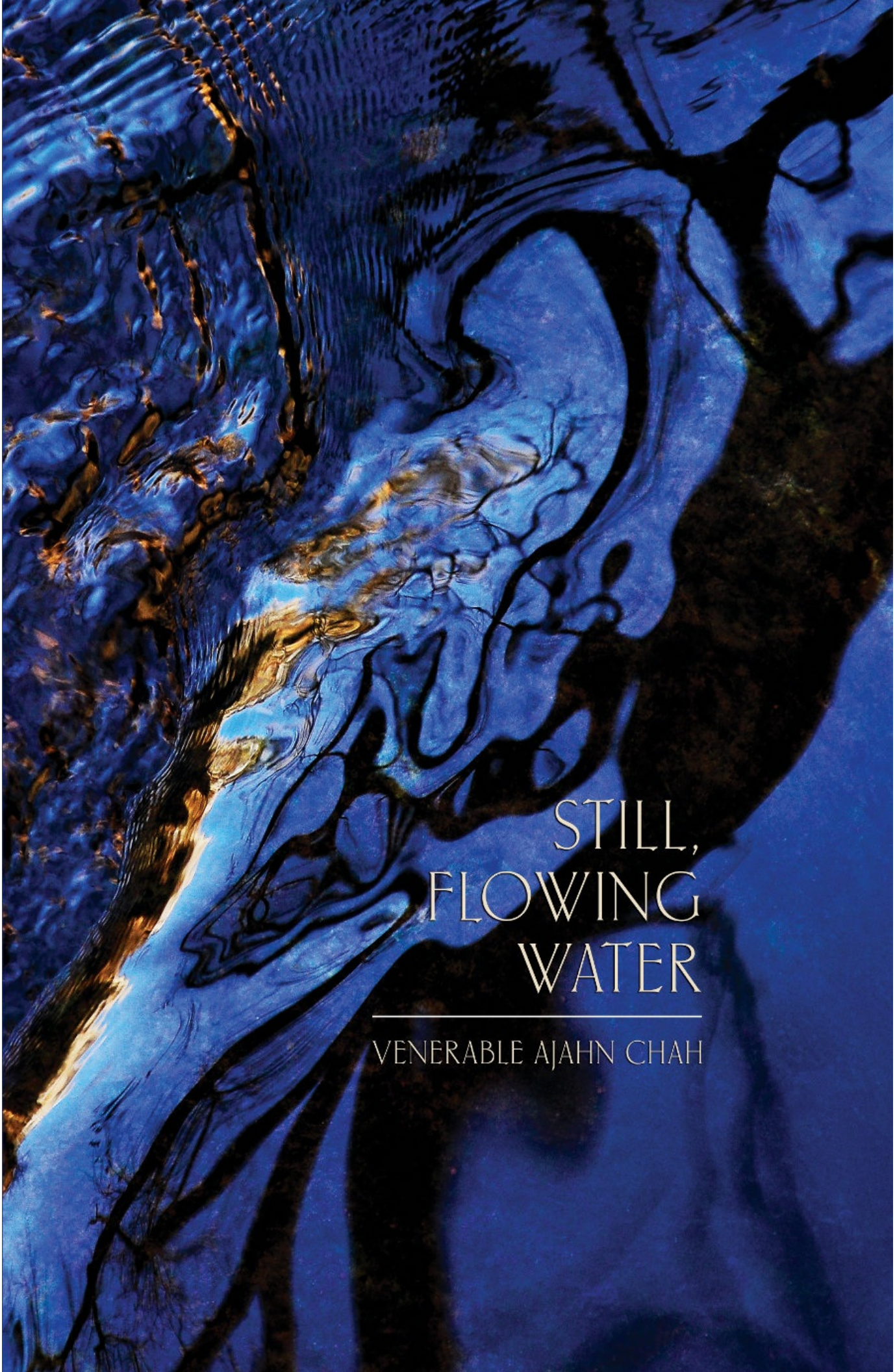


STILL, FLOWING WATER

VENERABLE AJAHN CHAH

Still, Flowing Water

EIGHT DHAMMA TALKS

Venerable
Ajahn Chah

TRANSLATED FROM THE THAI BY
ṬHĀNISSARO BHIKKHU

additional resources

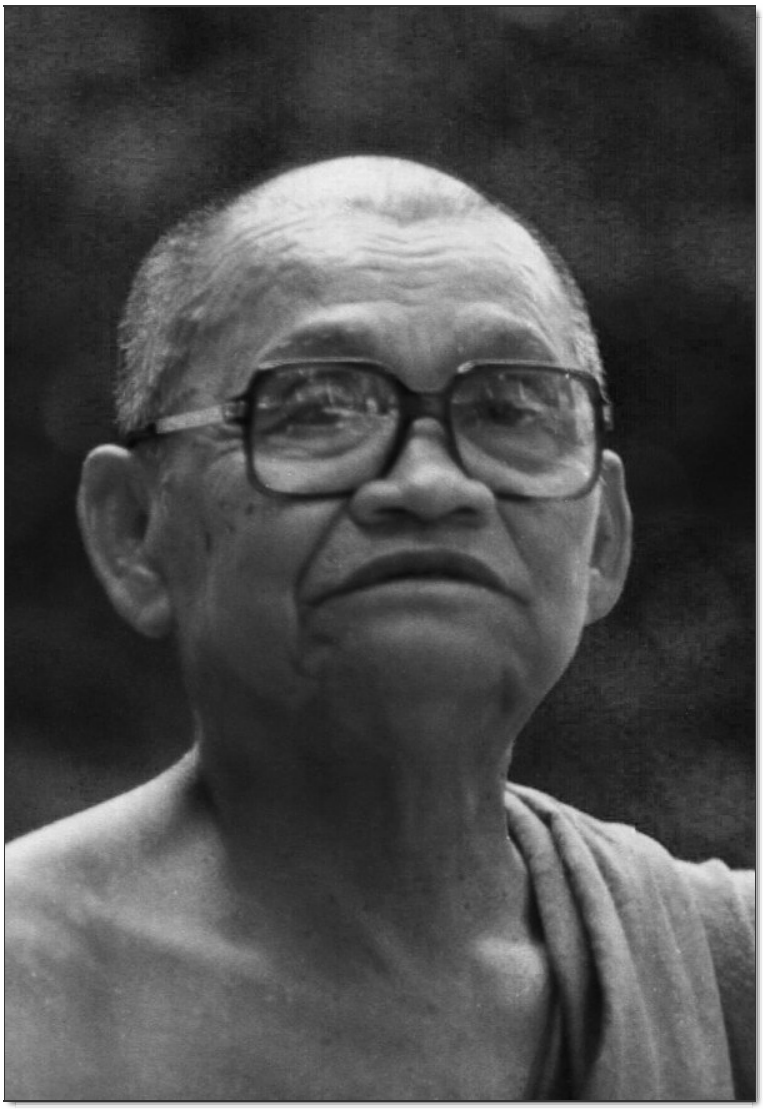
More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org and accesstoinsight.org.

printed copy

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

questions

Questions regarding this book may be addressed to: The Abbot, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.



VENERABLE AJAHN CHAH

A Gift of Dhamma

A public talk given on October 10, 1977, addressed to the parents of a monk who had come from France to visit their son.

SO NOW... There's been not enough time.... too little time.... You've been visiting for many days now, and we haven't had the chance to talk, to ask questions, because here at Wat Nong Pa Pong there've been many visitors, both day and night. So we haven't had the opportunity to talk. *[Aside:* Whose parents are these?] *[Answer:* Ṭhitiñāṇo's.] Ṭhitiñāṇo's parents have come to visit from Paris for several days now, staying three nights at Wat Pa Pong and three nights at Wat Pa Nanachat. In two days you're going to leave.

So I'd like to take the opportunity to tell you how glad I am that you made the effort to come here to Wat Nong Pa Pong and that you've had the chance to visit with your son, the monk. I'm glad for you, but I don't have any gift to give to you. There are already lots of material things and whatnot in Paris. Lots of material things. But there's not much Dhamma to nourish people's hearts and bring them peace. There's not much at all. From what I observed when I was there, all I could see were things to stir up the heart and give it trouble all the time. From what I observed, Paris seems to be very advanced in terms of all kinds of material things that are sensual objects—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas that act as temptations for people who aren't familiar with the Dhamma, getting them all stirred up. So now I'd like to give a gift of Dhamma that you can put into practice in Paris after you leave Wat Nong Pa Pong and Wat Pa Nanachat.

