



THE  
HEIGHTENED  
MIND



*The  
Heightened  
Mind*

*DHAMMA TALKS*

*Ajaan Lee  
Dhammadharo*

TRANSLATED FROM THE THAI BY  
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## *Introduction*

The Buddha's path consists of three trainings: training in heightened virtue; in heightened mind, or concentration; and in heightened discernment. Although all three are essential for Awakening, the Buddha often singled out the second training for special attention. Ajaan Lee does the same in the talks translated here. As he once said, the three trainings are like posts supporting a bridge over a river. The posts on the near shore and far—virtue and discernment—are not that hard to set in place, for they lie in shallow water away from the main current of the river. The posts in the middle of the river—concentration—are the ones requiring special effort, and so they need to be treated in depth.

In previous collections of Ajaan Lee's talks, the main focus has been on technique. Here the focus is more on attitudes to bring to the practice of concentration. In some cases, Ajaan Lee shows the importance of concentration by exploring its role in the path of practice as a whole. In others he admonishes his listeners while they are meditating not to wander astray, or encourages them to stay the course. The admonitions and encouragement are especially notable for the inventive stories with which Ajaan Lee reinforces his points.

Many of the passages translated here had their beginnings in talks that Ajaan Lee gave to groups of people while they were meditating. In some cases, the people were his followers; in others, total strangers. Ajaan Lee thus found it necessary to cover all levels of practice at once. His main topic is often the most basic question that occurs to people new to meditation—Why meditate?—but he also includes brief hints to more experienced meditators, as food for their own contemplation.

One aspect of Ajaan Lee's teachings that might strike you as foreign is his analysis of the body into four properties: earth, fire, water, and wind. This mode of analysis dates back to the time of the Buddha, although Ajaan Lee develops it in a distinctive way. Think of this analysis not as an attempt at biology or chemistry—the sciences we use to analyze the body from the outside—but as a way of analyzing how the body feels from the inside. This is an aspect of awareness that we often overlook and that, in English at least, we have a poor vocabulary for

describing. As you gain through meditation a greater familiarity with this aspect of your awareness, you'll come to see how useful Ajaan Lee's method of analysis is.

Two of the talks in this collection—"Dhamma for Everyone" and "The Power of Goodness"—were translated from transcripts of taped recordings of Ajaan Lee's talks. The remaining passages have taken a more circuitous route from Ajaan Lee's mouth to your eyes. One of his followers—a nun, Mae Chii Arun Abhivaṇṇā—took notes during his talks, from which she later worked up reconstructed versions of what Ajaan Lee had said. Ajaan Lee had a chance to review and revise the reconstructions of the talks dated prior to 1957. As for the talks given on later dates, Mae Chii Arun didn't make reconstructions until after Ajaan Lee's death in 1961, and so these were printed without his input.

Although the talks make for great reading, they make for even better listening. If you meditate with a group of friends, try arranging for one member of the group to read a passage while the others are meditating. In that way, you can best recreate the context for which the talks were originally intended.

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# *Beyond Death*

*Undated*

Every human being falls under the same conditions. In the beginning we're born, then in the middle we change, and in the end we fall apart and die. Death is something no one aspires to, and yet no one can escape it. We all have death at the end of our path.

Thinking about death gives rise both to benefits and to harm. For shortsighted people it's harmful, because it makes them so depressed and discouraged that they don't want to do any good in the world. In other words, all they see is the part that dies. They don't see the part that doesn't.

Actually, there are two parts to every person: the part that can die and the part that doesn't die. For example, the nature of the body is to keep changing until it falls apart. You can say that it dies, and you can say that it doesn't. The word "dies" applies to the fact that the person disappears from his or her friends and relatives, but the elements of the body simply go back to their original form. The earth returns to being earth, the water to water, the fire to fire, and wind to wind. It's like a cube of ice: If you keep the ice long enough, it'll return to its original condition of being water.

So you can say that the body dies, and you can say that it doesn't die—simply that it doesn't maintain the same form it had. According to the conventions of the world, this is called death, but wise people don't see death as anything strange or out of the ordinary. The only question is whether death is accompanied by merit or not.

This brings us to the mind that used to stay with the body. This is the important part because it doesn't die. It simply changes in line with the way good and evil arrange things for it. In other words, they arrange the level of the mind, the place where it takes rebirth. If you do good, you'll have to go to a good destination. If you do evil, you'll have to go to a bad destination. If you develop goodness to the ultimate degree so that you can let go of good and evil, the mind will become changeless, or what's called deathless. But most of us can't conceive of the truth. We

tend to overlook it, so that we never reach the deathless. This is because of our own stupidity and lack of discernment. Our ignorance hides the truth from us.

The nature of the mind is very subtle. You can't see it with your eyes. Some people say it doesn't exist, which is why people who don't consider things carefully say that death is followed by annihilation. We can make a comparison with the fire element in the air. The mind is like the fire element. The body is like a lit candle. When the candle runs out of its wax and wick, the fire has to go out. But when the fire goes out, that doesn't mean that no fire is left in the world. We're able to light another candle because of the fire element still there throughout the air. That's the way it is with us: When the body falls apart, the mind gives rise to a new level of being for itself as long as it still has the fuel of ignorance, craving, and clinging.

This is why the Buddha taught his disciples not to be heedless, to develop as much merit and skillfulness as possible, for merit and skillfulness are what bring happiness both in this world and in the next. This is in line with the sayings,

*Sukho puññassa uccayo*: The accumulation of merit brings wellbeing;  
*Puññaṃ sukhaṃ jīvita-saṅkhamhi*: Merit brings wellbeing at the end of life; and  
*Puññāni para-lokasmiṃ patitṭhā honti pāṇīnaṃ*: Merit is what establishes living beings in the next life.

The word merit here means the happiness or wellbeing that results from doing good. The good we can do comes in many forms, but in short there are two kinds:

- (1) the merit that acts as a cause, i.e., the good we have to do; and
- (2) the merit that acts as a result, i.e., the happiness coming from our goodness.

The merit that acts as a cause comes in three types: *dānamaya*, the merit of being generous; *sīlamaya*, the merit of observing the precepts; and *bhāvanāmaya*, the merit of meditating. In the Abhidhamma these three types are divided into ten meritorious activities. Generosity is expanded to include *pattidānamaya*, the merit of dedicating merit to others, and *pattānumodanāmaya*, the merit of appreciating other people's merit. These three go together in that they all counteract jealousy and stinginess. The merit of observing the precepts is expanded to include *apacāyanamaya*, the merit of showing respect to people worthy of respect, such as our elders and those to whom we should be grateful; *veyyāvaccamaya*, the merit that comes in helping others in skillful activities, sharing your strength, wealth, and intelligence. These three all go together in that they're related to interpersonal

virtue. As for the merit of meditation, that's expanded to include *dhammassavanamaya*, the merit of listening to the Dhamma; *dhamma-desanāmaya*, the merit of teaching the Dhamma; and *ditṭh'ujukamma*, making one's views straight. All four of these go together in that they are all sources of discernment.

These forms of merit can arise only when they are rooted in mental states free of greed, aversion, and delusion. As the Pali says, *alobho dāna-hetu*, lack of greed is the basis for generosity; *adoso sīla-hetu*, lack of aversion is the basis for virtue; and *amoho bhāvanā-hetu*, lack of delusion is the basis for developing the mind in meditation.

The merit you do gives you ease in body and mind. Whenever you think of the good you've done, it will always make you happy. It's a noble treasure that follows you, just as your shadow follows you at all times. Even when you die, the merit you've done will follow you and arrange a good place for you to be reborn. This is called *puññābhisaṅkhāra*, merit as a fabricating factor.

When people are about to die, they are like travelers getting ready to go abroad. Before they go, they have to prepare themselves. Only then will the trip be comfortable. For example, they have to put money in the bank, exchanging their Thai currency for foreign currency so they can use it when they're abroad. If they simply take their Thai money along with them, they won't be able to use it to buy anything. In the same way, when people leave this world at death, they can't take along their wealth or possessions to use in the next world. Instead, while they're still alive here, they have to deposit their money in the bank for Buddhists and exchange it for noble treasures, or inner wealth.

What this means is that they make donations, for example, in homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. That way they'll be able to use their wealth in the next world. If they have only counterfeit money—i.e., if they've done nothing but evil and unskillful things—they won't be able to go to anywhere comfortable or prosperous, because they lack the funds needed to take themselves there. They won't be able to return to the human world because they lack the funds—the human values—needed to take themselves there. So they'll have to turn into hungry ghosts, wandering around, losing their way, haunting people and possessing them, suffering all kinds of hardships. For this reason, being generous is like depositing your money in a bank so that you'll be able to use it when you go abroad. That's the first step.

The second step is to get a passport as proof of your nationality. What this means is that you establish yourself in the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and

Saṅgha, observing the precepts to get rid of the gross defilements in your words and deeds, as proof of your status as a member of the Buddha's following.

The third step is to learn foreign languages. In other words, you have to practice tranquility meditation and insight meditation so as to get rid of the intermediate and refined defilements—the hindrances—in the heart, straightening out the heart so that you can give rise to three forms of knowledge:

*pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*, the ability to remember previous lifetimes;  
*cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*, knowledge of the death and rebirth of living beings, seeing why they are born on low levels or high, with pain or pleasure; and  
*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*, the knowledge enabling you to rid the heart of its fermentations.

These three forms of knowledge count as the foreign languages you'll need for your journey. Your trip will be easy and fun, dazzling bright, with plenty of treasures along the way. You'll see sights you've never seen before, such as the heavens and brahmā worlds. This is what it means to be "well-gone." Even as you stay here, you'll stay well. If you want to come back, you'll be able to. If you don't, you can continue your studies and go all the way to nibbāna, released from having to swim around in the cycle of death and rebirth. You'll reach security, joyful and free from danger of every sort.

The practice of generosity, virtue, and meditation thus results in three types of treasure—the treasure of the human state, the treasure of the heavenly state, and the treasure of nibbāna—in line with your abilities to do the practice. People who are complete in all three of these forms of skillfulness are said to go well, come well, and stay well, because their thoughts, words, and deeds have been trained well. Wherever they go they are free from animosity and danger, for they are loved and respected by all beings, human and divine.

So we should each look at our condition, realizing that we're on a journey leading day by day, minute by minute, to death. There's no escaping this. For this reason, we should develop the three forms of skillfulness and merit—generosity, virtue, and meditation—so that the happiness and security resulting from goodness will arise for us, taking us beyond death, in line with our abilities.

# *The Essence of Merit*

*July 23, 1957*

Merit is the intention that arises in the heart beginning with the first thought to do something good. For example, today you decided that you wanted to come to the monastery. That thought, in and of itself, was merit arising in the mind. Then you came to the monastery, received the precepts, and listened to a sermon in line with your original intention. In this way, your original intention succeeded in producing more merit in line with its aims. But if you think that you want to go to the monastery, to receive the precepts and listen to the Dhamma, but someone else happens to object or criticizes you in a way that spoils your mood, the merit in your mind—the original intention—disappears. Even if someone else then invites you to come to the monastery, you come here against your will and sit here like a stump, with no merit arising in your mind. This is because the essence of merit in your mind has already died.

The meritorious things that you do aren't the essence of merit. For example, giving donations, observing the precepts, listening to sermons, or sitting in meditation aren't the essence of merit. Still, we have to keep doing these things so that our old merit can grow fat and healthy instead of dying away. For this reason, when you make up your mind to do something good, hurry up and do it right away. When you want to give a donation, go ahead and give a donation. When you want to observe the precepts, observe the precepts. When you want to listen to the Dhamma, listen to the Dhamma. When you want to meditate, meditate. In this way, the results of your actions will grow full and complete in all three time periods. In other words, your mind will feel happy, joyful, and satisfied in your merit when you first think of doing it, while you're doing it, and when you're done....

The intention to do good—the first stage in your goodness—is the essence of merit. It's like planting a tree. When you give a donation, it's like putting fertilizer around the tree. When you observe the precepts, it's like picking away the worms and caterpillars that will eat the flowers or leaves. As for meditating, that's like watering the tree with clean, clear, cool water. In this way, your tree is sure to keep

growing until it produces leaves and fruit that you can eat for your enjoyment in line with your original aim. If it's a flowering tree, the flowers will be bright and colorful, with large petals and a refreshing scent. If it's a fruit tree, the fruits will be plentiful, large, and sweet. This is how generosity, virtue, and meditation are means of developing the merit of your original thought.

But if your heart is in a sour mood, then you won't get much fruit from making merit or giving donations. It's like giving fertilizer to a tree that's already died. Even if all you want is a single custard apple from the tree, you won't be able to get what you want, because the fertilizer you gave to the tree has all gone to nourish the grasses and herbs growing at the foot of the tree, and hasn't done a thing for the custard apple you wanted. In the same way, if you just go through the motions of making merit, your original aim—to abandon greed, aversion, and delusion—won't bear fruit. The act of generosity is simply the fertilizer of merit. When the essence of merit has died, there's no way that you can eat the fertilizer, for it's nothing but filth—cow dung and chicken droppings. How can you ask for filthy stuff like that to come and help you in any way? But still, you're better off than people who haven't fertilized anything at all—i.e., who haven't developed virtue, concentration, or discernment—for at the very least you can gather the grasses and herbs that have fed on your fertilizer, to boil in a soup or fix as a salad.

So whenever you do anything, you have to check to see whether the essence of merit is in your heart. Some people make merit when their hearts are evil. They're like a sticky-rice sweet roasted in bamboo, where the rice on the top is soft and well-cooked, but the rice at the bottom is raw or burnt to a crisp. When this is the case, there's no way you can eat it, for it's not good all the way through. People by and large act in ways that aren't in line with their minds. Some people make donations but their hearts are still greedy, as when they give a gift because they want to become millionaires. Some people give one dollar expecting to get ten thousand or a hundred thousand in return. Some people observe the precepts but their hearts are still angry, jealous, or hateful toward this person or that. Some people meditate so that they can be beautiful and shapely in their next birth, or because they want to become devas up in heaven. Other people want to be this or that—always looking for something in exchange. This kind of merit is still wide of the mark.

The Buddha taught us to be generous for the sake of doing away with greed, to observe the precepts to do away with anger, and to meditate to do away with delusion, *not for the sake of feeding these defilements*. Some people come here to meditate and sit here absolutely still—their eyes are closed, their posture straight

and unmoving, everything on the outside just the way it should be—but their minds are running around all over the place: to their orchards, their fields. Some people’s minds go zooming abroad in search of their children or friends, thinking about all kinds of things. Their minds aren’t sitting together with their bodies. This is called a mind and a body not in line with each other—like a sticky-rice sweet where the top is cooked but the bottom is still raw.

If you’re careful to keep the essence of merit with your heart, then go ahead and do whatever goodness you want. *Don’t come to the monastery behind the corpse of your merit.* In other words, if you originally want to come to the monastery but someone else yells at you so that you come here in a foul mood against your will, this kind of merit-making doesn’t help you much at all.

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The reason we need to train our minds to be solid and strong in the Dhamma is because we’re sure to face the three dangers of the world: (1) suffering, illness, and poverty; (2) death; and (3) enemies and foolish friends. We have to prepare ourselves so that when any of these things come our way, our hearts will be strong enough to contend with them bravely and without fear. No matter what side they may attack from, we have a strategy to fight them off in every way. This is why the daily blessing says, *“Icchitaṃ patthitaṃ tumhaṃ khippam’eva samijjhatu,”* which means, “Whatever you want and desire, may it succeed quickly.” In other words, when the mind is strong and powerful, whatever you think of doing is bound to succeed.

If you let your original thoughts of merit die or disappear from the mind before you come to give a donation, observe the precepts, or meditate, the results of the original intention won’t develop, but at least you’re better off than people who don’t come at all. The original thought of merit is like a tree. If your tree doesn’t die, then the more you fertilize it, the bigger it’ll grow and the more it’ll branch out. In other words, your actions will be lovely and quiet. Whatever your hands do will be merit. Wherever your feet step will be merit. Whatever your mouth says will be merit. Whatever your mind thinks will be merit. Your whole body will be merit. When this is the case, you’ll meet with nothing but happiness.

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Virtue, in terms of its *wording*, consists of undertaking the five, eight, ten, or 227 precepts. In terms of its *meaning*, it consists of thinking, speaking, and acting in ways that harm no one. When you think, you do it with a mind of goodwill. When

you speak, you do it with a mind of goodwill. When you act, you do it with a mind of goodwill. In terms of its *flavor*, virtue is coolness. For this reason, the act of undertaking the precepts isn't the essence of virtue; it's simply a way of fertilizing virtue—our original intention—so that it'll grow fat and strong.

The Pali word for virtue—*sīla*—comes from *selā*, or rock, so when you develop virtue you have to make your heart large like an enormous rock. What's a rock like? It's solid, stable, and cool. Even though the sun may burn it all day or rain may lash at it all night, it doesn't tremble or shake. In addition, it keeps its coolness inside. What kind of coolness is that? The coolness of bravery, quick reflexes, and circumspection. This kind of coolness is virtue—not the kind of coolness of a person who's slow and lackadaisical. If you're cool, you have to be cool from the virtue within you. Having virtue within you is like having a pool of water in your house. When your house has a pool of water, how can fire burn it down? When you have this kind of coolness looking after your heart, how can anger, hatred, or ill will overcome it?

In addition, this cool rock of virtue holds fire within it—but not the fire of defilement. It's a cool fire that you can put to all kinds of good uses. When you strike one rock against another, the spark can light a fire that you can use to cook your food or light your house. These are some of the benefits of virtue.

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When you practice concentration but your mind isn't firmly established in genuine merit, Māra will come after you with a big grin on his face. What this means is the Māras of the aggregates: There will be feelings of pain throughout your body, your perceptions will be a turmoil, your thought-fabrications will think of 108,000 different things, and your consciousness will be aware of things all over the place. When this happens, your heart will be crushed and your merit snuffed out. Like a sticky-rice sweet that's not cooked all the way through: If you eat it, you'll get indigestion.

When practicing concentration, you have to be careful not to force or squeeze the mind too much, but at the same time you can't let it run too loose. Force it when you have to; let it go when you have to. The important point is to keep directed thought and evaluation in charge at all times. In this way, the mind gains quality: It won't play truant or go straying off the path of goodness. The nature of goodness is that there are bound to be bad things sneaking in, in the same way that when there are rich people there are bound to be thieves lying in wait to rob them. When you

make merit, Māra in his different forms is sure to get in the way. So when you meditate, be careful not to fall into wrong mindfulness or wrong concentration.

Wrong mindfulness is when your awareness leaves the four frames of reference—body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities. Here, the body means the breath, feelings are sensations of comfort or discomfort, the mind is the awareness of the body, and the mental quality we want is the quality of the present.

Wrong concentration is when you're forgetful or unaware, as when you're unaware of how the body is sitting, where the mind is wandering off to, how it comes back. The mind lacks both mindfulness and alertness.

But when your concentration gets established, the mind will grow higher. And when the mind is up high, nothing can reach up to destroy its goodness. Like the stars, the moon, or the sun that shine in the sky: Even though clouds may pass in front of them from time to time, the clouds can't sneak up or seep up to make the brightness of the stars, moon, or sun grow murky or dark.

