—assuming that the past kamma was bad—the good kamma of changing your mind and changing your behavior will then compensate. Be patient when unfortunate kamma does bear fruit, and remember that the important factor is your state of mind right now. As you keep the mind developing unlimited goodwill, as you train it to not be overcome by pleasure or pain, that, in and of itself, will make the results of past bad kamma weaker, and will keep you from creating any bad new kamma right now.

**Q:** I’m a sinner. I know I will go to hell because of my past actions. Every day I try to live with my precepts, and I’m proud of this, but in my dreams and nightmares, the bad things I did in the past come to mind, and I’m very regretful about it. How can I let this feeling go away so I die without confusion? Should I go to everyone I hurt and ask for forgiveness?

**A:** It’s important to realize that just because you’ve broken the precepts does not mean you’re going to go to hell. As the Buddha said, if you realize that you’ve been doing wrong and you make up your mind not to repeat that mistake again and you hold to the precepts, that good kamma can protect you from going to hell. He added that the right response when you learn about the precepts and you realize that you did break the precepts in the past is to tell yourself, “Okay, that was a mistake. That was not a good thing to do, but if I have remorse or regret for that, the remorse will not go back and erase the mistake.” The proper course is to make up your mind that you’ll restrain yourself in the future and to spread thoughts of goodwill: goodwill for the people whom you’ve harmed, goodwill for yourself, and then goodwill for all beings. So, the next time you have bad dreams in which you feel feelings of regret or remorse, when you wake up, spread thoughts of goodwill to everybody involved in the dream and then goodwill for yourself.

Now, while you’re in the course of dying, it’s as if different doorways open up to you. If there’s one door that goes to hell, don’t tell yourself, “I am a sinner. I’ll have to

go to hell,” because that thought will take you through that door. Keep reminding yourself of the good you’ve done ever since you started taking the precepts, and keep telling yourself, “I do not have to go to hell.” That will help you to go through a better door.

As for asking forgiveness of others: Try to put yourself in their place. If you think they would appreciate the fact that you now realize the harm you did to them, and it would calm their mind to hear your apology, then go ask forgiveness. But if you think that seeing you again would simply disturb them, and that they’d rather you stayed out of their lives, then leave them alone. Spread lots of goodwill in their direction, and leave it at that.

**Q:** I want to prepare for the moment of my death so that I won’t go to a bad destination. How do I prepare so that I don’t believe the committee member in my mind who says that I’m a bad person?

**A:** One of the reasons why we meditate is so that we’ll be alert at the moment of death. Then remember that any voice that comes into the mind is just one member of the committee, and as a meditator, you should have learned not to believe everything that every member of the committee says. This is one of the reasons why one of the meditation topics is reflection on your own virtue and your own generosity, so that you get skilled at recalling these things when you need them.

EVENING

## *Persistence*

Last night we talked about how the desire to put an effort into the practice comes from meeting a reliable teacher and deciding that the Dhamma the teacher teaches makes sense. But the desire to practice comes from more than that. The Canon tells the story of one of the Buddha’s relatives who died. The Buddha said that if that person had put an effort into the practice when he was young, he would have become fully awakened. If he had put an effort into the practice when he was middle-aged, he would have reached a lower level of awakening. If he’d put an effort into the practice when he was old, he would have reached the first stage of awakening. But he never put an effort into the practice at all, and so he missed out on the opportunity to gain awakening in this life.

That’s a chilling story. It should give rise to the desire that you don’t want to miss out on what can be attained through human effort. That desire is what lies at the

basis of the perfection of persistence, which is our topic for tonight.

The Pāli word for persistence, *virīya*, can also mean “energy” and “effort.” It’s identical with right effort in the noble eightfold path. As the Buddha explains, right effort works closely with right view and right mindfulness. Right view tells you what is skillful and what’s not. Right mindfulness helps you remember the lessons of right view. Right effort is what actually puts those lessons into practice, so as to abandon the wrong factors of the path and to develop the right factors in their place. So tonight, I’d like to look into the different ways in which discernment, or right view, and right mindfulness work to develop the perfection of persistence.

Persistence is directed by discernment in four ways:

- The first way is seeing the *distinction* between what is skillful and what’s unskillful.
- The second way is giving you the *motivation* to want to put forth effort to abandon what’s unskillful and to develop what’s skillful.
- The third is teaching you the different *types* of effort that can be skillful.
- And the fourth concerns the *amount* of effort that is skillful.

So let’s look at each of these four.

The first one doesn’t require much explanation, because we’ve already been talking a lot about what’s skillful and what’s unskillful. Unskillful qualities are those that lead you to do harm. Skillful qualities are those that help you to avoid doing harm.

The second way in which discernment guides your persistence, though, requires more explanation. That’s in providing motivation. There are many different ways in which you can motivate yourself to want to practice. The Buddha says that the primary motivation underlying all skillful activity is heedfulness, in which you see the dangers that come from not acting in skillful ways and the benefits that can come from acting in skillful ways. For example, you focus on the drawbacks of ordinary sensual pleasures as a way of motivating yourself to want to find a non-sensual happiness, such as the happiness in concentration, which is higher and more secure.

All the other ways of motivating yourself to practice derive from heedfulness.

For example, you can motivate yourself to practice through developing compassion. This is based on heedfulness because you realize that by practicing, you will benefit, and people around you will benefit, too. After all, the less greed,

aversion, and delusion you have in your mind, then the less you'll suffer from them and also the less other people will be inflicted by them as well.

Another way of motivating yourself is to try to develop a sense of humor around your defilements. If you can see them as ridiculous, it's easier to give them up. This is based on heedfulness because a healthy sense of humor comes from stepping back and looking at something objectively, seeing where it's incongruous and doesn't make sense. Heedfulness is what inspires you to step back.

Most people miss the examples of humor in the Canon, largely because they're most prominent in the Vinaya, which is the section concerning the rules that the monks have to follow, and very few laypeople read that section. Each rule has an origin story to explain the reasons why that rule was formulated, and often those stories contain an element of humor.

I think this is interesting because, first, it helps you see how ridiculous the mistake would be if you broke the rule, and that helps to distance you from any desire within yourself to break the rule. That's the objective viewpoint that comes from stepping back from your defilements. Second, it's a lot easier to live by a system of rules if you can see that the people who formulated the rules had a good sense of humor. It helps you appreciate that the rules are not grim, punitive, or dull.

For example, one of the origin stories concerns a monk with psychic powers who has defeated a fire-breathing serpent. The laypeople hear about this and want to make merit with him. So, they ask the monks, "What is it that monks usually don't receive on alms rounds?" However, they ask the wrong monks. The monks say, "We never get any hard liquor." So, the next morning, everybody in the city has prepared a glass of hard liquor for the monk who defeated the fire-breathing serpent. He drinks the liquor at house after house after house, and then passes out at the city gate.

The Buddha comes along with a group of monks and sees the monk lying there, so he has the monks take him back to the monastery. They lay him down on the ground with his head toward the Buddha. Now, he doesn't know where he is, he tosses and turns, and he ends up with his feet pointed straight at the Buddha, which in India is a sign of great disrespect. The Buddha asks the monks, "In the past, didn't this monk show respect to me?" "Yes." "Is he showing respect now?" "No." "And didn't he do battle with the fire-breathing serpent?" "Yes." "Could he do battle with a salamander now?" "No." This is why the monks have a rule against drinking liquor.

So, that's another way of motivating yourself to want to do what is skillful: by using your sense of humor to see how ridiculous your defilements are.

Another way of motivating yourself is to take inspiration from the examples of the Buddha and the great teachers, because they expand your idea of what human beings can do. There's a story in the Canon where a monk is out in the wilderness and he's ill. He asks himself, "Am I going to try to go back to the city to find a doctor?" Then he thinks of the example of the Buddha and the great noble disciples who treated their diseases by developing the factors for awakening and the five faculties, and he decides, "I'll try that, too. I'll stay on in the wilderness."

Another way of motivating yourself is by cultivating healthy versions of what the early texts call craving and conceit. In other words, you think, "Other people can gain awakening. I'd like that, too." That's healthy craving. "They're human beings, I'm a human being. They can do it, so why can't I?" That's healthy conceit. Even though you eventually have to abandon craving and conceit, there are stages in the path where you need to use healthy versions of them to convince yourself that the goal is worth pursuing and that you're capable of attaining it.

There are even some instances when the Buddha recommends some fairly unskillful motivations to get yourself to do something skillful. For example, when it's very difficult to have goodwill for someone you're angry at, you can remind yourself that if you acted on your anger, you'd probably do something very stupid, and that would please your enemy. Do you want to give pleasure to your enemy?

It's not a very skillful thought—it's actually quite spiteful—but it can prevent some unskillful behavior. And it, too, is based on heedfulness: the desire to use a lesser unskillful state to avoid a more damaging unskillful state.

I know in my own case, when I was a monk in Thailand, I came to realize that some people there view Western monks like dancing elephants. The simple fact that they can dance is enough. They don't think they're going to dance well. In the same way, there were people who would say, "These Westerners, can they really understand the Dhamma?" So, I said to myself, "I'll show them." Which may not be the most skillful thought, but it got me to meditate a lot more.

Now, you'll notice that all of these forms of motivation require a healthy sense of self. This is a point that has to be underlined many times. We hear so much about the teaching on not-self that we tend to forget that the Buddha said we should try to make the self its own mainstay. You do that by developing a healthy sense of self: that you're responsible, you're capable, and you will benefit from developing skillful actions. This also requires a resilient sense of self that's willing to admit mistakes and learn from them.

There's a medical university in the United States that has, as one of its specialties, brain surgery. Of course, everyone who applies to a brain surgery school will have good grades, but not everybody with good grades would make a good brain surgeon. So, the administrators at the university tried to find a way of asking questions during the interview that would help weed out the people who would not make good surgeons. They found two questions to be especially helpful in this area. The first was, "Can you tell us of a mistake you made recently?" If the candidate said, "No, I can't think of any mistakes I've made recently," the candidate would be rejected. The second question: "If you had to do it again, how would you do it differently?" If the candidate hadn't thought of how to do it differently, again the candidate would be rejected. What you're looking for in a good brain surgeon is someone who recognizes mistakes and thinks about how not to repeat those mistakes. This requires a sense of self that's very solid, that's not threatened by admitting mistakes and doesn't try to deny mistakes. This is precisely the kind of healthy sense of self you need as you practice, to motivate yourself to develop the path even further.

In fact, you want to be proud that you can learn from mistakes. This relates to another one of the teachings that the Buddha gave to his son. He said, "Before you meditate, try to make your mind like earth. People throw disgusting things on the earth, but the earth doesn't react." The Buddha says the same thing about wind, fire, and water. Wind can blow disgusting things around, but the wind doesn't get disgusted by them. Water can be used to wash dirty things away, but the water doesn't get upset. Fire burns things that are disgusting, but the fire isn't disgusted by them. In the same way, you need to have a solid attitude toward looking at your past mistakes. When you can admit them and not be shaken by them, you put yourself in a position where you can learn from them.

These, then, are some of the ways in which discernment gives guidance in how to motivate yourself to put forth effort.

As for the types of skillful effort, there are basically four: The first is to prevent unskillful qualities from arising, the second is to abandon unskillful qualities that have arisen, the third is to develop skillful qualities that have not yet arisen, and the fourth is to develop and maintain skillful qualities that have already arisen.

Now, it's important that we notice that there are four different kinds of right effort. All too often we hear that there's just one, which is letting go, letting go, letting go. But there are a lot of things that you should not let go of, or that you should develop first before you can let them go later. For example, when concentration arises, you don't just let it go and think that you've gained insight into

the impermanence of your concentration. When concentration arises, you should try to maintain it and develop it further. That's when you're engaging in right effort.

Now, of these four different kinds of effort, the one that gets discussed least is the act of preventing, so that's what I'd like to focus on tonight.

One way of preventing unskillful qualities from arising is by exercising restraint over your senses. In other words, when you're looking at or listening to something, ask yourself why. What purpose do you have? Or you might ask another question: "Which member of the mind's committee is in charge of the looking or the listening?" Only if one of the skillful members is in charge should you continue looking or listening. For example, you're walking down the street. You see something that you'd really like to have, and you're looking at it in a way that aggravates your greed. You have to ask yourself, "Do I really need this?" And if you realize that you don't really need it, then you should look at the object in a way that helps to undercut your greed.

Nowadays, most of our problems with sense restraint don't happen so much while we're walking down the street. They happen when we turn on the computer or we look at our phone. You have to remind yourself: These things do not turn themselves on. *You're* turning them on and you have to ask yourself why. If you're not really clear, don't turn them on. You can prevent a lot of unskillful mind states that way.

Another way of preventing unskillful qualities from arising is by contemplating what the Buddha calls your requisites. We live in dependence on four requisites: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. Each time you use these things or think of getting new ones, you have to realize they have a proper purpose, which is to help you develop skillful qualities of the mind. If you're going to use them in ways that give rise to unskillful qualities, you're misusing them. So, it's good to reflect on these requisites with these questions in mind each time you use them. That will undercut a lot of unskillful behavior. For example, when you go out to get something to eat, remind yourself that you eat simply to keep the body alive and healthy. Anything beyond that is a waste of your resources, which could be put to better purposes, and you're placing unnecessary burdens on other people. So, it's good to reflect on these things on a daily basis.

Another way of preventing unskillful qualities from arising is, at the end of your meditation every morning, to think about what you expect to happen during the day. If you anticipate any situations in which you might do or say something unskillful, ask yourself, "How could I prepare for that situation so that I don't do

anything unskillful?” Run a few scenarios through your mind until you can think of a skillful way to avoid doing or saying something unskillful, even when the people around you do or say things that would ordinarily provoke you. All too often, we emphasize the present moment in our meditation and forget that we can use the meditation to prepare for the future—and that’s a perfectly legitimate way of using our meditation.

Those are some thoughts on the different types of effort.

As for the amount of effort, you try to find an effort that’s just right, and this is going to depend on two factors: One is the task at hand, and the other is the amount of energy you have.

In terms of the task at hand, the Buddha said the causes of suffering in the mind come in two forms. Some of them will go away easily if you simply look at them. These are cases where you should look at them with equanimity. There are other causes for suffering in the mind, though, that when you look at them, they stare right back. They don’t go away easily. They have no sense of shame. This, the Buddha said, is the time when you have to “exert a fabrication.” Remember what the three kinds of fabrication are: You learn to breathe in a different way, you learn to talk to yourself in a different way, and you bring new perceptions to the issue. This requires that you can take apart your unskillful state, analyzing it into the three types of fabrication, and then use skillful versions of those three fabrications to create something skillful in its place.

So, those are cases where the amount of effort that is just right will depend on the task at hand.

The second issue is the amount of energy that you have. There’s a story in the Canon of a young man, gently brought up, whose feet were so tender that they had hair growing on their soles. The story is quite long, but eventually this young man ordained as a monk. One night, he was doing walking meditation, and it was so hard on his feet that they started bleeding. Feeling discouraged, he sat down and thought, “Maybe I should disrobe. I could still make merit as a layperson.”

Well, the Buddha was on top of Vulture Peak, and so he disappeared from Vulture Peak and appeared right in front of the monk. He said, “Were you thinking of disrobing just now?” Can you imagine? You’re sitting and meditating, and you’re thinking, “I might as well give up,” and all of a sudden, the Buddha appears in front of you. So, the young monk said, “Yes, I was.”

The Buddha asked him, “When you were a layperson, were you skilled at playing the lute?” The monk said, “Yes.” The Buddha said, “When you tuned the strings of



the lute so they were too tight, did it sound good?” “No.” “And when they were too loose, did they sound good?” “No.” “How about if they were tuned just right? Did the lute sound good then?” “Yes.” Then the Buddha concluded, “In the same way, when you’re practicing meditation, you tune your effort to the level of energy you have, and then you tune the rest of your five faculties—your conviction, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment—to that, and then your practice will go well.”

In the same way, as you’re meditating at home—it’s been a long day, you’re tired, all you can think about is wanting to sleep—that’s not the time to say, “I will not get up from my meditation until I’ve achieved full awakening.” You tell yourself, “Okay, I’ll sit and meditate for the hour”—or however long you’ve determined—“and try not to fall asleep.” However, on other days when you *do* have more energy and you’ve set the timer for half an hour, if the alarm sounds and you still have energy, give yourself another half-hour.

That’s determining how much effort is just right based on how much energy you have.

So, these are the four different ways in which discernment gives guidance to your effort and persistence:

- in pointing out what’s skillful and what’s not,
- in giving you ideas for how to motivate yourself,
- in pointing out the different types of effort that are appropriate, and
- in determining the amount of effort that’s just right.

For your persistence to be right, it’s best guided by right view as to what issues in life are important and what qualities in mind will keep you on track. Remember, right effort focuses on skillful and unskillful qualities in the mind, and as your discernment points out, the mind is the most important factor in your life. So, that’s where you have to focus your right efforts. Discernment also teaches you how to determine which efforts are right for attaining the goal.

Now, right mindfulness remembers these lessons and it keeps you alert so that you can apply them at all times. In this way, you’ve got mindfulness working together with discernment. Now, it’s interesting to note that in Thai, the words for mindfulness and discernment, *sati* and *paññā*, when you put them together—*sati-paññā*—form a compound that means “intelligence.” And here we’re talking about the kind of intelligence in which you’re alert to what needs to be done, you have presence of mind to remember what should be done, and you use your knowledge to

good effect. True intelligence requires more than just mindfulness and discernment. It also requires effort. In other words, if you learn something but then don't try to remember it, that's not really intelligent. If you learn and remember but don't try to put it into action, that's not very intelligent either. It's when you try to learn, try to remember, and try to put into action what you've learned: That's when you're really using your intelligence. And that's when your efforts, your persistence, become the perfection of persistence.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** How can I meditate to overcome laziness in daily life?

**A:** Ajaan Maha Boowa once said his least favorite question was, "What's an easy way to overcome laziness?" You have to remind yourself that if you want anything good out of life, you have to put in effort. Think of the bad things that happen to lazy people, the things they miss out on, and then think of all the good things that come from putting in effort. Then the question is "What is the appropriate effort for this task I have right now?"

**Q:** Why do we feed on the vicious cycle of not doing what we know is good for us?

**A:** There's part of the mind that doesn't really believe that what is good for you really is good for you. You have to find which part of the mind that is and ask it, "Why? What's the allure of being lazy?"

**Q:** I have a lot of psychological defects, including laziness, ill will, and attachment to material things. What can I do to fight this?

**A:** With ill will, consciously try to develop thoughts of goodwill, and the members of the committee that like ill will will start to complain. Then you can get in a dialogue with them. Ask them, "Why do you like ill will? What do you get out of it? It's miserable food for the mind." As for attachment to material things, make a practice of giving things away. Here again, part of the mind will complain, and then you can get into a dialogue with it. As for laziness, give yourself little rewards for being more energetic, and after a while your energy will develop momentum.

**Q:** If any unskillful thought arises and you acknowledge it as unskillful, does it still have negative kammic effects?

**A:** No.

**Q:** In other words, does the arising of unskillful thoughts cause bad kamma or is it just our reaction to them?

**A:** It's our reaction to them that can cause bad kamma. The fact that the thought arises is the result of old kamma. What you do with it is your new kamma. If you simply acknowledge it and it goes away, or if you think skillful thoughts that counteract it and make it go away, then the new kamma is good new kamma.

DAY SIX  
MORNING

## *Mindfulness*

Last night we talked briefly about the role of mindfulness in developing persistence. This morning, I'd like to discuss that point in a little more detail because there's a lot of misunderstanding around the topic of mindfulness.

We often hear that mindfulness is an accepting and non-reactive state of mind, that it's very closely related to equanimity. But actually, in the way the Buddha teaches mindfulness—as a faculty of memory—mindfulness is purposeful. You keep certain things in mind because you have a purpose—the purpose being to protect your behavior and your state of mind from being unskillful. As the Buddha said, when mindfulness is in charge, its purpose is that if there's any skillful behavior in thought, word, or deed that you haven't yet mastered, you're mindful—i.e., you keep remembering—to try to master it. If you have mastered it, you try to protect it, maintain it, and bring it to full development. In other words, instead of simply watching skillful qualities come and go, you keep remembering to try to *make* them come and to *prevent* them from going. That's the role of right mindfulness.

The Buddha frequently talks of the practice of mindfulness as a kind of protection and refuge, and he uses a variety of analogies to illustrate the various kinds of protection that mindfulness provides.

First, it keeps you in bounds. To illustrate this role, the Buddha gives the analogy of a quail. Normally, quails live in fields that have been plowed, with stones turned up. But one day a quail wanders away from its territory. A hawk swoops down and carries it off, and the quail laments, "Oh, my lack of merit! If only I had stayed in my ancestral territory, this hawk would have been no match for me!" The hawk hears this and is irritated by this upstart quail, so it says, "But where is your ancestral territory?" And the quail says, "A plowed field where stones have been turned up."

The hawk lets the quail go: "Go. Go to your territory, but even there you still won't escape me." So, the quail flutters down to the field, stands on top of a stone, and starts taunting the hawk, "Come, get me, you hawk! Come, get me, you hawk!" The hawk swoops down again, and as soon as the quail sees that the hawk is coming

at him full speed, he slips behind the stone. The hawk shatters his breast there on the stone and dies.