The Dhamma is.... [Are you going to translate as we go along?] [Yes.] [Okay, but it's not really convenient.]

The Dhamma is a condition that can cut through and reduce the problems and difficulties in the human heart—reducing them, reducing them until they're gone. This condition is called Dhamma. So you should train yourself in this Dhamma in your daily life. When any preoccupation strikes and disturbs the mind, you can then solve the problem, you can resolve it. That's because problems of this sort, everyone—whether here in Thailand, abroad, everywhere: If you don't know how to solve this problem, it's normal that you suffer.

When this sort of problem arises, the way to solve it is discernment: building

discernment, training discernment, making discernment arise from within our heart.

As for the path of practice, it's nothing far away. It's right within you: in your body and mind. It's the same whether you're Thai or from abroad. The body and mind are what stir up trouble. But the body and mind can bring peace.

Actually, the mind is already at normalcy. It's like rain water, water that's normally clear, pure, and clean. But if you put green or yellow dye into it, it turns green or yellow.

It's the same with the mind. If you meet up with a preoccupation you like, the heart feels good and at ease. If it meets up with a preoccupation you don't like, it feels dis-ease. It gets murky—like water that turns yellow when mixed with yellow dye, black when mixed with black dye, green when mixed with green dye. It keeps changing its color. But actually, the water that's yellow or green: Its normalcy is that it's clear and clean. The normalcy of the mind is like rain water. It's a mind that's clear and clean. It's a mind whose normalcy isn't stirred up and troubled. The reason it's stirred up and troubled is because it takes after its preoccupations. It falls for its preoccupations.