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Merit is a noble treasure. It's the source of all our inner wealth. When it arises in the mind, don't let anyone else touch it. When you have a source of wealth like this, it's like having a raw diamond, which is a hundred times better than having your wealth in property, cattle, or workers, for those things lie far away and are hard to look after. If you have a raw diamond, all you have to do is wrap it in cotton and it'll keep on growing. Just make sure that you don't cut or polish it. If you turn it into a cut diamond, then even if you keep it for 100 years it won't grow any further.

In the same way, when concentration arises in the mind, you have to look after it. Don't let any labels or concepts touch it at all. That way your concentration will develop step by step. Your mind will grow higher and higher. Happiness and coolness will come flowing your way. Everything you aspire to will succeed, and eventually you'll attain the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna.

# *The Power of Goodwill*

*October 21, 1958*

The rewards of goodwill are: (1) It purifies the virtues of the person who develops it; and (2) it brings the mind to right concentration. This is why it's included in the classical forty topics of concentration.

Our Lord Buddha, from the time before he gained Awakening until he entered total nibbāna, practiced goodwill in his deeds, goodwill in his words, and goodwill in his thoughts at all times. The fact that we human beings have lived in peace through the virtues of the Triple Gem up to the present day is because of the power of the Buddha's great goodwill and compassion. For this reason, we too should develop goodwill for all beings in line with his example.

The power of goodwill can bring peace and security to the world in countless ways. There's a brief story from the time of the Buddha that illustrates this point. Once a king was returning home with his troops after having engaged in a battle. On the way, they stopped off in a cool, quiet forest to rest and to find water to drink and to bathe in, and there in the forest they happened to come across a group of around 500 monks practicing goodwill concentration. The monks' quiet manner—they weren't even making a sound—astonished the king. He said to himself, "Even in a single household of two or three people there are bound to be quarrels and commotion. But here these contemplatives are living together by the hundreds without any commotion at all. If our country could be at peace like this, there probably wouldn't need to be any battles or war."

Impressed, he went to the head monk, bowed down, and asked to be taught their contemplative practice. After listening to the head monk's advice, he sent his troops back to his capital while he stayed there in the forest, practicing goodwill meditation for twelve years to the point where he had mastered the jhānas. Only then did he return to his capital. Immediately on his return, he made a practice of spreading thoughts of goodwill in every direction throughout his kingdom and to the neighboring kingdoms as well. His people came thronging around him: happy, joyful, and filled with respect for him. When he conversed with them to learn of

their hardships and joys, he taught them to develop goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity for one another. Captivated by his words, his people listened to him with trust and respect, and followed his instructions. From that point on, love and kindness spread through every home and village, giving rise to a sense of friendship, fellowship, and cooperation that spread throughout the kingdom. There were no more wars with neighboring kingdoms, and the people lived in happiness and peace.

This story shows what the power of goodness in a single person's heart can accomplish: It brings security and wellbeing to people throughout an entire nation.

This is why the Buddha teaches us to develop inner goodness by meditating on goodwill. But you have to be earnest in really doing it if you want to get real results. Even if it's only for a short time—the wiggle of an elephant's ears or the flicker of a snake's tongue—it can give rise to amazing power, like the power of an elephant or a snake in being able to kill off people or other animals in the twinkling of an eye. But if you're not truly earnest in what you do, the power of truth won't appear in the mind, and you won't be able to use it to get any results—like the ear of a dog or a cat: It can wiggle all day long and yet it won't cause anyone any fear. With an elephant, though, all it has to do is wiggle his ears just once, and people trip all over themselves trying to run away so fast that their legs practically fall off. Or a cobra: All it has to do is wiggle its tongue once, and people fall over in a faint. The power of the mind's true earnestness has the same sort of potency.

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The worldly crown of a king, embellished with all the nine auspicious gems, even though it's dazzling and priceless, is still no match for a meditator's Dhamma-crown embellished with the Buddha Gem, the Dhamma Gem, and the Saṅgha Gem.

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If we let evil come flowing into the heart, goodness will have no chance to come in and take charge. Evil will seize power and take control, while goodness will have to go running out to stand shivering outside the walls.

# Coming Ashore

June 28, 1959

The Dhamma is something that cleanses the mind so that it's bright, clean, and happy. People differ in their temperaments: Some are crude, others intermediate, and others refined. This is why the Buddha elaborated on the Dhamma in various ways in line with the character of his listeners. In other words, he took short things and explained them until they were long. For example, sometimes he'd explain the rewards of generosity, sometimes the rewards of virtue, and sometimes the rewards of polishing the heart: what's called meditation. But his real aim was to teach people to make their minds pure. Everything else was just elaboration.

Each of us human beings is like a person sitting in a boat in the middle of an ocean filled with wind, waves, and storms. Some people are floating so far out they can't even see the shore. Some are bobbing up and down, so that sometimes they see the shore and sometimes they don't. This stands for the people who are repeating *buddho, buddho*. Some people are floating closer to land, so that they can see the fish traps, the sailboats, and the green trees on shore. Some have struggled to swim closer to shore, but they still haven't made it to land. As for the Buddha, he's like a person standing on the shore, free from all the dangers of being at sea. He's seen the dangers that people are subject to, which is why he has the great compassion to want to help us get out of the sea and safely on land. This is why he teaches us to practice generosity, virtue, and meditation, for these are the things that will pull us safely onto shore.

When we set our minds on practicing the Dhamma, we have to set our sights on the Dhamma's true aim. Don't go wandering off in other directions. You have to know which path is the wrong one, the dangerous one; and which one is the right one, the safe one. It's like steering a ship across the ocean. The captain has to watch for the signals of the lighthouse. Or you can make a comparison with driving a car: The traffic police have their red, yellow, and green lights as traffic signals at the major intersections. If, when the signal has its red light on, you don't stop, then if you keep on driving there's bound to be danger, and you're sure to get pulled over. If

the green light is on but you don't go, that's wrong, too. This is why when you're driving you have to understand the signals so that you'll reach your destination safely.

It's the same when you're traveling to the Dhamma. You have to know the Buddha's traffic signals. His red lights are his prohibitions, the things he doesn't allow. Anyone who lets his or her boat or car go through the red light will have to meet with danger. So while we're meditating here we have to make sure we don't go through the red light of our defilements.

The Buddha compared our defilements to fire. The heat of our single sun can make the world as hot as it is. Think of how hot it would be if there were five or six suns. The defilements around each of our senses are like the heat of the sun. *Cakkhum ādittam*: The eye is a mass of fire. *Sotam ādittam*: The ear is a mass of flame. *Ghānam ādittam*: The nose is a mass of fire. *Jivhā ādittā*: The tongue is a mass of flame. *Kāyo āditto*: The body is a mass of fire. *Mano āditto*: The heart is a mass of flame. Don't let these six masses of fire burn you. Normally the sensual desires arising around the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are red masses of flame burning away at the heart. If, while we're meditating, we stick our minds into these preoccupations, it's like taking a burning match and sticking it into some kerosene or gasoline. For this reason, while you're meditating, don't stick your mind into the affairs of your family, your home, your belongings, or absolutely anybody or anything at all. This is the Buddha's red light, where he tells you not to go.

The other signal is the green light, the Dhamma being explained. When the light is green, that's a sign for you to go ahead. The green light here stands for the Dhamma you've already studied, as well as the Dhamma you're training yourself in right now. When the light is green, then whether we're fast or slow, we have to go. Don't just loiter around and block the way, or the police will arrest you. In other words, when the Dhamma arises by way of our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, we have to pursue that goodness.

The Dhamma is what pushes or pulls as to goodness and peace. The green light is the Dhamma arising in a heart that's clean and pure. Right now, have our minds entered the quality of *buddha*? This is an important point. We have to be observant to see whether the affairs of our minds are heading toward the green light or toward the red light. If we're not heading in the right direction, we have to turn ourselves around. It's like picking flowers, washing them, and then putting them in a vase. We have to make sure there aren't any worms or caterpillars eating away at them. Make the mind like a pure, blooming lotus in a vase. This qualifies as the quality of

*buddha*. Or think of it in another way: The mind is cool and refreshed like a lotus blooming in the middle of a pond. It's surrounded by nourishing water, cool and with an appealing scent. If you're sitting here in the meditation hall without any hindrances in the mind, it's like a lotus in the middle of a pond. This is also called the quality of *buddha*. This is called the radiant mind, or in simpler terms, the quality of inner worth. When the mind is saturated in inner worth like this, it's happy and at ease.

The Dhamma is a preoccupation that gives the mind a sense of rapture, fullness, and ease. When it arises, we're taught to develop it and cultivate it as much as possible. Keep the mind in this preoccupation until it attains a state of oneness: That's the Dhamma. Whatever is good in the heart, we try to raise that goodness to a higher and higher level. Keep evaluating it, focusing your mindfulness on it at all times, to see how the mind enters into this state of goodness. This is called developing a foundation of mindfulness.

If you keep your mindfulness focused on a single path—as when you think *buddho, buddho*—without sending your mind off on other paths, the mind grows deeper and deeper into a state of inner worth. Just as when we walk along a path on the ground: If we keep walking back and forth on the same path, it's bound to get worn smooth. The grasses and weeds will die away, and the path will get worn deeper into the ground, to the point where, when it rains, it becomes a watercourse, watering our crops, so that they grow abundant. We'll be able to sell them for a living and grow rich, freed from poverty. This is why this quality of merit or inner worth is called noble wealth.

Things deep and refined tend to be high in quality. If the breath is refined, the mind refined, and mindfulness refined, then the brightness of our awareness will spread wider and wider, like the electric lights that spread their light throughout the capital. This is different from lantern light, which—if we want to see all around us—we have to carry and run around. When the mind is refined and the breath is refined, we'll be able to know the breath energies throughout the world. We'll see how things are going with all the elements. The heart will grow even broader, so that our foundation of mindfulness becomes the great frame of reference. The mind grows even deeper and cooler. More full and rapturous. Blooming and at ease. When the mind matures in this way, you've got noble wealth. You're no longer poor.

Coolness is like water. Wherever the ground has water there are bound to be fish, crabs, crayfish, and shellfish, grasses and vegetables, all of which can be converted to wealth. The Buddha saw the fullness of this mind state, which is why he told the

monks, “Don’t farm for a living. Don’t get involved in receiving gold and silver. Focus on doing only one thing—be intent on really practicing the Dhamma, making your minds into the single, unified path—and then whatever you want, you’ll be sure to get. This is because when the mind is full of virtue and Dhamma, you’ll always have wealth.”

This is the power that comes from making your goodness deep—like the Chao Phraya River, which is deeper and broader than any other river in Thailand. It’s full of everything—boats, rafts, motor boats, steamboats, big boats, little boats—so that travel and commerce are convenient. In the river will be fish, in the fields will be rice, melons, cucumbers, corn, wheat—all of these things will be within you. You’ll be wealthy in everything. If you don’t give rise to goodness, then no matter what, you won’t be wealthy. This is why the Buddha taught the monks, “Don’t be farmers or merchants. And don’t worry, you won’t be poor. Simply build up a lot of goodness in your hearts, and all forms of wealth will come flowing your way on their own.”

But we don’t really believe him. We believe our defilements instead, and so our minds keep sliding toward red masses of flame rather than to the clear mass of purity. This is why we’re taught, *sukkam bhāvētha paṇḍito*, the wise person develops the clear Dhamma of purity.

All I’ve mentioned so far deals with the qualities of the Buddha and Dhamma.

The quality of the Saṅgha means making the mind go forward without sliding back. We keep putting our mind into good shape. For instance, when the eye sees something that isn’t good, our mind is in good shape. The ear hears something that isn’t good, yet our mind is in good shape. The nose smells an aroma that isn’t good, the tongue tastes a flavor that isn’t good, the body touches a tactile sensation that isn’t good, yet our mind is still in good shape. This is called *supaṭipanno*, practicing rightly. When we keep the mind straight on the right path, that’s called *uju-paṭipanno*, practicing straightforwardly. When we bring the mind to the level of insight meditation, attaining the transcendent, that’s *ñāya-paṭipanno*, practicing for the sake of knowledge. As for *sāmīci-paṭipanno*, practicing masterfully, that means making our goodness even better and better. For example, when defilement arises in the heart, we have to use the Dhamma to pen it in. Defilement is like a rabid dog running around in misery. Whoever it sees, it runs right up to bite indiscriminately, until eventually it gets killed or falls down dead on its own. In the same way, when our defilements arise we have to pen them in quickly and keep them under our thumb. Don’t bring them out to put them to use. Greed, anger, and delusion are

intoxicants. When we're intoxicated, our minds are in the dark. When we're in the dark we stagger around, back and forth, dizzy and confused, not knowing what way to go, and as a result we never get to the destination we want.

The Buddha's green light takes us to the clear light of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. When we have these three gems and are sitting on the crystal throne of the seven forms of noble wealth, what suffering will we have? When we make our minds into Dhamma, the various defilements that lie fermenting in the heart will have to disappear. There will be nothing to spoil the heart. We'll be able to escape from the sea.

Once we get on land we can have all kinds of fun, for there are a lot of things we never saw at sea. It's like when we come into the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, where there are marsh trees and fresh green plants. We become enchanted and keep walking further inland to Sukhumvit Road. There we see bicycles and trucks and jeeps and pretty automobiles of different colors. This gets us even more excited, and some of us get smitten with what we see on land. In other words, we fall for the visions and signs that come in meditation. For instance, we may begin to remember previous lifetimes. If we remember bad things, we become sad. If we remember good things, we get happy. This turns into craving, the desire to be this or that, and some people get really deluded, thinking they actually are the things they see.

If our discernment isn't strong enough, then whatever we see will turn into the corruptions of insight (*vipassanūpakkilesa*)—like people who get all excited the first time they see a car. They go running to the car, wanting to ride in it, wanting to drive it, but without looking right or left or stopping to take note of anything. They run right out into the middle of the road, get run over, and either die or break an arm or a leg. After all the trouble they went to in order to get out of the sea, they get deluded and put themselves in danger all over again.

Like the example that happened a few days ago. An old monk came into the monastery, so some lay people asked him where he was from and whom he wanted to meet. He told them, "You all don't know a thing. Ajaan Lee used to be King Asoka, which is why he built Wat Asokaram. I'm King Pasenadi the Kosalan, his old friend. That's why I've come to visit him today." He had his student come in to inform me, and so I told the student, "Quick. Quick. Go back and tell him to go away. He's absolutely forbidden to come in here." Even this sort of thing can happen. This is called getting smitten with being on land, i.e., falling for the visions you see. That old monk probably had a few ideas of one sort or another arising in his mind, and so got carried away.

If you start seeing things when your discernment isn't strong enough, it turns into a corruption of insight—as when a person gets excited at the sight of a car because he's never seen one before. He wants to ride in it, to drive it, so without looking left or right he goes running toward it, right into the middle of the road. And so he gets run over by a car and killed, or else crippled with a broken leg. This, too, is a kind of delusion, a danger.

But if our discernment is strong enough, whatever we see will turn into noble treasures (*ariya-dhana*). If we see a forest of marsh tress, we can put them to use. We can cut them into firewood to use ourselves or sell in the market. If the land is a tangle of weeds, we can clear it and turn it into fields. If we don't let it lie fallow, it's sure to yield crops.

Falling for visions is also called “skewed perception.” The right way to act when you see a vision is to remember to evaluate it and then let it go in line with its true nature. Don't latch onto what you see, because all things are inconstant. If you're born poor, you suffer from your desire to be rich. If you're born rich, you suffer in looking after your possessions, afraid that they'll wear out, afraid that you'll get cheated out of them, afraid that thieves will break in and steal them. There's nothing certain or dependable at all. The same holds true with visions. So whatever you see, you have to let it go in line with its nature. Leave the trees in the forest, the grass in the meadows, and the rice in the fields. If you can do this, you can be at your ease, because you know what it's like on land, what it's like in the water, when to get in and when to get out. Once you're skilled, you can travel on water or land, at ease in every way. You can go forward or back without any obstacles. This is called *lokavidū*, knowing the world. You can stay with what you know, but you're not stuck on it. You can live in the ocean without drowning. You can live in the world without getting sunk in the world—like a lotus leaf in the water: The water doesn't seep into the leaf at all.

Fabricated things belong to no one, have no one in charge. If you contemplate them and let go of them in line with their nature—in the same way that you put down a knife, without holding onto it—the mind will reach an important point: the level of the radiant mind.

## *Right Action, Right Result*

*November 11, 1958*

The Dhamma is something constant and true. The reason we don't see the truth is because we're always spinning around. If we're riding in a car, we can't clearly see the things that pass near by us on the road, such as how big the stones on the ground are, what color they are. We look at trees, mountains, and fields, and they all seem to be on the move. If we've been in a car since birth, without stopping to get out and walk around on our own, we're sure to think that cars run, trees run, and mountains run. The fact is, though, that the truth and our spinning around aren't in line with each other. The running lies in us, in the car, not in the trees or mountains.

Everything that's Dhamma stays firm and constant. That's why it's called the truth. Whatever isn't true, isn't Dhamma. In the area of the Dhamma, one of the Buddha's highest aims was discernment. He wasn't just out after a sense of peace and ease, for simple peace of mind isn't really peaceful, isn't really easeful, isn't really restful. It still has some unrest mixed in with it. The highest happiness lies above not only peace of mind, but also above discernment as well.

Most of us, when we feel at peace and at ease, tend to get heedless and careless. As a result we don't develop any discernment. We can take a lesson from the people of Japan: Their land is poor, their crops grow slowly, and the landscape is full of volcanoes. As a result, the people have to exert themselves to make a living and always be on the alert, ready to evacuate whenever there's danger. This is why they're so active and intelligent, solving all their difficulties so that they can bring progress to their country. People who have it easy, though, tend to be stupid because they have no sense of how to exert themselves to get rid of suffering.

People nowadays have studied a lot, but they're still stupid. Stupid in what way? Stupid in that they don't know how to fix their own rice, sew their own clothes, or wash their own clothes. They don't have any skills. The time will have to come when this causes them to suffer and fall into difficulties. Most of us Thai people complain that foreigners are taking over our economy, but actually the fault lies with our own

stupidity. We can't even make one big toe's worth of happiness for ourselves, and instead sit staring off into the distance. Other people run and jump and do everything necessary for the sake of their happiness, but we just sit around and create difficulties for our families. Then, when we suffer, that opens the way for corruption. We get up from a meal and don't wash our own dishes or put them away. If all our discernment is in knowing how to eat, how will we ever get anywhere? This is why the Buddha taught the Dhamma both in terms of causes and results, skills and their rewards. He taught first about things that lie immediately around us. Once we put ourselves into good shape, it will spread to help everyone who comes after us. Whatever causes, whatever skills, will give rise to peace, ease, and convenience for ourselves, we have to do. The results are sure to follow.

On the good side, virtue is a cause for concentration. Concentration is a cause for discernment. On the bad side, suffering comes from craving. And what does craving come from? From our own stupidity. It's because we're stupid in so many ways that we suffer so much. When craving arises, it damages people all around us. This is why we should develop the causes for happiness and ease, so as to prevent these kinds of dangers—for when difficulties arise, the mind will start spinning in all sorts of ways that will cause us to suffer.

For this reason you should examine yourself whenever you get the chance, at all times. If you start feeling ill at ease, you should trace back to the causes. Ask yourself, "What have I been doing since I got up this morning? What have I been thinking about?" When you try to cut down a tree but can't cut all the way through, you have to look at your machete to see if it's nicked or dull. If you try to cut the tree down with your teeth, you won't get anywhere. You have to trace back to the causes of your problems if you want to figure out how to solve them. When you do that, all your difficulties will vanish.