The Buddha says the field here stands for the establishing of mindfulness, whereas the area outside of the field stands for thoughts of sensuality. The hawk stands for your defilements. If your thoughts don't stay in bounds, then your defilements can get you. This is one of the things that mindfulness does: It keeps your thoughts in bounds. You remember what is skillful, you remember what is not skillful, you remember that you're safe only when you stay within what is skillful, so you remember to do whatever is needed to keep your thoughts within safe bounds.

Another image the Buddha used to make the same point is that of a gatekeeper at the gate of a fortress. The fortress is located at the frontier of a country, and there's always the danger that enemy spies may try to get into the fortress. So, the gatekeeper has to recognize who's a friend and who's not, and to keep out those who are not friends. Now, if mindfulness were simply acceptance, the gatekeeper would just stay there at the side of the gate, noting who came in and who went out. If a spy came in, it would simply say, "Oh, there's a spy." Now, some spies, when they're recognized, might run away, but a lot of spies would just walk on into the fortress. The point of this analogy is that mindfulness has to be very active in recognizing what's not skillful and in keeping it out. This is another analogy to illustrate the role mindfulness plays in keeping your thoughts within bounds.

The second way in which mindfulness protects you is to keep you focused on what's important. It reminds you that the most important thing that you have right now is the state of your mind, and if any unskillful thought comes in, your first priority is to get it out. The Buddha illustrates this point with an analogy of a man whose head is on fire. His mindfulness is focused on putting the fire out right away. He doesn't simply watch the flames and note their pretty colors; he remembers that he's got to put them out, and he can't let anything else distract him. That's the second way in which mindfulness helps protect your mind: It keeps your priorities in mind and keeps you focused on your task.

The third way is that it keeps reminding you always to stay observant, to learn from your actions what works and what doesn't work. In other words, it doesn't just keep you in bounds. It also reminds you that your best protection is knowledge, and the best way to gain knowledge is to learn from your own actions. This relates to that point we made earlier: that the Buddha looked for two qualities in a student—one, that the student be honest about what he has done and two, that he be observant about what the results are. These two qualities underlie this role of mindfulness.

The Buddha illustrates this point with the simile of a cook. The cook works for a prince, and he has to notice what kinds of food the prince likes to eat. Sometimes the prince will say what he likes, but sometimes he won't. But if the cook is observant, he notices what the prince likes to reach for. He'll make more of that kind of food, and in that way he'll get rewarded. In the same way, you have to learn how to be observant as to what helps your mind gain concentration and other skillful states—in other words, what ways of meditating the mind likes and that give good results—and you also have to remember the lessons you've learned, so that you can apply them each time you meditate. That's how your meditation becomes a skill you can rely on. And that's one of the ways in which mindfulness provides a refuge.

These, then, are some of the ways in which mindfulness gives you protection as you go through life making choices. Because remember: We don't live in a deterministic world where all our actions are pre-determined. We do have a range in the present moment for choosing what to do and what not to do, remembering that the suffering that weighs most on the mind is the suffering that comes from our own choices. This is why it's so important to know about the different ways in which we fabricate our experience of the present moment—by the way we breathe, by the way we talk to ourselves, and by the perceptions and feelings we focus on and hold in mind—because they'll play a big role in leading us to suffer or not to suffer. Remember that you do have the ability within you to make a difference in whether you're going to suffer or not, and you can be more in charge of how you conduct yourself on the path.

Now, this doesn't mean that there's no room for equanimity and acceptance in the practice. Most of the Thai ajaans noticed that for Westerners, our biggest weakness is that we don't really understand equanimity and acceptance. The main point that we don't understand is that these mental qualities are skills and that we have to be selective in using them: when to apply equanimity and when not, when to be accepting and when not. If unskillful states are taking over your mind, you can't be equanimous about them. You can't simply accept them. You have to do what you can to get rid of them. As for other issues in life, you have to see where you can make a difference and where you can't, and also evaluate where it's worth the effort to try to make a difference and where it's not.

The Buddha often compares a person who's practicing the Dhamma to a warrior. Like any good warrior, we have to choose our battles, realizing that we don't have the energy to solve every problem in life. That means we need to apply our main energy to solving the problems within our own minds. The most important thing for us to

accept is responsibility for our own suffering. This is the main lesson of the four noble truths. It is possible for us to make a difference for the better, and the question we should always be asking ourselves is, “What is the most skillful thing to do now?” We meditate to make the answer to this question more and more clear, and then when we’ve learned what’s skillful, we meditate further in order to give ourselves strength to carry through with what we’ve learned.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** What is the difference between mindfulness and concentration?

**A:** Mindfulness practice as the Buddha described it is actually how you get the mind into concentration. In other words, you stay focused on the body in and of itself—ardent, alert, and mindful—and you put aside any distractions with regard to the world. That’s the description of mindfulness. When you succeed in doing it well, you bring the mind into concentration.

**Q:** Are mindfulness and vipassanā the same thing?

**A:** No. Mindfulness is the act of keeping something in mind. Vipassanā is insight, a quality of seeing the fabrications of the mind clearly, so clearly that you develop dispassion for them. Now, mindfulness is one of the practices that can lead to clear insight, but clear insight also requires concentration and right view.

There’s one passage where the Buddha says that for the mind to develop concentration, you need insight and tranquility, and to develop tranquility and insight, you need to develop concentration. The image is of two hands washing each other. The left hand cleans the right hand, the right hand cleans the left hand, and that way both get cleaned.

**Q:** You’ve said that mindfulness is to always keep something in mind. I thought that mindfulness was to be aware of the present moment, but if I’m keeping something in mind, I might not be aware of the present moment. I get a little confused. Could you say more about it?

**A:** There is mindfulness and there is right mindfulness. Mindfulness in general means keeping something in mind. Right mindfulness means remembering which qualities are skillful, which ones are unskillful, and remembering to be alert and ardent about recognizing and developing skillful qualities in the present moment.

EVENING

## *Giving*

Tonight, we start with the perfections that come under the heading of relinquishment. There are two of them: giving and renunciation. Tonight's talk is on giving, which covers not only giving material things, but also giving your time, giving your energy, giving your knowledge, giving your forgiveness.

There are many motivations for giving, but giving becomes a perfection when your motivation to do it focuses on the value of generosity in training the mind. You're using material things, your energy, and your knowledge for the benefit of your mind. Ajaan Lee makes a comparison. He says it's like squeezing the juice out of a fruit. The juice is the virtue of generosity; the rind that's left is the object you give away.

This is a lesson in trading up through letting go. As you practice generosity, you realize that there is a hierarchy in pleasures. In particular, you increase your happiness by sharing with others. When you enjoy sensual pleasures, they may be pleasant while they're there, but the pleasures soon pass. And afterwards, when a pleasure is gone, the memory of that pleasure is not always pleasant, especially if you had to do something unskillful to get it, or when you think about the fact that you used to have that pleasure but now it's gone and may not return in this lifetime. However, with generosity, if it's done skillfully, you're happy before you give the gift, you're happy while giving the gift, and the memory after giving the gift is also happy. As you see how happiness increases by sharing it with others, that drives home the lesson that Dhamma practice is cooperative.

As the Buddha taught the monks, they have to depend on one another when they're sick, and they have to depend on laypeople for their material support. In turn, the laypeople depend on the monks. After all, laypeople can rarely devote themselves full-time to the Dhamma, but the monks do have the time to devote themselves fully to the practice, which means that they have knowledge to share. This exchange is an economy of gifts. There's no price for teaching the Dhamma, and the laypeople are not forced to give gifts. Both sides give voluntarily, and this helps to break down barriers. If you have to pay for something, that puts up a barrier. But when no payment is required, the barrier is removed.

The act of generosity is also a lesson in delayed gratification. This is an important lesson underlying the entire practice. We had a question about ends and means the other day, and that's what the path is: means to a good end, an end that may take a



long time to attain. If you learn the lessons of delayed gratification early on—that you can take pleasure in the fact that you’re on a good path to an even better destination—it will help see you through many fallow stretches of the practice.

Many years back, they conducted an experiment with a group of children. They took each child and put him in a room. On the table in front of him was a doughnut. They told him, “We’ll come back in five minutes. If you haven’t eaten the doughnut, we’ll give you a second doughnut.” Then they left the child alone in the room. They were secretly taking a video of the children while they were doing this. The videos showed that some of the children were able not to eat the doughnut; some of them ate the doughnut immediately; others would play with the doughnut, nibbling it away slowly; some of them would bite underneath it and put it back on the table to hide what they had done. Then they did a follow-up study for many years until the children were adults. They found that the children who were able to refrain from eating the doughnut did much better in life generally than the others. The lesson is that if you learn the lesson of delayed gratification early, it establishes good habits throughout life.

The act of generosity is also a solid way of building self-esteem. There was another study about children, this time centered on the issue of doing chores. They found that in many advanced societies, the parents no longer have their children do chores. Both parents work, they’re in a hurry to get the house in order, they don’t have the time or patience to teach the children how to do chores properly, so they send the children off to look at their iPads or play video games. Whereas in traditional societies, if a child wants to do a chore, the parents will encourage it, even if it takes a fair amount of time for the child to get it right. And they’ve found that the children who do chores when they’re young grow up with more self-esteem.

So, when you realize the lessons that can be learned with generosity and you practice generosity as a way to train your mind, this is how generosity becomes a perfection.

Now, as I said, the act of giving doesn’t cover just material things. It can also include the gift of your time, the gift of your strength, the gift of your knowledge, the gift of forgiveness, or the gift of the Dhamma itself.

One of the most impressive instances of generosity that I’ve experienced was when we built a chedi, a spired monument to the Buddha, at Ajaan Fuang’s monastery in Thailand. His students wanted to build a chedi, and they tried to hire people to do it, but the people they hired worked for a week and then ran away. The students then decided to build the chedi themselves. For a year and a half, they

would come almost every weekend. They would leave Bangkok on Friday evenings, right after work, arrive at the monastery at midnight on Friday, work most of the day Saturday, usually with a cement-pouring Saturday night, do some more work on Sunday afternoon, and then drive back to Bangkok early Monday morning and go straight to their jobs.

Now, very few of these people were wealthy, and few of them had any construction experience, so they had to learn a lot of new skills. But they happily gave a lot of their time and their energy, and they learned many of the benefits of generosity in the course of doing so. In particular, there was a very strong sense of family among the people who worked together, even though they came from many backgrounds and many levels of society. And they appreciated the fact that Ajaan Fuang had given them the opportunity to do this. So, generosity is not just the giving of material things. It's giving what you have, and then this becomes the basis for all other practices in the path.

When Ajaan Suwat was teaching meditation in the United States, after the second or third day of the retreat, he turned to me and said, "Do you notice how grim all these meditators are?" His analysis was that they hadn't first learned the joys of generosity and virtue. When you learn the joy of giving, it gives you a sense of confidence in the teachings, that you're able to benefit from practicing them. You realize that if you want to get anything of lasting value out of life, you have to be willing to give up some of what you've already got. When you learn the joy that comes from that lesson, it spreads to the joy of virtue and the joy of meditation.

Now, for generosity to become a perfection, it has to be guided by right view, in particular, in relationship to kamma. And here's where we learn what's specifically Buddhist about the Buddhist culture of giving.

The first point is that generosity must be done voluntarily. King Pasenadi once came to ask the Buddha, "Where should a gift be given?" He probably expected the Buddha to say, "Give to the Buddhists," or, "Give to Dhamma teachers." Because if he asked the Brahmins, the Brahmins would say, "Give to the Brahmins." If he asked the Jains, the Jains would say, "Give to the Jains." But the Buddha said something very different. He said, "Give where you feel inspired or where you feel the gift would be well used." In other words, there are no "shoulds" as to where you should give a gift. That's why, when the monks are asked, "Where should I give a gift?" they are supposed to answer, "Give where you feel inspired, or where you feel the gift would be well used or well cared for."

We've already had a couple of questions about generosity that we haven't answered until now. One question is, "Should we give to beggars?" One woman asked if she should give to her daughter, because she was afraid her daughter was becoming too dependent on her. But here again, the answer is, "Give where you feel inspired." In the Buddhist culture of giving, giving is our first lesson in free will: the realization that we have freedom of choice. This is probably the most important lesson you can learn about kamma. And the Buddha wants us to protect that lesson. That's why people should never be pressured to give—for instance, saying that, as a good Buddhist, you have to give to this or that cause. Giving should always be voluntary.

You might carry out a mental experiment yourself. Think back to the first gift that you gave voluntarily—not because it was someone's birthday, not because the gift was expected, but simply because you wanted to give. That was your first lesson in free will. So, the first lesson we learn from right view about generosity is that it has to be voluntary.

King Pasenadi went on to ask another question of the Buddha, "When a gift is given, where does it give the best result?" This time, the Buddha replied, "That's a different question." This is where we begin to approach generosity not simply as an expression of free will, but as a skill. And generosity as a skill has four dimensions.

- The first has to do with your motivation in giving.
- The second concerns your attitude while you are giving.
- The third has to do with who are the best recipients of gifts.
- And then the fourth concerns what kind of gift is good to give.

Let's look at these four dimensions.

First, with regard to motivation: The lowest motivation the Buddha mentions is when you give a gift because you expect to get something similar back, sometimes with interest. When I was a monk, newly ordained, there was a nun I knew who had decided to build a hut for some of the monks at Wat Asokaram, Ajaan Lee's monastery. She sponsored the construction and also directed the workers. One day, I visited the construction site as she was directing the work, and although the hut was small, it was very well built. I asked her, "Are you building your palace for your next life?" She replied, "No, this is my vacation home. I've already built my palace at a temple in Bangkok." That may not be the highest motivation, but it's better than not giving.

A higher motivation, the Buddha said, is the idea that it's good to give. An even higher motivation is that "I have these things, these other people don't have these things, it's not right that I don't share." A motivation higher than that is when you realize that giving a gift makes your mind serene and happy. And ultimately, you give not because you're expecting anything from the gift at all. It's simply an expression of the goodness of the mind: That's the gift of a non-returner. So, to get the most out of the gift, you try to develop increasingly higher motivations.

The second dimension in giving as a skill is your attitude while you give. You give attentively, you give with conviction that something good will come of this, you give with empathy for the person who's receiving the gift, and you're not simply throwing it away. In other words, you appreciate the opportunity to give a gift, like Ajaan Fuang's students appreciating the opportunity to give their time and energy to building the chedi. You sense that you'll benefit from the gift, and you show respect to the person to whom you're giving the gift. That makes the recipient glad to receive it and more inclined to use it well.

As for the third dimension—the best people to give a gift to—the Buddha said that it's best to give to those who are free of passion, aversion, and delusion, or to those who are practicing to overcome passion, aversion, and delusion, because these are the people who are most likely to make best use of the gift. When you reflect back on the gift, you'll be happy that you gave.

And finally, as to the gift that's good to give, the Buddha said that you give in season. In other words, you give a gift that's appropriate for the time. For example, you don't give winter clothes in the summer. Also, you give without adversely affecting yourself or others. In other words, you don't give so much that you don't have enough to use yourself, and you don't steal the gift to give it to somebody else.

Now, as for the results that come from giving, the Buddha says that people will find you charming, they'll admire you, you'll have a good reputation, and you'll approach assemblies of people without being ashamed. These are benefits in the present life. One of the benefits not mentioned in the texts is that this is the perfection that allows you the most room for creativity. There are not many creative ways of observing the precepts or of meditating, but you can be as creative as you like in deciding what to give, in trying to find something that will give joy to the recipient and that will be especially appropriate for the occasion. There's a lot of joy that comes from being creative in this way. These are the results you gain in the present life.

In the future life, you'll tend to have a good rebirth. There's a passage where the Buddha says that no matter what level you're born in, you'll tend to be good-looking within that level. For example, if you're reborn as a dog, you will be a good-looking dog. And that's nothing to sneer at.

Years back, the late king of Thailand decided that he didn't like the idea that Thai people were so enamored of buying foreign dogs to raise, so he wanted to promote Thai breeds of dogs instead. Now, there's a belief in Thailand that really smart dogs will be born with what look like socks on their feet. In other words, if the dog is brown, the paws and bottom parts of its legs are white. So, the king gave an order: If any puppies with socks on their feet were born anywhere on royal or government properties, he would raise them in the palace. And so quite a few dogs born on the side of the road ended up living in the palace. One of them was so smart and well-behaved that the king actually wrote a book in her honor.

These are some of the future-life rewards of being generous.

As we learn the culture of generosity, it's important to realize that, in addition to not pressuring other people to give, we should also be gracious in receiving gifts from other people. I don't know if this is a problem in Brazil, but many American people are very embarrassed about receiving gifts. They'll say, "Oh, you shouldn't have done that!" That attitude, of course, doesn't encourage generosity. Whereas the Buddhist culture *does* encourage generosity, which is why it's important to be gracious when you receive a gift.

Now, as I said earlier, generosity forms the basis for other practices on the path. There's a passage where the Buddha says that stingy people can't get into good concentration, and they can't reach the higher attainments. This is probably because they don't appreciate the cooperative nature of the practice, and they also don't appreciate the principle that you trade up as you give away. You take material objects, your energy, your knowledge, your time, and then you turn them into good qualities of the mind. Only when you appreciate that principle will your practice progress.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** On giving, could you explain in more detail "an ornament for the mind," passage [§30]. By giving in this way, does one become a non-returner?

**A:** It's not that by giving with this motivation you become a non-returner. Basically, this passage describes the motivation of someone who already is a non-returner. Someone who's not coming back to the world can still give gifts to the

world without any anticipation of returning to enjoy the results of that gift. That kind of giving is the purest kind. In fact, this was the gift that the Buddha gave to the world when he taught after his awakening. He knew he was going to leave, but he decided to leave something good behind for the people who were going to come after. That was the ornament of his mind.

**Q:** You talked about the highest motivation of giving. I'm not sure precisely what you said, but I was left with the paraphrase that it's the natural expression of the mind? Sounds like Buddha nature. Thanks.

**A:** Generosity is a natural expression of the mind only after the mind has reached the level of non-returner. Prior to that time, there always will be some expectation of a return on a gift. The return will get more and more refined as your motivation goes up. But only after the stage of non-returning is the mind totally free of any sense of having anything back in return. So, it's not Buddha nature.

**Q:** Of the two highest motivations for generosity, calming the mind and generosity as an ornament of the mind, what is the difference?

**A:** The highest motivation, as I said just now, is the motivation of a person who already is awakened to at least the level of non-return. That person doesn't need to have his or her mind calm through generosity, because it's already calm. As long as you need to have your mind calmed, stick with the second highest motivation.

**Q:** The next question is: Is the highest motivation so strong that it can actually lead to non-return?

**A:** And the answer is No. It's the result of having reached the state of non-return.

**Q:** Is it wrong to be generous knowing that it's good kamma? I don't want to bargain with the Dhamma.

**A:** The highest motivation for generosity, in which you don't expect anything in return, applies only to a person who is at the third stage of awakening. Up until that point, we need something to motivate us in order to give: the thought that, "Yes, we will benefit from this." So, knowing that it's good kamma is actually good motivation to foster.

**Q:** You said that a stingy person cannot enter into concentration. What if that person does become generous? Would he or she be able to enter into concentration in this lifetime?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** We've talked about generosity. What about charity? Why don't Buddhists support charitable organizations for people in need, as other religions do?

**A:** Traditionally, every monastery functioned as a charitable organization. If a child was orphaned, it would be taken into the monastery and raised by the monks or nuns. If a man or a woman lost a spouse, he or she could ordain. Either that or they could live as lay attendants at the monastery. I know of some monasteries where they always keep a couple of huts empty in case a husband and wife in the village get into a big argument and need a place to go to get away from each other for a while. The point is that the monasteries have long been functioning as charitable organizations on a grass-roots level—local people helping local people. Also, the monasteries in Asian countries have functioned as one of the few ways in which people of a low social position could advance to a high social position. Many of the Supreme Patriarchs of Thailand, for instance, have been the sons of peasants.

**Q:** Is it skillful to give alms to anyone who asks for them?

**A:** Give to anyone you feel inspired to give to. If you don't feel inspired, it's perfectly okay not to give.

**Q:** So as not to excite pride and envy, should acts of generosity be done discreetly? There's the teaching of the Buddha that criticizes people who are not ashamed of things that are worthy of shame and are ashamed of things that are not worthy of shame.

**A:** You have to look at the situation. The Buddha said, of course, that generosity is nothing to be ashamed of, and sometimes it's good to be open with your acts of generosity so as to be a good example to other people. But if there are people who become jealous about your generosity, that might be a time to be more discreet.

DAY SEVEN  
MORNING

## *Selves & Not-self*

The other night, I mentioned how a healthy sense of self is essential for motivating yourself in the practice. We then got a lot of questions on the issue of not-self, so I'd like to talk about that topic this morning.