To put it so that you'll see this clearly: Right now we're sitting in a forest that's quiet, like a leaf. A leaf, if there's no breeze blowing, is still. Quiet. If a breeze blows, it flutters in line with the breeze. The same with the mind. If it makes contact with a preoccupation, it flutters in line with the preoccupation. The more it's ignorant of the Dhamma, the more you keep letting it run loose in line with its moods. If the mood is happy, you let it run loose. If the mood is unhappy, you let it run loose, and it keeps staying stirred up—to the point where people have nervous breakdowns, because they don't know what's going on. They let things run loose in line with their moods. They don't know how to care for their minds.

When the mind has no one to care for it, it's like a person with no parents to care for it, a destitute person. A destitute person has no refuge. A person who lacks a refuge suffers. The same with the mind. If it lacks training in making its views right, it's put to all sorts of difficulties.

So the practice of bringing the mind to peace is called, in Buddhism, doing *kammaṭṭhāna. Kammaṭṭhāna. Ṭhāna* means foundation. *Kamma* is the work we have to do. One part of this is the body; one part is the mind. That's all there is: these two things. The body is a *rūpa-dhamma*, a physical condition. It has a shape you can see with your eyes. The mind is a *nāma-dhamma*, a mental phenomenon that doesn't have a shape. You can't see it with your eyes, but it's there. In ordinary language we call these things body and mind. The body you can see with your physical eyes. The mind you can see with your inner eye, the eye of the mind. There are just these two things, but they're all stirred up.

So the practice of training the mind, the gift I'm giving you today, is simply doing

this kammaṭṭhāna. I'm giving it to you to train the mind. Use this mind to contemplate this body. Use this mind to contemplate this body.

What is the mind? The mind isn't "is" anything. But through our suppositions we say it's an awareness. It's always aware of receiving preoccupations. What's aware of receiving preoccupations, we'll call "mind." Whatever is aware, that's called the mind. It's aware of preoccupations and moods—sometimes happy, sometimes painful, moods of gladness, moods of sadness. Whatever takes on the burden of being aware of these things is called the mind.

The mind is right here right now. While I'm talking to you, the mind is aware of what I'm saying. When the sounds come into the ear, the mind is aware of what I'm saying. Whatever's there, it's aware of it. What's aware: That's called the mind. The mind has no body, no shape. It's simply what's aware and nothing else. That's called the mind.

This mind, if we teach it to have right views, won't have any problems. It'll be at its ease. The mind will be the mind, the preoccupations will be preoccupations. Preoccupations won't be the mind; the mind won't be its preoccupations. We contemplate the mind and its preoccupations so that we'll see clearly in our awareness that the mind receives and is aware of preoccupations that come passing in. These two things meet and give rise to an awareness in the mind—good, bad, hot, cold, all kinds of things. If we don't have the discernment to straighten things out, the problems that come about in this way will put the mind in a turmoil.

To do kammaṭṭhāna is to give the mind a foundation. The in-and-out breath is our foundation. Take this—the breath coming in, the breath going out—as the object of your meditation. Familiarize yourself with it. There are lots of other meditation objects, but they can cause difficulties. It's better to stay with the breath. The breath has been the crown of all meditation objects from time immemorial.

You sit and meditate—when you have the chance, you sit and meditate. Put your right hand on top of your left hand, your right leg on top of your left leg. Sit up straight. Think to yourself: "Right now I'm going to put aside all my burdens. I won't concern myself with anything else." Let go. Whatever responsibilities you have, all your many responsibilities, let them go for the time being. Teach your mind: "Right now I'm going to keep track of the breath. I'll be alert to one thing only: the breath." Then breathe in, breathe out. When you focus on the breath, don't make it long, don't make it short, don't make it light, don't make it heavy. Let it be just right. Just right.

Mindfulness is the ability to keep this in mind. Alertness is the awareness that comes from the mind. Let it know that the breath is going out. Let it know that the breath is coming in. At ease. You don't have to think about this or that or anything at all. Just be aware in the present that "Right now my only duty is to focus on the breath. I don't have any duty to think about anything else." Then focus just on the

breath going out, the breath coming in. Focus your mindfulness to keep track of this. Make your alertness be aware that right now you have a breath.

At first, when the breath comes in, the beginning of the breath is at the tip of the nose, the middle of the breath is at the heart, the end of the breath is at the navel. When you breathe out, the beginning of the breath is at the navel, the middle of the breath is at the heart, the end of the breath is at the tip of the nose. Feel it in this way. The beginning of the breath, one—nose; two—heart; three—navel. Then one—navel; two—heart; three—nose. Focus on these three stages and let all your concerns fade away. You don't have to think of anything else. Focus on the breath. Focus on in. Always know the beginning of the breath, the middle of the breath, the end of the breath. The beginning of the breath, the middle of the breath, the end of the breath.