Knowledge has to come from the discernment we give rise to within ourselves. The lowest or weakest level of discernment knows neither causes nor results. The middle level knows results without knowing their causes, or causes without knowing their results. The highest level of discernment knows causes before they give rise to their results. In other words, you know what kind of results you'll get from your actions. But most of us don't even know what causes we're creating, which is why the results we get aren't good at all. When we want to progress in life, we have to give rise to the causes for peace and ease. In other words, we have to practice meditation in line with the factors of the noble path.

*Sammā-kammanta*, right action, is the cause for peace and ease. Our actions come in all sorts of forms. The way we stand is an action. The movement of the body is an action. The actions, the various kinds of work in the world, require us to run, to pick things up with our body. But in the area of the Dhamma, simply sitting still with the right intention is a form of work or action. Lying down with the right intention is a form of work or action. Sitting, standing, walking, lying down: All of our movements and postures, if done with the right intention, are a form of work or action. When our actions are right, we'll experience peace and ease. And then how will suffering come our way? The reason we suffer is because our actions are wrong. We sit, stand, walk, and lie down in ways contrary to the Dhamma. And then when we take on other work in addition to our basic actions, that work is bound to turn into wrong action as well. This was why the Buddha improved his manners in how he sat, stood, walked, and lay down, so that they were all pure in terms of the intentions of his mind. What this means is that he kept practicing tranquility meditation in all his activities. His mind had to stay with what the body was doing. If the mind told the body to do something, but didn't do it along with the body, then he didn't succeed in what he wanted to do. He couldn't let the body work on its own. The mind had to work along with the body. Otherwise, his old manners would come back and take charge of the mind.

Wrong action means thoughts of sensuality: thinking in terms of sensual objects that give rise to sensual defilements. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas come from the body and mind acting together. If the mind then wants any of these things, that's called greed. You want them to be good, but when they aren't good in line with your thoughts, that gives rise to aversion. If you get carried away by your aversion, that's delusion.

But if you direct your thinking to the breath, that will kill off sensual desires. Evaluate your breath, and that will kill off ill will. There are two kinds of evaluation: (1) evaluating the in-and-out breath, and (2) evaluating the inner breath sensations of the body until they interact with the other properties of the body. When you reach this point, you forget any feelings of ill will. Once the mind and body are full, you feel a sense of ease. Rapture and pleasure are thus the results of directed thought and evaluation. Directed thought and evaluation thus count as right action. The principle of cause and effect applies to all your activities, both inside and out.

The reason we suffer is because we eat. How is eating suffering? Because we never can get full. The body isn't full; the mind isn't full. It never has a sense of

enough with its preoccupations. This gives rise to hunger.

But when the mind stops worrying about eating, and instead stays with its right actions, then you can be at your ease. Sometimes, while you meditate, you focus on the cause, the sense of seclusion, without any thought for the results. Sometimes you stay with the results, *vihāra-dhamma*, the ease of staying in the home of the mind. Even though the work this requires may be difficult, you aren't worried or concerned. The mind keeps staying with its sense of ease. When you get skilled, you gain a sense of when to focus on the causes and when to focus on the results. This is called acting with a sense of causes and results. You're not stuck on any of the baits of the world. You stay exclusively with the ease of the Dhamma. Even though the work may require effort, you're not worked up about it. You do it with a sense of wellbeing.

When there's a sense of wellbeing, the mind doesn't get stirred up. When it's still in this way, liberating insight can arise. Our work turns into the work of insight. You watch the properties of sensation: When sights strike the eye, there arise feelings of liking and disliking. You watch while these things stay for an instant, disintegrate, and disappear. You see sights as properties that move. The eye is a property that moves. Consciousness—the awareness of these things—is a property that moves. This applies to all the sense media: They all lie under the characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Discernment is what stays still enough to see what moves and what doesn't. And then there's a letting-go of both. That's when you see that ease on the conventional level, from the point of view of the Dhamma, is a falsehood—for there's an ease on the ultimate level that's true.

## *Clean & Clear*

*August 3, 1957*

The happiness to which every human being aspires is attained solely through the heart. Some of these forms of happiness, though, aren't clear or clean. The happiness that *is* clear and clean is the highest happiness in the Buddha's teachings, in other words, nibbāna. Any form of happiness aside from this is neither clear nor clean.

For the mind to attain happiness it has to depend on the Dhamma as its foundation. This is why the Buddha taught us to become acquainted with the Dhamma so that we can put it to use in developing the goodness that brings us the beneficial happiness we want.

In what way is the practice of the Dhamma so important? It's important in that when a person practices the Dhamma it gives cool shelter (1) to the person who practices it and (2) to others at large. If the world lacked the Dhamma, there's no way we could find happiness anywhere at all. This is why we have to seek out Dhamma for the heart, because the current situation of the world is such that all kinds of events are sure to come seeping into the heart. Anything protected by the Dhamma contains the causes that will bring about happiness. Anything not protected by the Dhamma contains the causes for disturbance and unrest.

We human beings are like trees. If a tree has an abundance of flowers and fruits, thick branches and leaves, and a firmly rooted trunk that doesn't fall down in the wind, it gives pleasure to the birds who come and live in it, to the travelers who pass by and rest in its shade. This is like a person who has the Dhamma as a firmly rooted foundation in the heart. Such a person gives shelter both to himself and to others as well. The Dhamma is like a rainy mist that keeps plants fresh and green. People protected by the Dhamma have a cool sense of ease within themselves and are able to spread and share it with others at large.

Take the Buddha as an example: When he was still a lay person, he was the son of a powerful king with great wealth and a large following. His palace was enormous. He had everything he could wish for, without the least thing lacking. But

even then, he saw that this sort of happiness was like a ripe banana on a tree: There's no way it could escape from the beaks of the hawks and ravens who wanted to eat it. This is why he abandoned his great wealth and went forth in search of a happiness lasting and true—in other words, the path to release from suffering. When he found it, he kept exclaiming in his heart, “What bliss! What bliss!” Even though there were times when he had to encounter situations that were difficult to bear—for instance, when there were hardships in gaining food or in the external conditions of his life—he never saw those things as troublesome in any way at all. He kept repeating to himself, “What bliss! What bliss!” to the point where he was rumored to be crazy.

Still, when he had found a happiness this true, he naturally felt compassion for the stupidity of human beings and other living beings at large who still kept themselves sunk in suffering in such a pitiful way without knowing the means for gaining release from it. Feeling this compassion, the Buddha thus wandered from city to city, village to village, to teach people the Dhamma and the way to practice by which they could release themselves from suffering and reach the same kind of happiness he had found himself. When people listened to the Buddha's Dhamma, many of them gained conviction and confidence in what he taught. So they put it into practice to the point where they attained many of the highest levels of happiness. They then brought their children, grandchildren, and friends to hear the Buddha's Dhamma, and so ever-increasing numbers of people saw the results appearing in their hearts. This is how the Buddha's teachings spread far and wide in every direction. At present, Buddhism seems to be most predominant in Thailand, in that those who respect the Buddha's teachings are found in every level of society, from the lowest to the highest. The study of the Dhamma is found on every level from the lowest to the highest. The same is true of the practice of the Dhamma: It occurs on low levels, intermediate levels, up to the highest level. The lowest levels are those of us sitting here training ourselves in meditation. The intermediate levels start with the attainment of stream-entry on up. On the highest level are the arahants. You have to be very observant to know this. There are lots of people on the low levels, but only a few on the intermediate and highest levels. The really low levels are those who want to develop goodness but whose motivation is bad. In this way our practice depends on what we want to choose: Do you want to eat leaves, flowers, or the actual fruit?

If we want the kind of intelligence that can gather flowers and fruit to eat, we have to use our discernment—the inner brightness called the eye of the mind, or

the inner eye. As for the outer eye, that's the eye of flesh. For the brightness of the inner eye to arise and see the truth, we need concentration. The outer eye keeps deceiving the mind all the time, making us see things in this way or believe things in that. This is why the Buddha taught us to develop the inner eye so that our vision can penetrate far.

There are actually two parts to each person. The outer part is the body; the inner part is the heart and mind. The outer part is like a puppet or a mannequin, built out of the elements of stress. No matter how much we fawn over it, caring for it at great expense, it won't stay with us. In the end it'll have to turn into ashes and sink into the ground. As for the mind, which is the more lasting part, we don't give it much care or attention at all. This is why the Buddha said that people are very deluded. We don't see our substantial part, and instead see only the deceptive part. We're like a monkey who sees its reflection in a mirror and assumes that there's another monkey. So it sticks out its tongue and makes faces at its reflection, trying to scare its reflection—and so scaring itself, until it gets all worn out to no purpose at all. Our substantial part is the mind. Our fake part is the body. Even if we were to decorate the body with crowns and headdresses to make it look really fancy, it wouldn't change its basic nature. Once it's born it ages, then it starts to hurt, and then it dies. No matter how much we study and gain degrees from universities all over the world, we still can't divert the body from its basic nature. There's no way it can escape dying.

This is why discerning people focus their attention on the substantial part of themselves, in other words, the part that's responsible for all things: the mind. The body isn't responsible for good or evil at all. For example, if we murder or steal, the body doesn't go to hell. No matter how much good we do, the body doesn't go along with us to heaven. The mind we can't see: That's what goes. We can't see the process of its going, but it's nevertheless capable of moving from place to place. The act of going to the good or bad destinations is entirely an affair of the heart and mind. This is why those who train their own hearts and minds are said truly to love themselves. Those who don't train their own hearts and minds are said to be in a place of darkness, or unawareness.

When the light of awareness, or cognitive skill, arises in the mind, the mind will have the arms, legs, hands, and eyes it needs to succeed in its aims. If it doesn't have this awareness, it's in so much darkness that it can't see anything at all. It has to depend totally on the body. But when you practice so as to give rise to the eye of the mind, you'll see that the body is one thing, the mind another. They're not one and

the same. At the moment our minds are still like children, which is why we have to depend on the body to be our guardian. But once the mind is trained, it will grow into an adult and be able to let go of the body. The nature of children is that they still have to depend on their guardians. But once a child is raised to adulthood, it can go out on its own without the guardian. There's no need to carry the child around any more. If we don't know how to train the mind, it'll simply stay at the childish level. The reason we all suffer so much in our lives is that our minds are still children.

This is why the Buddha taught us to find the Dhamma as a refuge or shelter for the mind. At present our minds don't have a home to stay in. No matter where we sit or lie down, the mind won't stay put. The only thing that does stay put is the body. And this is why the mind knows no happiness, like a person who always has to keep wandering without rest, tired and hot from the sun. The phrase, "home for the mind," here means the foundation of concentration. Just as a person with lots of possessions but no safe place to keep them can find no rest, in the same way people with no concentration—the foundation for the mind—can't find any peace no matter how many meritorious things they do. This is why we should train the mind to attain concentration. Training the mind is like eating a meal: When you've finished eating, you have to wash the dishes and put them away in an orderly fashion, so that the next time you want to eat you'll have them right at hand. When we want to use the mind in any of our activities, we have to keep washing it and putting it in order in just the same way.

Tell yourself, while you're sitting here, that you're on your way to the shade of a Bodhi tree, i.e., the refuge of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. When you develop your inner goodness in this way, you can't entrust your mind to the world, to any people, or any material things at all. You're going to entrust it entirely to someone venerable. In other words, you keep your mind flowing in the recollection of the Buddha without getting snagged on anything else. Use your alertness to survey your heart and take the body as your playground. Keep mindfulness always in charge of the mind, thinking *bud-dho* with the in- and out-breath. You know what the breath is like when it comes in, you know what it's like when it goes out. This is called getting established in the recollection of the Buddha. That's the first step.

The second step is to clean up the mind. You don't focus on anything involved with the hindrances, such as loving this person, hating that person, liking and disliking, good and bad. You have to be intent on releasing the mind from these

things. In this way, the Dhamma will arise in the heart with a cool sense of relief. Then you can look at the cleanliness of the mind, to see whether the way you live from day to day is clean or not. Being unclean means having a mind mixed up with defilements. As you sit here calming the mind, don't go thinking about sights, sounds, smells, etc., in ways that lead to sensual desire, ill will, or thoughts of harmfulness. If greed arises, try to wash it away. Don't let it arise again. If anger arises, try to wash it away. Don't let it arise again. The same holds true with delusion. Try to chase out every form of evil.

This is called mental purity. Once the mind comes to a stop, that's when purity will arise—like a traveler who stops and rests under the shade of a tree. His weariness will disappear, and he won't have any sweat. Passion, aversion, and delusion are like sweat that moistens and stains our mind. Whoever can stop sweating in this way—by entering the shade of the Bodhi tree through practicing recollection of the Buddha—will become clean like a person sitting under a tree. When the mind is established in good qualities, it'll be sheltered and at ease (this ease comes from stillness and calm). As the mind grows more and more clean, it will become as clear and transparent as water, giving rise to an inner brightness. Sometimes it's clean but not bright. In other words it keeps moving forward and back without staying in place. Once the mind is bright and clear, though, it'll give rise to awareness. *Cakkhum udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi*: Vision arises, knowledge arises, discernment arises, awareness arises. You'll give rise to three eyes. The eye of the past is recollection of past lives, the eye of the future is knowledge of the death and rebirth of living beings, and the eye of the present is knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations. You'll be able to let go of all things poisonous. You won't be stuck on the past, present, or future at all.

This is why, when you develop concentration, you'll end up with three eyes. In other words, your outer left eye will see good things, your outer right eye will see bad things, and they'll send them in to the inner eye, which will remain at equilibrium. You'll also have three ears: Your outer left ear will hear praise, your outer right ear will hear criticism, and they'll send them in to the inner ear, which will stay at equilibrium. This is how you can receive all the guests the world sends your way. As for the eye of the mind—intuitive insight—it'll receive your defilements. Once it really understands them, it'll be able to send them packing. That way you'll be able to live comfortably in the world, with nothing to disturb your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. You'll meet with nothing but brightness and purity.

The mind that hasn't been trained is like a child. When it's trained, it turns into an adult. As for the body, which used to seem so large and mature, you'll now see that it's really a child. It's inconstant, stressful, and not-self. But the mind trained to the point of adulthood won't be troubled by these things. Even though the body is inconstant, inconstancy won't appear in the mind. Even though the body is stressful, stress won't appear in the mind. Even though the body is not-self, nothing troubling will appear in the mind. The mind will stay still and at equilibrium, equanimous, without latching onto any of these things at all.

Once the mind is trained to a point of real strength, it's able to let go of the body. For this reason, when we develop our goodness by practicing the recollection of the Buddha as our constant preoccupation, we'll reach the point where we can let go of all attachments. Our minds will enter the current of the Dhamma with true intuitive insight, and we'll ultimately meet with the brightness, coolness, and ease I've described.

## *Genuine Practice, Genuine Knowing*

*August 30, 1958*

When you're sitting in concentration, don't think that you're sitting here in this meditation hall. Tell yourself that you're sitting alone, in the deep, deep forest. Cut away all your commitments and concerns. Don't think about the group or about anyone at all. Thoughts of what's good, what's bad, what you have or what you lack: You don't have to think them. Think just about what's in your body and establish your mindfulness exclusively on the breath. Or you can tell yourself that you're sitting face-to-face with the Buddha, so that you have to keep careful watch over the manners of the mind. Don't let it fidget around, picking its ears and nose, or scratching itself here and there. Keep the body straight and the mind focused steadily on the Buddha—i.e., exclusively on your meditation word, *buddho*. Be mindful with each and every in-and-out breath. Don't go slipping off anywhere else.

If you aren't genuinely intent on what you're doing, you're deceiving your teacher, deceiving the people around you, and deceiving yourself as well. The deceit here is that you close your eyes and act like you're in concentration, but the mind isn't still like the body. When this is the case, you'll suffer.

The results of not genuinely being intent are that things sometimes go well, sometimes they don't, sometimes you're aware, sometimes you're not. In other words, the good results you're looking for aren't constant. That's the first result. The second is absentmindedness. The mind thinks about other people, other things, and doesn't stay with the body, doesn't stay with the present. You're like a person eating a meal. You intend for your hand to put rice in your mouth, but you gaze around absentmindedly. You think you're eating a spoonful of soup, but it turns out to be a spoonful of pepper sauce. You reach for a sweet but grab and bite into a clod of dirt or a piece of gravel instead. Or you can make a comparison with a blind person eating a meal. A person with good eyesight sends you your food, telling you that, "This is rice. This is curry. This is a sweet," but you don't take note of what she says and so you get them all mixed up. Then you go blaming her for your own absentmindedness.

The third result of not genuinely being intent is forgetfulness. You lose track of your mindfulness, lose track of the breath, lose track of yourself.

All three of these results are obstacles to the practice. They're signs of not being sincere in your duties.

There are two kinds of knowing: genuine knowing and deceptive knowing. Genuine knowing is what stays right here and now within you, without going anywhere else. You know when you're standing, you know when you're lying down, speaking, thinking, etc. As for deceptive knowing, that's the knowledge going after labels and perceptions. Labels are an act of knowing, but they're not the knowing itself. They're like the shadow of knowing. Genuine knowing is being mindful of the present, seeing causes and effects. This is discernment.

For this reason, we should each try to train ourselves to give rise to discernment, the genuine knowing that won't deceive us into falling for a mass of suffering. We do this by training the mind to stay firmly in concentration, by being mindful and circumspect in our breathing, by being alert in our every movement, by being genuinely intent in our duties, and by showing respect for our teachers and for ourselves. These are the factors that will lead us to the happiness and wellbeing to which we aspire.

## *Intent*

*August 25, 1957*

When a person makes up his mind to do one thing but then turns around to do something else entirely, the results of his first intention simply won't come about. A person like this has to be classed as really stupid—an ingrate to himself, a traitor to himself. Like a child who says goodbye to its parents, telling them that it's going to school, but then goes wandering off to see a movie or a traveling show. The parents don't know what's going on. They think the child is at school. By the time they've tracked down the truth, they will have wasted a lot of time. In this way, the child harms itself in four ways: (1) There's the bad karma of having deceived its parents; (2) it throws away the money the parents paid for its tuition; (3) it stays ignorant and doesn't pick up any of the knowledge it would have gained at school; and (4) death keeps creeping closer day by day, the child itself eventually becomes a parent, and yet it can't even read or write three letters of the alphabet.

In the same way, when you aren't really intent on the practice—you come and sit here meditating but your mind isn't with the body; it goes wandering off to think about things unrelated to the Dhamma, thinking about things at home, thinking about your children or grandchildren, thinking about this person or that, thinking about things ahead or behind; your mind isn't established in stillness; your eyes are closed but your mind slips off to look for fun with different kinds of preoccupations; sometimes you meet up with dogs and cats, so you play with the dog and cats—when this happens, you harm yourself in the same ways. (1) First, there's the bad karma of deceiving your teacher, telling him you're going to practice concentration but then not doing it. (2) The teacher doesn't know what's going on and so teaches the Dhamma until his mouth runs out of saliva, but with no results to show for it. (3) You yourself stay ignorant. You sit and meditate for three years but don't get anything out of it. If people ask you about the practice, they can't get any sense out of you, which reflects badly on the teacher. (4) When death comes, you'll die with pain and hardship, with no inner wealth to take along to the next life.

So you'll keep on spinning around in death and rebirth for who knows how many lives, without ever getting to nibbāna.