One of the biggest misunderstandings about Buddhism is the belief that the Buddha taught that there is no self. Actually, the existence or non-existence of the self was an issue he refused to get involved with. He had a policy that there were certain questions he would not answer, and one of the questions he wouldn't answer was, "Do I have a self? Do I have no self?" He said that if you held to the position either that you had a self or that you had no self, you would get involved in a tangle of views that would get in the way of awakening. So, he would put that question aside.

What he *did* talk about was the process he called "I-making" or "my-making" by which you create a sense of self. There are also times when we deny that something is us or ours. He saw both of these processes—self-making and not-self-making—as actions. And the question about actions always is, are they skillful or not? In other words, when is creating a sense of self a skillful action, and when is it more skillful to say that something is not your self? What ways of creating a self are skillful, and what ways are not? What ways of saying "not-self" are skillful and what ways are not?

In both cases, the concepts of self and not-self are perceptions, and we use both of these perceptions as strategies to find happiness.

For example, with the perception of self, when you have a desire and you want to bring the desire about, you create two senses of self. The first is the self as the *consumer*, the you that will enjoy the results of getting that desire fulfilled. Then there's the self as the *producer*, the self that will actually be able to bring that thing about. For example, if you have a desire for a vegan pizza, the self as the consumer is your sense of your self as the person who will enjoy eating vegan pizza. The sense of self as the producer is the self who has the skills and means to bring this about, either



the self who has the money to buy the pizza or the self who has the ability to get the ingredients to make the pizza.

Now, this applies to all kinds of desires, both skillful and unskillful. Even to practice the path, you also need both senses of self. For example, Ven. Ānanda, who was one of the Buddha's foremost disciples, said that you need to have a healthy sense of self as a producer. He expressed it in this way: You think of the fact that there are other people who have gained awakening. "They are human beings, I'm a human being. They can do it, why can't I?" That's a healthy sense of self as a producer on the path, the self that feels capable of following the path.

As for the self as a consumer, the Buddha recommends that when you're getting discouraged in the practice, you should remind yourself that you got on the path because you wanted to find a way to the end of suffering. You loved yourself. If you give up on the practice, does that mean you don't love yourself anymore? This is a healthy sense of self as a consumer on the path.

As we go through life, we create many different selves around our different desires because we see that they're helpful in bringing about whatever it is we want. It's in this way that they're strategies, strategies for happiness.

The same principle applies to not-self. You see that there are certain things that are not worth desiring or certain ideas or certain habits that are getting in the way of your desires, and you decide that you're not going to identify with them anymore.

Now, as we go through life ordinarily, we tend to adopt these different strategies of self and not-self without thinking too much about them. For example, think back to when you were a child. If some children down the street were beating up on your little sister, you'd think, "This is my sister. I have to go defend her." But when you got her safely back home and she started playing with your toys, she wasn't your sister anymore. She was the Other.

We apply these different perceptions pretty unconsciously as we go through life, but when we come to the practice, the Buddha asks us to be more systematic in applying them for the sake of putting an end to suffering. For example, when you're practicing the precepts, there may be some things that would pull you away from practicing the precepts. Suppose that someone were to offer you some money to lie: You'd have to remind yourself, "That money is not really mine. The things that I could buy with that money would leave me after a while." So, you apply the perception of self to your precepts, and a perception of not-self to the money and the things you would buy with the money you'd gain from lying. That helps you to stick with your precepts.

Similarly, when you're practicing concentration, the object of the concentration is yours, and the person meditating is you. As for any distracting thoughts that would come up, that's when you think about how the perceptions and thought fabrications in that distracting thought are not-self. It's in this way that you learn how to apply these perceptions of self and not-self more systematically, so that both the strategy of self and the strategy of not-self actually are conducive to a genuine happiness.

It's only when you've fully developed all the factors of the path that you let go of everything, because you've found a happiness that doesn't require any strategies anymore, and the only way to fully experience that happiness is to let go of everything. You don't identify with perceptions of self, and at that point, even the perception of not-self is something you don't identify with, either. You have to let that go as well. That's the way you can find the ultimate happiness.

So, to understand the teaching on not-self, we have to view it within the context of the teaching on kamma. This is the opposite of what many people usually do. They make the teaching on not-self the context, interpreting it as saying there is no self, and then they say, "Well, how does the teaching on kamma fit into that?" And it doesn't fit very well, because it seems like the Buddha is saying there is no agent deciding how to act, and there's no one being affected by the action, so why should kamma matter?

The Buddha, however, took the issue the other way around. He started with the principle that there are skillful and unskillful actions, and some skillful actions can be so skillful that they can take you all the way to nibbāna. The question of self as an activity and not-self as an activity fits into that context very well. You use perceptions of self and perceptions of not-self when they're helpful for the path. In that way, they enable you to follow this path, which the Buddha called the kamma that leads to the end of kamma. Then, when you reach the end of kamma, you also reach the end of the perceptions of self and not-self. All that's left is the ultimate happiness. And as Ajaan Suwat used to say, once you've found that ultimate happiness, you're not interested in asking whether there is or is not a self experiencing it. The experience is there, with no need for strategies to attain or maintain it, and it's totally satisfying.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Could you explain the differences between: 1) identity-view, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, 2) self, *attā*, and 3) conceit, *māna*? A person who has right view has abandoned personality view, self, and conceit.

**A:** This issue could be an entire talk, but to be brief: *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, or identity-view, is basically when you tell yourself, “I am this.” And “this” may be the body, feelings, perceptions, mental fabrications, or consciousness—or what it is that has these things, something that lies inside these things, or something that contains these things within itself. Any of these views would count as identity-view. The crucial element is that there is the thought in the mind, “I am the same thing as this.” The same goes for self. However, *māna*, which is translated in English as “conceit,” is the thought, “I am,” or “I exist,” with no “this.”

The texts say that, as you attain the different levels of awakening, at the very first level you abandon identity-view, in other words, any thoughts of: “I am this.” However, conceit or *māna* is abandoned only on the last level of awakening, and that’s because in the meantime you still have to train yourself in concentration and discernment. The work of developing those trainings will require a sense of “I”—just a sense that there’s an “I.” After all, to develop concentration and to develop discernment, you need to have a sense of “I am responsible for doing this. I am doing this.” There’s a sutta, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22:89, where a non-returner explains that he still has a sense of “I am,” but it’s not identified with any of the aggregates. He compares it to the scent of soap lingering in a piece of cloth after the soap has been used to wash the cloth.

So, when you develop right view at the first level of awakening, you abandon identity-view—the “I am this”—but there will still be a sense of “I am.” Only after full awakening will there be no need for any sense of “I.” But even after awakening, arahants still know who they are as opposed to who somebody else is. For example, when they’re eating, they know which mouth to put their food in. But their attitude toward that sense of “I” is very different from ours.

**Q:** It’s said that we should not identify with events or phenomena, so when I spread thoughts of goodwill, to individuals or to myself, or to an event in the past, etc., if I say, “May my loving-kindness be beneficial to all beings,” wouldn’t it be better to just say, “May loving-kindness be beneficial to all beings”? When I speak of this energy of loving-kindness, I’m talking about the internal energy that can be called goodwill.

**A:** This is one area where you actually have to take responsibility for your goodwill. Anything connected with kamma is an area where you have to remember that you need to be responsible. So, here you do want to identify with the wish, because you have to remember to keep giving rise to this wish. It's not a universal force or innate nature that will come through you on its own. Ajaan Suwat used to comment several times that there were many, many things that the Buddha said are not-self, but still the area of kamma is one area where he said, "This is yours, and you will be the inheritor of the actions." So basically, the actions are yours. This is one of the areas where you have to take responsibility and develop a healthy sense of self. On this topic, you might want to read the book, *Selves & Not-self*. It discusses the role of a skillful sense of self in furthering your practice.

EVENING

## *Renunciation*

Renunciation is the second of the perfections coming under the heading of relinquishment. As with all of the other perfections, it's based on desire. The desire here is to get beyond the back-and-forth between pain and sensual pleasure, pain and sensual pleasure, where sensual pleasure is your only alternative to pain. As you know, for most people, the main pleasures in life are the sensual pleasures: pleasures of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations. But these are also very closely aligned to pain. Ajaan Chah has a nice image. He says that pain and sensual pleasure are like a snake. One end of the snake has teeth: That represents pain. The other end does not have teeth: That represents sensual pleasure. We think it's okay to catch hold of the end that doesn't have teeth because it's not going to bite us, right? But we don't notice that the end with teeth is connected to the end that we're catching, which is why we keep getting bitten.

The Canon provides a similar image in one of its descriptions of hell. As in any description of hell, there's lots of suffering, but this particular hell is the one that has always impressed me the most. It's an immense iron box—iron walls, an iron ceiling, and an iron floor. All the iron is glowing hot, so hot that the flames from one side reach all the way to the other side. And all the beings in that hell are there in the box. Every now and then, a door opens in one of the walls, so the beings of hell run through the fire to get to the door. As soon as they get to the door, it slams shut. And then another door opens on another side, and so they go running to that door, and as soon as they get there, it slams shut. This goes on for quite a while. Finally,

another door opens, they go running to it, and as soon as they go through, they fall into the hell of excrement. One of the most sadistic hells I know of.

But it's also a good image for human life. We suffer from pain, and we see no other alternative to pain aside from sensual pleasure. When we see the possibility of a sensual pleasure that would give us some respite from pain, we go running for it. If we can't get it, we see another sensual pleasure we'd like, and we go running for that, but we can't get that one, either. Finally, there's a pleasure we go running for, we attain it, and then it becomes a big disappointment. Either that or, in our desperation to get out of pain at any cost, we run for a sensual pleasure that requires us to behave in unskillful ways that will lead to pain in the future.

That's the kind of back-and-forth between sensual pleasure and pain that we would like to escape. The Buddha says that there is an alternative pleasure that can get us out of this back-and-forth, and that's the pleasure of concentration. As he said, this pleasure is blameless in the sense that it doesn't harm anyone and doesn't intoxicate the mind. Sensual pleasures are a form of intoxication, but this type of pleasure is not.

One of the first requisites for getting the mind into concentration is that you contemplate the drawbacks of sensuality. In the Buddha's terminology, sensuality is not the same thing as sensual pleasures themselves. It's our fascination with fantasizing about sensual pleasures and planning them. So, as a preliminary to getting into concentration, think about the drawbacks of this fascination. To begin with, it makes you dependent on things being a certain way. When they're not that way, you suffer. This puts you in a position of dependence and weakness.

The Buddha provides many images to depict the drawbacks of sensuality. One is a dog chewing on a bone. There's no nourishment in the bone, and the only flavor the dog gets from it is the taste of its own saliva. In other words, as we're thinking about sensual pleasures, the pleasure we get is solely from the way we elaborate on our vision of that pleasure, but there's no real nourishment there.

Another image the Buddha gives is of a hawk flying off with a piece of meat in its talons, while other crows and hawks are coming after it to get the piece of meat. In other words, sensuality makes your happiness depend on things that other people are going to want to take from you, and they may injure you in the process.

Another image the Buddha gives is of a man who's borrowed some jewelry and other ornaments from some friends and goes around showing them off. The original owners see what he's doing and they take their things back. In other words, sensual

pleasures often depend on something that other people can give you, but then they can take it back at any time.

These are some of the ways in which the Buddha illustrates the drawbacks of sensuality.

Now, the Buddha doesn't say that all sensual pleasures are bad. Basically, he says you have to look at (1) what the pleasure requires you to do to attain it and (2) the effect that a particular pleasure has on the mind. If it requires you to break a precept to obtain it, or if indulging in it increases your passion, aversion, and delusion, then it's a pleasure to be avoided. But if it doesn't require that you break the precepts and it doesn't give rise to unskillful states in the mind, then it's okay.

In terms of the impact that the pleasure has on the mind, there are certain sensual pleasures that the Buddha said are okay across the board. These include the pleasures of going out in nature, the pleasures of having a basic level of health, the pleasures of living in a group that's harmonious. But in other cases, it's really going to be up to you as an individual which sensual pleasures give rise to unskillful states and which ones don't.

However, he also says that even if you see the drawbacks of sensuality but you don't have the pleasure that comes from concentration, then you're going to go back to the old sensual pleasures anyhow—or to ones that are even worse. You'll stay stuck in the back-and-forth, running away from pain toward sensual pleasures that then turn into further pain, perpetuating the cycle.

So, an important aspect of renunciation is not simply that you give up sensuality, but that you provide the mind with an alternative pleasure. That pleasure, as I said, is the pleasure of concentration.

Here I'd like to make a few remarks about concentration practice. We've had a number of people saying they want to get into this or that *jhāna*, and it's important to remember that when you're meditating, *jhāna* is not the topic of meditation. The topic is the breath. In other words, while you're meditating, you shouldn't be thinking of *jhāna*. You should be thinking about and focusing your attention totally on the breath.

The Buddha identifies the themes of concentration as the four establishings of mindfulness, which are the processes of getting the mind to stay solidly, say, with the body or with feelings or mind states or dhammas—in and of themselves. For example, if you're focusing on the breath, you're with the sensation of the breath as it is right here, right now. That's an instance of body in and of itself.

The Buddha describes four levels of jhāna, but it's good not to worry about them while you're practicing. It's better to reflect on them after you've come out of meditation. Then, of course, the problem comes, "How do I know what level of jhāna I was on?"

There are some descriptions in the Canon that can give you an idea. For example, in the first jhāna, you drop any interest in sensuality and focus your full attention on the breath. You think about the breath and you evaluate how well the mind is staying with the breath and how comfortable the breath is. There's a sense of well-being and even a sense of rapture that comes from the fact that you're free from being burdened by sensual thoughts. You let that sense of well-being and rapture spread throughout the body.

Now, as the breath becomes more and more comfortable, and the sense of well-being has spread through the body, you don't have to keep thinking and evaluating it anymore. You can simply zero in on the sensation of the breath, to the point where your awareness and the breath seem to be one, and the breath surrounds you on all sides. That would be the second jhāna. There's still a sense of pleasure and rapture, more intense than before, and you let that spread through the body on its own.

But after a while, the sense of rapture begins to seem unpleasant. You want something that's more still and more refined. You notice that there's a more subtle level of energy in the body. It's like turning your radio on. You hit a station of hard rock and you say, "Oh, that's a little bit too much for me now. I want something more calming." So, to get a calmer station, you don't have to move the radio, you just change the setting. In the same way, you tune in to a more refined level of energy right at the spot where you've been focused. In that way, you get into the third jhāna, in which the body has a sense of pleasure, and the mind a sense of equanimity.

As you stay on that level, the breath becomes more and more refined until the in-and-out breath seems to stop moving. There's a sense that the breath energy in the body is the source of the breath, and there's no need to get any breath energy from the outside. The breath energies in the body are now so well-connected that they nourish one another. And there's a very strong sense of being fully aware throughout the body, along with a sense of stillness throughout the body. That's the fourth jhāna.

The Buddha gives some analogies for each of these jhānas. For the first jhāna, the image is of a bathman. In those days, they didn't have bars of soap. They had a soap powder that they would mix with a little bit of water and make into a kind of dough, like the dough for bread. In the image for the first jhāna, the bathman is working the water into the dough, making sure that all of the dough is moistened with the water.

This, of course, is symbolic for the work of your directed thought and evaluation as they work the pleasure through the body to fill the entire body.

The image for the second jhāna is a lake with a spring near the bottom of the lake. The spring has very cool water, and the cool water is coming up through the lake, cooling the entire lake. This is a symbol for the sense of pleasure and rapture filling the body without your having to do anything.

The image for the third jhāna is a still pool of open water with lotuses growing in the water that haven't come up above the water, so they're totally saturated with the still, cool water from their roots to their tips. This is a symbol for the still sense of pleasure, minus the rapture, filling the body.

The image for the fourth jhāna is of a man sitting covered with a white cloth, and there's no part of the body that's not covered by the white cloth. The cloth here stands for awareness filling the body.

In all these images, water stands for pleasure, and movement stands for rapture. The image for the first jhāna is the only one with a conscious agent doing any activity: That stands for directed thought and evaluation. In that image, the movement consists of the bathman's actions for working the water through the soap dough. In the second image, the water flows of its own accord through the lake, whereas in the third image the water is still. In the fourth image, there's no water and no movement.

These are the images the Buddha uses to illustrate what it feels like to be in these different levels of jhāna.

Now, you still have the question: Which of these levels am I in? My teacher, Ajaan Fuang, when he taught meditation, would give every new student Ajaan Lee's book on the steps of breath meditation. At the end of the book, there are instructions about how to use breath meditation to get into the four jhānas. But Ajaan Fuang never told his students which jhāna they were in. He'd simply ask them, "What does your breath feel like?" In other words, he wanted them to focus on the actual sensation of the concentration and not to worry about how to label it as this or that jhāna. As you were focusing on that direct sensation, he would say, "If you notice any stress here or any stress there, what are you doing that's causing the stress?" And then, "Can you stop doing that?" As you'd go deeper into concentration, you'd get more sensitive to the levels of stress you hadn't noticed before. Finally, you reached the point where the breath stopped.

I noticed, as I was listening to him teach other people, that the descriptions of how people felt their breath would be very different at the beginning, but as the



practice got to the point where it settled down and the breath stopped, from that point on, everybody's practice was the same. The conclusion I came to is that as you're getting the mind into concentration, when you experience a level of stillness that might be the first jhāna, you put a Post-it note on it. Then if you come to a level of stillness that goes deeper and might be the second jhāna, put another Post-it note there. You keep this up until you finally get to the point where the breath stops and you can stay comfortably with the sensation that the breath has stopped. Then you know, "This is the fourth jhāna." Then, if need be, you go back and rearrange your other Post-it notes.

I had an experience once when I was camping in Utah. We were going to a place called Powell Point. The guidebook had said that from Powell Point you could see different mountain ranges across southern Utah. You're up at 10,000 feet, and you have an immense view across the southern part of the state. We turned off the wrong road, though, and it took us to a point, and we figured, "This must be Powell Point," so we got out and we looked around. We saw mountain ranges here and there, so we tried to identify which range corresponded to the ranges described in the guidebook: "This must be that mountain and that must be this mountain." We had names for all the mountains. But the problem was that there was one large cliff off to the east that wasn't in the book. After a while, we realized that that was Powell Point. So, the next day, we went up to Powell Point, and there we realized that the other mountains we had seen the previous day were not really the mountains we thought they were.

Do I need to explain that image?

The important thing about jhāna is that you learn how to deal with the pleasures and pains that come up. At first, you're going to be dealing with pain as you try to get the mind into concentration, and you have to be unafraid of the pain. You find that with enough directed thought and proper evaluation, you can actually work around the pain, work through the pain, dissolve the pain, and you become less and less afraid of pain.

At the same time though, you have to become more and more skillful with pleasure. As we've noted many times in the guided meditation, when the breath becomes pleasant, there is a danger of leaving the breath and going for the pleasure, so you have to learn how not to give in to the temptation to simply wallow in the pleasure.

As a result, when you're working with jhāna, you learn how to deal more effectively with both pleasure and pain, and not be overcome by them. And as the

Buddha says, an important point of having the mind well-trained and well-developed is that you train it not to be overcome either by pain or by pleasure.

At the same time, when you learn how to get more separated from the pleasure and pain, and not be so affected by them, this is how practice in concentration puts you on the middle way. As you may remember, the middle way avoids the pain of self-torture and also the extreme of sensual pleasure. Now, the fact that it's in the middle doesn't mean that it's a neutral feeling halfway between pleasure and pain. It's not the middle of the snake. It's something outside of this continuum of running back and forth between pain and sensual pleasure. The pleasure of jhāna puts you in a position where you can look at pleasure and pain, and actually use them, instead of running toward the pleasure and running away from the pain. From that position, you can learn how to analyze the pain and learn about the mind in the process. That's the first noble truth. Jhāna also teaches you how to be with pleasure and not be attached to it. It also helps you gain some detachment from sensual pleasures, so that you can look at them objectively and be willing to admit their drawbacks. This is how you get on the right track for developing the discernment that leads to awakening.

Listening to this, you should realize that renunciation is not simply deprivation. It's actually a trade—a trade up. You're trading your everyday pleasures for skills in the mind that enable you to deal skillfully with both pleasure and pain, and not be overcome by them. That's what allows you to free yourself from them.

This is one of the reasons why the Buddha said that concentration is the heart of the path—and why renunciation is one of the most important of the perfections.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Is there a difference between jhāna and samādhi, and if so, what is it?

**A:** Samādhi means any way of concentrating the mind on one object. Jhāna is a type of samādhi where you're focused on one object but you also have a full-body awareness at the same time. Jhāna is required for the path because it's only from the basis of that state of mind that you can actually see clearly what's going on in the entire mind.

**Q:** Would it be correct to define right concentration basically as the activity of skillfully holding skillful perceptions in the mind?

**A:** Most of the states of right concentration do require perceptions. When you hold on to, say, the perception of the breath, that helps you stay concentrated on the breath. What makes it concentration is that you hold on to one perception continually.