Perhaps the mind may think of something. It'll bring up the breath as its preoccupation. It'll evaluate the breath, contemplate it, staying involved with its preoccupation, keeping this up continually—knowing the beginning of the breath, knowing the middle of the breath, knowing the end of the breath.

When you keep doing this, then *citta-mudutā:* The heart will be malleable. *Kāya-mudutā:* The body will be malleable. Its tiredness and stiffness will gradually disappear. The body will become light; the mind will gather together. The breath will grow more gentle and refined.

Mindfulness and alertness will coalesce with the mind. Keep doing this until the mind quiets down, grows still, and becomes one. One. The mind rests with the breath. It won't separate out anywhere else. At ease. No disturbance. It knows the beginning of the breath, the middle of the breath, the end of the breath. When you know this, stay focused on it at all times. When the mind is quiet, you can focus just on the end point and beginning point of the breath. You don't have to follow it down into the body. In other words, stay just at the tip of the nose. The breath goes out, the breath comes in, goes out, comes in, but you don't have to follow it down.

When you do this, it's called making the mind comfortable, at peace. When the mind is at peace, let it stop and stay right there. It stops and stays with one preoccupation. The mind is one. It stays with a single preoccupation, the in-and-out breath, at all times. This is called making the mind quiet and making it give rise to discernment.

This is the beginning, the foundation of doing kammaṭṭhāna. Try to do this every day, every day, wherever you are: at home, in your car, in your boat, sitting, lying down. Have mindfulness and alertness in charge at all times.

This is called meditation *(bhāvanā)*. There are many types of meditation and they can be done in all four postures, not only while you're sitting. You can do them while standing, sitting, walking, or lying down. All that's asked is that your mindfulness be always focused on knowing: "At this moment, what are the characteristics of the mind?

What mood is it in? Happy? Pained? Stirred up? At peace?" Observe it in this way. In other words, know what's right and wrong in your mind at all times. This is called making the mind quiet.

When the mind is quiet, discernment will arise; discernment will know; discernment will see. When the mind is quiet, use the quiet mind to contemplate. Contemplate what? It's kammaṭṭhāna: your body from the head down to the toes, from the toes up to the head. Use the quiet mind to keep contemplating back and forth. Look at hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin as your kammaṭṭhāna. See that all bodies have earth, water, fire, and wind. These four groups are called kammaṭṭhāna. They're called properties: the earth property, the water property, the fire property, the wind property. When they come together, we call them a "human being," a "living being." But the Buddha said to see them just as properties. The parts of the body that are solid are earth, the earth property. The liquid parts that circulate in the body are called the water property. The breath that flows up and down is called the wind property. The heat and warmth in the body is called the fire property.

A person, when analyzed, has only these four things: earth, water, fire, wind. There's no "being," no "human being." There's nothing: no Thai, no Westerner, no Cambodian, no Vietnamese, no Lao. Nobody. There's just earth, water, fire, and wind. But we suppose these things into being a person, a living being. But actually you'll come to see that there's nothing at all to this earth, water, fire, and wind that we call a human being. They're composed of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. They're not for sure. They keep cycling around and changing. They don't say in place. Even our body isn't for sure. It keeps moving around, changing. The hair of the head changes, the hair of the body changes, the skin changes. Everything keeps changing.

Even the heart is the same way. It's not our self, it's not "us," it's not "him" or "her." It can think all kinds of things. Sometimes it can think of committing suicide, sometimes it can think pleasant thoughts, sometimes it can think painful thoughts—all kinds of things. It's not for sure. If you don't have any discernment, you believe it—this one mind that can keep lying to you: sad, happy, all mixed up together. This is what we mean when we say that the mind isn't for sure. The body isn't for sure. In short, they're both inconstant, both stressful, both not-self. The Buddha said that these things aren't a being, aren't a person, aren't our self, aren't us or anyone else. They're properties, that's all: earth, water, fire, and wind.

This is contemplation. Use the mind to contemplate until it sees clearly all the way down.

When it sees clearly all the way down, the clinging that teaches us that we're beautiful, good, bad, unhappy, right, whatever, gets uprooted. Removed. You see everything as one and the same thing: human beings, animals. Westerners are one and

same with Thais; Thais, one and the same with Westerners. Everything. It's all properties: earth, water, fire, wind. When the mind sees in this way, it uproots every clinging out of itself. When you contemplate and see inconstancy, stress, and not-self — that there's no "us," no "being"—you give rise to a sense of chastened dismay. You uproot your clingings, uproot your clingings. You don't have to cling to anything at all as "you" or your self or anyone else.

When the mind sees in this way, it gives rise to disenchantment. Dispassion. In other words, when it sees everything as inconstant, stressful, and not-self, it stops. It becomes Dhamma. Passion, aversion, and delusion keep wasting away, wasting away until nothing is left but Dhamma: this mind. That's all there is.