All of this comes from not really being intent. If you're really intent on practicing the Dhamma, then no matter what, you'll have to get results—large or small—depending on the strength of what you can do. If you're going to meditate, be intent on meditating. If you're going to listen to the Dhamma, be intent on listening. If you're going to speak, be intent on speaking. Whatever you do, be intent on what you're doing. That way you'll get the results you want from your actions.

To get results, your intent has to be composed of the four bases for success. In other words, (1) *chanda*: Like what you're doing. If you're going to meditate, be content to stay mindful of the breath. (2) *Viriya*: Be persistent and don't get discouraged. Even though there may be pains in the body, you endure them. (3) *Citta*: Give your full mind to what you're doing. Don't just play around. Don't let your mind wander off to think of other things. (4) *Vimāṇsā*: When you really do the meditation, you contemplate to see what gives rise to a sense of peace and ease in the body and mind.

When your meditation is composed of these four factors in full, it's as if you're sitting on a chair with four good legs. You won't have to fear that the chair will start tilting or fall over. This is different from a person who's sitting on a chair with only two legs or one. If anyone happens to brush past, he may tip over or fall flat on his back. But if you're sitting on a chair with four good legs, then even if someone runs into you or grabs hold of the chair to give it a shake, you needn't be afraid of falling off. Even if they pick up the chair and move it somewhere else, you'll still be able to sit on it in comfort. You don't have fear any danger at all.

This is what it's like when you make your mind fully solid and strong in the goodness of what you're doing. You can sit and lie down in ease. Whether you're in the monastery or at home, you can live at your ease. You can eat or go without food and still be at ease. You can handle a lot of work or only a little and still be at ease. You can have ten million billions in money or not even a single red cent and still be at ease. When death comes, you can die with ease, free from suffering or hardship. When anyone can do this, the devas clap their hands in joy. When anyone can't, the devas screw up their faces, while Māra and his gang laugh and clap their hands because they've beat another of the Buddha's disciples. Think about it: Do you really want to be one of Māra's disciples?

We have to use skillfulness and merit to polish ourselves until we're shining and bright. In other words, we polish our actions with virtue, concentration, and discernment. When you train your mind with concentration until it's fully tempered and strong, it'll be calm and cool, bright and gleaming like still water in a deep well, or like the stars in the sky. The hindrances won't be able to walk all over you, for the level of the mind will keep growing higher and higher at all times. When it's really up high, it grows cool. Just as when we're sitting here: We don't feel especially cool where we're sitting, but if we go up two or three kilometers off the surface of the earth, we'll feel cold right away. In addition to cooling off, our eyes will be able to see things far, far away. We'll be able to see the condition of human beings and animals, all the dangers and difficulties of life on the world beneath us. We'll start taking these dangers to heart, so that we won't want to come back down again.

When we talk about the mind's being on a high level, we don't mean that it's high up like an airplane, simply that the quality of its awareness is heightened through training its concentration and discernment. When this happens, you'll be able to see the causes and effects of everything true and false. You'll see the dangers of wandering on through death and rebirth, and gain a sense of disenchantment with birth, aging, illness, and death, seeing them as nothing but pain and trouble. When you see things in this way, you'll lose all hankering for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas. You'll be intent solely on developing the heart to gain release from all defilements and mental fermentations, so that you won't have to come swimming around through death and rebirth in the world ever again.

# *The Fresh Flavor of Dhamma*

*August 23, 1959*

When you sit in meditation, focus your attention solely on a single preoccupation. If you slip off that preoccupation, you fall into hell. What does “hell” mean here? *Cakkhum ādittam*: Any preoccupations that come in by way of the eye are said to be a ball of hellfire. *Sotam ādittam*: Any preoccupations that come in by way of the ear are a ball of fire. Any preoccupations that come in by way of the nose, tongue, body and mind are all balls of fire. If you focus your attention on any of these preoccupations, they’ll make you as hot as if you had fallen into hell in this very lifetime. That’s why you should cut away all perceptions of that sort. Don’t let them get involved with your mind at all.

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The defilements are like salt water; the Dhamma is like fresh water, which benefits the world in three ways: (1) People can drink it; (2) it washes things clean; and (3) it helps plants to grow. As for salt water, you can’t drink it, you can’t use it to wash things clean, and if you use it to water plants, they’ll die.

A person who sits fermenting in his defilements is like a saltwater fish. Saltwater fish have a strong, nasty smell. Once when I was in Chantaburi, staying at the LotusPond Monastery, a group of fishwives carried a batch of ocean fish past the monastery at a distance of about 80 meters. Even then, the smell of the fish hit my nose and seemed really foul. As for freshwater fish, even though they have some smell, it’s not as foul as saltwater fish. In the same way, people with a lot of defilements really smell: No one wants them to come near, and wherever they go they’re despised.

Ordinarily, saltwater fish like to stay only in salt water. If you catch them and put them in fresh water, they’ll die in an instant. The same with freshwater fish: If you catch them and put them in salt water, they’ll immediately die. But modern scientists have found a way to turn saltwater fish into freshwater fish. They put saltwater fish in salt water, and then gradually mix in fresh water little by little. The

fish gradually get more and more accustomed to fresh water until ultimately they can be released into a freshwater pond and they won't die. The same with freshwater fish: the scientists gradually mix salt water into the tanks where they're keeping freshwater fish, and the fish gradually get used to being in salty water, until the scientists can throw them into the sea and they won't die. In the same way, people who are full of defilements are like saltwater fish. When they first start coming to the monastery, they bring all their defilements along with them. Then—as they start tasting the flavor of the Dhamma, as they chant and meditate—their hearts gradually get further and further away from their concentrated saltiness: their greed, anger, and delusion. Goodness seeps into their hearts little by little, gradually diluting the evil of their defilements until their hearts are entirely fresh with the taste of the Dhamma. The restlessness and turmoil in their hearts will vanish, and they'll be content to stay with the Dhamma happily and at peace, like a saltwater fish that's grown accustomed to fresh water.

There are four kinds of fresh water: still, flowing, falling, and shooting up. Still water is the water in lakes and wells. Flowing water is the water in rivers, canals, and streams. Falling water is the water of waterfalls and rain. Sometimes this type of water is so heavy and cold that it turns into hailstones, which can hurt as they hit you on the head. Shooting-up water is the water of fountains and geysers. In the same way, there are different kinds of Dhamma—so you can choose to stay with whichever of the 40 types of meditation themes you like.

When you stay mixed up with your defilements, or like to run back and forth with your external concepts and perceptions, you're no different from a person floating in a boat in the middle of a stormy sea. You can't sit or lie down to get any rest because the waves are constantly striking, making you dizzy and nauseous all the time. Your heart is all stirred up and can't find any peace. All you can do is cry out, "I'm dying! I'm dying!"

But when you try to pull yourself out from the mass of defilement or the balls of hellfire—bringing your mind into the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and establishing it in concentration—you free yourself from the wind and waves. You're like a person who has reached shore and is standing on firm ground. A person on firm ground can sit, lie down, stand, walk, or jump around as he likes. He's much more comfortable than a person out on the ocean. For this reason, we should train our hearts to reach right concentration, absolutely cutting off all our external concepts and perceptions. In this way, we'll all gain shelter and rest.

The flavor of the Dhamma is like ambrosia, the nectar that—when you drink it—makes you immortal. If you live with the Dhamma, then when you die you'll go to a good destination, as a *visuddhi-deva*, a deva pure in body and mind. This sort of person doesn't die easily—and doesn't die at all in the same way as people in general. If you aspire to the Deathless, you should wash your thoughts and deeds with cool, clean, clear, pure Dhamma so that they're sparkling clean. That way you'll meet with the flavor of the Deathless and go beyond death, reaching the transcendent and nibbāna at last.

## *Living in Peace*

*August 24, 1957*

The Dhamma is what gives peace, shelter, and happiness to the world. If the world were deprived of the Dhamma, we couldn't find any peace here at all. If people individually or as a group have the Dhamma constantly in their hearts, they're like fresh, green grass growing in a spring-fed meadow or mountain valley, constantly watered by the rain. If people lack the Dhamma—if they're evil or unskillful in their behavior—they're like grass in the dry season or in a desert, lying dead on the ground. They have nothing to attract the hearts of other people to like them or respect them. Instead, they'll simply get stepped all over and thrown away. They'll reap nothing but suffering and misfortune.

People with the Dhamma in their hearts are like trees whose flowers are beautiful and fragrant. Everyone wants to be near them, to associate with them. As for people who are shoddy in their behavior, they're like the kind of tree whose flowers may be pretty but are surrounded by thorns, or have no fragrance, or are downright foul smelling. Other people are sure to detest them and won't want to come near.

The Dhamma can also be compared to the flame of a lantern, which by its nature is dazzling bright. Our mind is like the globe around the lantern. If the globe hasn't been washed and is covered with soot, then no matter how bright the light of the flame may be, it won't be able to radiate that brightness outside of the globe. In the same way, if our mind is clouded and obscured with evil intentions, then no matter how much good we try to do, it won't be clean or pure because our hearts are still soiled with defilements in the same way that the soot soils the globe of the lantern.

We've come to this place, which is a peaceful place, so we should try to be peaceful and pure in our behavior: pure in our words and deeds, and pure in our thoughts. When we're pure both inwardly and outwardly like this, we fit in with the peacefulness of the place.

Peace comes from causes and gives rise to results. If the causes aren't present, the results won't come. The kind of happiness coming from a lack of peacefulness lasts only as long as a quick catch in your breath. But the happiness coming from peace lasts for a long, long time. If where we live isn't peaceful, it won't help us benefit from our activities. For instance, if we want to read, write, or memorize a passage from a book, we'll have a hard time. This is why peacefulness is something very important that we should all work together to foster.

Our body is like a large water jar; the mind, like the water in the jar; and our defilements, like sediment in the water. If we take an alum crystal and swish it around in the water, the bits of sediment will gather as a precipitate on the sides or bottom of the jar, leaving the water clean and clear. The Dhamma is like an alum crystal that can make our minds clean and clear. When we listen to the Dhamma and take it home to ponder so as to benefit from it, it will filter out all our unskillful tendencies, which are defilements, so that they separate out as a precipitate in the mind. When the Dhamma stays with the mind in this way, then even when there are feelings of anger, we won't get angry along with them. When there are feelings of hatred, we won't get worked up along with them. When there are feelings of infatuation, we won't get infatuated along with them. But even so, these feelings are still lying in wait there in the mind, which is why we have to develop higher forms of goodness so as to remove the precipitates completely from our water jar.

The higher forms of goodness that we have to develop are the practices for giving rise to peace in the mind. When the heart is at peace, it gives rise to an inner quality within itself, in the same way that water allowed to sit still will become more clear. We people have three instigators within us: our eyes, our ears, and our mouth. This is on the physical level. On the mental level, the instigator within us is our heart. These are the things that create a lack of peace within us. So you have to be careful not to let poison into your system through any of these things. If you realize that you've ingested poison, you have to spit it out right away. Otherwise, it'll harm you. In other words, your eyes, ears, and mouth are areas where you have to exercise a lot of restraint.

Normally, our eyes are always looking for trouble, our ears are looking for trouble, and our mouth has a habit of saying things that cause trouble. To speak in ways that won't cause trouble requires wisdom and discernment. When you have discernment, then when you ingest good food, you won't be harmed. Even if you ingest poison, you won't die. The discernment I'm referring to here is knowledge of past lives, knowledge of how people die and are reborn, and the knowledge that

puts an end to the fermentation of defilement in the heart. If you don't yet have these kinds of discernment, you have to be extra careful in looking after yourself, so that you can gain knowledge of what's skillful and what's not.

In looking after yourself, you have to (1) watch out for evil so that it doesn't arise; (2) watch out for your goodness so that it doesn't fall away; and (3) put your goodness to use so that it gives rise to benefits. When you speak, speak in a way that leads to peacefulness. If you speak in a way that gives rise to trouble, it's as if you had eaten poison. And in this way you harm not only yourself, but other people as well, in the same way as when you sprinkle poison in an aquarium of fighting fish. One fish bites another, so that the wound becomes poisoned, and when all the fish have bitten one another they end up floating dead like a raft on the surface of the water. So when you realize that you still have greed, anger, and delusion in your mind, you have to be extra careful in what you say. When you're mindful to speak only the things that should be said and hold back when you're about to say anything you shouldn't, you'll be looking out for your goodness to make sure it doesn't fall away, at the same time that you prevent evil from arising. In addition, you have to watch out for your ears. Sometimes other people speak with good intentions, but we hear them as bad. Sometimes we speak with good intentions, but other people misunderstand. When this is the case, it's no different from playing a flute in the ears of a water buffalo. It serves no purpose at all.

When we live together in a group like this, there are bound to be all kinds of sounds when we come into contact with one another. If you were to make a comparison, we're no different from an orchestra, which has to include the sound of the oboes, the sound of the gong, the sound of the xylophones, high sounds, low sounds, treble, and bass. If all the instruments had the same sound, there would be no fun in listening to the orchestra, for a one-sound orchestra wouldn't be pleasing at all. In the same way, when lots of people live together, there are bound to be good sounds and bad arising in the group. So each of us has to look after his or her own heart. Don't let yourself feel anger or dislike for the bad sounds, because when there's a lot of disliking it's bound to turn to anger. When there's a lot of anger, it'll turn to ill will. When there's ill will, it'll lead to quarrels and trouble.

For this reason, we should spread thoughts of goodwill to people above us, below us, and on the same level. When people below us show disagreeable attitudes in their words or actions, we should forgive them. When we can do this, we'll be contributing to the peace and calm of the group.

Our human minds rarely have any time to rest and relax. We all have things we keep thinking about. You could say that ever since we've learned human language, we've kept on thinking without any time to stop and rest. The mind keeps itself busy until it dies. If our bodies were this industrious, we'd all be millionaires. But when the mind doesn't have any time to rest, it's filled with the hindrances. That's why it knows no peace. So we're taught to practice concentration, letting go of thoughts about sensuality. In other words, we close off our sense doors, so that the mind isn't involved with anything external, and we set our mind still and tall in the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. We don't let it fall down into any sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations, which are sensual objects.

As for sensual defilements, we don't let the mind fall into passion, aversion, or delusion. Sometimes our concentration practice goes as we want it to, and we get pleased and oblivious. Sometimes it doesn't go as we'd like it to, and we get irritated and annoyed. These are cases of passion and aversion. As for delusion, sometimes when we sit we lose track of what we're doing or where we are. We get distracted or absentminded and don't know what's going on, good or bad, right or wrong. This causes the mind to become dark and obscure. Sometimes we drift off into thoughts of the past and think about people who have done us wrong, so that we fall into ill will, wanting to get revenge and to settle an old score. In this way we harm ourselves by spoiling our practice. All three of these defilements—passion, aversion, and delusion—are piles of dried timber just waiting to catch fire, so we have to clear them completely out of the heart.

Mindfulness and alertness are the quality of the Buddha. The cool sense of happiness they give is the quality of the Dhamma. If you can maintain that coolness until it hardens into a block of ice—in other words, you make that goodness solid and strong in your heart—that's the quality of the Saṅgha. Once you've got a solid block of goodness like this, you can pick it up and put it to any use you like. Whatever you say will give good results. Whatever you do will give good results. Your solid block of goodness will turn into a wish-fulfilling gem, bringing all sorts of happiness your way.

## *Feeding the Mind*

*August 10, 1957*

When water is subjected to the heat of the sun or the heat of a fire to the point where it has evaporated away, leaving just the dry kettle or pot: Can you say that that's the end of the water? Actually, it still exists, simply that the heat has turned it into a vapor that has dispersed into the air. So you can't say that the water no longer exists. It still exists somewhere else in another condition. The same holds true with the mind. When the body dies, the mind doesn't die along with it. It simply moves to a new place in line with your good or bad kamma. The fact that it still exists in another condition: That's what we mean when we say that it doesn't die.

Still, when it's subjected to a lot of fire, it degenerates. Just like the body: When the body is subjected to the fires of aging, illness, and death, it degenerates. When the mind is subjected to the fires of defilement—passion, aversion, and delusion—it degenerates. The more these three masses of flame burn away at the mind, the more it degenerates in terms of its goodness. It's because we have fire burning the body and the mind from both sides, that they end up having to fall apart and going their separate directions. This we call the process of birth and death.

So if you want happiness, you have to train the heart to get rid of its defilements. Only then will you be done with birth and death. But if you were to ask where that place of no birth and no death is located, it would be hard to point out. Just like pointing at an albino elephant or water buffalo to get a blind person to look at it: It would be a waste of effort. In the same way, describing the place of no birth and no death so that an ignorant person would understand it is a waste of time. Only when you develop discernment will you understand where people go after they die, and whether or not there's really a place of no birth and no death. This is because a person of discernment has an inner eye—the *ñāṇa-cakkhu*, or eye of knowledge. What this means is that he or she has seen the true Dhamma. That's what gives such a person the ability to understand this issue. The Buddha said, "Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me." In other words, when we see the Dhamma that doesn't die, we'll be able to see those who don't die, what it is that doesn't die. So when we reach

the Dhamma that doesn't die, we meet with the place that doesn't die. As long as we haven't met with that place, we have to keep practicing so as to give rise to the eye of the mind.

The problem is that even though most of us have clear eyesight, our minds are still dark and blurry. The Dhamma of the Buddha that we're taught every day is like a lens for casting some light into the eye of the mind, so that we can feel our way along without falling into pits or wells. Even then, though, our minds are still blurry. This is why we have so many differing opinions: Our eyes are still blurry—but at least we're not blind. We can still see vague shapes and shadows.

There's a saying: *samaññañca dassanaṃ etam-maṅgalamuttamaṃ*. "Seeing a contemplative is the highest blessing." What this means is that whoever sees a noble one—a stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, or arahant—sees a grand auspicious sight. But you really have to see a genuine noble one for this to be true. So where are you going to look for a noble one? What sorts of features help you recognize a noble one? If you look at a noble one from the outside, there's no way you can know for sure. The only way to know for sure is to practice the Dhamma so as to give rise to the qualities of a noble one within yourself. As long as you don't have those qualities within you, you can't see a genuine noble one. Your eyes are still blurry, so everything you see is blurry. Your mind is an ordinary mind, so everywhere you look, all you can see are ordinary people.

To help us see the truth in this way, the Buddha teaches three guidelines for practice:

- 1) *mattaññutā ca bhattasmim*—having a sense of moderation in consuming food;
- 2) *pantañca sayanāsanam*—delighting in seclusion;
- 3) *adhicitte ca āyogo*—being committed to the heightened mind, i.e. heightening the happiness of the mind.

With regard to the first guideline—having a sense of moderation in consuming food—there are two kinds of consumption: consuming food for the body and consuming food for the mind. Two sorts of food for the body should be avoided: anything that's been obtained through bad kamma, and anything that doesn't really nourish the body. When you avoid these two sorts of food, that's called having a sense of moderation in consuming food.

As for food for the mind, there are three kinds:

- 1) *phassāhāra*, the food of sensory contact, i.e., the contact of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas as they strike against the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind;
- 2) *viññāṇāhāra*, the food of consciousness, i.e., awareness at the six sense doors; and
- 3) *mano-saṅcetanāhāra*, the food of mental intentions, i.e., setting the mind on an object.