**Q:** I don't really know the characteristics of the different jhānas. At what point should I look into this?

**A:** When you begin noticing that the mind settles down on different levels or with different characteristics, that's when you get out your Post-it notes to place on the different types of concentration you notice. If and when you finally do get to the point where the breath stops and it stays comfortably still, that's when you put on the note that says "fourth jhāna." Then you look at however many jhānas you've labeled before that and you can move the Post-it notes around a little bit. In most of the descriptions of jhāna in the Canon, the Buddha describes four levels of jhāna of form, but there are some where he describes five, and some where he describes three. You'll figure out how many you have only after you've gotten to the point where the breath stops.

**Q:** While meditating, I use verbal fabrication to keep my concentration, almost like a guided meditation, although I'm guiding myself. Is it okay to do it this way?

**A:** Yes. The first jhāna includes verbal fabrication of this sort, to help get the mind and its object to fit snugly together. Once they're snug, then you can drop the verbal fabrication, to see if you can simply stay with the perception of breath.

**Q:** Any advice on how to develop even more concentration and maybe not always have to verbally fabricate?

**A:** You do the verbal fabrication as long as you feel a need to adjust things in the mind and in the body. When things seem relatively good, then you can try staying focused on the sensation of the breath, telling yourself, "I don't need to make any adjustments." Now, if it turns out that you can't stay continuously with that state, go back to adjusting the breath and adjusting the mind until things seem better, and then try settling in there again. Finally, you will get to a point where you can stay with just that one sensation without the need to talk a lot about it. But you'll still need to hold a perception—in other words, the simple label of "breath" or "aware"—in the mind.

**Q:** In working on the perfection of renunciation or relinquishment, it appears to be necessary to meditate on the four noble truths. In our meditation, at what moment do we start doing that? Also, how is it done?

**A:** Actually, when you're working with the breath in the way I've described, you're already beginning to deal with the framework of the four noble truths. You notice where there is tension and you ask yourself, "What's causing the tension?" Once you identify that, you try to let go of the cause. You notice that the tension goes when the cause has been abandoned. And identifying both the tension and the cause requires that you develop your mindfulness and concentration. So, you're already dealing in terms of the four noble truths and the duties appropriate to each, simply that as your concentration deepens, your understanding of those four noble truths will deepen as well.

Some people have been describing visions they've been having during their meditation. Always remember that the basic rule of thumb is always to ask yourself with regard to any vision: What is the Dhamma lesson of this vision? There was one person who recorded a vision of being surrounded by clear water and had a fear of becoming dirty again. In a case like that, when you come out of the vision, you ask yourself, "What does it mean to be dirty?" Maybe it means breaking the precepts. So, the lesson you learn from that is to be careful about your precepts. Then let the vision go.

DAY EIGHT  
MORNING

## *Maintaining Concentration*

The question sometimes arises: After you've done the body scan, you finally settle down at one spot and you spread your awareness to fill the entire body, and then, what's next? "What's next" is just maintaining what you've got. Try to make sure that no other thought comes in to disturb the stillness of your awareness. Now, if your focus begins to get a little bit vague, a little bit blurry, go back to the body scan. Or you can focus special attention on any one spot where you find that there's an energy problem. As that strengthens your concentration, then you can go back to the whole body.

Watch out for the thought that says, "This is boring." Just tell yourself that that thought is a disturbance. You don't have to believe it. Or, if a thought comes in and says, "This is stupid; the mind isn't thinking any intelligent thoughts at all," tell yourself that you don't have to be intelligent all the time. You're learning how to step back from your thoughts. This is an important skill, an exercise in a different kind of intelligence, so you protect what you've got.

Now, you begin to notice that even before a thought forms, there will be a little knot of tension appearing someplace in your awareness. The mind will have a tendency to focus there to decide whether it's a physical tension or a mental tension. If it decides it's a mental tension, then it will take that mental tension and turn it into a thought. It'll slap a perception on it, saying, "This is a thought about  $x$ , and so, let's go with it." That's how thoughts and disturbances take over the mind.

So, try to catch the thought at the moment when it's just a little knot of tension. Zap it with a good breath and it'll dissolve away. Then watch out for the next little knot of tension. It's like being a spider on a web. The spider is at one spot on the web. All of a sudden, a fly comes and hits another spot. The spider will immediately go and take care of the fly and then return to its original spot. So, try to make this your sport: shooting down these thoughts before they turn into something big.

In this way, as you watch over your concentration, it will become deeper and deeper. Then part of the mind says, "I've rested enough." Again, remind yourself

you're not here just to rest. You're here to learn about the mind. And one of the best ways to learn about the mind is to see the different stages by which thoughts form. In this way, you take charge of your thoughts, instead of letting your thoughts be in charge of you, and the process of protecting your concentration becomes the process by which you gain insights into the mind's fabrications.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** The quality and depth of my concentration has been decreasing since I started applying directed thought and evaluation to my mind ☒. Instead of applying directed thought and evaluation, should I just let the meditation flow more freely?

**A:** When you apply directed thought and evaluation, it should primarily be directed toward the breath with very simple questions: "Is the breath comfortable? Could it be more comfortable? If it is comfortable, how can I maintain that? And then, when I'm maintaining the comfort, can I let it spread?" Try not to evaluate anything much more than that. However, if even that much is disturbing, just pose the question in the mind each time you breathe in: "What kind of breathing would feel good now?" See how the body responds.

**Q:** If we're able to concentrate on the more subtle breath energy in the body, should we focus on that and let the in-and-out breath go into the background?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Second question: If the breath stops while in concentration, we wouldn't die, right?

**A:** Most of the time, you won't die. But if it does happen that you die, it's good to be in concentration. Now, it is possible for the body to survive without breathing as long as the mind is really, really quiet. How that happens, I can't explain in terms of modern physiology, but it does happen.

**Q:** Regarding the steps of breath meditation listed in the Canon, my first question is: What does it mean to discern, "I am breathing in long" or "I'm breathing in short"? What does that mean and how does that apply to the practice?

**A:** It simply means being sensitive to the quality of the breath. And you don't stop with just noticing whether it's long or short. You can also notice the effect that long and short breathing have on the body, because in further steps you'll be trying to breathe in and out calming bodily fabrication, and then breathing in and out

sensitive to pleasure and rapture. So, it's good to notice what kind of breathing is calming, what kind is conducive to pleasure and rapture.

**Q:** Second question: Do the sixteen steps have to be mastered in order?

**A:** The sixteen steps come in sets of four, called tetrads in English. The first tetrad has to do with the body; the second one with feelings; the third with the mind. When you're getting the mind to settle down with the breath, you're dealing with all these three things at once: body, feelings, and mind. Whichever aspect is the problem, that's the tetrad you'll focus on. For instance, if the breath is uncomfortable, you focus your primary attention on the body and the breath. If the mind is disobedient, you focus primary attention on the step of steadying it. Now, within each tetrad, there's a pattern. You become sensitive to how you're fabricating that particular aspect of your experience, you fabricate it in a way that gives rise to a sense of energy, well-being, or rapture, and then you fabricate it in such a way as to calm things down. So, within each tetrad, the steps are mastered in order, but there's no particular order from tetrad to tetrad.

**Q:** And then the last question is: How are your instructions on meditation specifically related to these sixteen steps?

**A:** The instructions I'm giving are primarily related to the first four steps in the first tetrad, which is to be sensitive to the breathing, to be aware of the whole body as you breathe in and out, and then to calm the breath as you're breathing in, breathing out. However, we're also dealing with the second and third tetrads indirectly. In the second tetrad, we're following the steps of being sensitive to pleasure, rapture, and the effect that pleasure, rapture, and your perceptions have on the mind, and then calming that effect down. Within the third tetrad, we're focusing on the steps of being sensitive to the mind, trying to breathe in a way that gives energy to the mind if the mind is lacking energy, to steady the mind if it has too much energy. So, the meditation we're doing deals with many of the steps listed in the Canon.

**Q:** Do you consider that the experience of steps 5 and 6 in the sutta on breath meditation correspond to the first and second jhānas? Do you see other connections between these steps of breath meditation and jhānas?

**A:** As I just said, there are four tetrads in the 16 steps of breath meditation. The first tetrad corresponds to the body, the second to feelings, the third to the mind, and the fourth to dhammas or mental qualities. It's not the case that you work on

the body and then you work on feelings and then you work on the mind. Right from the beginning, you're going to be working on the first three together: body, feelings, and mind.

In the first tetrad, the one dealing with the body, step number 4 is calming bodily fabrication. Bodily fabrication is the in-and-out breath. That step corresponds to all four jhānas as the breath gets more and more calm to the point where it finally stops.

As for the steps dealing with the third tetrad, dealing with the mind, these, too, would also be equivalent to the jhānas, but the numbers of the steps don't correspond to the different stages of jhāna.

In the second tetrad, on feelings, you go into the first and second jhānas in the first two steps (5 and 6), dealing with rapture and pleasure. Then you get to 7 and 8, where you become sensitive to mental fabrications—feelings and perceptions—and then calm them down. The calmest feeling is equanimity, which is present in the third and fourth jhāna. The calmest perceptions are those that aid in that process, taking you to the fourth jhāna and potentially beyond it, into the formless states, as you focus on perceptions of infinite space, infinite consciousness, and nothingness.

**Q:** When I begin to find myself getting established in the second jhāna, my breath completely goes out of whack. The need for oxygen seems to be much less, things are suddenly quiet, and yet both the mind and the body still need to breathe at a normal rate. I find myself almost suffocating without knowing what to do. Can you give me some advice?

**A:** The first piece of advice is not to try to enter the second jhāna. Don't force yourself to stop breathing. And you don't have to move from the concentration where you already are in order for your concentration to develop. Allow it to develop at its own rhythm and pace. When it does deepen, it'll deepen with a sense of doing it naturally without any pressure. It's like a piece of fruit on a tree. To ripen, it doesn't have to go anywhere, and you don't have to squeeze it to make it soft. It just stays right there and, as it's nourished, it ripens on its own.

**Q:** Bhante, I have developed an attachment to very refined mental states. I am mostly now stuck in the third jhāna. How do I reenter these states with the proper skillful attitude?

**A:** The third jhāna is a pretty good place to be stuck, because there are many worse places you can be stuck. The only times when these states become a problem is when you refuse to leave concentration in order to take care of your daily duties.



Otherwise, if the mind wants to stay there and rest, let it rest for a while. Then, the next question to ask yourself is, “Is there still some disturbance in this state?” There may be a very subtle level of stress that goes up and down. When you notice the ups and downs, ask yourself, “What am I doing when the stress goes up? What am I doing when the stress goes down?” In that way, you actually use the state of concentration to gain insight into the mind.

**Q:** Could you give us a guided meditation on the dissolution of the body and pure awareness, which would be the fourth and the fifth jhānas? Or could you give some indications?

**A:** I would love to get all of you into those jhānas, but it’s impossible to give a guided meditation to get you there. Still, I can give you some indications. As you get settled in with the breath and gain a sense that your awareness and the breath are one, and that all of the breath channels in the body are connected, just stay with that sensation of everything being connected. After a while, you find that your need to breathe gets weaker and weaker, and then you get to the point where you don’t feel like you’re breathing at all. Your first reaction will usually be fear that you’re going to die. But you can remind yourself: “As long as I’m aware in the body, I’m not going to die.” If the body needs to breathe, it will. If you can simply stay balanced at that sensation of total stillness in the body, after a while you’ll feel that you’re solidly there. You’re comfortable there.

Then you begin to notice that the sense of the outline or the surface of the body begins to disappear, and the body feels like a cloud of sensation dots. You can stay with that sensation of a cloud for a while. Then you begin to notice that if you focus on the space between the sensations, that sense of space permeates your entire body and spreads out from the body in all directions, without your sensing any boundary or limit. That’s the infinitude of space, and you should stay with that perception of space until the perception is steady and solid. Then you can ask yourself, “What is aware of the space?” and there will be a perception of pure awareness, and you can just stay with that perception. That, too, has no boundaries. Once you can do that, then let me know, and I’ll tell you what to do next.

**Q:** Is meditation only for the purpose of attaining the jhānas? Is that beneficial as a practice? Or should the daily practice also include right view, right resolve, right action, right speech, right livelihood in order to give benefits?

**A:** The practice of concentration on its own can give benefits, but if you’re doing it with wrong view, it can also lead to harm. The other factors of the path are needed

to protect your concentration and turn it into right concentration. For example, if you practice concentration with wrong view, there are some states that you get into when you feel that you've touched the ground of being, especially if you develop a sense of consciousness in and of itself, and you notice that no matter what you do, that consciousness remains unaffected. That might give rise to the idea that you can do anything and that that consciousness won't be harmed. This is how some meditators think that they're beyond good and evil, and they start doing some very unskillful things. So, it's safest if you practice all factors of the path.

**Q:** When I was first learning meditation, I was told it was not a matter of emptying the mind and then not having any thoughts, but of observing the thoughts as they come and then regarding them as on a movie screen, simply not following them as they go. This is in contradiction with what you've been teaching us, teaching us how not to think. Are these two different types of meditation? Can you say more about this? And is the first technique bad?

**A:** It's more a question of knowing the right time and place for how to relate to the thoughts of your mind. There are times when you do have to watch your thoughts, but there are also times when it's really good to be able to rest and have as little thinking as possible. In the very beginning, you have to think about the breath in order to get the breath and the mind to fit snugly together. This is why directed thought and evaluation are part of the first *jhāna*. Then, when they've done their work, you can put them aside.

As the mind gets quieter, then when you come out of concentration you can see the processes of thinking a lot more clearly. At the same time, as I was saying earlier, if you can get the mind really quiet, then as soon as you sense a little stirring in the body or mind that would be the beginning of a thought, you learn how to zap it. This is what gives you more understanding into the processes of how the mind will create a thought and how it will latch on to a thought—and how you can stop those processes. You can't gain these insights if you simply watch the thoughts come and go.

However, there are times when you cannot figure out how to put a stop to your thinking. Those are good times to simply watch the thoughts come and go—as long as you stay separate from them—in hopes that you might catch sight of something that you would have missed otherwise.

**Q:** The very beginner thinks that meditation is simple: It's only to sit and to breathe. After a while, we think it's complex and we search for a lot of support

points, like temporary supports of a building. I expect that for the experienced meditator, the meditation—like a finished building where the temporary supports have been removed—becomes simple again. After all: It's just to sit and to breathe. Am I correct?

**A:** The practice of concentration does get simpler as you get better at it. And the development of discernment tries to boil things down to one major question: What is the ignorance that causes us to create unnecessary suffering for ourselves? The work of discernment, however, grows more and more subtle as it gets closer and closer to the real cause. So, it's not necessarily simpler as you go along. The concentration gets simpler, but the work of discernment gets more demanding as it become more subtle.

**Q:** Is success in meditation analogous to recovering a lost friendship?

**A:** In many ways, yes, especially in the practice of concentration. However, as you develop insight, you may find the mind going to places it's never been before.

EVENING

## *Endurance*

Tonight, we begin the discussion of the perfections coming under the heading of calm. Tonight, we'll discuss endurance, and tomorrow night, equanimity.

As I noted the other day, many of the forest ajaans noticed that when Westerners came to study with them, these were the two qualities they lacked most. So, I'll have to go into them in detail. We'll notice, as we're discussing them, that these two perfections are very closely related to the practice of concentration and the practice of discernment. You're going to need both endurance and equanimity in order to develop concentration, and these two qualities will also have to depend on your powers of concentration in order to maintain them. We'll also discover that, in developing them, we have to use our background in discernment, particularly our knowledge of the three fabrications.

The Pāli word for endurance, the perfection we'll discuss tonight, is *khanti*. This word can also be translated as "patience" or "tolerance." As with all the other perfections, it's rooted in desire: basically, our desire to stick with our skillful desires in spite of the pain and other hardships that following through with our skillful desires may entail. This, in turn, is based on a desire for independence: You don't

want your goodness to have to depend on the goodness of others or on the goodness of the situation in which you find yourself.

Think of the story of Lady Vedehikā in the readings. She was the one who had a reputation for being kind and gentle, so her female slave, Kālī, decided, “Well, does she have this reputation because she really is kind and gentle, or is it simply because I’m always good in my work?” So, Kālī tested her. One day, she woke up a little bit later than normal, and her mistress got a little upset. The slave said to herself, “Ah, there is anger present in her. Let’s test her some more.” The next day, Kālī woke up even later, and the mistress got even angrier. Kālī said to herself, “Ah, she really is angry. Let’s test her again.” On the third day, she got up even later. The mistress got so upset that she hit Kālī over the head with a rolling pin. So, Kālī, her head bleeding, went to denounce her mistress to the neighbors. From that point on, Lady Vedehikā had a reputation for being harsh and violent.

The point of this story is to remind you that you don’t want your goodness to have to depend on the goodness of others. If it’s dependent on them, you can’t rely on it yourself.

Endurance is a quality that, when you develop it, is a way of helping others and helping yourself at the same time. If you respond to hardships with anger, it creates trouble for yourself and creates trouble for the people around you. However, if you can restrain your anger, then you benefit, and the people around you benefit as well. This is why, in the Canon, endurance is directly linked to the perfection of goodwill.

Now, as I said, we have to apply discernment to our practice of tolerance or endurance. One way to do this is to remember the framework of the three kinds of fabrication, and to use that framework to fabricate mind states that strengthen endurance and make it easier.

When I returned to America after many years in Thailand, some people asked me, “What was the hardest thing you had to put up with while practicing in Thailand?” I couldn’t think of anything in particular. This made me realize that that was probably why I was able to endure a lot of hardships over there: I wasn’t focusing on the hardships; I was focusing on the things that were interesting and good. That can strengthen endurance: You don’t focus on what’s hard. Instead, you focus on what’s supporting and energizing you.

For example, with the three kinds of fabrication, no matter how difficult things are outside, you can always breathe comfortably. There are no breath police, and they haven’t privatized your breath yet, so it’s still yours to do with as you like.

Secondly, with verbal fabrication, a lot of endurance has to do with how you talk to yourself about the situation. For instance, there's often a belief that if someone mistreats you and you don't respond with anger, they will see you as weak. So, to counteract that belief, you have to hold in mind the perception that endurance is a strength. Also, by not showing your feelings, you're putting yourself in a safer position. You keep in mind the fact that if other people know what makes you angry, they can control you.

I was once giving a talk to a group of people in the California desert, and the morning after the talk one of the students said, "You know, I realized after your talk last night that I was very angry at you, so I asked myself why. I thought it over afterwards, and I realized that it was because I didn't know where your buttons are." (This is a common expression in America: It's as if the other person is a machine, you push the button, and the machine does what you want it to.) I smiled and said, "This is one of the reasons why we monks wear robes, so that no one can see where our buttons are."

So, from the Buddha's point of view, not reacting is a position of strength. This doesn't mean that you don't try to correct injustices and misbehavior. It means that you simply stay calm enough to figure out what would be the best time and place to respond to a difficult situation. This is a good thing to tell yourself when you're faced with a difficult situation: that you're in a stronger position if you don't react. It allows you to find the proper way to respond. That's a good verbal fabrication to hold in mind.

As for mental fabrications, suppose somebody is attacking you verbally. Mark Twain had a good perception to hold in mind, which is that it's not wise to fight with a pig. One, you'll get dirty; and two, it pleases the pig.

Note the importance of using your sense of humor to—as we say in English—"make light" of difficulties. We've already seen the element of humor in the story of Lady Vedehikā. But the use of humor in developing endurance is something universal and contains an element of folk wisdom.

There was a British explorer in Canada back in the 1830s who wanted to find a copper deposit that was said to be in the Northwest Territories. He couldn't find anyone to guide him there except for a group of Dene natives. So, he decided to go with them. It was one of the first cases of a British explorer entrusting his life to the natives. As they were going across the territory, they lived off their hunting and fishing skills. He noticed that on the days when the hunting and fishing were bad,

those were the days when the Dene were telling the most jokes, to keep their spirits up in spite of the hunger.

These are some of the ways that you use your knowledge of fabrication to help you endure a situation.

The other use of discernment in strengthening endurance is to see clearly what should and shouldn't be tolerated. The basic distinction comes down to the difference between the results of past kamma and your present kamma: You should learn to tolerate the results of past kamma, but you don't tolerate any unskillful kamma you might do right now.

In terms of the results of past kamma, the Buddha focuses on two things that you should tolerate: harsh words and pain.

The Buddha's basic approach for learning how to endure harsh words is to depersonalize them. In one case, he has you remind yourself that human speech has many aspects. It's normal that there will be kind words and harsh words, true words and false words, things said to you with good intentions and things said to you with bad intentions. So, if someone lies or says something harsh to you, it's nothing out of the ordinary. This is the nature of human speech.

Sometimes, when I was living in Thailand, people would insult me. I would remind myself, "*I* was the one who made the effort to learn the Thai language, so it's my fault that I understand them." That's one way of depersonalizing things, to realize that this is the nature of human speech. As they say in Thailand, "Even the Buddha was criticized, so what should I expect?"

The second way of depersonalizing harsh words is when someone says something nasty to you, you just tell yourself, "An unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear." And just leave it there, at the ear. The problem is that we tend not to leave it there. We pull it into the mind. Our minds are like vacuum cleaners that pull in only the dirt. So, who are you going to blame? You're the one who pulled it in.