This is what's meant by doing kammaṭṭhāna.

So I give this to you to take and contemplate. Study it every day in your everyday life. Even though you've received these teachings from Wat Nong Pa Pong or Wat Pa Nanachat, they're an heirloom that's been passed down. I advise you—as do all the monks, the ajaans, and your son the monk—to take this gift of Dhamma and contemplate it. Your heart will be at ease. It won't be troubled any more. It'll be at peace. If the body is disturbed, don't worry about it. Make sure the mind isn't disturbed. If people in the world are disturbed, we're not disturbed along with them. Even though there may be a lot of disturbance in your foreign land, you don't have to be disturbed—because your mind has seen. It's Dhamma.

This is a good path, a correct path. So remember it and contemplate it.

Our Real Home

This is a talk that Ajahn Chah recorded at the request of one of his students whose mother was on her deathbed. The student had expected just a short message for his mother, but instead Ajahn Chah gave this extended talk of consolation and encouragement for the mother and the whole family.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa.
Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One.

Sīlena sugatiṁ yanti: Through virtue they go to a good destination.
Sīlena bhogasampadā: Through virtue there's consummation of wealth.
Sīlena nibbutiṁ yanti: Through virtue they go to nibbāna.
Tasmā sīlaṁ visodhaye: So virtue should be purified.

NOW, GRANDMA, set your heart on listening respectfully to the Dhamma, which is the teaching of the Buddha. While I'm teaching you the Dhamma, be as attentive as if the Buddha himself were sitting right in front of you. Close your eyes and set your heart on making your mind one. Bring the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha into your heart as a way of showing the Buddha respect.

Today I haven't brought you a gift of any substance, aside from the Dhamma of the Buddha. This is my last gift to you, so please accept it.

You should understand that even the Buddha—with all his virtues and perfections—couldn't avoid the weakening that comes with aging. When he reached the age you are, he let go. He let go of the fabrications of life.

"Letting go" means that he put these things down. Don't carry them around. Don't weigh yourself down. Accept the truth about the fabrications of the body, whatever they may be: You've relied on them since you were born, but now it's enough. Now that they're old, they're like the utensils in your home—the cups, the saucers, and the plates—that you've held onto all these years. When you first got them they were bright and clean, but now they're wearing out. Some of them are broken, some of them are lost, while the ones remaining have all changed. They haven't stayed

the same. That's just the way things are.

The same holds true with the parts of your body. From the time of birth and on through your childhood and youth, they kept changing. Now they're called "old." So accept the fact. The Buddha taught that fabrications aren't us, they aren't ours, whether they're inside the body or out. They keep changing in this way. Contemplate this until it's clear.

This body of yours, lying here and decaying, is the truth of the Dhamma. This truth is a teaching of the Buddha that's certain and sure. He taught us to look at it, to contemplate it, to accept what's happening. And it's something you *should* accept, regardless of what's happening.

The Buddha taught, when we're imprisoned, to make sure that it's only the body that's imprisoned. Don't let the mind be imprisoned. And the same thing applies here. When the body wears out with age, accept it. But make sure that it's only the body that's wearing out. Make sure that the affairs of the mind are something else entirely. This gives your mind energy and strength, because you see into the Dhamma that this is the way things are. This is the way they have to be.

As the Buddha taught, this is the way the body and mind are of their own accord. They can't be any other way. As soon as the body is born, it begins to age. As it ages, it gets sick. After it's sick, it dies. This truth is so true, this truth you're encountering today. It's the truth of the Dhamma. Look at it with your discernment so that you see.

Even if fire were to burn your house, or water were to flood it, or whatever the danger that would come to it, make sure that it's only the house that gets burned. Make sure your heart doesn't get burned along with it. If water floods your house, don't let it flood your heart. Make sure it floods only the house, which is something outside the body. As for the mind, get it to let go and leave things be—because now is the proper time, the proper time to let go.

You've been alive for a long time now, haven't you? Your eyes have had the chance to see all kinds of shapes, colors, and lights. The same with your other senses. Your ears have heard lots of sounds, all kinds of sounds—but they were no big deal. You've tasted really delicious foods—but they were no big deal. The beautiful things you've seen: They were no big deal. The ugly things you've seen: They were no big deal. The alluring things you've heard were no big deal. The ugly and offensive things you've heard were no big deal.

The Buddha thus taught that whether you're rich or poor, a child or an adult—even if you're an animal or anyone born in this world: There's nothing in this world that's lasting. Everything has to change in line with its condition. The truth of these conditions—if you try to fix them in a way that's not right— won't respond at all. But there *is* a way to fix things. The Buddha taught us to contemplate this body and mind to see that they aren't us, they aren't ours, they're just suppositions.

For example, this house of yours: It's only a supposition that it's yours. You can't take it with you. All the belongings that you suppose to be yours are just an affair of supposition. They stay right where they are. You can't take them with you. The children and grandchildren that you suppose to be yours are just an affair of supposition. They stay right where they are.