A person without a sense of moderation in food is like an ill person who doesn't know what foods will aggravate his illness. He's bound to have a short life and an early death. Not only that, he also creates burdens for the people around him: his parents, spouse, children, and relatives. They're put to all sorts of trouble. When he dies, they have to find the money to pay for the funeral and make merit to dedicate to him. Before he dies, they have to pay for medical care. The doctors and nurses have to look after him until way late into the night, giving him medicine, cleaning up his urine and feces, all kinds of things. But if you gain a sense of how to look after yourself and are careful about how you consume your food, you'll have few diseases. You yourself will be at ease, and the people around you won't be burdened.

The five hindrances are like germs. If they get established in your heart, they'll multiply and spread and eat away at your heart continually, to the point where your mind falls to such a low level that you can't lift it up again.

The food of consciousness means the consciousness at the six sense doors that arises when sights strike the eyes, sounds strike the ears, and so forth. Pleasing sights are like sugar, molasses, or honey, which are sure to be teeming with ants, gnats, and flies. Disagreeable sights are like filth: In addition to carrying germs, they're sure to attract all sorts of other bad things, too, because they're crawling with flies and worms. If we don't notice the ants, flies, and filth, we'll go ahead and eat the food—and it will be toxic to our health. Like a person without any teeth who finds chicken bones in his food: He can't chew them, so he tries to swallow them whole and ends up with his eyes bulging out of their sockets. If you aren't discerning, you'll gobble down the filth together with the worms and smelly parts, and the sugar together with the ants and flies.

So you have to pay careful attention. Before you eat, look to see what you can handle and what you can't, what you have to be wary of and what you don't. This is called having a knife and a chopping board for your food. When you examine things for yourself in this way, you'll get to eat food that's well prepared and cooked

—not like a monster that eats things raw. If you don't examine things, you'll misunderstand what's happening, thinking that good things are bad, and bad things are good. The mind won't be clear about these things because you lack mindfulness and discernment. You'll swallow toxic food right into your heart. This is called being very greedy, very deluded, because you're careless in your eating, and this creates hazards for your heart.

The same holds true with the food of ear-consciousness. The sounds you like are like sugar or delicious sweets. The sounds you don't like are food that's rotten and spoiled. If you don't use discernment, don't use restraint, and don't pay proper attention, you'll end up eating food that's all rotten and wormy. Whatever's sweet you'll swallow down whole, and all the ants, worms, and flies will go down with it. This will cause pain and trouble for your intestines, and turmoil for your heart. Your heart is already in poor health, and yet you go gobbling down things that are toxic. When this happens, no one can cure you but you yourself.

The same thing applies in the area of the nose, tongue, body, and mind. Whatever food you plan to swallow, you first have to pay careful attention, as monks do when they chant the passage for reflection before using any of the four requisites. At the same time, we have to reflect on whether the person bringing us these things suffers from wrong views and practices wrong livelihood as well. Otherwise, our own virtues will be compromised.

So we have to be firmly intent, using mindfulness to gain evidence, and our discernment to pass judgment. That way we'll get to eat food that's just and fair. Anyone who doesn't use mindfulness and discernment is like an ogre that eats dead things, rotten things, and raw. Bones, wings, skins, and feathers: Everything you swallow right down, like a savage who doesn't know any better.

Scientists nowadays are smart. They can take things you normally couldn't eat and then distil and process them so that you can eat them, and they're good for you, too. People without discernment, who allow themselves to get overcome with greed and hunger, will eat everything: wings, tails, bones, fins. The things they like get stuck in their hearts. The things they don't like get stuck in their hearts. Wherever they go, it's as if they have bones stuck in their throats. But if we have virtue, concentration, and discernment in our consumption of the food of consciousness, it's as if we have a fire, a stove, and a knife to prepare our food the right way.

The next kind of food is the food of mental intentions. If we set our hearts on the wrong things, it can be toxic to us. If you sit here thinking about someone you

hate or who makes you angry, telling yourself that if you meet that person you'll have to say this or that, this is called setting your heart on the wrong object. If you set your heart on the right things, it will flow in the right direction. Forgetfulness and delusion won't be able to arise. For instance, you can think about the virtues or the generosity you've practiced, or about your teachers. This is called setting your heart on the right object. The heart will begin to blossom. Just like the people in the time of the Buddha: When their hearts were inclined toward recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, they entered the refuge of the noble attainments. For this reason, we should incline our hearts toward the people or things that will cause our hearts to flourish and grow. This is what will give them the strength they need to gain release from the hindrances, which are like curtains of fog, or like worms that swarm over and eat away at the heart. This is what will give us the strength to shoot our way up to the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna. In this way we'll be good cooks for ourselves. But if we don't know how to chop, boil, or fry our own food, we'll have to eat it raw, just like a monster.

The third mouthful of food is the food of contact. Whatever sights come in by way of the eyes, whatever sounds come in by way of the ears, whatever smells comes in by way of the nose, and so forth, you have to be careful. Pay attention at all times to whatever will be of use, and avoid anything poisonous. Whatever will be meritorious or skillful, even if it may be painful, you have to endure and stick with it, as when you have to endure heat, cold, or rain in the practice. As for anything that will be unskillful, you have to shake it right off. The same applies to the ideas that make contact in the mind. When you can act in this way, good food will keep flowing in to benefit your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, and will seep in to bathe your heart. You'll be secluded from evil, secluded from defilements. *Adhicittē ca āyogo*: You'll be committed to the heightened mind. Mind states heading to the level of the lower realms will disappear, and those of the noble ones will arise in their place. The mind will be in a firm steady state, heading straight for nibbāna. That's how it gets beyond the reach of the fires that burn at the end of the eon.

# Shelter

September 28, 1958

*This talk is unusual in that we have two reconstructions of it: a longer one (II) by Mae Chii Arun Abhivaṇṇā, and a shorter one (I) by an unknown hand. Comparing the two reconstructions is a sobering experience, giving a hint of what can sometimes get lost in the process of reconstructing a talk. Still, we owe a great deal to those who went to the trouble of taking notes while Ajaan Lee explained the Dhamma. Without them, we would have nothing of his spoken teachings at all.*

*Some passages in II have already been translated in Food for Thought and The Skill of Release. Putting them in the context of the original talk shows how they function in Ajaan Lee's teaching style. As Ajaan Fuang, one of his students, once said, Ajaan Lee could talk on three levels at once. This talk has a little something for everyone.*

## I

“Pleasure” and “purity” mean two different things. They’re not one and the same. Pleasure is the physical and mental ease that comes from material objects, but it’s not purity, because the mind is still soaked and saturated with various preoccupations, which defile it. As for purity, that’s a kind of pleasure independent of material objects. It’s a pleasure that comes from the stillness and ease of the mind.

Pleasure is a lower form of goodness. It’s mundane. Purity is a higher form of goodness: the transcendent.

In concentration practice, right effort is a supporting factor, while right mindfulness and right concentration are supervising factors. These two types of factors are the basic principles of tranquility. They’re the factors that oversee and protect the mind from falling into wrong concentration.

Some people say that tranquility and insight are two separate things, but actually they’re one and the same. Tranquility gives rise to insight. Insight gives rise

to purity. And so purity comes from this plain old stillness of mind.

What can we do to reach purity? For the mind to become pure we have to train it. If you were to say it's easy, it's easy. If you were to say it's hard, it's hard. If you're true in what you do, you'll get results easily. If you aren't, the results will be hard.

Tranquility is like a lit candle. If it's well protected from the wind, the flame will stand straight and give off a bright light. You'll be able to see anything clearly. If the candle tips over, the flame will go out and you'll have to grope around with your hands. You may mistake a cat for a dog, or a dog for a cat, because you can't see clearly.

In the same way, we have to make an effort to use mindfulness to protect the mind from the wind. Don't let the hindrances blow in and overcome the mind.

## II

Pleasure and the goodness of purity are two different things, not one and the same. Pleasure is the physical and mental ease that comes from ordinary things: eating, living, and sleeping comfortably, without any illness; having plenty of wealth at your disposal, and so forth. As for the goodness of purity, that comes from a pleasure apart from the ordinary. It comes from your own mind without having to depend on the support of things outside. This kind of pleasure takes its support from the Dhamma. And when it arises, it's stable, unchanging, and lasting. As for ordinary pleasure, it's undependable. It tends, by and large, to leave people disappointed. This is why we've come to look for pleasure in the area of the Dhamma, which is a pleasure that won't let us down.

The Dhamma is like the thatch or tiles that people put on their roofs to protect them from the sun and rain. When people are born into the world it's as if they're left out in the open without any shelter. They're sure to suffer from the sun and rain and stormy winds. Only if they have the Dhamma ensconced in their hearts will they escape from these dangers. This is why we're taught to find shelter for the heart—i.e., the Dhamma—to give us protection. The Dhamma here is virtue, concentration, and discernment.

There are four types of virtue: restraint of the senses, restraint in terms of the Pāṭimokkha (precepts), purity of livelihood, and contemplation of the requisites. These four types of virtue are like walls on all four sides, which will protect us from stormy winds. Concentration—the four levels of jhāna—is like a four-sided roof

that will protect us from the sun and rain. Discernment—transcendent discernment—is like a solid floor that will protect us from the danger of falling into the states of deprivation. When you’ve provided yourself with these three types of protection, you have a sense of security and don’t have to fear any of the sufferings that might come in this world or the next.

The precepts are shelter for the body; concentration is shelter for the mind. This shelter for the mind is composed of tranquility and insight. Tranquility means making the mind quiet and firm, free from the hindrances. Insight means using your discernment to investigate the causes and effects of all fabricated things within you so that you can see their truth to the point where you can let go of defilements, level by level. When you can let go of them all, your mind will gain release from mental fermentations, reaching the goodness of purity. Some people say that tranquility and insight are two separate things, but actually they’re one and the same. Tranquility is making the mind still. When the mind is still, it gives rise to a glow. As the glow gets brighter and brighter, it turns into the light of insight. When insight arises, you enter into the goodness of purity. And so this goodness, this purity, comes from tranquility: this plain old stillness of mind.

The mind that isn’t still is the mind that doesn’t stay with the body. When this happens, you’ll meet with nothing but suffering and defilement. It’s like a house in which no one is living: It’s bound to get dusty and messy. You don’t have to look very far for an example: Take this meditation hall we’re sitting in. Suppose all the monks, novices, and lay people were to go off and leave it for just a day. On your return you’d see that it was covered with dust and cobwebs, simply from having no one to do the sweeping and dusting. In the same way, when the mind goes off and leaves the body, both the body and mind get dusty and defiled. And when the body is dusty, how can the mind stay with it? It’s like a dusty, dirty house: The owners can’t live there, and nobody else can either. Monks won’t want to visit them. Suppose you lay people were to invite me into your home. If your home were messy and filthy, filled with chicken droppings and duck droppings, I wouldn’t want to go in, I wouldn’t want to sit down, I’d scarcely be able to breathe. So keep this comparison in mind: If the mind doesn’t have concentration, isn’t developing skillful qualities, it’s like a filthy house. Where would you find monks who would like to visit your house when it’s like that? And when monks won’t visit you, where will you gain any blessings?

When the mind is outside of the body, it’s the world. When it’s inside the body, it’s Dhamma. If it’s the world, it has to be as hot as fire. If it’s Dhamma, it’s as

cooling as water.

Skillfulness on the sensual plane is goodness on the conventional, social level. It has to involve people and things outside. Transcendent skillfulness is goodness above and beyond the social level: You learn to depend on yourself and can handle your problems on your own.

The mind of an ordinary person can go forward and back, and so it's not dependable. Sometimes, after winning, it turns around and loses. It wins today and loses tomorrow. As for the mind of a noble disciple, when it wins it doesn't then lose. It goes forward and doesn't slide back. It keeps forging straight ahead.

When the mind is undependable, when it doesn't have firm principles, it's a Communist mind, i.e., one without any religion. A mind with a religion has to have principles so that it can depend on itself. It's a mind that can be its own person.

When the mind isn't its own person, it doesn't have complete authority. It can't give orders or exercise complete control over anything. For instance, if you order the body to come and listen to a Dhamma talk, it won't be willing to come. If you order it to sit in concentration, it won't be willing to sit. Like being a parent: Only if you're the child's parent 100% will you have full authority over it. If you're just 50% its parent, and it's 50% your child, you can't exercise full control with any confidence. So the mind is like a parent; the body, like a child. That's why we have to train the mind to be its own person, so that we can have full control over the body. When the mind has full control, we can overcome any pains that arise from the body and any defilements that arise from the mind. That's when you can say that you're really your own person.

Each of us is like a long-playing record. When we do good, that goodness gets recorded within us. When we do bad, that badness gets recorded within us—just like a record that's been used to record good and bad sounds. Whatever type of kamma we do, it stays within us—it doesn't go off anywhere else. So ask yourself whether you want to keep goodness or badness within you.

The mind is neither good nor bad, but it's what knows good and knows bad. It's what does good and does bad. And it's what lets go of good and lets go of what's bad.

The body is something that wears down and disintegrates into nothing. The mind is something that doesn't disintegrate, doesn't die. So we're like a rice grain, with one part that takes birth and another that doesn't take birth. The part that doesn't take birth is the plain rice flour. The part that takes birth is the white spot on its tip. If we don't want that rice grain to take birth as a plant, all we have to do is

demolish the little white spot, and it won't be able to sprout. The same with us: The body is like the plain rice flour; the mind, the little white spot that sprouts. If the mind contains defilements—its attachments to good and bad—without demolishing them, it will cause us to sprout in new planes of becoming and birth. This is why we're taught to let go of our attachments to good and bad, to put them both down. When the mind has nothing more to sprout, it can then gain release from birth and death.

When the mind leaves the body at death, it vanishes in the same way that an extinguished candle flame doesn't have a shape for our physical eyes to see. But that doesn't mean that flame fire has disappeared from the world. It simply gets diffused into its property, like the fire of electricity in a copper wire. If we simply look at the wire we won't see any fire in it. But if we touch it with our hand, we'll immediately feel the heat. In the same way, when the mind leaves the body it reappears in other places just like the fire that diffuses into its property.

To hold onto the body is to hold onto old kamma. To let go of the body is to let go of old kamma. And when we can let go in this way, there will be no more kamma in the body. It's the same as with a piece of property. If we take possession of it, with a deed and the boundaries staked out, there tend to be problems with trespassing, swindling, boundary disputes, and cases in court. But if we don't take possession of it and simply let it be public property, there will be no troubles or quarrels. This way the heart can be at its ease.

The body is like a boat; the river is our skillful intentions. Mindfulness is the wind that moves us along. The defilements are like sand bars. If you develop mindfulness at all times you'll be able to take your "body-boat" to the other shore without running aground on the sand.

Defilements are like sand bars or stumps in a river that will keep our boat from getting to shore. In other words, passion is something that snags us, anger is something that bumps into us, and delusion is something that makes us spin around and sink. There's a story they tell of two men who were hired to row a boat along the rivers and canals to sell plowshares, shovels, and hoes. If they sold all the wares in the boat, their employer would give them their full wages of one kahāpana, which was equal to about four dollars, a day. The first day their employer went out with them, and they sold all their wares. After that, he didn't go with them, so the two of them went out to sell their wares on their own. One day, as they were out rowing along, calling out, "Plowshares, shovels, and hoes!" their minds wandered and they started getting drowsy. All of a sudden they crashed smack into a stump

and ran aground on a sandbar. Even after they got free they were so shaken up that instead of calling out, “Plowshares, shovels, and hoes!” they started calling out, “Sandbars and stumps! Sandbars and stumps!” all along the river, but nobody wanted to buy.

When evening came, they rowed back to their employer’s house, their boat still full of plowshares, shovels, and hoes. They hadn’t been able to sell a thing. So the employer gave them each only a dollar for their day’s wages. One of the men took the money back to his wife, who was surprised to see that she was getting only one dollar, instead of the usual four. “Maybe he’s given the rest of the money to another woman,” she thought, so she gave him a piece of her mind. No matter how much he tried to explain things, she wouldn’t listen. So he told her to go ask the employer. If what he said wasn’t true, he’d be willing to let her hit him once on the head. The wife, impatient because she was so angry, said, “No, let me hit you first, and then I’ll go ask.” As she said this, she reached for a shovel handle, but all she could grab was the stick they used to drive the dog out of the house, so she used that to bash her husband three times on the head. Later, of course, she found out the truth, but by that time it was too late, for the husband had already gotten three free hits on the head.

This story shows the harm that can come from not being mindful. If you let your mind wander away from what you’re doing, you can end up getting yourself into trouble.

If we were to make a comparison, the man at the prow of the boat stands for the monks. The man at the tail of the boat stands for the lay people. The stumps are passion, aversion, and delusion; while the sandbar is the hindrances. If we’re not careful to be mindful, if we let our minds get entangled in defilements and covered with the five hindrances, our Dhamma practice will have a hard time succeeding.

Skillfulness on the sensual plane is like a truck running along a road or a boat running along a river, but in either case it’s not as good as a truck stopped still at a warehouse or a boat stopped still at a dock. Now, there *are* benefits that come when a truck runs along a road or a boat runs along a river. (1) It can carry freight or passengers. (2) It can collect fare from the passengers or shipping charges for the freight. But when our truck stops at the warehouse or our boat stops at the dock, we get greater benefits many times over. (1) We get time to rest our weary bones. (2) We get to unload all our old freight and pick up new freight. (3) If we keep stopping at the same dock often enough, we’ll get more and more familiar with the person who runs the dock and the people native to the area. Ultimately we’ll get so that they’ll

share food with us without our having to pay for our dinner, or let us spend the night without having to pay for our room. This is because we get more intimate and familiar with one another, so that they come to like us. Ultimately, they'll trust us so much that we can share the same bed. When this happens, we may get to ask them their family secrets: how many wives and children they have, how they make their money, where they keep the family treasures. They'll tell us everything.

In the same way, if our mind stops running after its preoccupations and stays still at its dock—the body—we'll reap the same three kinds of benefits. (1) The mind will get to rest and recover from its weariness. (2) It will pick up a sense of peace, pleasure, and ease. (3) It will become more familiar and intimate with the four properties, which are like the natives in this area. We'll come to know thoroughly the workings of the body and mind. When we stay with the earth property, we'll know the affairs of the earth property. When we stay with the water property, we'll know the affairs of the water property. When we stay with the wind property, we'll know the affairs of the wind property. When we stay with the fire property, we'll know the affairs of the fire property. We'll give rise to the three and the eight cognitive skills. We'll know all the affairs of the body to the point where we have no more doubts. That will enable us to let the body go.

Knowing in line with labels, in line with books or with what people say, is imitation knowing, not the real thing. It's like the shadow of knowing. Real knowing is the knowing that arises within yourself. It's *paccattaṃ*: entirely personal. It's the kind of knowing that can't be taught and can't be told. It has to arise within you. Only then will you know what's inconstant, stressful, and not-self; and what's constant, easeful, and self. Change-of-lineage knowledge (*gotarabhū-ñāṇa*) sees both sides and lets go of both. The truth of the Dhamma is *Dhammaṭṭhiti*, the aspect of mind that stays in place without changing. The movements and characteristics of the mind are simply shadows or imitations of knowing. In practicing the Dhamma, you want true knowing. If you don't really practice, you'll meet up only with the shadows of the Dhamma. For this reason, we should practice so that true knowing will appear within us.