Ajaan Lee has a nice image. He says if someone says something nasty to you, it's as if they've spat something out on the ground. If you take it to brood about, it's as if you've picked up to eat what they've spat out. And if you get a stomachache, who are you going to blame? We can also build on his image to say that if you put their food in your mouth to spit it back at them—in other words, you fling an insult back at a person who insulted you—you look foolish, and you've picked up whatever germs were there in the food. In other words, the other person's bad kamma now becomes yours.

These are ways of using verbal fabrication and mental fabrication to help you to endure harsh words by depersonalizing them.

As for pain, we talked about this the other day, in terms of the second tetrad in breath meditation: You learn how to breathe with a sense of rapture, breathe with a sense of ease. Then you try to notice which perceptions are making the pain worse, and you change the perceptions to calm the mind down.

The Buddha offers another approach when you're in pain. Once Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha by rolling a rock down a mountain. The rock hit another rock and split into slivers, and one of the slivers pierced the Buddha's foot. After the sliver was removed, the Buddha lay down with a lot of pain. Māra came to taunt him: "You sleepy head, are you miserable because someone tried to kill you?" And the Buddha said, "No, I'm lying here spreading goodwill and sympathy to all beings."

I've personally found that when I'm sick, spreading thoughts of goodwill as far as I can is a good way to deal with the illness. It keeps the mind from complaining about the illness and expands it to a much larger state, like the river into which the lump of salt has been thrown.

So, those are the two things you have to learn how to tolerate: harsh words and physical pain. Using discernment and developing your powers of concentration can help in both cases. You'll notice that, in both cases, you're following the steps in the second tetrad of breath meditation. We've already made this point explicitly when explaining how to deal with pain, but it applies to dealing with harsh words as well. You focus on breathing comfortably while you're being verbally attacked—that's bodily fabrication—which keeps you from adding unnecessary stress to the situation, and then you find ways of perceiving the situation—that's mental fabrication—to calm the mind down.

Now, the things that you don't tolerate are your unskillful mind states. The Buddha says that if greed, aversion, or delusion arise in the mind, you don't let them stay. You try to get them out of the mind in the same way that you'd try to put out a fire burning the hair on your head.

This distinction between the things you should and shouldn't tolerate has a parallel with the Buddha's teachings on contentment. You learn to be content with your physical surroundings, in terms of food, clothing, and shelter. If these requisites are good enough to allow you to practice, then they're good enough. But you're not content with your level of skillfulness. As long as you find that the mind is still causing itself suffering, you have to say, "I've got to do better."

Now, one of the types of tolerance that's not mentioned in the texts is when you find yourself in a situation where it's difficult to practice and you have too many responsibilities to get out of the situation. In a case like that, my teachers have said not to focus on the difficulties. Instead, focus on the things you *can* do. The ajaans in Thailand are often told by people, "I don't have any time to meditate," and the ajaans always respond, "Do you have time to breathe?" "Yes." "In that case, you have time to practice."

Ajaan Maha Boowa had a student, a woman in her 60s, who was dying of bone cancer, and she asked his permission to meditate at his monastery to prepare for her coming death. He told her to bring a doctor along, as he had no medical knowledge. She had a friend who was a retired doctor, an elderly woman in her 80s, who agreed to go with her.

They stayed for three months, and he gave them a Dhamma talk almost every night. After they returned to Bangkok, the old doctor decided to transcribe the talks, which they had recorded on tape. Her health wasn't good, and her eyesight was poor, but she managed to transcribe all the talks—almost 90 in all.

She said that she took encouragement from one of Ajaan Maha Boowa's teachings: that as you get older and your body is failing, try to squeeze as much goodness out of it as you can before you have to throw it away.

That's a thought we should all keep in mind.

So, we can regard our difficulties as opportunities to develop the perfections. When I was looking after my teacher, there were times when it would take all hours of the day and night to look after him, but I kept telling myself, "I'm learning good lessons." Prior to looking after him, I was not very good at looking after people who were sick. I always thought that I was doing them a big favor. But with Ajaan Fuang, I never got the sense that I was doing him any favor at all. For instance, I would have to be up with him two or three nights in a row, and then when he finally got better, he would say, "You can go off anywhere you want." No, "Thank you." Just, "Go." I realized I had to do this not for the thank you, but for the good qualities I was developing: patience and endurance. That's the attitude you have to adopt when things are difficult around you. There are a lot of things you can't change or that will take a while to change, but if you regard them as a challenge to develop the perfections, then they actually become part of the practice.



## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Are emotions all mental fabrications?

**A:** Emotions are composed of bodily, verbal, and mental fabrications. For example, when anger comes, you'll be breathing in a certain way, talking to yourself in a certain way, and then holding certain perceptions and physical feelings in mind.

**Q:** And the next question: Can you trust your emotions?

**A:** No. You made them up. As with anything you've fabricated, you have to ask yourself: "Is this emotion skillful? If it's not skillful, which fabrications do I have to change?"

DAY NINE  
MORNING

## *Grief & Remorse*

Tonight's talk will be on equanimity. It's a large topic—so large that we'll have to split it into two parts, and give one of them this morning.

One of the main points in understanding equanimity is that the Buddha never recommends equanimity on its own. On its own, he says, equanimity can very easily become unskillful. This is why, when discussing the development of equanimity, he always lists it in conjunction with the development of other skillful qualities.

To introduce this principle this morning, I'd like to discuss two big areas in daily life where developing skillful equanimity is especially helpful: when dealing with grief over loss, and when dealing with remorse for mistakes you have made. When you see how the Buddha's recommendations for equanimity in these cases involve developing other qualities as well, you can get a sense of how equanimity is meant to function, not only in everyday life, but also on more refined levels of the practice.

First, grief: Grief over loss covers not only the death of a loved one, but also the loss of a loved one in other ways—or the loss of love itself.

There are a couple of passages in the Canon where the Buddha talks about how to deal with grief. One involves King Pasenadi. One day, while he was talking to the Buddha, one of his courtiers came to inform him that Queen Mallikā, his favorite queen, had died. King Pasenadi immediately broke down and cried. The Buddha's way of comforting him was to point out to him that this kind of thing was happening not only to him. He said, "When has it ever happened that someone who was born does not die?" In other words, this kind of loss is universal. It happens to everyone.

It may seem strange that thinking about all the many deaths in the world would actually make your own loss less sharp, but it actually does. You remind yourself, "It's not happening only to me." You're not being singled out for any suffering that's out of the ordinary. In fact, thinking about the universality of loss might lead you to feel compassion for others that have undergone the same sort of loss that you have. This can soften your grief, by giving you some distance from it without trying to deny the

loss. At the same time, it can direct your energies toward acting with more consideration for others.

The Buddha then goes on to say that as long as you see that some purpose is served by grieving, by giving eulogies, or by conducting funeral ceremonies for someone who has died, go ahead and do it. This way, you give honor to what you have lost, recognizing the goodness in what is now past. This can encourage you—and the people around you—to devote the remainder of your life to more goodness. At the same time, it's traditional in Buddhist funeral ceremonies to make merit and dedicate it to the deceased, both as an expression of your goodwill for the deceased and as a reminder that you are not totally helpless in the face of death: There are still things that you can do for the person who has passed on.

But then when you realize that your expressions of grief have reached the point of self-indulgence, you have to remind yourself that you have a life you have to live and duties you have to perform, so don't let the loss overcome you. In this case, you develop equanimity toward the loss and re-dedicate your determination to return to fulfilling your duties, both for the sake of your genuine happiness and for the happiness of those still around you. In this way, you develop equanimity as a basis for two other perfections: determination and goodwill.

The Canon has a very interesting analysis of grief. There was one time when Ven. Sāriputta was talking to some of the other monks, saying, "This afternoon I was sitting and meditating, and I asked myself, 'Is there anyone in the world whose loss would cause me any sorrow or grief?'" The answer to the question was No. Ven. Ānanda was sitting there and he asked, "Now, wait a minute. What if something happened to the Buddha?" And Sāriputta replied, "I would say that it's a sad thing that such a great and beneficial person has passed away. It would be a great loss for the world. But what could be done? This is the nature of all living beings." Then Ānanda made an interesting comment, which was that, "This is a sign that you have no conceit."

Now, remember that conceit in this sense means a strong sense of "I am." What Ānanda was saying here is that a lot of our grief has to do less with concern for the suffering of the other person who's passed away and more with our own sense of loss. Sometimes there's a feeling that you owe the person who's passed away a certain amount of grief. But the other person is not benefiting from your grief at all. So, you really have no responsibility or debt that requires you to grieve for a person for a certain amount of time or with a certain amount of intensity.

The irony of this story is that Ven. Sāriputta actually passed away before the Buddha. Ānanda went to see the Buddha to deliver the news, telling him that hearing the news of Sāriputta's death made him lose his sense of bearings. The world seemed dark to him. The Buddha asked Ānanda, "When Sāriputta died, did he take away virtue?" "No." "Did he take away concentration?" "No." "Did he take away discernment?" "No." "Did he take away release?" "No." So, the good things in life are still there. These are some of the ways in which the Buddha would talk to the monks about loss.

In more general terms, you have to remember that the amount of tears you have already shed from the death of a mother is more than the amount of water in the oceans. The same goes for the amount of tears you've shed over the death of a father, the loss of a brother, the loss of a sister, the loss of a son, the loss of a daughter. When you think about that, it becomes overwhelming. The Buddha adds that thinking about this should make you realize that the best thing in life would be to gain release from all of this.

This kind of thinking, which comes under the perfection of discernment, can help you develop a certain amount of equanimity around loss and lead to a sense of *saṁvega*, or dismay, motivating your determination to practice further on the path.

Now, the Buddha's not forcing you to give up your grief. That would be heartless. What he's actually doing is giving you the opportunity to realize that your life does not have to be ruined by a loss.

There are two examples of women whom he comforted after they had lost their children. In one case, it was her son, and one of the contemplations he recommended to her was this: "He came to you without permission and he's left you without permission. Do you know where he came from? Was he yours before he came? And now he's gone, to another unknown place." He added, "This is the nature of all beings." The woman later said that this calmed her mind and completely removed the arrow of her grief.

The other case was a woman named Ubbiri. She had lost her daughter, Jīvā, and she had gone to the cemetery, where she was crying, "Jīvā, Jīvā, where are you?" The Buddha said to her, "Do you realize that 84,000 women named Jīvā have been buried in that cemetery? So for which of them are you grieving?" The sense of the vast extent of all the loss that human beings have suffered does help to pull you out of your individual grief and to view the whole situation with a lot more equanimity.

So, we can see that, in the face of loss, the Buddha doesn't advise overcoming your grief simply by numbing yourself into equanimity. Equanimity, to be skillful in

situations like this, has to be developed together with other perfections, such as discernment, goodwill, and determination.

The second situation where the Buddha talks about using equanimity to get over your emotional upset regarding things in the past deals with remorse for your own mistakes. He says that no matter how much remorse you have for what you've done, remorse cannot go back and undo what you did. Sometimes there's a childish thought that if we punish ourselves enough over a past mistake, then no one else will punish us. You've probably seen dogs act this way, right? They wet on your carpet and they know they did something wrong, so when you come back to the house they turn over on their back and look miserable, in hopes that if they look miserable enough, you won't hit them. There is this aspect of the human mind as well.

But, as the Buddha says, this accomplishes nothing. Simply recognize the mistake —“Yes, that was a mistake”—and determine not to repeat the mistake. That determination, which is then carried out in the persistence of your right efforts, is really all that can be asked of a human being. Then at that point, he said, you develop thoughts of goodwill, compassion, and equanimity for all beings: yourself, the people you've wronged, and the other people you will be dealing with in the future. This way, by not punishing yourself over the mistake and still wishing goodwill for yourself, you don't weaken yourself. By extending goodwill to others, you erase any resentment you might have for the person you wronged, and you remind yourself to be careful in how you treat others from now on.

In cases like this, the Buddha doesn't simply have you develop equanimity toward your past mistakes. He also has you develop discernment into how to use the teaching on kamma wisely, along with the perfections of goodwill, determination, and persistence that will ensure that you do your best not to repeat those mistakes in the future.

Those, then, are two of the areas in daily life—grief and remorse—where the Buddha talks about how to develop equanimity with regard to things that have happened in the past. In both cases, you're combining equanimity with other good qualities, such as discernment, goodwill, persistence, and determination. These additional qualities are what ensure that your equanimity doesn't become indifference, and instead becomes skillful equanimity, a perfection that furthers the path.

EVENING

## *Equanimity*

Our topic tonight is equanimity, the second of the two perfections that come under the heading of calm in the four determinations.

Both endurance and equanimity play an important role in helping to keep our persistence going. They're the two qualities that give us stamina. They're similar in inducing calm, but they differ in that equanimity is more a matter of maintaining emotional stability and equilibrium: keeping the mind on an even keel both in good and in bad situations. It's your ability to step outside of emotions that would get in the way of the path. It involves not engaging in the present-moment fabrication that would keep those emotions going. Endurance, on the other hand, deals more with your external behavior: not behaving unskillfully in response to difficult situations, such as unkind words and actions or physical pain. Ideally, equanimity and endurance work together: You develop equanimity to provide inner support for external endurance.

Endurance, as you may remember, is based on the desire to make your goodness independent of the goodness or badness of the people and situations around you. Equanimity is based more on the desire not to weigh yourself down with needless emotional baggage.

As we noted earlier, in discussing determination, the quality of calm plays two roles. It can be either the goal to which we're headed or else the means by which we get there. A similar distinction applies to equanimity. There are three levels of equanimity altogether: two that function as part of the path, and one that comes about as a result of reaching the true happiness of the goal. And here it's important to emphasize that equanimity is not, in and of itself, the goal. The goal, as we've said many times, is true happiness.

The fact that there are these different levels of equanimity means that we need to be careful not to confuse them. If we do, it'll get in the way of our perseverance and persistence. For instance, if we experience a strong sense of the first level of equanimity and think we've already arrived at the goal, we'll conclude that there's nothing more to do. That will undercut any desire to put any further effort into the path and create an obstacle to finding genuine peace.

The three levels of equanimity are these:

1) Worldly equanimity: your ability to keep the mind on an even keel in the presence of enticing sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. This level of

equanimity overlaps to some extent with what the Buddha calls “house-based equanimity,” which refers to keeping the mind on an even keel in the face of good or bad sensory input, ranging from the things you experience in everyday life up through the third jhāna.

2) Unworldly equanimity: the equanimity attained when the mind is in the fourth jhāna or any of the higher formless attainments.

These two levels of equanimity function as part of the path.

3) Even more unworldly unworldly equanimity: the sense of inner peace that arises when, after you’ve attained full awakening, you reflect on how your mind is released from passion, aversion, and delusion.

Equanimity is never recommended as a good thing on its own. This is perhaps the most important point of tonight’s talk, so I’ll repeat it: *Equanimity is never recommended as a good thing on its own*. It’s always recommended in conjunction with right effort and other skillful qualities. In terms of equanimity on the path, this fits in with the Buddha’s observation—which we discussed under the topic of persistence—that the causes of suffering fall into two types: those that go away simply when you look at them with equanimity, and those that go away only when you exert any of the three types of fabrication against them. For instance, there are cases where lust goes away when you simply watch it steadily. It’s as if it’s embarrassed to show its face. There are other times, though, when you stare at your lust and it stares right back, not the least bit embarrassed. That’s when you need to make a concerted effort to get rid of it. You have to use your discernment skillfully to determine which kind of case you’re facing, and you need to have more than just equanimity in your box of tools.

Equanimity on the first two levels can be either skillful or unskillful, depending on the qualities you combine it with, guided by discernment.

As with all the perfections, it’s good to understand these two levels of equanimity in light of right view, particularly in line with the teachings on kamma, fabrication, and the four noble truths.

- In terms of the first level of equanimity—ordinary, everyday equanimity—there are two rules of thumb.

The first rule is similar to the basic principle underlying when and when not to practice endurance: You have to be equanimous about the kamma you’ve already done, along with its results, but not about the kamma you’re planning to do in the present. However, equanimity can also be applied to uncertainty about the future.

You have to calm your mind and have confidence that, whatever the future holds, you'll be best prepared by developing skillful qualities in the mind right now.

The second rule of thumb is that you shouldn't develop equanimity that leads to laziness and defeatism. Instead, develop the sort of equanimity that allows you to accept setbacks and not get knocked out by them: the kind of equanimity that allows you to deal with difficulties and come out winning.

The forest ajaans give some good examples to illustrate this distinction. A big storm once went through Ajaan Chah's monastery, and the next day he was going through the monastery to check on the damage. He came to one hut and saw that half the roof had been blown off. A monk was sitting and meditating in the hut, so Ajaan Chah asked him, "Why aren't you fixing the roof?" The monk replied, "I'm practicing equanimity." And Ajaan Chah said, "That's the equanimity of a water buffalo. You're a human being. Fix the roof!"

As for the kind of equanimity that involves defeatism and depression, Ajaan Fuang made a distinction between what he called large-hearted equanimity and small-hearted equanimity. Small-hearted equanimity is when you resign yourself to thinking, "I just can't do anything in life, there's nothing worth attaining, everything is inconstant, stressful, and not-self," so you give up. That's small-hearted equanimity. I've read a study of some laypeople in Sri Lanka who were reputed by their friends to be very advanced in the Dhamma because they always talked about inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Some social scientists gave them a psychological test and came to the conclusion that they were all suffering from clinical depression. There's something really wrong there. That's not Dhamma. It's small-hearted equanimity.

Large-hearted equanimity is when you've found true happiness inside so that the events of the world don't have any effect on you emotionally, because the well-being you've gained is not affected by such things. This is the kind of equanimity we're trying to develop.

The Canon, in recommending the type of equanimity to be developed, tends to list it together with other good qualities. For example, there's the equanimity that's part of the four brahmavihāras. This is the kind of equanimity that functions well together with goodwill and compassion. You might call it the equanimity of a good doctor. Every good doctor has goodwill and compassion for the patient and wants the patient to be cured, but may find that there are some symptoms he cannot cure. But he doesn't give up totally on the patient. He develops equanimity toward the symptoms he can't cure so that he can focus on those he can—or at least on ways in which he can alleviate the patient's pain and suffering. Instead of trying to force



things in areas where he cannot make a difference, he channels his goodwill and compassion for the patient in other ways that are more fruitful and productive. In this way, he doesn't waste his time and energy on areas where he cannot give help so that he will have the time and energy to focus on areas where he *can* be of help.

When, in the context of the perfections, we combine equanimity with the perfections of endurance and determination, we're developing what could be called the equanimity of a good soldier. A soldier in battle will have to endure hardships and suffer setbacks, but he doesn't let himself get emotionally upset by them. That allows him to look for—and find—ways to come out victorious. This is the opposite of defeatist equanimity. It's the equanimity that enables you to come out winning.

When we apply these lessons to equanimity in daily life, we can see that one of the purposes of equanimity is to keep us from getting emotionally distracted by ups and downs that would pull us off the path. We've already talked about the ups under the perfection of renunciation, so here we'll focus on the downs:

Equanimity functions well when it helps you to let go of what cannot be changed—or of something whose change cannot be stopped—so that you can focus your energy on what *can* be changed and is worth changing, or on things changing in the wrong direction where you're in the position to put a stop to the change. As we said earlier, this is an area where equanimity, to be skillful, has to function together with other emotions and mental qualities on the path. In other words, there are some situations in your life where you're like a doctor: You're motivated by goodwill and compassion, but you have to balance them with equanimity. There are other times when you have to practice the equanimity of a soldier: There are battles you have to fight in life, and you need equanimity to stay calm in the midst of setbacks.

This is where you develop your mastery of the processes of verbal fabrication and mental fabrication—in other words, the stories you tell yourself about your situation in life. For instance, suppose something bad has happened in your life, and your mind is telling you all kinds of things about how horrible it is. You could be a victim of the attitude that inspires the Thai expression, *taai laeo*, which means, "I'm already dead!" Too many people react to situations in life that way. You have to look at yourself to remind yourself that you're not dead, you're still alive, and there are still things you can do. That helps to calm you down.

Some people object to the idea of developing equanimity in daily life because it sounds like you'll end up with no feeling or affection for anybody, but that's not the case. You have to realize that as long as you feel the need to feed on other people, there's going to be emotional upset. The mind is going to be like a roller coaster, and

if your mind is like a roller coaster, you're not in a good solid position to help them. You would actually be more helpful to the people you love if you could develop equanimity. You could view situations more objectively and come from a more emotionally secure and steady place. That way, you'd be better equipped to provide genuine help—as with the equanimity of a doctor. So, you can still have affection for others, and you can still be helpful to them even though you develop equanimity.

As I noted earlier, the lowest level of equanimity covers everything from equanimity in daily life up through the attainment of the third jhāna. What this means in practice is that this is the equanimity you have to develop as you're learning to bring the mind into concentration. And here again, it has to be combined with the right qualities, in the right balance, at the right time, in order to be skillful.