And this isn't just true for you. This is the way things are all over the world. Even the Buddha was this way. Even his enlightened disciples were this way. But they differed from us. In what way did they differ? They accepted this. They accepted the fact that the fabrications of the body are this way by their very nature. They can't be any other way.

This is why the Buddha taught us to contemplate this body from the soles of the feet on up to the top of the head, and from the top of the head on down to the soles of the feet. These are the parts of your body. So look to see what all is there. Is there anything clean? Anything of any substance? These things keep wearing down with time. The Buddha taught us to see that these fabrications aren't us. They're just the way they are. They aren't ours. They're just the way they are. What other way would you have them be? The way they are is already right. If you're suffering from this, then your thinking is wrong. When things are right but you see them wrong, it throws an obstacle across your heart.

It's like the water in a river that flows downhill to the lowlands. It flows in line with its nature. The Ayutthaya River, the Muun River, whatever the river, they all flow downhill. They don't flow uphill. That's their nature.

Suppose a man were to stand on the bank of a river, watching the current flowing downhill, but his thinking is wrong. He wants the river to flow uphill. He's going to suffer. He won't have any peace of mind. Whether he's sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, he won't find any peace. Why? Because his thinking is wrong. His thinking goes against the flow. He wants the water to flow uphill, but the truth of the matter is that the water can't flow uphill. It's not appropriate. The nature of the water is that it has to flow along with the flow. That's its nature.

When this is the case, the man is upset. Why is he upset? Because his thinking is wrong, his ideas are wrong, all because of his wrong view. Right view sees that water has to flow downhill. This is a truth of the Dhamma that we can contemplate and see that it's true. When that man sees this truth, he can let go—he can let the water flow along with its flow. The problem that was eating away at his heart disappears. When the problem disappears, there's no more problem. When there's no problem, there's no suffering.

It's the same here. The water flowing downhill is like the life of your body. After it's young, it's old. When it's old, it flows along in its way. Don't think that you don't want it to be that way. Don't think like that. We don't have the power to fix it.

The Buddha looked at things in line with their conditions, that they simply have to be that way. So we let them go, we leave them be. Take your awareness as your refuge. Meditate on the word *buddho, buddho.* Even though you're really tired, put your mind with the breath. Take a good long out-breath. Take a good long in-breath. Take another good long out-breath. Focus your mind again if you wander off. Focus on the breath: *buddho, buddho.*

The more tired you feel, the more refined you have to keep focusing on in every time. Why? So that you can contend with pain. When you feel tired, stop all your thoughts. Don't think of anything at all. Focus the mind in at the mind, and then keep the mind with the breath: *buddho, buddho.* Let go of everything outside. Don't get fastened on your children. Don't get fastened on your grandchildren. Don't get fastened on anything at all. Let go. Let the mind be one. Gather the mind in to one. Watch the breath. Focus on the breath. Gather the mind at the breath. Just be aware at the breath. You don't have to be aware of anything else. Keep making your awareness more and more refined until it feels very small, but extremely awake.

The pains that have arisen will gradually grow calm. Ultimately, we watch the breath in the same way that, when relatives have come to visit us, we see them off to the boat dock or the bus station. Once the motor starts, the boat goes whizzing right off. We watch them until they're gone, and then we return to our home.

We watch the breath in the same way. We get acquainted with coarse breathing. We get acquainted with refined breathing. As the breathing gets more and more refined, we watch it off. It gets smaller and smaller, but we make our mind more and more awake. We keep watching the breath get more and more refined until there's no more breath. There's just awareness, wide awake.

This is called meeting with the Buddha. We stay aware, awake. This is what *buddho* means: what's aware, awake, serene. When that's the case, we're living with the Buddha. We've met with awareness. We've met with brightness. We don't send the mind anywhere else. It *gathers* in here. We've reached our Buddha. Even though he's already passed away, that was just the body. The real Buddha is awareness that's serene and bright. When you meet with this, that's all you have to know. Let everything gather right here.

Let go of everything, leaving just this singular awareness. But don't get deluded, okay? Don't lose track. If a vision or a voice arises in the mind, let it go. Leave it be. You don't need to take hold of anything at all. Just take hold of the awareness. Don't worry about the future; don't worry about the past. Stay right here. Ultimately you get so that you can't say that you're going forward, you can't say that you're going back, you can't say that you're staying in place. There's nothing to be attached to. Why? Because there's no self there, no you, no yours. It's all gone.

This is the Buddha's teaching: He tells us to be "all gone" in this way. He doesn't

have us grab hold of anything. He has us be aware like this—aware and letting go.

This is your duty right now, yours alone. Try to enter into the Dhamma in this way. This is the path for gaining release from the round of wandering-on. Try to let go, to understand, to set your heart on investigating this.