This body of ours has parts that are constant and those that are inconstant, both ease and stress, both self and not-self. For example, the properties of earth, water, wind, and fire are constant in that they've never turned into anything else. The earth property has never turned into water, the water property has never turned into wind, the wind property has never turned into fire. Whatever they've been since the beginning of the world, that's what they'll be until the world falls to pieces. Take

water as an example: Even if people freeze it until it's hard, or put green, yellow, or red dye into it, it'll still be water just the same. There's even a constant aspect to the parts of our body: Our hand has never turned into a foot, our arm has never turned into a leg, our eye has never turned into an ear, our lower lip has never pushed its way up to being the upper lip. These are the aspects that are constant and self. As for the inconstant parts, those are just the characteristics of these things, not what they really are.

The properties of earth, water, wind, and fire are like four people. If you keep trying to acquaint yourself with them, after a while they'll become your friends.

In the beginning they aren't too familiar with you, they don't trust you, so they'll want to test you first. For instance, when you start sitting in meditation, they'll take a stick and poke you in your legs and shins, so that your legs hurt or grow numb. If you lie down, they'll poke you in the back. If you lie on your side, they'll poke you in the waist. If you get up and sit again, they'll test you again. Or they may whisper to you to give up. If you give in to them, the King of Death will grin until his cheeks hurt.

What you have to do is smile against the odds and endure everything to the end point. Keep talking with all four properties. Even though they don't respond at first, you have to keep talking with them, asking them this and that. After a while they'll give you a one-word answer. So you keep talking and then their answers will start getting longer until you eventually become acquaintances and can have real conversations. From that point they become your intimates and friends. They'll love you and help you and tell you their secrets. You'll be a person with friends and won't have to be lonely. You'll eat together, sleep together, and wherever you go, you'll go together. You'll feel secure. No matter how long you sit, you won't ache. No matter how long you walk, you won't feel tired—because you have friends to talk with as you walk along, so that you enjoy yourself and reach your destination before you realize it.

This is why we're taught to practice meditation by keeping mindfulness immersed firmly in the body. Use directed thought and evaluation with your meditation themes—body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities—without letting your mind wander astray in outside thoughts and preoccupations. Contemplate the body so as to know how all four properties are getting along, where it feels pleasant, painful, or neutral. Notice how the mind moves around in the various things you know until you reach the mental quality that's still, solid, and true.

This way it's like having friends go with you wherever you go and whatever you do. In other words, when the body walks, the mind walks with it. When the body lies down, the mind lies down with it. When the body sits, the mind sits with it. Wherever the body stops, the mind stops, too. But most of us aren't like this. The body takes two steps, but the mind takes four or five—so how can it *not* get tired? The body lies in a mosquito net surrounded by a railing and seven thick walls, but the mind can still go running outside the house. When this is the case, where will it get any happiness? If it doesn't stay in its house it'll have to wander around exposed to the sun, wind, rain, and all sorts of dangers because it has no roof, no protection. If there's no concentration to act as a shelter for the heart, it'll always have to meet with misery and pain.

For this reason, you should train your heart to stay firm in concentration and to develop full authority within yourself so that you can be your own person. This way you'll be bound to meet with the goodness of purity, as mentioned above.

## *Loyalty to Your Meditation*

*October 22, 1958*

While we meditate here on the word *buddho*, we have to make up our minds that we're going to stay right here with someone venerable, in the same way that we'd be a monk's attendant. We'll follow after him and watch out for him and not run off anywhere else. If we abandon our monk, he's going to abandon us, and we'll be put to all sorts of hardships. As for the monk, he'll be put to hardships as well, as in the story they tell:

Once in the time of the Buddha there was a rich moneylender couple who had been married a long time but without any children. Both of them really wanted a son who could carry on the family line and receive their inheritance. So they talked the matter over and decided to invite a monk to their home to inform him of their predicament, to see if he could use his meditative powers to help intercede with the devas so that they could have a child. When they had made their decision, they told one of their male servants to go into a nearby forest to invite a meditating monk to come have a meal in their home.

The next morning before dawn, the servant got ready to go into the forest to a hut where a meditating monk had taken up residence. Now, this servant had once been a hunter and still had all his old hunting instincts. He had even kept his crossbow and arrows and other hunting equipment, and maintained them in good shape. When his master had sent him to invite the monk, which would require going into the forest, he was happy to go, for it would give him a chance to do a little hunting on the side. So he snuck his crossbow and arrows out of the house under his shirt.

When he got halfway to the monk's hut, he realized that it wouldn't be proper to approach a monk while armed, so he decided to hide his weapons on the side of the path. On the way back, he'd be able to pick them up. So he stashed the crossbow and arrows behind a bush near the path. Then he went on his way empty-handed until he came across an old monk sitting in front of a hut. After bowing down to the monk, he said to him, "Venerable sir, my master the moneylender and his wife

have asked me to come invite you to a meal in their house this morning and have told me to take you there. Would you please be so kind as to accept their invitation.”

The old monk, on hearing this, decided to accept. Now it so happened that he didn't have an attendant of his own, so he had the servant carry his bowl and shoulder bag. Then he picked up his cane and headed out in unsteady steps toward the moneylender's house. As they walked along, he asked the servant, “Where is your master's house? How far is it from here? How do you get there?” The servant answered all his questions. After they had walked on a little further, the servant remembered the crossbow and arrows hidden behind the bush on the side of the path. The thought occurred to him that he'd like to abandon the old monk, pick up his weapons, and sneak off to do a little hunting in the forest. After all, he told himself, he had already given explicit directions to the old monk, so he'd be able to find his way on his own.

Then he came up with a plan. He told the old monk, “I've got to go to the bathroom really bad, so let me head into the woods for a moment. You can walk on ahead. When I'm finished I'll catch up with you.”

The old monk wasn't the least bit suspicious and thought that the servant was telling the truth, so he let the servant go off while he hurried on ahead, afraid that it was getting late and that he wouldn't get to the moneylender's house in time for his meal. As for the servant, he turned off the path and headed for the bush where he had hidden his crossbow and arrows. But before he got there, one of the forest devas decided to test his loyalty to the old monk. So the deva metamorphosed himself into a large golden swan and pretended to have a broken wing, flying an erratic course under the trees near the path the servant was following.

The servant heard the sound of a bird flapping its wings—*flip-flap, flip-flap*—and, looking up, saw an enormous golden swan zig-zagging back and forth, looking like it couldn't get away. Seeing this, he got really excited, thinking that he'd have to shoot this bird for food for sure. In his excitement he forgot that he was carrying the monk's bowl and shoulder bag, and thought instead that he had a quiver strapped to his back and a crossbow on his shoulder. So he reached into the shoulder bag and pulled out the old monk's betel nut crusher, about two feet long, and took aim with it as if it were a crossbow or a rifle. Then he took his stance and pulled back on the crusher, at the same time making the sound of a gun firing, *byng, byng, byng*. But of course he never hit the bird at all.

As for the old monk, after walking on a ways he began to forget the servant's directions, so he turned left and right, right and wrong, and couldn't find his way out of the forest. He looked back over his shoulder to see if the servant was catching up with him, but the servant never came. All he could hear was the sound—*byng*, *byng*, *byng*—echoing through the forest, but no matter how much he called out, there was never any answer. The later it got, the hotter the sun, and the more tired and hungry he got—for after all, he was very old—so he made up his mind to turn around and retrace his steps, staggering back to his hut.

Meanwhile, the servant—exhausted from trying to shoot the golden swan without success—was ready to give up. So the deva, seeing that he had had enough fun with the servant, pretended to be shot and fell down panting heavily on the path a little ways ahead. Thrilled, the servant came running up to pick up the bird, but just as he bent over to grasp hold of it, it disappeared in a flash. This startled the servant, and suddenly it dawned on him that some forest spirit had been deceiving him. That's when he remembered the old monk. So in his panic he dropped the bowl and shoulder bag and ran away with his arms flailing, all the while calling out to the monk, "Help me! Help me!" But the monk was nowhere to be found. So the servant hurried straight home and told his master everything that had happened. The moneylender was so furious that he punished the servant by making him sleep outside the walls of the house compound and go without food for three days. On top of that, he cut back his daily wage.

This story shows the hardships that come when a person isn't loyal to his monk, when he runs away from his responsibilities and abandons his monk. He causes all sorts of problems for himself and for others as well. The old monk had to go without food for a day. Having lost his bowl, shoulder bag, and betel nut crusher, he was forced to search for new requisites. As for the moneylender and his wife, they didn't get the things they had hoped for.

When you apply this story to the Dhamma, it becomes a lesson worth remembering. If you're not loyal to your meditation object or to yourself, if you forget the breath you're meditating on with *buddho*, *buddho*, and let your mind go wandering off in thoughts and concepts, it's as if you've abandoned the monk you're supposed to look after. You don't follow him; you don't act the role of his student as you had intended to. The results that you had hoped for will thus get ruined. In other words, your mind won't get established in concentration. All kinds of hardships—the five hindrances—will come flowing into the heart, and no peace

will appear. This causes you to suffer and to miss out on the good results that you should have achieved.

At the same time, you cause hardships to others—i.e., the monk sitting up here giving you a Dhamma talk. He wastes his time, talking for hours until his rear end hurts. Instead of lying around his hut at his leisure, he has to sit here jabbering away with no results to show for it at all.

So keep this story in mind as a lesson in teaching yourself to be intent in doing what's good. Don't be the sort of person who—like the servant in the story—is disloyal to his monk.

There's another story to illustrate the good things that come from being loyal to your monk, which I'll tell to you now.

Once there was a moneylender couple who had a large mansion in the city of Bārāṇasī. Both husband and wife were avid merit-makers. Every year during the Rains retreat they would invite a monk to have his meal in their home each day for the entire three months.

Now the moneylender couple had a slave couple working in their household. The duty of the slave woman was to pound the rice and separate it into various grades. The highest grade rice was for giving the monk as alms. The second grade rice was for the moneylender couple to eat. The third grade rice was for the servants in the household, and the fourth grade—the lowest grade rice mixed with bran—was for the slave couple to eat themselves. As for the slave woman's husband, his primary duty was to cut firewood in the forest and make the fire for cooking the rice. His secondary duty was to wait at the mansion gate each morning to welcome the monk who would come for the meal, and to carry his bowl and shoulder bag up to the house for him. And if I remember rightly, the monk who was invited for the meal that year was a Private Buddha. At any rate, when the monk had finished his meal, the slave would carry his bowl and bag from the front door of the house back out to the mansion gate. As he performed this duty every day, the slave came to develop a strong affection for the monk. And the monk felt compassion for the slave. If he had any fruits or other delicacies left from his meal, he would always share them with the slave. This made the slave feel an even greater loyalty toward the monk—to the point where the moneylender couple allowed him to enter the house as the monk's attendant.

One day the slave got to follow the monk all the way into the dining room. Before reaching the dining room, he passed the bedroom, the parlor, and the moneylenders' private dining room. He got to see all the many beautiful and

expensive things decorating the moneylender couple's home. On the way out, after the meal, he happened to see the moneylenders' favorite dog—a male—eating food from a dish near the door to the dining room. He couldn't help noticing that the dog's food was fine rice with curries, and that the dish was made of silver. He thought to himself, "Look at all the merit this dog has. It gets to live in the house and doesn't have to run around looking for food on the ground outside like other dogs. When the time comes, someone fixes food for it to eat, and the food looks so delicious. The rice is a higher grade than what my wife and I get to eat. And its dish is a fine one made of silver. If only I could be reborn as a moneylender's dog, just think of how happy I'd be!"

After he had accompanied the monk to the mansion gate, he went back to his shack and told his wife about all the things he had seen in the moneylenders' house, and especially about the dog eating high grade rice and curries from a silver dish. Then he added, "Neither you nor I have any real happiness or ease in our lives. You're exhausted every day from having to pound the rice. As for me, I have to slash through the forest to find firewood and to make the fire for cooking the rice for everyone in the household. But all we get to eat is the lowest grade rice mixed with bran. We shouldn't have been born as human beings. If only we could be reborn like that moneylenders' dog!"

From that day on, the memory of the moneylenders' dog kept occupying his thoughts. At the same time, though, he still remained loyal to the monk. But just a few days later he had an attack of horrible cramps and died. After he stopped breathing, his spirit didn't go off anywhere, but kept hovering around the moneylenders' house—both because it was still fixated on the dog and because it felt attached to the monk. Every morning it would follow the monk in and out of the house.

One day, after offering the monk his meal, the moneylender couple presented him with many additional offerings. When he had finished eating, he carried all the offerings out the door where the dog was lying on guard. Seeing the monk with his arms all full of things, the dog thought that he had stolen them from the moneylender couple. So it rushed at him and started to bark. The spirit of the slave, hovering behind the monk, slipped right into the dog's open mouth and into its stomach—and then couldn't get out.

So now it was stuck. It couldn't follow the monk in and out of the house as it had every morning. Instead it could only stir around restlessly in the dog's stomach, which of course had an effect on the dog's behavior. It couldn't lie still, and kept

getting into places it didn't belong. The moneylender couple noticed it acting abnormally and, mystified, had one of their servants put it outside in a pen with the other dogs of the household. Before too long, the dog mated with a female, and the female became pregnant. And so now the slave was reborn as a puppy in the female's womb. While it was in the womb, it still wanted to follow the monk in and out of the house, but it couldn't get out. All it could do was thrash around in its mother's womb, causing her all sorts of misery and pain.

When her time came, the female finally gave birth to a male puppy much larger and stronger than normal. This was because the puppy's consciousness had such a strong desire to get out and see the monk all along. As soon as it was born, it opened its eyes wide and started to run—because actually it had been running ever since its time in the womb. So the next morning, when it saw the Private Buddha come to the mansion gate, it was overjoyed. It ran up and jumped all over him, grabbing his shoulder bag from his hand and running after him all the way into the dining room in the moneylenders' house. This amazed the moneylender couple and made them feel strong affection for it.

The next morning happened to be the last day of the Rains retreat, which was the final day of the monk's invitation to eat in the moneylender couple's home. So before leaving the house after he had finished his meal, the monk said to the moneylender couple, "Because today is the last day of your invitation, I would like to give you my blessing and take my leave to return to the seclusion of my hermitage in the forest." Then he turned to the puppy, "Tomorrow I won't be coming to your masters' home any more now, so I want you to stay here and guard your masters with loyalty. Don't follow me out into the forest, okay?"

When the puppy heard the Private Buddha say this, it was so heart-broken that it dropped dead on the spot. Through the power of its love and loyalty for the Private Buddha, it was reborn as a deva's son in heaven, with a large following and many divine treasures. His palace was more lovely than that of anyone else's, his looks more handsome than any other deva's son in heaven. His voice was alluring, his fragrance like that of flowers. Any female deva who heard his voice or smelled his fragrance wanted to see him. On seeing him, she would want him as her mate.

All of this was the result of the goodness of the slave's sincere loyalty to the Private Buddha. The only bad part of his story was that moment he got fixated on the moneylenders' dog, which was why he had to spend one lifetime as a puppy. But because the good kamma of his mind was stronger, it was able to wipe out the kamma of his animal birth and take him to heaven.

This story is another example that you should take to heart in your practice of training the mind. You have to be very, very careful. Don't let *any* hindrances come in and take over your mind while you're practicing concentration. Don't let your monk run away from you, and don't you abandon your monk to go running after dogs. If your mind doesn't stay with your monk—i.e., the factors of your meditation—all sorts of troubles will result, as in the stories I've told you here. As for the goodness that comes from keeping track of your monk, it will send you to good states of becoming and birth, and will raise your mind ultimately to the level of the transcendent.

\* \* \*

Wrong concentration is concentration lacking mindfulness and alertness. Wrong release is when you get beyond distractions by falling asleep.

Another form of wrong concentration is when you lose track of your breath and your body. Another form is when you don't lose track of them, but you get deluded—as when you get fixated on signs or light, and assume yourself to have gained some special attainment. You fall for these things and hold onto them as being trustworthy and true. In this way, they turn into the corruptions of insight (*vipassanūpakkiḷesa*) and all sorts of skewed perceptions.

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A pure mind is one that has grown dispassionate toward thoughts of past and future, and has no hankering for any sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or ideas at all.

# Dhamma for Everyone

October 5, 1960

Now I'm going to remind you of some of the Buddha's teachings as a way of encouraging you to be intent on practicing correctly in line with the Buddha's bidding. These teachings are called Dhamma. The Dhamma is an ornament for the mind. It's also a means for developing the faculties of the mind. The teachings I'm about to discuss come in the *Ovāda-Pāṭimokkha*, the Pāṭimokkha Exhortation. This is a talk that deals with the duties of those who have ordained in the Buddha's dispensation, but these practices also apply to lay people as well. Lay people can take these practices and train themselves to be good people, so that they can be eyes and ears, legs, feet, and hands, to help look after the work of the religion and to help it prosper.

These guidelines, which apply to all of us, fall under six headings:

*anupavādo*: not disparaging

*anupaghāto*: not injuring

*pāṭimokkhe ca saṁvaro*: restraint in line with the Pāṭimokkha

*mattaññūtā ca bhattasmim*: moderation in food

*pantaṇca sayanāsanam*: dwelling in seclusion

*adhicitte ca āyogo*: commitment to the heightened mind—

*etaṁ buddhāna-sāsanam*: this is the Buddhas' bidding.

The first guideline: *anupavādo*. Don't go finding fault with one another. In other words, don't say evil things about one another, don't misrepresent one another, don't say anything that will cause people to fall apart from one another. Don't start false reports about one another, and don't encourage them. Don't curse or yell at one another. Instead of finding fault with one another, each of us should look at his or her own faults. This is what's meant by *anupavādo*. You can use this principle anywhere, whether you're ordained or not.

*Anupaghāto*: Don't allow yourself to hate one another. It's only normal that when people live together, their behavior isn't going to be on an equal level. Some

people have good manners, some people have coarse manners—not evil, mind you, just that their manners are coarse. Physically, some people are energetic, industrious, and strong; others are weak and sickly. Verbally, some people are skilled at speaking, others are not. Some people talk a lot, some people hardly talk at all; some people like to talk about worldly things, some people like to talk about the Dhamma; some people speak wrong, some people speak right. This is called inequality. When this is the case, there are bound to be conflicts and clashes, at least to some extent. When these things arise among us while we live together within the boundaries of the same Dhamma, we shouldn't hold grudges. We should forgive one another and wash away that stain from our hearts. Why? Because otherwise it turns into animosity and enmity. The act of forgiving is called the gift of forgiveness. It turns you into the sort of person who doesn't hold onto things, doesn't carry things around, doesn't get caught up on things—the sort of person who doesn't bear grudges. Even when there are missteps or mistakes from time to time, we should forgive one another. We should have a sense of love, affection, and kindness for everyone around us, as much as we can. This is called *anupaghāto*. It's a part of our training as Buddhists, both for householders and for contemplatives.

***Pāṭimokkhe ca saṁvaro:*** Act in a way that keeps you near the entrance to nibbāna. What's the entrance to nibbāna? The Pāṭimokkha. *Mukha* means mouth or entrance. *Mokkha* means liberation. Sit close to your food so that your mouth is near liberation. Don't sit far away, or you'll have trouble eating. Sit close enough so that liberation is within reach and you can stick it right in your mouth. In other words, whatever behavior is near the ways of the religion, that's the behavior you should follow. To be near the religion means following the holy life. Lay people have their holy life, too, you know, just as monks have theirs. Lay people follow the holy life in two ways. The first is observing the first five of the eight precepts: no killing; no stealing; no sex—this is what makes it the holy life; no telling lies; and no intoxicants. This is one form of holy life, near the entrance to nibbāna. The second way for lay people to follow the holy life is by observing all eight precepts.