For example, when the Buddha was first teaching Rāhula, his son, how to meditate, he started out with the instruction for Rāhula to make his mind like earth: Just as earth isn't upset when disgusting things are thrown on it, you should try to train your mind not to let agreeable or disagreeable sense impressions take charge of your mind. The purpose of this instruction, though, is not simply to put the mind into a state of equanimity or acceptance. Instead, it's meant to act as a foundation for the more proactive steps of breath meditation. If you're going to train the mind to be skilled at fabricating a good state of concentration, you first have to train yourself to be a good observer, solid and balanced, and that means not letting pleasant and unpleasant things take over the mind to tip it out of balance. That way, when you make a mistake, you can see it clearly and admit it. When you do something well, you're in a position to figure out how to put it to good use, rather than simply enjoying the immediate good results.

So, equanimity in this case acts as a basis for persistence and discernment.

Now, as you're trying to apply these lessons to get the mind into concentration, the Buddha notes that there are times when equanimity, if it's emphasized at the wrong time, can be unskillful. For example, when he describes the seven factors for awakening, he notes that three of the factors are skillful when the mind has too much energy and three are skillful when it doesn't have enough. When the mind has too much energy, you need to develop the factors that calm it: calm, concentration, and equanimity. You avoid the more energizing factors, which include analysis of qualities—which is the activity of discernment—persistence, and rapture. When the mind is sluggish, however, you develop the energizing factors and avoid the more calming ones.

The Buddha gives an analogy of trying to control a fire. If the fire is too big, you put water and ashes on it. As for the three more energizing factors, those are like adding more fuel to the fire. So, if there's too much energy in your mind, then equanimity is one of the factors that functions like water or ashes. But if you're sitting here falling asleep in the middle of your meditation, it's not a time for equanimity. It would be like putting ashes and water on a fire that's already threatening to go out. So, there are times when equanimity is not what you want.

There's another passage where the Buddha makes a similar point about equanimity and its role in meditation, where it's more a matter of getting several different skillful qualities to work together at the same time. He says you have to balance equanimity with concentration and persistence. If you develop just concentration, the mind gets lazy. If you develop just persistence, the mind gets restless. If you develop just equanimity, the mind doesn't get concentrated. In other words, if you just sit there watching things coming and going, coming and going, nothing gets developed.

He compares this to the process of refining gold. Persistence is like putting the gold into the fire, concentration is like blowing on it, and equanimity is like simply watching it. So, imagine: If you just sit there watching the gold without putting it into the fire or doing anything to it, nothing happens. If you just put it into the fire without taking it out to blow on it or watch it, it burns up. If you just blow on it, it stays cool—and there you are: nothing. So, as you're working on your meditation, you have to balance your equanimity with concentration and persistence, getting them to work together as you refine the state of your mind.

Now, even though we're talking about equanimity in meditation, as long as we haven't reached the fourth jhāna, it still counts as worldly equanimity. It's still based on the determination not to react. As long as you can maintain that determination, your equanimity will last, but if it lacks the nourishment of the fourth jhāna, it can crumble pretty easily. Still, to reach the higher levels of equanimity, you need to learn to develop this level of equanimity first.

- The second level of equanimity, which the Buddha calls unworldly equanimity, is the equanimity based on high levels of concentration, starting with the fourth jhāna. The Buddha also calls this “equanimity based on singleness” because it's based on getting the mind solid in a state of oneness. This is stronger than the first level of equanimity because its foundation is stronger. This is another area where the practice of jhāna enters into the perfections.

Now, even though this level of equanimity is more solid than the first level, it, too, can become unskillful if you simply let yourself rest content with it. There's a passage where the Buddha talks about how this level of equanimity is not the goal because we can still feed on it. We can still cling to it. You still need the discernment to get past that kind of attachment, and it requires a certain amount of persistence to get that discernment to work, because the second level of equanimity is something extremely calm and extremely stable. Because it's so stable, it can make the mind lazy, which is why you have to energize your discernment, your mindfulness, and your persistence—in other words, right view, right mindfulness, and right effort—to act on the realization that “I have to let go of this attachment, too.”

This is another example of how equanimity needs to be teamed with other skillful qualities in order to stay skillful. It also shows how the different perfections have to work together, and how we need all the perfections and not just one or two: Equanimity helps give our persistence and discernment some stamina, but at the same time, persistence and discernment have to check equanimity to make sure we're not getting stuck on a lower level. Without these two perfections, equanimity can make you lazy, and it's very easy to tell yourself, “This is it, this is it, this is all I need. My mind is calm; my mind is stable.” So, you have to be very watchful.

- The third level of equanimity is the equanimity based on awakening. The Buddha calls this “even more unworldly unworldly equanimity.” This level of equanimity is a by-product of awakening, but it's not a characteristic of awakening itself. Awakening itself is the highest happiness. The equanimity that follows on awakening comes when you reflect on how you are now free from passion, aversion, and delusion. This realization can give rise to equanimity because this level of happiness is not based on conditions and so cannot be affected by anything. That means that this equanimity cannot be shaken by anything at all. It's emotionally stable with regard to anything else. However, this realization can also give rise to strong pleasure and rapture, so here, too, is a case where skillful equanimity does not occur alone.

It's important to note that this equanimity does not get in the way of compassion. In fact, quite the contrary: Now that your desire for true happiness has succeeded and your own needs have been met, you can turn your energies to helping others with no need to feed on them. This is why the Buddha places so much emphasis on solving the problem of your own suffering and your tendency to feed. Your motivations with regard to yourself and others can now be totally pure.

Now, this third level of equanimity is not something that can be done. In other words, it's not part of the path. It's something that comes as a result. This is an important distinction to make. All too often we hear that awakened people have lots of equanimity, so we decide, "I'm going to have equanimity. And there we are!" But that kind of willed equanimity would be nothing more than worldly equanimity, the lowest level of equanimity. It's nothing more than an attempt to clone awakening, but awakening can't be cloned. It requires you to follow all the steps of the path and develop all the factors of the path. Then, when the path has been fully developed and is yielding its results, that's when the highest level of equanimity will appear—and, as the ajaans all say, it's totally unlike the first two levels of equanimity.

Ajaan Maha Boowa tells a story about his own practice. He got his mind into a very strong level of concentration and it got to the point where it didn't seem to change at all. At first, he was convinced, "This must be it. This must be awakening." But then he began to notice that that level of equanimity and peace still had its subtle ups and downs. It still had to be tended to. Finally, he realized, "This can't be it. If this were unconditioned, it wouldn't have any ups and downs, it wouldn't have to be tended to." Only when he was able to let go of his attachment to that state of concentration was he able to step back from it, analyze it, and then come to true awakening. And—excuse me for this image—he said that although he originally thought that that earlier state of concentration was so wonderful, when he found true awakening and compared the two, he said the concentration was like excrement, only he used a more impolite word. It's for this reason that he was very strict with his students. And it's also for this reason that we should be strict with ourselves. Don't allow yourself to rest content when there's something better to be attained. Keep developing your discernment, persistence, and renunciation. You'll be glad you did.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** What is the difference between *upekkhā*, equanimity, and *adukkham-asukham*, a neutral feeling?

**A:** The difference is that *upekkhā* has to do with the emotions. A neutral feeling is simply the feeling tone of a sensation, physical or mental. Equanimity has more to do with mental and emotional stability.

**Q:** Contentment is hard for me, the idea of accepting things just as they are. What should I do?

**A:** The Buddha didn't teach you to accept things as they are in all cases. This is where it's important to understand his teachings on kamma. Everything we experience in the present moment is a combination of three factors. The first factor consists of the results of past intentions. These could be intentions from just the moment before to lifetimes before, ripening now in the present moment. The second factor is your present intentions. The third is the result of your present intentions. You can't do much about the results of your past intentions, but you can change your present intentions and their results.

So, the things you have to content yourself with are the things that come from past kamma. But even then, the simple fact that your past kamma up to now has, say, given bad results doesn't mean that it has to keep on giving bad results. You can change your present intentions freely. This is why the Buddha said that we don't have to suffer even from the results of past bad actions. If we master skillful intentions in the present moment, we can keep the mind from suffering even in bad situations. So, content yourself with things you cannot change, but don't content yourself with things you can change and need to be improved. A lot of discernment will lie in figuring out which is which.

The Buddha taught that, as a meditator, you should content yourself with outside conditions if they're good enough for you to practice in. But as long as you're still suffering, you should not content yourself with the level of skill in your own mind. In fact, the Buddha said that was the secret to his awakening: As long as there was a further skill that he could still develop, he would not rest content.

**Q:** There are those who I like, those who I don't like. I have my preferences. Equanimity to me seems like a utopia. Please comment.

**A:** Equanimity doesn't mean not having likes or dislikes. It simply means not letting your likes and dislikes take over the mind. It basically comes down to the fact that certain things in life you can change and certain things you cannot. You need to have equanimity about the things you cannot change so that you have the strength and energy to work on the things that you *can* change and improve. When they say that the Great Way is not difficult for those with no preferences, what they mean is that you have to be willing to do whatever the Great Way requires. If it requires observing the precepts, then you observe the precepts. If it requires learning how to concentrate the mind, then you concentrate the mind. You prefer following the path to not following the path, but you don't let other preferences get in the way of actually following the path.

DAY TEN  
MORNING

## *Conclusion*

Before the Buddha's awakening, he had a vision. He saw the world as a small puddle of water full of fish fighting one another over the water. Those that lost the battle died, but all those that won the battle died as well. As he looked around at the world, he couldn't see anything that wasn't already laid claim to, which meant, of course, that if he was going to find happiness in the world, he would have to fight somebody else off, just like the fish. It gave rise to a strong sense of dismay and discontent.

Then, he said, he looked inside and he saw that the whole problem came from an arrow, there in the heart. It was the arrow of desire and craving. He realized that if you could remove the arrow, there would be no more suffering. So, he committed himself to finding a way to pull that arrow out. He found that the path to pulling it out required desire as well: the desire to put an end to desire. It didn't work simply to say, "Don't have any more desires." Instead, it first required determination to give priority to skillful desires over unskillful desires.

In general, this ability to give priority to some desires over others in a systematic way is a sign of maturity. It requires determination. In fact, that's what determination is: the desire to give consistent priority to your most valuable desires. Now, the Buddha's determination in particular was that he not rest content until he had found something that didn't die. He realized that this determination would require that he negotiate with death. In other words, he realized that when death came, there would be many things he would have to give up if he wanted to arrive at the deathless. That meant devoting his life to finding the things that would be of value even after death occurred.

He conveyed this determination in an analogy he described to King Pasenadi. One time, King Pasenadi came in the middle of the day to see the Buddha. The Buddha asked him, "What have you been doing today?" The king, in a remarkable display of frankness, said, "All the typical things that a person obsessed with power would be doing." Can you imagine our political leaders being frank enough to say

that now? So, the Buddha said to the king, “Suppose someone trustworthy came from the east and said, ‘There’s a mountain moving in from the east, as tall as the sky, crushing all living beings in its path.’ Suppose another trustworthy person came from the south, saying, ‘There’s a mountain moving in from the south, as tall as the sky, crushing all living beings in its way.’” Similarly from the west and the north—in other words, four huge mountains moving in from all sides. The Buddha asked the king, “Given this danger, this horrible destruction of life, and given that human birth is rare, what would you do?” The king replied, “What else could I do except calm my mind and practice the Dhamma?” Then the Buddha said, “I tell you, aging, illness, and death are moving in, crushing all living beings in their path. So, what are you going to do?” And the king said, “What else can I do but calm the mind and practice the Dhamma?” That’s what skillful determination is about: focusing your mind, focusing your desires, on things that will be of value even in the face of death.

The perfections are the qualities of heart and mind needed to carry through with that determination.

You notice, as you look at the list of perfections, that they give priority to the state of your heart and mind. And more: They give *purpose* to the heart and mind. After all, the nature of the heart and mind is that they need to have purpose and can’t be happy unless the purpose is good. By aiming your desires at a happiness that doesn’t change and gives no harm, you’re giving the heart and mind the best purpose of all.

As you look at the list of perfections, you notice two more things.

- One is that they develop qualities of both a good mind and a good heart. When we talk about a good mind, we usually mean someone who has discernment, someone who has a wise purpose in mind and is intelligent in bringing them about. This sort of discernment requires an understanding of cause and effect, not only in the abstract but also in its practical application. Think of the Buddha’s instructions to his son, that he examine not only his intentions for acting, but also the actual results of his actions. A person with a truly good mind is willing to learn from his mistakes to increase his skill in arriving at good ends. Remember the candidates at the brain surgery school. Really smart people are those who are active in recognizing a mistake and trying to correct it.

As for the qualities of a good heart, those basically have to do with your will, which aims not only at your own happiness, but also at the happiness of others. This covers the perfections of goodwill and giving. But a good heart does more than aim at happiness. It also needs the strength to carry through with its aims, regardless of



the difficulties it encounters. Think of the man pinned down by bandits who are sawing his limbs off. For him to feel goodwill for them in an extreme situation like that, he needs to have developed more than goodwill. He needs to have developed the other perfections—qualities like truth, virtue, persistence, giving, renunciation, endurance, and equanimity—to provide the strength so that good intentions lead to good realities. This means that a truly good heart is not only well-meaning, generous, and kind. It's also strong in sticking to its skillful intentions.

- This relates to the second point, which is that these perfections are aimed at finding a true happiness, but in the course of developing that true happiness, you also have to be truly good. This means that your pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of goodness are basically the same thing. There doesn't have to be a conflict between the two. Whatever conflict there is between the heart and the mind becomes settled. The practice of the perfections helps to make the heart and the mind into one.

They become one because we give clear priority to our most skillful desires: That's the function of skillful determination. Now, remember the four determinations that the Buddha taught, which are basically the four desires to which he would have you give priority. The four are:

- not to neglect discernment,
- to guard the truth,
- to be devoted to relinquishment, and
- to train for calm.

So, let's look again at those four determinations.

The first determination includes the perfections of discernment and goodwill. As you will remember, the Buddha's discernment is strategic. It's concerned less with the nature of *things* and more with the nature of your *actions*, focused on how to direct your actions so that they give the results you want. This requires an understanding of cause and effect, and of how to use that understanding in order to bring about true happiness. This is how discernment and goodwill work together.

Right view always carries duties if you wish well for yourself and others. The duty with regard to the first noble truth, which is suffering, is to comprehend it. The duty with regard to the second noble truth, the cause of suffering, is to abandon it. You should try to realize the cessation of suffering, which is done by developing the path to the end of suffering.

Of these four noble truths, the third is the most important, because it's the goal to which the practice aims. Always keep in mind that it is possible to put an end to

suffering. All too often we let ourselves get distracted by other messages. We're told that true happiness is not possible, so we should content ourselves with lesser pleasures. That's what the world economy is based on—which means that the economy is based on keeping you within its limits. This is why it's almost an act of defiance to allow yourself to imagine that true happiness is possible. This is what it means not to neglect discernment: to keep in mind the possibility that true happiness can be found as a result of your own efforts, so you should always choose your actions in light of what their long-term results will be.

This leads into the second of the determinations, which is to guard the truth. Once you've made up your mind that you have a goal, you want to be true in doing whatever needs to be done to attain that goal. Now, there is a seeming paradox here in the practice, in that we have to learn to guard the truth but at the same time we have to learn how not to be attached to views about the truth. But it's not really a paradox. It's a matter of strategy.

Remember the four different kinds of truth: the truth of person, in other words, your ability to stick with something that you really believe is right; the truth of perceptions; the truth of statements; and the truth of facts, in and of themselves. Now, the first and the last are the ones that you never abandon until the very end of the path. As for the truth of statements and perceptions, there are statements that give us a true idea of what would be a good way to practice and there are statements that give us the wrong idea, so you have to make a clear distinction. To guard the truth, you have to keep reminding yourself that you are acting on conviction as you follow the Buddha's recommendations as to which statements about suffering are true, so you have to hold on to them skillfully: not for the sake of defeating other people in argument, but for the sake of finding out whether or not they give true results.

Remember the image of the raft. You're going across the river and you have to hold on to the raft. Otherwise you get swept away. But you realize that the raft itself is not the goal, it's a means to get you to the goal. Once you get to the goal, then you can let go of the raft because you've arrived at the truth of the *fact* that you were hoping for. That's what it means to be unattached to views. But make sure you don't let go of right views before you get to the other side of the river. Simply be conscious of the fact that these are things that you hold on to because of conviction, so you're not yet 100% sure. You'll know for sure when you reach the other shore.

Truth requires trying to find a reliable teacher, being truthful in judging the teacher, and then being true in sticking to the path even though it's demanding. All

three of these actions require that you be true as well. To learn the truth, you have to *be* true. When you're consistently true in this way, it allows you to reach the truth that is a fact, beyond the truth of perceptions and statements.

Now, this quality of truth is found in the perfections of truth, virtue, and persistence. With the perfection of virtue, we're faced with a paradox similar to that of the perfection of truth. In other words, there are the precepts that correspond to right speech and right action, but we're sometimes told not to hold on to precepts and practices. Here again, though, the issue is strategic. You practice the precepts and stick to them, being mindful and alert to remember them and apply them in your actions, but once they become qualities of your heart, then you don't have to keep reminding yourself of the precepts because the quality of truth and virtue is now a part of your heart. You don't have to hold on to the words. You've got the reality of virtue within you.

As for persistence, this is a matter not only of abandoning or letting go of things. There are altogether four types of right effort: trying to prevent unskillful states from arising, to abandon unskillful states if they have arisen, to give rise to skillful states that have not arisen, and then to maintain and develop them when they have. We need the quality of calm—endurance and equanimity—to maintain our stamina as we pursue these four efforts. These efforts also require taking joy in being on the path, so that when we're confronted with challenges, we don't see them as problems. We see them as opportunities. This depends on our ability to develop the perfection of discernment to keep ourselves motivated on the path.

The third desire in determination is to be devoted to relinquishment. This covers the perfections of giving and renunciation. In both cases, you regard giving and renunciation of sensuality as a trade up: There are certain things you'll have to sacrifice, but you'll gain things of greater value in return.

Giving covers not only giving material items away, but also giving your energy, your time, your knowledge, and your forgiveness. In return, you gain a much broader mind and heart, a sense of spaciousness and self-esteem.

In a similar way, the perfection of renunciation is not simply a matter of giving up sensual pleasures and sensual thoughts. You're opening the way to an alternative pleasure that's higher than sensual pleasures. In mastering the pleasure of concentration, you take yourself out of the back-and-forth between trying to run away from pains and running towards sensual pleasures. You remember the image of the hell of beings trapped in a flaming cube, in which you keep running toward the

door you think will lead to pleasure and it immediately gets shut in your face. But when you finally do get through the door, you fall into another hell.

When you practice concentration, you get yourself out of that situation. You change your relationship to pleasure and pain. Instead of having to run toward sensual pleasure to get away from pain, you put yourself in a position of strength where you can learn how to *use* pleasure and to *use* pain. You can use pain to develop your discernment into the process of fabrication in your mind. You can use the pleasure of concentration to give yourself a foundation where you can continue to look deeper and deeper into the mind, to see its fabrications on more and more subtle levels. This is how you put yourself onto the path of the middle way.

The fourth and final of the desires of determination is to train only for calm. Now, calm here functions in two ways. On the one hand, it's the goal to which you aim; on the other hand, it's a means to help give you stamina on the path to that goal.

The two perfections coming under calm are endurance and equanimity.

In developing endurance, we have to learn what to tolerate and what not to tolerate. The things we have to learn how to tolerate are harsh words and painful feelings. As we pointed out, learning how to tolerate or endure these things requires that we use all three kinds of fabrication—bodily, verbal, and mental—and that we cultivate a sense of humor that makes light of our difficulties.

The things you have to learn not to tolerate are unskillful states that arise in the mind. You don't just accept them and stay with them or simply note their presence. You have to figure out some way to get them out of the mind, using whatever strategy you find will work.

As for equanimity, it's the ability not to weigh ourselves down with unnecessary emotional baggage. There are three levels of equanimity in all. The ability simply to be indifferent when things happen is the lowest level of equanimity. Higher than that is the equanimity of the mind in the fourth jhāna and the formless attainments, and higher still there's the equanimity that comes as a result of release. The first two levels of equanimity play a role in the path. The third level comes about as a result of attaining the goal. Now, we can't clone that last level of equanimity. We have to develop the first two levels, remembering that equanimity is useful on the path as a means of enabling us to carry through with the perfection of persistence. So, don't let your equanimity make you lazy.

Remember the equanimity of a doctor. You maintain your goodwill, you maintain your compassion, you accept what cannot be changed, and that frees up

your energy to focus on what can be changed. Also, remember the equanimity of a soldier, which is that in spite of hardships and setbacks, you maintain your determination to come out victorious. In that way, your equanimity is combined with other skillful qualities so that it doesn't get in the way of your goal. It actually becomes the basis for which you can find your way beyond the hardships and setbacks to come out winning.

Above all, don't fall for the equanimity of resignation, telling yourself, "This is all there is in life, so I have to accept it." That's basically trying to find happiness by lowering your standards. It's a defeatist attitude. The Buddha's message is just the opposite: You find happiness by giving yourself good standards and then raising them. In other words, keep on remembering the message of discernment, which is to hold to the view that the total end of suffering is possible. It is possible to win in the fight against suffering.