Don't be worried about this person or that. Your children, your grandchildren, your relatives, everybody: Don't be worried about them. Right now they're fine. In the future they'll be just like this: like you are right now. Nobody stays on in this world. That's the way it has to be. This is a condition, a truth, that the Buddha taught. All the things that don't have any truth to them, he has us leave them be. When you leave them be, you can see the truth. If you don't leave them be, you won't see the truth. That's the way things are. Everybody in the world has to be this way. So don't be worried. Don't fasten onto things.

If the mind is going to think, let it think, but think using discernment. Think with discernment. Don't think with foolishness. If you think about your grandchildren, think about them with discernment, not with foolishness. Whatever there is, you can think about it, you can be aware of it, but think with discernment, be aware with discernment. If you're really aware with discernment, you have to let go. You have to leave things be. If you think with discernment and are aware with discernment, there's no suffering, no stress. There's just happiness, peace, and respite, all in one. The mind gathers like this. All you need to hold onto in the present is the breath.

This is your duty now. It's not the duty of anyone else. Leave their duties to them. Your duty is your duty. And your duty right now is to keep your awareness at your mind, making sure it doesn't get stirred up. Your duty is to know how your mind is doing. Is it worried about anything? Is it concerned about anything? Examine the mind while you're lying here sick. Don't take on the duties of your children. Don't take on the duties of your grandchildren. Don't take on the duties of anyone else. Don't take on any outside duties at all. They're none of your business. Now's the time for you to let go, to leave things be. When you let go in this way, the mind will be at peace. This is your duty now, right here in the present.

When you're sick like this, gather the mind into oneness. This is your duty. Let everything else go its own way. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, whatever: Let them go their own way. Just stay focused on your duty.

If any preoccupation comes in to bother the mind, just say in your heart: "Leave me alone. Don't bother me. You're no affair of mine." If any critical thoughts come up —fear for your life, fear that you'll die, thinking of this person, thinking of that person —just say in your heart, "Don't bother me. You're no affair of mine."

This is because you see all the Dhammas that arise. What are Dhammas? Everything is a Dhamma. There's nothing now that isn't a Dhamma.

What's the world? The world is any preoccupation that gets you stirred up, that disturbs you right now. "How is that person going to be? How is this person going to be? When I die will anyone look after them?" All of this is the world. Whatever we think up—fear of death, fear of aging, fear of illness, whatever the fear—it's all world. Drop the world—it's just world. That's the way the world is. If it arises in the mind, make yourself understand: The world is nothing but a preoccupation. Preoccupations obscure the mind so that it can't see itself.

Whatever arises in the mind, tell yourself: "This isn't any affair of mine. It's an affair of inconstancy, an affair of stress, an affair of not-self."

If you think that you'd like to keep on living a long time, it makes you suffer. If you think that you'd like to die right now and get it all over with, that's not the right way either, you know. It makes you suffer, too, because fabrications aren't yours. You can't fix them up. They're just the way they are. You can fix them up a little bit, as when you fix up the body to make it look pretty or clean. Or like children: They paint their lips and let their nails grow long to make them look pretty. But that's all there is to it. When they get old, they all end up in the same bucket. They fix up the outside, but can't really fix things. That's the way it is with fabrications. The only thing you can fix is your heart and mind.

This house you're living in: You and your husband built it. Other people can build houses, too, making them large and lovely. Those are outer homes, which anyone can build. The Buddha called them outer homes, not your real home. They're homes only in name.

Homes in the world have to fall in line with the way of the world. Some of us forget. We get a big home and enjoy living in it, but we forget our real home. Where is our real home? It's in the sense of peace. Our real home is peace.

This home you live in here—and this applies to every home—is lovely, but it's not very peaceful. First this, then that; you're worried about this, you're worried about that: This isn't your real home. It's not your inner home. It's an outer home. Someday soon you'll have to leave it. You won't be able to live here anymore. It's a worldly home, not yours.

This body of yours, that you still see as you and yours, is a home that stays with you a while. You think that it's you and yours, but it's not. It, too, is a worldly home. It's not your real home. People prefer to build outer homes; they don't like to build inner homes. You rarely see any homes where people can really stay and be at peace. People don't build them. They build only outer homes.

Think about it for a minute. How is your body right now? Think about it from the day you were born all the way up to the present moment. We keep running away from progress. We keep running until we're old, running until we're sick. We don't want things to be that way, but we can't prevent it. That's just the way things are.

They can't be any other way. It's like wanting a duck to be like a chicken, but it can't because it's a duck. If you want a chicken to be like a duck, it can't, because it's a chicken. If you want ducks to be like chickens, and chickens to be like ducks, you simply suffer—because these things are impossible. If you think, "Ducks have to be the way they are, and chickens the way *they* are; they can't be any other way," then that kind of thinking gives you energy and strength.

No matter how much you want this body to stay stable and permanent, it can't be that way. It's just the way it is. The Buddha called it a fabrication.

Aniccā vata saṅkhārā: How inconstant are fabrications!
Uppāda-vaya-dhammino: Their nature is to arise and pass away.
Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti: Arising, they disband.
Tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho: Their stilling is bliss.