As for novices and monks, they should maintain restraint in line with the ten or 227 precepts. At the same time, they shouldn't omit any of the good types of behavior that they should follow. This is called *ācāra-gocara-sampanno*. Don't go wandering around in areas that are out of bounds and can harm you. In other words, don't let your body go there, don't let your speech dwell on those places, and don't let your mind go there, either. Don't associate with immoral people who are coarse in their habits. Don't ask advice from unvirtuous people. Don't let your mind

get entangled with them. Try to keep in mind people who are good, together with the goodness that you yourself are trying to develop. This is called the holy life. Whoever behaves in this way is said to be restrained in line with the Pāṭimokkha, right next to nibbāna.

*Mattaññutā ca bhattasmim:* Have a sense of moderation in the food you eat. Here I'll talk about physical food. People eat in three ways, and the first is **eating greedily**. Even though the stomach is full, the mind isn't full. The mouth is full, you can't swallow what you've got, the stomach is full, and yet the mind still wants to eat more. This is called eating greedily. Don't let this greed take charge of the heart.

The second type is **eating contentedly**. You're content with what you have in your alms bowl, and don't eat anything outside your bowl. Or you're content with the food within reach. You don't ask for anything out of reach. You don't give any sign with your hand, your eyes, or your expression that you'd like more to eat. You eat only what's on your plate, what's in your bowl. This is called eating contentedly.

The third type is **eating modestly**. This type of eating is very good, both in terms of the world and of the Dhamma. Take Ven. Sīvali as an example. He ate modestly. How did he eat modestly? All that most of us know about Ven. Sīvali is that he was wealthy in terms of the donations he received. But where did that wealth come from? It comes from eating modestly. Eating modestly is the source that gives rise to wealth. What Ven. Sīvali did was this: Whenever he received cloth, if he didn't then give a gift of cloth, he wouldn't wear what he had received. When he received food in his bowl, he wouldn't eat until he had given some of it as a gift to someone else. No matter which of the four requisites he received—food, clothing, shelter, or medicine, no matter how much or how little—once it was in his possession, he wouldn't use it until he had shared some of it with those around him. When he received a lot, he would make a large gift to benefit many people. When he received just a little, he'd still try to benefit others. This gave rise to all sorts of good things. His friends loved him, his community loved him, and they were kind to him. This is why being generous is said to tie the knot of friendship and to wipe out your enemies.

So that's what Ven. Sīvali did. When he passed away from that lifetime and was reborn in his last lifetime, he gained all kinds of wealth and never had to go hungry. Even when he went to live in places where food should have been scarce, he never suffered from scarcity, never had to do without....

What this means for us is that, whatever we get, we eat only a third and give the other two thirds away. The parts appropriate for animals, we give to animals. The parts appropriate for human beings, we give to human beings. The parts we should share with our fellows in the holy life, we give with a clear heart. This is what it means to be modest in our consumption. We feel ease of heart and ease of body. When we die, we won't be poor.

This principle is something very good not only in terms of the religion, but also in terms of the modern world at large. It's a great means for subduing terrorism. How does it subdue terrorism? When people aren't poor, they don't get stirred up. Where does terrorism come from? It comes from people having nowhere to live, nothing to eat, no one to look after them. When they're poor and starving like this, they think, "As long as I'm suffering, let's have everyone else suffer all the same. Don't let there be any private property. Let everything be owned in common." This kind of thinking comes from poverty and deprivation. And why is there poverty? Because some people eat all alone. They don't share with people at large. Then when people at large suffer and feel revenge, they turn into communists and terrorists.

So terrorism comes from greed and selfishness, from not sharing what we've got. If we get ten baht, we can give away nine and eat what we can get for the one baht remaining. That way we'll have lots of friends. There will be love and affection, peace and prosperity. How can that come about? When people have places to live and food to eat, when they can eat their fill and can sleep when they lie down, why would they want to bother their heads with the confusion of politics?

This is why the Buddha taught us that modesty in our consumption is something good, something noble and outstanding. When we practice in this way, we're in line with the phrase, *mattaññutā ca bhattasmim*. We'll be practicing right, practicing properly, for the benefit of ourselves and others.

***Pantañca sayanāsanam:*** Don't be a busybody. Wherever you live, try to be quiet and at peace. Don't get entangled or "play the gongs" with the other members of the group. Don't get involved in issues unless it really can't be helped. When you've studied and understand your duties, look for quiet, solitary places to live and to meditate. When you live with others, look for quiet groups to live with. When you live alone, in physical seclusion, be a quiet person. Even when you live with the group, be a secluded person. Take only the good, peaceful things the group has to offer. When you live alone, don't get involved in a lot of activity. Be quiet in your actions, quiet in your speech, quiet in your mind. When you live in a group—either

two or three people—don't get involved in quarrels, for when there's quarreling there's no peace. Your actions aren't peaceful, for you have to get up and storm around. Your words aren't peaceful. Your mind—with its thoughts of anger, revenge, and ill will—isn't peaceful. And this gives rise to all sorts of bad karma. When you live in a community—anywhere from four on up to 99—you have to make sure that the community is at peace, that there's no conflict, no quarreling, no hurting one another's feelings or doing one another harm. The community should be a cooperative for training peacefully in virtue and the Dhamma. That's when it's a good community, orderly and civilized, fostering progress for all its members. This is one of our duties as part of the Buddha's following, in line with the Buddha's bidding. It's called *pantañca sayanāsanam*: creating a quiet place to live, at your ease in both body and mind.

***Adhicitta ca āyogo***: Don't be complacent. Be diligent in practicing concentration to the level of *adhicitta*, or the heightened mind. Practice concentration frequently, sit in concentration frequently as an example to the rest of the community. When you talk, seek advice in how to develop your meditation theme. Discuss the rewards of concentration. Practice ridding the heart of its hindrances. When you do this, you're acting in line with the principle of heightened mind.

Another level of heightened mind is when the mind has been freed from its hindrances and has entered concentration, without any ups or downs. It's solid, stalwart, and strong, with nothing defiling it. This is called *adhicitta ca āyogo*, commitment to the heightened mind. So don't be complacent. Keep working at this always.

***Etam buddhāna-sāsanam***: When you do this, you're acting in line with the Buddhas' bidding. These are the Buddha's words, straight from his mouth.

So we should all work at giving rise to these principles within ourselves. If you establish yourself in these teachings, in all honesty and integrity, then even if you can't liberate your mind totally from suffering, at the very least you'll be developing yourself in the right direction. Your bad habits will disappear day by day, and the good habits you've never had before will arise in their place. As for the good habits you already have, they'll prosper and flourish.

So now that you've listened to this, take it and put it into practice. Train yourself to behave in line with the Buddha's exhortation. When you do that, you'll meet with happiness and prosperity as you flourish in line with his bidding.

# *Visākha Pūjā*

May 24, 1956

*Pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ  
Etam-maṅgalamuttamaṃ*

*Homage to those deserving homage:  
This is the highest blessing.*

I'm now going to give a Dhamma talk, discussing the teachings of the Buddha, as an adornment to the mindfulness and discernment of all those gathered here to listen, so that you will take the Dhamma and put it into practice as a way of achieving the benefits that are supposed to come from listening to the Dhamma.

Today, Visākha Pūjā, is an extremely important day in the Buddhist tradition, for it was on this day that the Buddha was born, and 35 years later awoke to the unexcelled right self-awakening, and another 45 years later passed away into total nibbāna. In each case, these events took place on the full-moon day in May, when the moon is in the Visākha asterism, which is why the day is called Visākha Pūjā.

Every year when this important day comes around again, we Buddhists take the opportunity to pay homage to the Buddha as a way of expressing our gratitude for his goodness. We sacrifice our daily affairs to make merit in a skillful way by doing such things as practicing generosity, observing the precepts, and listening to the Dhamma. This is called paying homage to the virtues of the Triple Gem: the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. The Buddha is like our father, while the Dhamma is like our mother—in that it's what gives birth to our knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. At present our father has passed away, leaving only our mother still alive. Both of them have been protecting us, looking after us, so that we've been able to stay free and happy up to the present. We're thus greatly in their debt and should find a way of showing our gratitude in keeping with the fact that we are their children.

Ordinarily, when people's parents die, they have to cry and lament, wear black, etc., as a way of showing their mourning. On Visākha Pūjā—which is the anniversary of the day on which our father, the Buddha, passed away—we show our mourning too, but we do it in a different way. Instead of crying, we chant the passages reflecting on the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Instead of dressing up in black, we take off our pretty jewels, go without perfume and cologne, and dress very simply. As for the comfortable beds and mattresses on which we normally lie, we abstain from them. Instead of eating three or four times a day, as we normally like to do, we cut back to only two times or one. We have to give up our habitual pleasures if we're going to show our mourning for the Buddha—our father—in a sincere and genuine way.

In addition to this, we bring flowers, candles, and incense to offer in homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. This is called *āmisa-pūjā*, or material homage. This is a form of practice on the external level—a matter of our words and deeds. It comes under the headings of generosity and virtue, but doesn't count as the highest form of homage. There's still another level of homage—*paṭipatti-pūjā*, or homage through the practice—which the Buddha said was supreme: i.e., meditation, or the development of the mind so that it can stand firmly in its own inner goodness, independent of any and all outside objects. This is the crucial point that the Buddha wanted us to focus on as much as possible, for this kind of practice was what enabled him to reach the highest attainment, becoming a Rightly Self-awakened Buddha, and enabled many of his noble disciples to become arahants as well. So we should all take an interest and set our minds on following their example, as a way of following the footsteps of our father and mother. In this way we can be called their grateful, loyal heirs, because we listen respectfully to our parents' teachings and put them into practice.

The verse from the Maṅgala Sutta that I quoted at the beginning of the talk, *Pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ etam-maṅgalamuttamaṃ*, means “Homage to those deserving homage: This is the highest blessing.” There are two kinds of homage, as we've already mentioned: material homage and homage through the practice. And along with these two kinds of homage, people aim their hopes at two kinds of happiness. Some of them practice for the sake of continuing in the cycle of death and rebirth, for the sake of worldly happiness. This kind of practice is called *vattaḡāmanī-kusala*, or skillfulness leading into the cycle. For instance, they observe the precepts so that they'll be reborn as beautiful or handsome human beings, or as devas in the heavenly realms. They practice generosity so that they won't have to be poor, so that

they can be reborn wealthy, as bankers or kings. This kind of skillfulness goes only as far as the qualifications for human or heavenly rebirths. It keeps spinning around in the world without ever getting anywhere at all.

The other reason that people can have for paying homage is so that they will gain release from suffering. They don't want to keep spinning through death and rebirth in the world. This is called *vivattaṅgaṃanī-kusala*, skillfulness leading out of the cycle.

In both kinds of practice, the aim is at happiness, but one kind of happiness is the pleasure found in the world, and the other is the happiness that lies above and beyond the world. When we pay homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, it's not the case that we have to take the results of our practice and try to push the Triple Gem any higher. Actually, what we're doing is to give rise to goodness that will benefit ourselves. So in searching for goodness for our own sakes, we have to keep yet another point in mind, as the Buddha taught us: *Asevanā ca bālānaṃ paṇḍitānaṃ sevanā*, which means, "Don't associate with fools. Associate only with wise people." Only then will we be safe and happy.

"Fools" here means people whose minds and actions are shoddy and evil. They behave shoddily in their actions—killing, stealing, having illicit sex—and shoddily in their words: telling lies, creating disharmony, deceiving other people. In other words, they act as enemies to the society of good people at large. That's what we mean by fools. If you associate with people of this sort, it's as if you're letting them pull you into a cave where there's nothing but darkness. The deeper you go, the darker it gets, to the point where you can't see any light at all. There's no way out. The more you associate with fools, the stupider you get, and you find yourself slipping into ways that lead to nothing but pain and suffering. But if you associate with wise people and sages, they'll bring you back out into the light, so that you'll be able to become more intelligent. You'll have the eyes to see what's good, what's bad, what's right, what's wrong. You'll be able to help yourself gain freedom from suffering and turmoil, and will meet with nothing but happiness, progress, and peace. This is why we're taught to associate only with good people and to avoid associating with bad.

If we associate with bad people, we'll meet up with trouble and pain. If we associate with good people, we'll meet up with happiness. This is a way of giving a protective blessing to ourselves. This sort of protective blessing is something we can provide for ourselves at any time, at any place at all. We'll gain protection wherever,

whenever, we provide it. For this reason, we should provide a protective blessing for ourselves at all times and all places for the sake of our own security and wellbeing.

As for things deserving homage: Whether they're the sorts of things that deserve material homage or homage through the practice, the act of homage provides a protective blessing in the same way. It provides happiness in the same way. The happiness that lies in the world, that depends on people and external things, has to suffer death and rebirth; but the happiness of the Dhamma is an internal happiness that depends entirely on the mind. It's a release from suffering and stress that doesn't require us to return to any more death and rebirth in the world ever again. These two forms of happiness come from material homage and homage through the practice, things that can either make us come back to be reborn or free us from having to be reborn. The difference lies in one little thing: whether we want to be reborn or not.

If we create long, drawn-out causes, the results will have to be long and drawn-out as well. If we create short causes, the results will have to be short, too. Long, drawn-out results are those that involve death and rebirth without end. This refers to the mind whose defilements haven't been polished away, the mind that has cravings and attachments fastened on the good and bad actions of people and things in the world. If people die when their minds are like this, they have to come back and be reborn in the world. To create short causes, though, means to cut through and destroy the process of becoming and birth so as never to give rise to the process again. This refers to the mind whose inner defilements have been polished off and washed away. This comes from examining the faults and forms of darkness that arise in our own hearts, keeping in mind the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, or any of the 40 meditation topics that are set out in the texts, to the point where we can see through all mental fabrications in line with their nature as events. In other words, we see them as arising, remaining, and then disintegrating. We keep the range of our awareness short and close to home—our own body, from head to foot—without latching onto any of the good or bad actions of anyone or anything in the world. We look for a solid foundation for the mind, so that it can stay fixed and secure entirely within itself, with no attachment at all, even for the body. When we've reached this state, then when we die we won't have to come swimming back to be reborn in the world ever again.

Whether we give material homage or homage through the practice, if we pull the focal point of the mind out and place it in our actions—i.e., if we get attached to our good actions, as in practicing virtue, generosity, etc.—then that's called

*vaṭṭagāmanī-kusala*, skillfulness leading into the cycle. The mind isn't free. It has to become the slave of this or that thing, this or that action, this or that preoccupation. This is a long, drawn-out cause that will force us to come back and be reborn. But if we take the results of our good actions in terms of virtue, generosity, etc., and bring them into the mind's inner foundation, so that they're stashed away in the mind, without letting the mind run out after external causes, this is going to help cut down on our states of becoming and birth so that eventually we don't have to come back and be reborn. This is *vivaṭṭagāmanī-kusala*, skillfulness leading out of the cycle. This is the difference between these two forms of skillfulness.

The human mind is like a bael fruit. When it's fully ripe it can no longer stay on the tree. It has to fall off, hit the ground, and eventually decay into the soil. Then, when it's been exposed to the right amount of air and water, the seed gradually sprouts again into a trunk with branches, flowers, and fruit containing all its ancestry in the seeds. Eventually the fruit falls to the ground and sprouts as yet another tree. It keeps going around and around in this way, without ever getting annihilated. If we don't destroy the juices in the seeds that allow them to germinate, they'll have to keep their genetic inheritance alive for an eon.

If we want to gain release from suffering and stress, we have to make our minds shoot out of the world, instead of letting them fall back into the world the way bael fruits do. When the mind shoots out of the world, it will find its landing spot in a place that won't let it come back and be reborn. It will stay there aloft in total freedom, free from attachment of any sort.

Freedom here means sovereignty. The mind is sovereign within itself. In charge of itself. It doesn't have to depend on anyone, and doesn't have to fall slave to anything at all. Within ourselves we find the mind paired with the body. The body isn't all that important, because it doesn't last. When it dies, the various elements—earth, water, wind, and fire—fall apart and return to their original condition. The mind, though, is very important, because it lasts. It's the truly elemental thing residing in the body. It's what gives rise to states of becoming and birth. It's what experiences pleasure and pain. It doesn't disintegrate along with the body. It remains in existence, but as something amazing that can't be seen. It's like the flame of a lit candle: When the candle goes out, the fire element is still there, but it doesn't give off any light. Only when we light a new candle will the fire appear and give light again.

When we take the body—composed of elements, aggregates, sense media, and its 32 parts—and the mind—or awareness itself—and simplify them to their most basic terms, we're left with name and form (*nāma, rūpa*). Form is another term for the body made up of the four elements. Name is a term for the mind residing in the body, the element that creates the body. If we want to cut back on states of becoming and birth, we should take as our frame of reference just these two things—name and form—as they're experienced in the present. How does form—the body—stay alive? It stays alive because of the breath. Thus the breath is the most important thing in life. As soon as the breath stops, the body has to die. If the breath comes in without going out, we have to die. If it goes out without coming back in, we have to die.

So think about the breath in this way with every moment, at all times, regardless of whether you're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Don't let the body breathe without your mind getting some good use out of it. A person who doesn't know his or her own breath is said to be dead. Heedless. Lacking in mindfulness. As the Buddha said, heedlessness is the path to danger, to death. We can't let our minds run out and get stuck on external preoccupations, i.e., thoughts of past or future, whether they're good or bad. We have to keep our awareness right in the present, at the breath coming in and out. This is called singleness of preoccupation (*ekaggatārammaṇa*). We can't let the mind slip off into any other thoughts or preoccupations at all. Our mindfulness has to be firmly established in our awareness of the present. The mind will then be able to develop strength, able to withstand any preoccupations that come striking against it, giving rise to feelings of good, bad, liking, and disliking—the hindrances that would defile the mind.

We have to keep our awareness exclusively in the present, alert and quick to sense the arising and passing away of preoccupations, letting go of both good and bad preoccupations without getting attached to them. When the mind stays firmly focused in its one preoccupation—the breath—it will give rise to concentration, to the point where the eye of inner knowledge appears. For example, it might give rise to powers of clairvoyance or clairsentience, enabling us to see events past and future, near and far. Or it might give rise to knowledge of previous lives, so that we can know how we and other beings have been born, died, come, and gone, and how all these things have come about from good and bad actions. This will give rise to a sense of dismay and disenchantment with states of becoming and birth, and will dissuade us from ever wanting to create bad kamma ever again.

This kind of disenchantment is something useful and good, without any drawbacks. It's not the same thing as its near cousin, weariness. Weariness is what happens when a person, say, eats today to the point of getting so full that the thought of eating any more makes him weary. But tomorrow, his weariness will wear off and he'll feel like eating again. Disenchantment, though, doesn't wear off. You'll never again see any pleasure in the objects of your disenchantment. You see birth, aging, illness, and death as stress and suffering, and so you don't ever want to give rise to the conditions that will force you to come back and undergo birth, aging, illness, and death ever again.