So, that's the Buddha's advice: that true happiness is possible and it's found by also developing true goodness in your own heart and mind. So, don't give up, keep up your effort, take joy in the practice and in encountering challenges, and don't rest content with these perfections until they've brought you to the goal. In other words, don't sell yourself short. Don't set your price too low.

As the Buddha himself developed these perfections, there came a point, of course, where he had to let them go. In fact, at the moment of awakening, he had to let everything go. But as Ajaan Lee would often point out, that didn't mean those things ran away from him. He still had those qualities left over to help him in his work of teaching the religion.

We can see the results of these perfections in the qualities that he displayed as a Buddha. The three main qualities are discernment, compassion, and purity. His discernment was developed by the perfections of discernment, renunciation, equanimity, and goodwill. His compassion was developed by his perfections of goodwill, generosity, endurance, and virtue. And his purity was developed by the perfections of virtue, truthfulness, determination, endurance, and persistence.

When you follow these principles, you're fully exercising the power of your mind and your heart. This gives purpose to your life, fulfilling one of the basic needs of the mind and the heart, which is to have a good purpose. Only when you have a coherent purpose, a good purpose, through developing the perfection of determination, can the mind and the heart be deeply happy. And, following the Buddha, you give yourself the best possible purpose, which is to focus on a genuine happiness, a genuine goodness, which is blameless and unchanging. Deathless. This

purpose will carry over even after you leave this life, and eventually you'll be able to pursue this desire until you reach the end of desire.

The end of desire doesn't come by denying your desires. It comes when you reach a happiness so satisfying that you no longer have any need to feed. In the meantime, you can take heart in the fact that your search for genuine happiness is at the same time a search for genuine goodness, and that someday you will arrive at what you are searching for. But this path doesn't save all of its rewards until the end. You'll find that your happiness and your goodness will become more and more solid all along the way. This will be good for you and for everyone else you encounter.

# Readings

The four determinations:  
“One should not be negligent of discernment,  
should guard the truth,  
be devoted to relinquishment,  
and train only for calm.” — *MN 140*

## **I. Discernment**

Goodwill

## **II. Truth**

Persistence

Virtue

## **III. Relinquishment**

Giving

Renunciation

## **IV. Calm**

Endurance

Equanimity

## **I. DISCERNMENT**

§1. Three types of discernment:

discernment from listening (*sutamaya-paññā*)

discernment from thinking (*cintāmaya-paññā*)

discernment from developing/meditation (*bhāvanāmaya-paññā*) — *DN 33*

§2. “This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask, ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is

blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?” — [\*MN 135\*](#)

§3. *Mundane right view*: “There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.” — [\*MN 117\*](#)

§4. Phenomena are  
preceded by the heart,  
ruled by the heart,  
made of the heart.

If you speak or act  
with a corrupted heart,  
then suffering follows you—  
as the wheel of the cart,  
the track of the ox  
that pulls it.

Phenomena are  
preceded by the heart,  
ruled by the heart,  
made of the heart.

If you speak or act  
with a calm, bright heart,  
then happiness follows you,  
like a shadow  
that never leaves. — [\*Dhp 1-2\*](#)

§5. “And what is right view? Knowledge in terms of stress, knowledge in terms of the origination of stress, knowledge in terms of the cessation of stress, knowledge in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.



“And what is right resolve? Resolve for renunciation, for non- ill will, & for harmlessness: This is called right resolve.” — [SN 45:8](#)

§6. “This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’ ... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’ ... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be realized’ ... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed.’” — [SN 56:11](#)

§7. “As for the course of action that is unpleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is profitable, it is in light of this course of action that one may be known—in terms of manly stamina, manly persistence, manly effort—as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.

“As for the course of action that is pleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is unprofitable, it is in light of this course of action that one may be known—in terms of manly stamina, manly persistence, manly effort—as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.” — [AN 4:115](#)

§8. What does discernment come from? You might compare it with learning to become a potter, a tailor, or a basket weaver. The teacher will start out by telling you how to make a pot, sew a shirt or a pair of pants, or weave different patterns, but the proportions and beauty of the object you make will have to depend on your own powers of observation. Suppose you weave a basket and then take a good look at its proportions, to see if it’s too short or too tall. If it’s too short, weave another one, a little taller, and then take a good look at it to see if there’s anything that still needs improving, to see if it’s too thin or too fat. Then weave another one, better-looking than the last. Keep this up until you have one that’s as beautiful and well-

proportioned as possible, one with nothing to criticize from any angle. This last basket you can take as your standard. You can now set yourself up in business.

What you've done is to learn from your own actions. As for your previous efforts, you needn't concern yourself with them any longer. Throw them out. This is a sense of discernment that arises of its own accord, an ingenuity and sense of judgment that come not from anything your teachers have taught you, but from observing and evaluating on your own the object that you yourself have made.

The same holds true in practicing meditation. For discernment to arise, you have to be observant as you keep track of the breath and to gain a sense of how to adjust and improve it so that it's well-proportioned throughout the body—to the point where it flows evenly without faltering, so that it's comfortable in slow and out slow, in fast and out fast, long, short, heavy, or refined. Get so that both the in-breath and the out-breath are comfortable no matter what way you breathe, so that—no matter when—you immediately feel a sense of ease the moment you focus on the breath. When you can do this, physical results will appear: a sense of ease and lightness, open and spacious. The body will be strong, the breath and blood will flow unobstructed and won't form an opening for disease to step in. The body will be healthy and awake.

As for the mind, when mindfulness and alertness are the causes, a still mind is the result. When negligence is the cause, a mind distracted and restless is the result. So we must try to make the causes good, in order to give rise to the good results we've referred to. If we use our powers of observation and evaluation in caring for the breath, and are constantly correcting and improving it, we'll develop awareness on our own, the fruit of having developed our concentration higher step by step. —  
*Phra Ajaan Lee: Inner Strength*

§9. People with discernment will see that stress is of two kinds: (1) physical stress, or the inherent stress of natural conditions; and (2) mental stress, or the stress of defilement....

Aging, illness, and death are simply the shadows of stress and not its true substance. People lacking discernment will try to do away with the shadows, which leads only to more suffering and stress. This is because they aren't acquainted with what the shadows and substance of stress come from. The essence of stress lies with the mind. Aging, illness, and death are its shadows or effects that show by way of the body. When we want to kill our enemy and so take a knife to stab his shadow, how is he going to die? In the same way, ignorant people try to destroy the shadows of stress

and don't get anywhere. As for the essence of stress in the heart, they don't think of remedying it at all. This lack of awareness on their part is one form of *avijjā*, or ignorance. — *Phra Ajaan Lee: Inner Strength*

## Goodwill

§10. All  
tremble at the rod,  
all  
are fearful of death.  
Drawing the parallel to  
yourself,  
neither kill nor get others to kill. — *Dhp 129*

§11. Think: “Happy, at rest,  
may all beings be happy at heart.  
Whatever beings there may be,  
weak or strong, without exception,  
long, large,  
middling, short,  
subtle, blatant,  
seen & unseen,  
near & far,  
born & seeking birth:  
May all beings be happy at heart.  
Let no one deceive another  
or despise anyone anywhere,  
or through anger or resistance  
wish for another to suffer.”  
As a mother would risk her life  
to protect her child, her only child,  
even so should one cultivate the heart limitlessly  
with regard to all beings. — *Sn 1:8*

§12. “May these beings—free from animosity, free from oppression, and free from trouble—look after themselves with ease.” — *AN 10:176*

§13. “Suppose that a man were to drop a salt crystal into a small amount of water in a cup. What do you think? Would the water in the cup become salty because of the salt crystal, and unfit to drink?”

“Yes, lord. Why is that? There being only a small amount of water in the cup, it would become salty because of the salt crystal, and unfit to drink.”

“Now, suppose that a man were to drop a salt crystal into the River Ganges. What do you think? Would the water in the River Ganges become salty because of the salt crystal, and unfit to drink?”

“No, lord. Why is that? There being a great mass of water in the River Ganges, it would not become salty because of the salt crystal or unfit to drink.”

“In the same way, there is the case where a trifling evil deed done by one individual (the first) takes him to hell; and there is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by the other individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

“Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual takes him to hell? There is the case where a certain individual is undeveloped in body [i.e., pleasure can invade his mind and remain there], undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind [i.e., pain can invade his mind and remain there], undeveloped in discernment: restricted, small-hearted, dwelling with suffering. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual takes him to hell.

“Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment? There is the case where a certain individual is developed in body, developed in virtue, developed in mind, developed in discernment: unrestricted, large-hearted, dwelling with the immeasurable. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.” — [\*AN 3:101\*](#)

§14. “Monks, for one whose awareness-release through goodwill is cultivated, developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken, eleven rewards can be expected. Which eleven?

“One sleeps easily, wakes easily, dreams no evil dreams. One is dear to human beings, dear to non-human beings. The devas protect one. Neither fire, poison, nor weapons can touch one. One’s mind gains concentration quickly. One’s complexion is bright. One dies unconfused and—if penetrating no higher—is headed for a Brahmā world.” — [\*AN 11:16\*](#)

## II. TRUTH

§15. “Let an observant person come—one who is not fraudulent, not deceitful, one of a straightforward nature. I instruct him. I teach him the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, he in no long time knows for himself, sees for himself: ‘So this is how there is the right liberation from bondage, i.e., the bondage of ignorance.’” — *MN 80*

§16. Kāpadika Bhāradvāja: “But to what extent, Master Gotama, is there the guarding of the truth? To what extent does one guard the truth? We ask Master Gotama about the guarding of the truth.”

The Buddha: “If a person has conviction, his statement, ‘This is my conviction,’ guards the truth. But he doesn’t yet come to the definite conclusion that ‘Only this is true; anything else is worthless.’ To this extent, Bhāradvāja, there is the guarding of the truth. To this extent one guards the truth. I describe this as the guarding of the truth. But it is not yet an awakening to the truth.

“If a person likes something... holds an unbroken tradition... has something reasoned through analogy... has something he agrees to, having pondered views, his statement, ‘This is what I agree to, having pondered views,’ guards the truth. But he doesn’t yet come to the definite conclusion that ‘Only this is true; anything else is worthless.’ To this extent, Bhāradvāja, there is the guarding of the truth. To this extent one guards the truth. I describe this as the guarding of the truth. But it is not yet an awakening to the truth.”

“Yes, Master Gotama, to this extent there is the guarding of the truth. To this extent one guards the truth. We regard this as the guarding of the truth. But to what extent is there an awakening to the truth? To what extent does one awaken to the truth? We ask Master Gotama about awakening to the truth.”

“There is the case, Bhāradvāja, where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village or town. Then a householder or householder’s son goes to him and observes him with regard to three mental qualities—qualities based on greed, qualities based on aversion, qualities based on delusion: ‘Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on greed that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, “I know,” while not knowing, or say, “I see,” while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?’ As he observes him, he comes to know, ‘There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on greed.... His bodily behavior & verbal behavior are those of one not greedy.

And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's greedy.

“When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on greed, he next observes him with regard to qualities based on aversion ... based on delusion: ‘Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on delusion that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, “I know,” while not knowing, or say, “I see,” while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?’ As he observes him, he comes to know, ‘There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on delusion.... His bodily behavior & verbal behavior are those of one not deluded. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's deluded.

“When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on delusion, he places conviction in him. With the arising of conviction, he visits him & grows close to him. Growing close to him, he lends ear. Lending ear, he hears the Dhamma. Hearing the Dhamma, he remembers it. Remembering it, he penetrates the meaning of those dhammas. Penetrating the meaning, he comes to an agreement through pondering those dhammas. There being an agreement through pondering those dhammas, desire arises. With the arising of desire, he becomes willing. Willing, he contemplates [literally: weighs, compares]. Contemplating, he makes an exertion. Exerting himself, he both realizes the ultimate meaning of the truth with his body and sees by penetrating it with discernment.

“To this extent, Bhāradvāja, there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. I describe this as an awakening to the truth. But it is not yet the final attainment of the truth.”

“Yes, Master Gotama, to this extent there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. We regard this as an awakening to the truth. But to what extent is there the final attainment of the truth? To what extent does one finally attain the truth? We ask Master Gotama about the final attainment of the truth.”

“The cultivation, development, & pursuit of those very same qualities: to this extent, Bhāradvāja, there is the final attainment of the truth. To this extent one finally attains the truth. I describe this as the final attainment of the truth.” — MN  
95

§17. “Whatever is seen or heard or sensed  
and fastened onto as true by others,  
One who is Such—among the self-fettered—  
would not further claim to be true or even false.  
“Having seen well in advance that arrow  
where generations are fastened & hung  
—‘I know, I see, that’s just how it is!’—  
there’s nothing of the Tathāgata fastened.” — [AN 4:24](#)

## Virtue

§18. “Now, there are these five gifts, five great gifts—original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning—that are not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and are unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans. Which five?

“There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the first gift, the first great gift—original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning—that is not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and is unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans.”

[Similarly with the four remaining precepts: abandoning taking what is not given (stealing), abandoning sexual misconduct, abandoning lying, abandoning the use of intoxicants.] — [AN 8:39](#)

§19. “Monks, the taking of life—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from the taking of life is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to a short life span.

“Stealing—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from stealing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the loss of one’s wealth.



“Sexual misconduct—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from sexual misconduct is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to rivalry & revenge.

“Telling lies—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from telling lies is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to being falsely accused.

“Divisive speech—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from divisive speech is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the breaking of one’s friendships.

“Harsh speech—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from harsh speech is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to unappealing sounds.

“Idle chatter—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from idle chatter is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to words that aren’t worth taking to heart.

“The drinking of fermented & distilled liquors—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from drinking fermented & distilled liquors is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to mental derangement.” — [\*AN 8:40\*](#)

**§20.** “And how is one an individual who practices for his own benefit and for that of others? There is the case where a certain individual himself abstains from the taking of life and encourages others in undertaking abstinence from the taking of life. He himself abstains from stealing and encourages others in undertaking abstinence from stealing. He himself abstains from sexual misconduct and encourages others in undertaking abstinence from sexual misconduct. He himself abstains from lying and encourages others in undertaking abstinence from lying. He himself abstains from intoxicants that cause heedlessness and encourages others in undertaking abstinence from intoxicants that cause heedlessness. Such is the individual who practices for his own benefit and for that of others.” — [\*AN 4:99\*](#)



§21. “Monks, there are these five kinds of loss. Which five? Loss of relatives, loss of wealth, loss through disease, loss in terms of virtue, loss in terms of views. It’s not by reason of loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease that beings—with the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. It’s by reason of loss in terms of virtue and loss in terms of views that beings—with the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.” — [AN 5:130](#)

## Persistence

§22. “And what is right effort? There is the case where one generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds, & exerts one’s intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This is called right effort.” — [SN 45:8](#)

§23. “And how is striving fruitful, how is exertion fruitful? There is the case where a monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not fixated on that pleasure. He discerns that ‘When I exert a [bodily, verbal, or mental] fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of *exertion* there is dispassion. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of *equanimity* there is dispassion.’ So he exerts a fabrication against the (first) cause of stress... and develops equanimity with regard to the (second) cause of stress... Thus the stress [coming from any cause of the first sort] is exhausted... and the stress [coming from any cause of the second sort] is exhausted.” — [MN 101](#)

§24. On that occasion Ven. Soṇa was staying near Rājagaha in the Cool Wood. Then, as Ven. Soṇa was meditating in seclusion [after doing walking meditation until the skin of his soles was split & bleeding], this train of thought arose in his awareness: “Of the Blessed One’s disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Now, my family has enough wealth that it would be possible to enjoy wealth & make

merit. What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?”

Then the Blessed One, as soon as he perceived with his awareness the train of thought in Ven. Soṇa’s awareness disappeared from Vulture Peak Mountain—just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—appeared in the Cool Wood right in front of Ven. Soṇa, and sat down on a prepared seat. Ven. Soṇa, after bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “Just now, as you were meditating in seclusion, didn’t this train of thought appear to your awareness: ‘Of the Blessed One’s disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from effluents.... What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?’”

“Yes, lord.”

“Now, what do you think, Soṇa. Before, when you were a house-dweller, were you skilled at playing the vina?”

“Yes, lord.”

“And what do you think: When the strings of your vina were too taut, was your vina in tune & playable?”

“No, lord.”

“And what do you think: When the strings of your vina were too loose, was your vina in tune & playable?”

“No, lord.”

“And what do you think: When the strings of your vina were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned to be right on pitch, was your vina in tune & playable?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, Soṇa, over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your persistence, attune the pitch of the (five) faculties (to that), and there pick up your theme.”

“Yes, lord,” Ven. Soṇa answered the Blessed One. Then, having given this exhortation to Ven. Soṇa, the Blessed One—as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—disappeared from the Cool Wood and appeared on Vulture Peak Mountain.

So, after that, Ven. Soṇa determined the right pitch for his persistence, attuned the pitch of the (five) faculties (to that), and there picked up his theme. Dwelling

alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.” And thus Ven. Soṇa became another one of the arahants. — [AN 6:55](#)

### III. RELINQUISHMENT

§25. If, by forsaking  
a limited ease,  
he would see  
an abundance of ease,  
the enlightened man  
would forsake  
the limited ease  
for the sake  
of the abundant. — [Dhp 290](#)

§26. *Ven. Suppiya:*  
I’ll make a trade:  
aging for the ageless,  
burning for the unbound:  
the highest peace,  
the unexcelled rest  
from the yoke. — [Thag 1:32](#)

### Giving

§27. As he was sitting to one side, King Pasenadi Kosala said to the Blessed One: “Where, lord, should a gift be given?”  
“Wherever the mind feels confidence, great king.”  
“But a gift given where, lord, bears great fruit?”  
“This (question) is one thing, great king—‘Where should a gift be given?’—while this—‘A gift given where bears great fruit?’—is something else entirely. What

is given to a virtuous person—rather than to an unvirtuous one—bears great fruit.”  
— [SN 3:24](#)

§28. “One who is generous, a master of giving, is dear & charming to people at large... this is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

“And further, good people, people of integrity, admire one who is generous, a master of giving... this, too, is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

“And further, the fine reputation of one who is generous, a master of giving, is spread far & wide... this, too, is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

“And further, when one who is generous, a master of giving, approaches any assembly of people—noble warriors, brahmans, householders, or contemplatives—he/she does so confidently & without embarrassment... this, too, is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

“And further, at the break-up of the body, after death, one who is generous, a master of giving, reappears in a good destination, the heavenly world... this is a fruit of giving in the next life.”— [AN 5:34](#)

§29. “A person of integrity gives a gift with a sense of conviction. A person of integrity gives a gift attentively. A person of integrity gives a gift in season. A person of integrity gives a gift with an empathetic heart. A person of integrity gives a gift without adversely affecting himself or others.

“Having given a gift with a sense of conviction, he—wherever the result of that gift ripens—is rich, with much wealth, with many possessions. And he is well-built, handsome, extremely inspiring, endowed with a lotus-like complexion.

“Having given a gift attentively, he—wherever the result of that gift ripens—is rich, with much wealth, with many possessions. And his children, wives, slaves, servants, and workers listen carefully to him, lend him their ears, and serve him with understanding hearts.

“Having given a gift in season, he—wherever the result of that gift ripens—is rich, with much wealth, with many possessions. And his goals are fulfilled in season.

“Having given a gift with an empathetic heart, he—wherever the result of that gift ripens—is rich, with much wealth, with many possessions. And his mind inclines to the enjoyment of the five strings of lavish sensuality.

“Having given a gift without adversely affecting himself or others, he—wherever the result of that gift ripens—is rich, with much wealth, with many possessions. And

not from anywhere does destruction come to his property— whether from fire, from water, from kings, from thieves, or from hateful heirs.

“These five are a person of integrity’s gifts.” — [\*AN 5:148\*](#)

§30. Ven. Sāriputta: “Lord, what is the cause, what is the reason, why a person gives a gift of a certain sort and it does not bear great fruit or great benefit, whereas another person gives a gift of the same sort and it bears great fruit and great benefit?”

The Buddha: “... Having given a gift seeking one’s own profit—with a mind attached (to the reward), seeking to store up for oneself, (with the thought), ‘I’ll enjoy this after death’—on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of the Four Great Kings. Then, having exhausted that action, that power, that status, that sovereignty, one is a returner, coming back to this world....

“Having given a gift with the thought, ‘Giving is good,’ on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of the Devas of the Thirty-three. Then, having exhausted that action, that power, that status, that sovereignty, one is a returner, coming back to this world....

“Having given a gift with the thought, ‘This was given in the past, done in the past, by my father & grandfather. It would not be right for me to let this old family custom be discontinued,’ on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of the Devas of the Hours....

“Having given a gift with the thought, ‘I am well-off. These are not well-off. It would not be right for me, being well-off, not to give a gift to those who are not well-off,’ on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of the Contented Devas....

“Having given a gift with the thought, ‘Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past—Aṭṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāmadeva, Vessāmitta, Yamadaggi, Aṅgīrasa, Bhāradvāja, Vāseṭṭha, Kassapa, & Bhagu—in the same way will this be my distribution of gifts,’ on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of the Devas who Delight in Creation....

“Having given a gift with the thought, ‘When this gift of mine is given, it makes the mind serene. Gratification & joy arise,’ on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others [muses?]. Then, having exhausted that action, that power, that status, that sovereignty, one is a returner, coming back to this world....

“ Or, having given a gift... with the thought, ‘This is an ornament for the mind, a support for the mind’—on the break-up of the body, after death, one reappears in the company of Brahmā’s Retinue. Then, having exhausted that action, that power, that status, that sovereignty, one is a non-returner. One does not come back to this world.

“This, Sāriputta, is the cause, this is the reason, why a person gives a gift of a certain sort and it does not bear great fruit or great benefit, whereas another person gives a gift of the same sort and it bears great fruit and great benefit.” — [\*AN 7:49\*](#)

§31. “And how is a donation endowed with six factors? There is the case where there are the three factors of the donor, the three factors of the recipients.

“And which are the three factors of the donor? There is the case where the donor, before giving, is glad; while giving, his/her mind is bright & clear; and after giving is gratified. These are the three factors of the donor.

“And which are the three factors of the recipients? There is the case where the recipients are free of passion or are practicing for the subduing of passion; free of aversion or practicing for the subduing of aversion; and free of delusion or practicing for the subduing of delusion. These are the three factors of the recipients....

“Just as it’s not easy to take the measure of the great ocean as ‘just this many buckets of water, just this many hundreds of buckets of water, just this many thousands of buckets of water, or just this many hundreds of thousands of buckets of water.’ It’s simply reckoned as a great mass of water, incalculable, immeasurable. In the same way, it’s not easy to take the measure of the merit of a donation thus endowed with six factors as ‘just this much a bonanza of merit, a bonanza of what is skillful—a nutriment of bliss, heavenly, resulting in bliss, leading to heaven—that leads to what is desirable, pleasing, charming, beneficial, pleasant.’ It is simply reckoned as a great mass of merit, incalculable, immeasurable.” — [\*AN 6:37\*](#)

§32. The world always has things that come in pairs, but the Dhamma is one thing all the way through. — *Phra Ajaan Dune: Gifts He Left Behind*

## Renunciation

§33. “There are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire; sounds cognizable via the ear... aromas cognizable via the nose... flavors

cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire. But these are not sensuality. They are called strings of sensuality in the discipline of the noble ones.

The passion for one's resolves is a person's sensuality,  
not the beautiful sensual pleasures  
found in the world.

The passion for one's resolves is a person's sensuality.  
The beauties remain as they are in the world,  
while the enlightened, in this regard,  
subdue their desire. — [\*AN 6:63\*](#)

§34. “Even though a disciple of the noble ones has clearly seen as it has come to be with right discernment that sensuality is of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks, still—if he has not attained a rapture & pleasure apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful mental qualities, or something more peaceful than that—he can be tempted by sensuality. But when he has clearly seen as it has come to be with right discernment that sensuality is of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks, and he has attained a rapture & pleasure apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful qualities, or something more peaceful than that, he cannot be tempted by sensuality.” — [\*MN 14\*](#)

§35. On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Āḷavī on a spread of leaves by a cattle track in a siṃsapā forest. Then Hatthaka of Āḷavī, out roaming & rambling for exercise, saw the Blessed One sitting on a spread of leaves by the cattle track in the siṃsapā forest. On seeing him, he went to him and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, “Lord, I hope the Blessed One has slept in ease.”

“Yes, young man. I have slept in ease. Of those in the world who sleep in ease, I am one.”

“But cold, lord, is the winter night. The ‘Between-the-Eights’ [a period in February] is a time of snowfall. Hard is the ground trampled by cattle hooves. Thin is the spread of leaves. Sparse are the leaves in the trees. Thin are your ochre robes. And cold blows the Verambā wind. Yet still the Blessed One says, ‘Yes, young man. I have slept in ease. Of those in the world who sleep in ease, I am one.’”

“In that case, young man, I will question you in return. Answer as you see fit. Now, what do you think? Suppose a householder or householder's son has a house



with a gabled roof, plastered inside & out, draft-free, with close-fitting door & windows shut against the wind. Inside he has a throne-like bed spread with a long-fleeced coverlet, a white wool coverlet, an embroidered coverlet, a rug of kadali-deer hide, with a canopy above, & red cushions on either side. And there a lamp would be burning, and his four wives, with their many charms, would be attending to him. Would he sleep in ease, or not? Or how does this strike you?”

“Yes, lord, he would sleep in ease. Of those in the world who sleep in ease, he would be one.”

“But what do you think, young man. Might there arise in that householder or householder’s son any bodily fevers or fevers of mind born of passion so that—burned with those passion-born fevers—he would sleep miserably?”

“Yes, lord.”

“As for those passion-born fevers—burned with which the householder or householder’s son would sleep miserably—that passion has been abandoned by the Tathāgata, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. Therefore he sleeps in ease.”

[Similarly with aversion and delusion.] — [AN 3:35](#)

§36. “Now, there is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *sensuality*, that is an affliction for him. Just as pain would arise in a healthy person as an affliction, even so the attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality that beset the monk is an affliction for him.” — [AN 9:34](#)

§37. “And how is striving fruitful, how is exertion fruitful? There is the case where a monk... notices this: ‘When I live according to my pleasure, unskillful mental qualities increase in me & skillful qualities decline. When I exert myself with stress & pain, though, unskillful qualities decline in me & skillful qualities increase. Why don’t I exert myself with stress & pain?’ So he exerts himself with stress & pain, and while he is exerting himself with stress & pain, unskillful qualities decline in him, & skillful qualities increase. Then at a later time he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was exerting himself with stress & pain....



“Suppose that a fletcher were to heat & warm an arrow shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable. Then at a later time he would no longer heat & warm the shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was heating & warming the shaft.... In the same way, the monk... no longer exerts himself with stress & pain. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was exerting himself with stress & pain.” —

*MN 101*

#### IV. CALM

§38. How inconstant are fabrications!

Their nature:       to arise & pass away.

They disband     as they are arising.

Their total stilling is bliss. — *DN 16*

#### Endurance

§39. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha at the Maddakucchi Deer Reserve. Now, at that time his foot had been pierced by a stone sliver [after Devadatta had tried to kill him by rolling a boulder down a hillside]. Excruciating were the bodily feelings that developed within him—painful, fierce, sharp, wracking, repellent, disagreeable—but he endured them mindful, alert, & unperturbed. Having had his outer robe folded in four and laid out, he lay down on his right side in the lion’s posture—with one foot placed on top of the other—mindful & alert.

Then Māra the Evil One went to the Blessed One and recited this verse in his presence:

“Are you lying there in a stupor,  
or drunk on poetry?  
Are your goals so very few?  
All alone in a secluded lodging,  
what is this dreamer, this sleepy-face?”

*The Buddha:*

“I lie here,  
not in a stupor,

nor drunk on poetry.  
My goal attained,  
I am sorrow-free.  
All alone in a secluded lodging,  
I lie down with sympathy  
for all beings.  
Even those pierced in the chest  
with an arrow,  
their hearts rapidly,  
rapidly beating:  
Even they with their arrows  
are able to sleep.  
So why shouldn't I,  
with my arrow removed?  
I'm not awake with worry,  
nor afraid to sleep.  
Days & nights  
don't oppress me.  
I see no threat of decline  
in any world at all.  
That's why I sleep  
with sympathy  
for all beings."

Then Māra the Evil One—sad & dejected at realizing, "The Blessed One knows me; the One Well-Gone knows me"—vanished right there. — [\*SN 4:13\*](#)

§40. "Once, monks, in this same Sāvattī, there was a lady of a household named Vedehikā. This good report about Lady Vedehikā had circulated: 'Lady Vedehikā is gentle. Lady Vedehikā is even-tempered. Lady Vedehikā is calm.' Now, Lady Vedehikā had a slave named Kālī who was diligent, deft, & neat in her work. The thought occurred to Kālī the slave: 'This good report about my Lady Vedehikā has circulated: "Lady Vedehikā is even-tempered. Lady Vedehikā is gentle. Lady Vedehikā is calm." Now, is anger present in my lady without showing, or is it absent? Or is it just because I'm diligent, deft, & neat in my work that the anger present in my lady doesn't show? Why don't I test her?'

“So Kālī the slave got up after daybreak. Then Lady Vedehikā said to her: ‘Hey, Kālī!’

“‘Yes, madam?’

“‘Why did you get up after daybreak?’

“‘No reason, madam.’

“‘No reason, you wicked slave, and yet you get up after daybreak?’ Angered & displeased, she scowled.

Then the thought occurred to Kālī the slave: ‘Anger *is* present in my lady without showing, and not absent. And it’s just because I’m diligent, deft, & neat in my work that the anger present in my lady doesn’t show. Why don’t I test her some more?’

“So Kālī the slave got up later in the day. Then Lady Vedehikā said to her: ‘Hey, Kālī!’

“‘Yes, madam?’

“‘Why did you get up later in the day?’

“‘No reason, madam.’

“‘No reason, you wicked slave, and yet you get up later in the day?’ Angered & displeased, she grumbled.

Then the thought occurred to Kālī the slave: ‘Anger *is* present in my lady without showing, and not absent. And it’s just because I’m diligent, deft, & neat in my work that the anger present in my lady doesn’t show. Why don’t I test her some more?’

“So Kālī the slave got up even later in the day. Then Lady Vedehikā said to her: ‘Hey, Kālī!’

“‘Yes, madam?’

“‘Why did you get up even later in the day?’

“‘No reason, madam.’

“‘No reason, you wicked slave, and yet you get up even later in the day?’ Angered & displeased, she grabbed hold of a rolling pin and gave her a whack over the head, cutting it open.

Then Kālī the slave, with blood streaming from her cut-open head, went and denounced her mistress to the neighbors: ‘See, ladies, the gentle one’s handiwork? See the even-tempered one’s handiwork? See the calm one’s handiwork? How could she, angered & displeased with her only slave for getting up after daybreak, grab hold of a rolling pin and give her a whack over the head, cutting it open?’

After that this evil report about Lady Vedehikā circulated: ‘Lady Vedehikā is vicious. Lady Vedehikā is foul-tempered. Lady Vedehikā is violent.’

“In the same way, monks, a monk may be ever so gentle, ever so even-tempered, ever so calm, as long as he is not touched by disagreeable aspects of speech. But it is only when disagreeable aspects of speech touch him that he can truly be known as gentle, even-tempered, & calm. I don’t call a monk easy to admonish if he is easy to admonish and makes himself easy to admonish only by reason of robes, almsfood, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick. Why is that? Because if he doesn’t get robes, almsfood, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick, then he isn’t easy to admonish and doesn’t make himself easy to admonish. But if a monk is easy to admonish and makes himself easy to admonish purely out of esteem for the Dhamma, respect for the Dhamma, reverence for the Dhamma, then I call him easy to admonish. Thus, monks, you should train yourselves: ‘We will be easy to admonish and make ourselves easy to admonish purely out of esteem for the Dhamma, respect for the Dhamma, reverence for the Dhamma.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.

“Monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you: timely or untimely, true or false, affectionate or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, with a mind of goodwill or with inner hate. Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you with what is true or what is false. They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way. They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way. They may address you with a mind of goodwill or with inner hate. In any event, you should train yourselves: ‘Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person’s welfare, with a mind of goodwill, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with goodwill and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.

“Suppose that a man were to come along carrying a hoe & a basket, saying, ‘I will make this great earth be without earth.’ He would dig here & there, scatter soil here & there, spit here & there, urinate here & there, saying, ‘Be without earth. Be without earth.’ Now, what do you think—would he make this great earth be without earth?”

“No, lord. Why is that? Because this great earth is deep & enormous. It can’t easily be made to be without earth. The man would reap only a share of weariness &

disappointment.”

“In the same way, monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you.... In any event, you should train yourselves: ‘Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person’s welfare, with a mind of goodwill, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with goodwill and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill equal to the great earth—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’ That’s how you should train yourselves....

“Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely into pieces with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: ‘Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of goodwill, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with goodwill and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the entire world with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.

“Monks, if you attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw, do you see any aspects of speech, slight or gross, that you could not endure?”

“No, lord.”

“Then attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw. That will be for your long-term welfare & happiness.” — *MN21*

§41. “And what are the effluents to be abandoned by tolerating? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, endures. He tolerates cold, heat, hunger, & thirst; the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles; ill-spoken, unwelcome words & bodily feelings that, when they arise, are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, displeasing, & menacing to life. The effluents, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to tolerate these things do not arise for him when he tolerates them. These are called the effluents to be abandoned by tolerating.

“And what are the effluents to be abandoned by avoiding? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, avoids a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, a wild dog, a snake, a stump, a bramble patch, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspool, an open sewer. Reflecting appropriately, he avoids sitting in the sorts of unsuitable seats, wandering to the sorts of unsuitable habitats, and associating with the sorts of bad

friends that would make his knowledgeable friends in the holy life suspect him of evil conduct. The effluents, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to avoid these things do not arise for him when he avoids them. These are called the effluents to be abandoned by avoiding.

“And what are the effluents to be abandoned by destroying? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence.

“Reflecting appropriately, he does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill will... an arisen thought of harmfulness...

“Reflecting appropriately, he does not tolerate arisen evil, unskillful mental qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. The effluents, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to destroy these things do not arise for him when he destroys them. These are called the effluents to be abandoned by destroying.” — [\*MN 2\*](#)

## Equanimity

§42. “Now, what is worldly equanimity? There are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire; sounds cognizable via the ear... aromas cognizable via the nose... flavors cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire. Any equanimity arising in dependence on these five strings of sensuality is called worldly equanimity.

“And what is unworldly equanimity? There is the case where, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—one enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called unworldly equanimity.”

“And what is the even more unworldly unworldly equanimity? Any equanimity that arises in one effluent-free while he/she is reflecting on his/her mind that is released from greed, released from aversion, released from delusion: This is called an even more unworldly unworldly equanimity.” — [\*SN 36:31\*](#)

§43. “Just as if a goldsmith or goldsmith’s apprentice were to set up a smelter. Having set up the smelter, he would fire the receptacle. Having fired the receptacle, he would take hold of some gold with his tongs and place it in the receptacle.

Periodically he would blow on it, periodically sprinkle it with water, periodically examine it closely. If he were solely to blow on it, it's possible that the gold would burn up. If he were solely to sprinkle it with water, it's possible that the gold would grow cold. If he were solely to examine it closely, it's possible that the gold would not come to full perfection. But when he periodically blows on it, periodically sprinkles it with water, periodically examines it closely, the gold becomes pliant, malleable, & luminous. It is not brittle, and is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament he has in mind—whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain—the gold would serve his purpose.

“In the same way, a monk intent on heightened mind should attend periodically to three themes: He should attend periodically to the theme of concentration; he should attend periodically to the theme of uplifted energy; he should attend periodically to the theme of equanimity. If the monk intent on heightened mind were to attend solely to the theme of concentration, it's possible that his mind would tend to laziness. If he were to attend solely to the theme of uplifted energy, it's possible that his mind would tend to restlessness. If he were to attend solely to the theme of equanimity, it's possible that his mind would not be rightly concentrated for the ending of the effluents. But when he attends periodically to the theme of concentration, attends periodically to the theme of uplifted energy, attends periodically to the theme of equanimity, his mind is pliant, malleable, luminous, and not brittle. It is rightly concentrated for the ending of the effluents.” — [\*AN 3:103\*](#)

§44. “There is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity; and there is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness.

“And what is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity? There is equanimity with regard to forms, equanimity with regard to sounds... smells... tastes... tactile sensations [& ideas: this word appears in one of the recensions]. This is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity.

“And what is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness? There is equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of space, equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... dependent on the dimension of nothingness... dependent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness.

“By depending & relying on equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, abandon & transcend equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity. Such is its abandoning, such its transcending.

“By depending & relying on non-fashioning [*atammayatā*], abandon & transcend the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness. Such is its abandoning, such its transcending.” — [\*MN 137\*](#)

§45. To purify the heart, we have to disentangle our attachments to self, to the body, to mental phenomena, and to all the objects that come passing in through the senses. Keep the mind intent on concentration. Keep it one at all times. Don't let it become two, three, four, five, etc., because once you've made the mind one, it's easy to make it zero. Simply cut off the little 'head' and pull the two ends together. But if you let the mind become many, it's a long, difficult job to make it zero.

And another thing: If you put the zero after other numbers, they become ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, hundreds, thousands, on to infinity. But if you put the zeros first, even if you have ten thousand of them, they don't count. So it is with the heart: Once we've turned it from one to zero and put the zero first, then other people can praise or criticize us as they like but it won't count. Good doesn't count, bad doesn't count. This is something that can't be written, can't be read, that we can understand only for ourselves. — *Phra Ajaan Lee: Inner Strength*



## Glossary

**Ajaan (Thai):** Teacher; mentor.

**Arahant:** A “worthy one” or “pure one”; a person whose mind is free of defilement and thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.

**Bhava:** Becoming. A sense of identity within a particular world of experience. The three levels of becoming are on the level of sensuality, form, and formlessness.

**Bodhisatta:** “A being (striving) for awakening;” the term used to describe the Buddha before he actually became Buddha, from his first aspiration to Buddhahood until the time of his full awakening. Sanskrit form: *Bodhisattva*.

**Brahmā:** An inhabitant of the higher heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

**Brahman:** A member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth.

**Brahmavihāra:** A mental attitude that, when developed to a level where it can extend without limit to all beings, is conducive to rebirth in one of the Brahmā worlds. There are four altogether: unlimited goodwill (*mettā*), unlimited compassion (*karuṇā*), unlimited empathetic joy (*muditā*), and unlimited equanimity (*upekkhā*).

**Chedi (Thai):** A spired monument, usually containing relics of the Buddha or other arahants.

**Deva (devatā):** Literally, “shining one.” A being on the subtle levels of sensuality, form, or formlessness, living either in terrestrial or heavenly realms.

**Dhamma:** (1) Event, action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) nibbāna (although there are passages

describing nibbāna as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma*.

**Gotama:** The Buddha's clan name.

**Jhāna:** Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion.

**Kamma:** (1) Intentional action; (2) the results of intentional actions. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

**Khandha:** Aggregate; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced; the raw material for a sense of self: *rūpa*—physical form; *vedanā*—feeling-tones of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain; *saññā*—perception, mental label; *saṅkhāra*—fabrication, thought construct; and *viññāṇa*—sensory consciousness, the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. Sanskrit form: *Skandha*.

**Mahāyāna:** Literally, the “Great Vehicle.” A branch of Buddhism that recognizes one valid spiritual goal: full Buddhahood.

**Māra:** The personification of temptation and all forces, within and without, that create obstacles to release from *saṃsāra*.

**Mettā:** Goodwill (see *Brahmavihāra*).

**Nibbāna:** Literally, the “unbinding” of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa*.

**Pāli:** The language of the oldest extant Canon of the Buddha's teachings.

**Parinibbāna:** Total unbinding. In some cases, this denotes the final passing of an arahant.

**Pīti:** Rapture; refreshment.

**Saṃsāra:** Transmigration; the process of wandering through repeated states of becoming, with their attendant death and rebirth.

***Samvega***: A sense of dismay over the meaninglessness and futility of life as it is ordinarily lived, combined with a strong sense of urgency in looking for a way out.

***Saṅgha***: 1) On the conventional (*sammati*) level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns. 2) On the ideal (*ariya*) level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry, the first stage of awakening.

***Saṅkhāra***: Fabrication (see *Khandha*).

***Satipaṭṭhāna***: Establishing of mindfulness.

***Sutta***: Discourse.

***Tathāgata***: Literally, one who has “become authentic (*tatha-āgata*)” or who is “truly gone (*tathā-gata*)”: an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

***Theravāda***: One of the early schools of Buddhism, which takes the Pāli Canon as authoritative.

***Upekkhā***: Equanimity (see *Brahmavihāra*).

***Uposatha***: Observance day, coinciding with the full moon, new moon, and half-moons. Lay Buddhists often observe the eight precepts on this day. Monks recite the *Pāṭimokkha*, the basic code of monastic rules, on the full moon and new moon uposathas.

***Vinaya***: The monastic discipline, whose rules and traditions comprise six volumes in printed text. The Buddha’s own term for the religion he taught was, “This Dhamma-Vinaya.”

***Vipassanā***: Clear-seeing insight into the processes of fabrication in the mind, with the purpose of developing dispassion for those processes.

***Wat (Thai)***: Monastery.

## *Abbreviations*

<i>AN</i>	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
<i>Dhp</i>	<i>Dhammapada</i>
<i>DN</i>	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
<i>MN</i>	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
<i>Sn</i>	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
<i>Thag</i>	<i>Theragāthā</i>

References to DN and MN are to discourse (*sutta*); those to AN and SN are to section (*nipāta*, *saṃyutta*) and discourse. Numbering for AN and SN follows the Thai Edition of the Pāli Canon.

All translations from these texts are by the author and are based on the Royal Thai Edition of the Pāli Canon (Bangkok: Mahāmakut Rājavidyālaya, 1982).