The important factors for anyone practicing to gain release from all stress and suffering are persistence and endurance, for every kind of goodness has to have obstacles blocking the way, always ready to destroy it. Even when the Buddha himself was putting his effort into the practice, the armies of Māra were right on his heels, pestering him all the time, trying to keep him from attaining his goal. Still, he never wavered, never got discouraged, never abandoned his efforts. He took his perfection of truthfulness and used it to drive away the forces of Māra until they were utterly defeated. He was willing to put his life on the line in order to do battle with the forces of Māra, his heart solid, unflinching, and brave. This was why he was eventually able to attain a glorious victory, realizing the unexcelled right self-awakening, becoming our Buddha. This is an important example that he as our "father" set for his descendants to see and to take to heart.

So when we're intent on training our minds to be good, there are bound to be obstacles—the forces of Māra—just as in the case of the Buddha, but we simply have to slash our way through them, using our powers of endurance and the full extent of our abilities to fight them off. It's only normal that when we have something good, there are going to be other people who want what we've got, in the same way that sweet fruit tends to have worms and insects trying to eat it. A person walking along the road empty-handed doesn't attract anyone's attention, but if we're carrying something of value, there are sure to be others who will want what we've got, and will even try to steal it from us. If we're carrying food in our hand, dogs or cats will try to snatch it. But if we don't have any food in our hand, they won't pounce on us.

It's the same way when we practice. When we do good, we have to contend with obstacles if we want to succeed. We have to make our hearts hard and solid like diamond or rock, which don't burn when you try to set them on fire. Even when they get smashed, the pieces maintain their hardness as diamond and rock. The

Buddha made his heart so hard and solid that when his body was cremated, parts of it didn't burn and still remain as relics for us to admire even today. This was through the power of his purity and truthfulness.

So we should set our minds on purifying our bodies and minds until they become so truly elemental that fire won't burn them, just like the Buddha's relics. Even if we can't get them to be that hard, at least we should make them like tamarind seeds in their casing: Even if insects bore through the casing and eat all the flesh of the tamarind fruit, they can't do anything to the seeds, which maintain their hardness as always.

So, to summarize: Cutting down on states of becoming and birth means retracting our awareness inward. We have to take the mind's foundation and plant it firmly in the body, without getting attached to any outside activity at all. We have to let go of every thing of every sort that follows the laws of events, arising and passing away in line with its nature. We do good, but don't let the mind go running out after the good. We have to let the results of our goodness come running into the mind. We pull in every thing of every sort to stash it away in our mind, and don't let the mind get scattered outside, getting happy or sad over the results of its actions or anything else external. We do this in the same way that the bael fruit keeps the trunk, branches, flowers, and leaves of the bael tree curled up inside the seed. If we can then prevent outside conditions of soil and water from combining with the inside potential of the seed, it won't be able to unfurl into a new bael tree.

Whoever practices in the way I've discussed here is paying homage to our lord Buddha in the correct way. Such a person will be endowed with blessings providing happiness throughout time.

Here I've discussed some verses from the Maṅgala Sutta as a way of developing our discernment, so that we will take these lessons and put them into practice as a way of paying homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha on this Visākha Pūjā day.

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

*Evam.*

# *The Power of Goodness*

*October 4, 1960*

The goodness we've been developing here: Don't forget it. It's bound to bear fruit. Don't underestimate it, thinking that the little things we've been doing here won't bear much fruit. Don't underestimate it at all.

There are examples from the time of the Buddha. Some of the monks and novices, after ordaining, weren't able to cut through their defilements. They were only able to thin them out a bit, so they got discouraged and disrobed. After disrobing they had to find a livelihood: sometimes in ways that were honest, sometimes in ways that were not. Those who got involved in dishonest ways were caught by the civil authorities and imprisoned.

One example was a student of Sāriputta. He ordained to develop his goodness, but when he didn't get the results he had hoped for he disrobed and became a thief. After a while he was caught and sentenced to death. Before he was to be executed, the civil authorities decided to torture him for seven days as an example to the general public so as to discourage other people from breaking the law. The king ordered his officials to sharpen some wood and iron spears to a super-fine point, to plant them in rows, and then to have the thief sit and lie on the spear points so that they would skewer his body, causing him to be bathed in blood and to experience excruciating pain. They would do this three times a day—morning, noon, and evening—calling the people of the city to come and see an example of how thieves have to suffer.

The plan was to have the thief tortured like this for seven days and then to behead him, but the thief still had some good karma left over from the time he had studied with Sāriputta. Sāriputta had taught him to follow some of the ascetic practices and to meditate, and he had been able to develop his mind to the level of the first jhāna. But the first jhāna wasn't enough to withstand his defilements and cravings, which is why he had disrobed.

It so happened that on the sixth day, Sāriputta, through his great compassion—after all, there were times when he, in the Buddha's stead, had helped teach the

populace to practice the Dhamma—used the powers of his meditation to check up on his students who were still ordained, as well as those who had disrobed to return to the lay life, to see where they were and how they were doing. Because of the goodness that the thief had developed with Sāriputta, a light appeared to Sāriputta in which he saw that his student was being tortured and was scheduled to be beheaded the next day. On seeing this, Sāriputta contemplated the student's reserves of goodness, seeing that he still had some potential, but that it had all withered away. Even so, some of the goodness he had developed was still buried there inside him. Even though defilements had enwrapped his heart, there was still some goodness there.

On realizing this, Sāriputta went on his almsround in the early morning to the area where his student was being tortured. His student was lying on his bed of spears as Sāriputta came near. The place was thronged with people running around in excitement, some of them excited about seeing Sāriputta, some of them excited about seeing the thief being tortured. It so happened that the crowd parted briefly, enough for Sāriputta's student to see the edge of his teacher's robe. Sāriputta spread thoughts of goodwill, which the student could feel and which served as a guarantee of his presence, but that was as close as he could get.

On seeing Sāriputta the student felt overjoyed, thinking, "Tomorrow I'm going to have to take my leave of my teacher—I'm going to be executed." At the thought of bowing down to his teacher, he remembered Sāriputta's meditation instructions, and so he started to practice jhāna, stilling his mind in concentration. When his mind grew still, he reflected on death, thinking, "Tomorrow they're going to get me for sure. There's no doubt about that." So he reflected further: "Where is death? Where does death happen?" And he came to the realization that death lies at the end of your nose: If the breath stops, that's it. But as long as you're still breathing, then even if you're being brutally tortured, you're not dead.

So he started to practice mindfulness of breathing. As soon as he got focused on the breath, the breath grew absolutely still and his blood stopped flowing from his wounds. When the blood stopped flowing, his wounds closed up and healed. When his wounds were healed, he felt a sense of rapture and joy over how much his meditation had been able to overcome the pain.

So he surveyed the parts of his body—hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin—back and forth, over and over again, until all the severed parts of his body connected back up again. When the parts of his body gained strength like this, he was able to sit up in full lotus on the tips of the spears and to enter into jhāna:

the first jhāna, the second, the third, and the fourth. On entering into the fourth jhāna, his body became as light as a tuft of cotton and stronger than the wood and iron spears. The tips of the spears couldn't penetrate his body any more. Finally, his mind entered fixed penetration and he made a vow: "If I escape with my life, I'm going back to live with my teacher." He focused his mind in the fourth jhāna, with its two factors. The first was singleness of preoccupation: not involved with anything at all; the thought that they were going to execute him had disappeared completely. The second factor was mindfulness, bright and dazzling. And in that light of mindfulness he was able to see his teacher. So he made another determination: "I'm going to go stay with my teacher." As soon as he made this determination, his body levitated up into the air and went to where Sāriputta was. After rejoining his teacher, he vowed he would never do anything evil ever again. So he practiced meditation and came out of the whole affair alive. He didn't become an arahant or anything, but he did come out alive.

This goes to show that even though the goodness we develop doesn't meet with our expectations right away, we shouldn't underestimate it. Goodness is like fire. You shouldn't underestimate fire, for a single match can destroy an entire city. Goodness has power in just the same way. This is why the Buddha taught us not to underestimate the goodness we develop. Even though it seems to be just a tiny bit, it has the power to ward off unfortunate events, to turn heavy into light, and to keep us safe and secure. This is one point to remember.

Another point is that people are like plants. Say that you plant some squash seeds in the ground: You want the seeds to grow and give you squash right away, but they can't do that. Still, the nature of what you've planted will grow bit by bit, and after a while will give you the squash you want. But if you sit there and watch it to see how much the squash plant grows in a day, an hour, a minute, to see how many centimeters the shoot will grow, can you measure it? No, of course not. But do you believe that it's growing every day? Sure. If it weren't growing, how would it get so long over time? The same holds true with however much or little goodness we develop: Even though we don't see the results right away, they're sure to come. You can know how much good you've done in a day, but you can't know how much goodness has resulted from your actions. Still, if you ask whether there are results, you have to answer Yes. It's like the squash plant: You can't see it growing, but you know that it grows. Even though the goodness you've been doing doesn't seem to be developing, you shouldn't underestimate it.

Another point is that some people are like banana trees. The nature of banana trees is that if you cut them off at the trunk and then come back in an hour, you'll see that a new shoot has grown a whole inch from the top. In two or three days, the shoot will have grown a foot or two. Some people are like this. They get fast results, extraordinary results, and develop all kinds of abilities. For example, they can get quickly into jhāna and then clearly explain what they've experienced to other people.

The same thing happened in the time of the Buddha. Take Cūḷapanthaka, for example: He had worked at developing goodness for a long time, but when he finally got the hang of the meditation, practicing with a sense of wounded pride after being scorned by his friends, he got results right away. The story is this: Once, when he was staying with a group of 500 monks headed by the Buddha, a moneylender invited the whole group for a meal at his home. Cūḷapanthaka's older brother, Mahāpanthaka, was the meal distributor. Whoever came with an invitation, it was Mahāpanthaka's duty to inform the other monks. Now, Mahāpanthaka was ashamed of his younger brother for being so lazy and torpid in his meditation, nodding off all the time. So, thinking that Cūḷapanthaka didn't deserve to eat food in anyone's home, Mahāpanthaka decided not to include him in the invitation. He invited only the remaining 499 monks, headed by the Buddha, to go to the moneylender's meal. When the group arrived at the moneylender's home and all the monks were served, one tray of food was left over. So the moneylender asked Mahāpanthaka why the monks didn't number the full 500 he had asked for; Mahāpanthaka informed him that Cūḷapanthaka hadn't been included in the invitation.

The moneylender then went to the Buddha. The Buddha, knowing that Cūḷapanthaka was meditating back at the monastery, told the moneylender that Cūḷapanthaka was an important monk: The moneylender would have to send one of his servants to invite him to the meal. But because the Buddha wanted the moneylender to see the powers Cūḷapanthaka had developed, he didn't explain how to go about making the invitation. He let the moneylender's servant go to see for himself; only then would he explain.

As for Cūḷapanthaka, his pride had been so wounded that he decided to go without food and to sit in meditation that day. It so happened that he entered the fourth jhāna: Never since the day of his birth had his meditation progressed so far. On reaching the fourth jhāna, he entered the fifth, making his mind clear, bright, and blooming, and giving rise to supernormal strengths both in body and mind.

It was at that point that the moneylender's servant arrived at the monastery. Cūḷapanthaka saw him and made a mental determination, causing monks—all of them images of himself—to fill the monastery. Some were sitting in meditation, some were doing walking meditation, some were washing their robes. The servant went to ask one of the monks where Cūḷapanthaka was, and the monk pointed to another part of the monastery. He went to that part of the monastery and asked one of the monks there, who pointed to still another part of the monastery. This kept up until the time for the meal was almost over, and yet the servant couldn't locate Cūḷapanthaka at all. So he ran back to the moneylender's house.

The Buddha at this point knew that Cūḷapanthaka had perfected his psychic powers and from now on wouldn't be scorned by his friends, so he told the servant to go back and make the invitation again, but this time he told him how to do it. How was that? When the servant asked one of the monks where Cūḷapanthaka was, then as soon as the monk was about to open his mouth, the servant should grab him by the arm before he had a chance to speak. So the servant did as he was told. He went back to the monastery, which was still filled with monks, and asked one of the monks where Cūḷapanthaka was. As the monk started to point to another part of the monastery, the servant grabbed hold of his arm. The instant he grabbed the monk by the arm, all the other monks in the monastery disappeared, leaving only the monk he was holding. So he invited that monk to the meal at the moneylender's home.

From that point on Cūḷapanthaka became one of the prominent monks of the Saṅgha, with all sorts of extraordinary psychic abilities. He was able to stand in the sun without getting hot, to walk in the rain without getting wet, to travel great distances in no time at all. He could make himself appear in many places at once: in forests, cemeteries, and other places as well. He developed all kinds of powers. As a result, he was able to get over his wounded pride from being scorned by his friends, and instead became one of the more extraordinary of the Buddha's prominent disciples.

This is the power of goodness. Some people gain extraordinary powers and wide-ranging abilities: mature in their concentration, mature in their insight, able to reach nibbāna in this very life. All of this comes from the goodness, the perfections they've developed. So we should take pride in the goodness we've been developing, too.

There's another story, about an old woman who went to a monastery one day and saw that the walking meditation paths were dirty. She swept the paths clear of

the dirt and rubbish, so that the monks could walk conveniently on the paths. She did it only this once, but she did it with an attitude of love, an attitude of conviction, an attitude of respect, and a pure state of mind. The dirt and rubbish had made her feel dispirited, so she swept it all away and set out water for washing the feet; as a result, her mind felt clean and refreshed. Soon after she returned home she had a heart attack. After she died she was reborn as a deva with a large following, a palace, divine food, and all kinds of abundant wealth. Living in her palace, she began to remember her previous life and thought to herself, "If I had done lots of merit, I'd be even richer than I am now. It'd be good to go back and do good things for just a little bit longer, so that I could get even more abundant results than what I have now. Before, I had no idea that goodness would give results like this."

So she left heaven and came down to earth, prowling around in search of monks in the forest and wilderness. She came across one monk who was about to enter concentration, so she stood there staring at him, looking for a way to be of service. But when he saw her, he chased her away: "What kind of deva is this, trying to horn in on human beings' merit? Before, you underestimated merit, but now that you've received good results you want even more. How greedy can you get? Go away! I won't let you do anything. Let human beings have a chance to do good. There are lots of people who don't have any of the good things you do. Don't come horning in on their chance for goodness."

Chagrined, the deva fled back up to heaven and had to content herself with the results she already had. She had wanted to make more merit, but they wouldn't let her. Why was that? We human beings tend to underestimate little acts of merit, but after you die it's hard for you to make any more merit at all. How is it hard? Your body is no longer like a human body. You can't talk with human beings at all. You can't even put food in monks' bowls. The best you can do is simply stand around rejoicing in the merit of others. Only human beings with good eyes can see you. Those without that kind of eye won't detect you at all. If you encounter those with the right mental powers, they can teach you to some extent. But if you don't encounter that kind of person when you're a deva, you have no way of developing any more goodness.

So you shouldn't underestimate the power of goodness. As long as you've got the time and the opportunity, then whenever you notice the chance to do goodness of which you're capable, you should hurry up and make the effort, trying to develop that goodness as soon as you can. If death were to come right now, what would you

have left? Nothing. All you could do is wrap up the trail mix you've put aside—in other words, the goodness you've done in the past. When you remember it, that goodness will nourish your spirit, helping you reach one of the good destinations in the heavenly worlds. If you've developed your mind in strong concentration, you'll be able to gain release from the range of worldliness and take your heart to the transcendent.

So those of us who haven't yet developed the goodness we've hoped for: Don't underestimate what you've got. Regard what you've done as your wealth. This wealth of yours is what will prevent your life from falling into low places. As long as you stay in this world, you can depend on the good you've done to determine the course of your life. If you leave this world, your goodness will follow you like a shadow at all times.

Here I've been talking about the goodness we've joined our hearts together in developing here. Take the advice I've given and remember it as part of your recollection of the Dhamma.

## Glossary

**Abhidhamma:** The third of the three “baskets” or collections comprising the Pali Canon, consisting of seven books devoted to standardizing the vocabulary of the teachings presented in the Suttas, or discourses, in the first basket.

**Ajaan:** A Thai word derived from the Pali term, *ācariya*: mentor or teacher.

**Arahant:** A “worthy one,” a person whose heart is freed from the fermentations (*āśava*) of sensuality, states of becoming, views, and ignorance, and who is thus not destined for further rebirth. An epithet for the Buddha and the highest level of his Noble Disciples.

**Ariyadhana:** Noble wealth, i.e., qualities that serve as capital in the quest for liberation: conviction, virtue, shame, compunction, erudition, generosity, and discernment.

**Āśava:** Fermentation; effluent. Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that bubble up in the heart and flow out, leading to the flood of further becoming.

**Avijjā:** Ignorance; counterfeit awareness.

**Brahmā:** Inhabitant of the higher, non-sensual levels of heaven.

**Buddho:** Awake.

**Deva:** Literally, a “shining one.” A terrestrial or celestial spirit inhabiting a plane of sensual pleasure.

**Dhamma:** Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles that underlie their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit

in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, “dhamma” is used also to refer to any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha refers both to his teachings and to the direct experience of the quality—*nibbāna*—at which those teachings are aimed. In contexts where the term is used in a neutral sense in these talks, it has been left uncapitalized. Where used in a positive sense, it has been capitalized.

**Dhātu:** Property; element. The four physical properties are earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (heat), and wind (energy). The six properties include these four together with space and consciousness. (For a description of how the fire dhātu is related to the appearance and disappearance of a fire, see the discussion under *nibbāna*, below.)

**Jhāna:** Absorption in a physical sensation (*rūpa jhāna*) or in a mental notion (*arūpa jhāna*). *Vitakka* (directed thought), *vicāra* (evaluation), and *pīti* (rapture) are three of the five factors forming the first level of *rūpa jhāna*, the other two being *sukha* (pleasure) and *ekaggatārammaṇa* (singleness of preoccupation).

**Kamma:** Intentional actions that result in states of being and birth. Sometimes this term is also used to denote the results of such actions.

**Khandha:** Component parts of sensory perception, from which one’s sense of self is constructed: *rūpa* (physical sensations); *vedanā* (feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain); *saññā* (labels, concepts); *saṅkhāra* (mental fabrications, anything created by the mind); and *viññāṇa* (consciousness).

**Māra:** The personification of death, temptation, and any force that obstructs the practice of the path to Liberation.

**Nibbāna (*nirvāṇa*):** Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from greed, anger, and delusion, from physical sensations and mental acts. As this term is used to refer also to the extinguishing of fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire in a latent state

exists to a greater or lesser extent in all objects. When activated, it seizes and sticks to its fuel. When extinguished, it is “unbound.”)

**Nīvaraṇa:** Hindrances to concentration—sensual desire, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.

**Pāṭimokkha:** The basic code of 227 rules followed by Theravāda Buddhist monks.

**Saṅgha:** The community of the Buddha’s followers. On the conventional level, this refers to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, or Buddhist monkhood. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha’s followers, whether lay or ordained, who have practiced to the point of gaining at least “stream-entry,” the first of the transcendent qualities culminating in nibbāna.

**Saṅkhāra:** Fabrication—the forces and factors that fabricate things, the process of fabrication, and the fabricated things that result; all processes or things conditioned, compounded, or constructed by nature, whether on the physical or the mental level.

**Sutta:** Discourse.

*sabbe sattā sadā hontu  
averā sukha-jīvino  
katarāṃ puñña-phalaṃ mayhaṃ  
sabbe bhāgī bhavantu te*

May all beings always live happily,  
free from animosity.  
May all share in the blessings  
springing from the good I have done.