This fabrication—this body-and-mind—is inconstant. It's not dependable. It's here and then it's not. It's born and then it passes away. But we human beings want it to be constant. That's the thinking of a fool.

Just look at your breath. It goes out and then it comes in. It comes in and then it goes out. That's the nature of breath. It has to be that way. It has to change, to go back and forth. The affairs of fabrication *depend* on change. You can't have them *not* change. Just look at your breath. Can you keep it from coming in? Does it feel comfortable? If you draw in a breath and then don't let it go out, is that any good? Even if you want it to be constant, it can't be constant. It's impossible. It goes out and then it comes in. It comes in and then it goes out. It's such a normal thing.

We're born and then we age; we age and then we get sick and die. It's so normal. But we don't like it. It's as if we wanted the breath to come in and not go out; or to go out and not come in. When it comes in and out, out and in, we can live. Human beings and animals have been living right up to the present because fabrications follow their duty in line with their conditions. That's their truth.

So we have to see their truth in line with their truth. As with the affair of birth, aging, illness, and death: Once we're born, we're already dead. Birth and death are all the same thing. One part is the beginning, and one part the end. Just like a tree: When it has a base, it has an upper tip. When it has an upper tip, it has a base. When there's no base, there's no upper tip. There's no upper tip without a base. That's the way things are.

It's kind of funny, you know. We human beings, when somebody dies, get all sad and upset. We cry and grieve—all kinds of things. It's delusion. It's delusion, you know, to cry and lament when somebody dies. That's the way we've been since who

knows when. We hardly ever reflect to see things clearly. In my opinion, and you'll have to forgive me for saying this, but if you're going to cry when somebody dies, it'd be better to cry when somebody's born. But we have things all backwards. If somebody's born we laugh; we're happy and glad. But really, birth is death, and death is birth. The beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning. When someone dies or is about to die, we cry. That's foolishness. If you're going to cry, it'd be better to cry from the very beginning. For birth is death. Without birth, there's no death. Do you understand? Death is birth, and birth is death.

Don't think in a way that puts you in a turmoil. Just let things be the way they are. This is your duty now. No one else can help you. Your children can't help you; your grandchildren can't help you; your wealth can't help you. The only thing that can help you is if you correct your sense of things right now. Don't let it waver back and forth. Let go. Let go.

Even if we don't let things go, they're already ready to go. The parts of your body are trying to run away. Do you see this? When you were young, your hair was black. Now it's gray. This is how it's already running away. When you were young, your eyes were bright and clear, but now they're blurry. Do you see this? They're already running away. They can't hold out any longer, so they have to run away. This is no longer their place to stay. Every part of your body has started running away. When you were young, were your teeth solid and sturdy? Now they're loose. You may have put in false teeth, but they're something new, not the original ones. The original ones have run away. Every part of your body—of everybody's body—is trying to run away.

Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body: All of these things are trying to run away. Why? Because this isn't their place to stay. They're fabrications, so they *can't* stay. They can stay for only a while and then they have to go. And it's not just you. Every part of the body—hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, everything—is getting ready to run away. Some parts have already gone, but not yet everything. All that's left are a few house sitters. They're looking after the house, but they're no good. The eyes are no good; the teeth are no good; the ears are no good. This body's no good because the good things have already run away. They keep running away, one after another.

You have to understand that this is no place for human beings to stay. It's just a shelter where you can rest a bit, and then you have to move on.

So don't let yourself be worried about so many things. You've come to live in the world, so you should contemplate the world to see that that's the way it is: Everything's getting ready to run away. Look at your body. Is there anything there that's like what it used to be? Is the skin like it used to be? Is your hair like it used to be? Are your eyes like they used to be? Are your ears like they used to be? Are your teeth like they used to be? No, they're not. They've run off to who knows where.

This is what their nature is like. Once they've served their time, they have to go. Why do they have to go? Because that's their duty. That's their truth. This isn't a place where anything can stay permanently. And while they're staying here, they're a turmoil: sometimes pleasant, sometimes painful, with no respite or peace.

It's like a person who's traveling back home but hasn't yet arrived. He's still on the way, sometimes going forward, sometimes going back: a person with no place to stay. As long as he hasn't reached home, he's not at his ease: no ease while he's sitting, no ease while he's lying down, no ease while he's walking, no ease while he's riding in a car. Why? Because he hasn't yet reached home. When we reach our home, we're at our ease because we understand that this is our home.

It's the same here. The affairs of the world are never peaceful. Even if we're rich, they're not peaceful. If we're poor, they're not peaceful. If we're adults they're not peaceful. If we're children they're not peaceful. If we lack education, they're not peaceful. If we're educated, they're not peaceful. All these affairs are not peaceful: That's just the way they are. That's why poor people suffer, rich people suffer, children suffer, adults suffer. Old people suffer the sufferings of old people. The sufferings of children, the sufferings of rich people, the suffering of poor people: They're all suffering.

Every part in your body is running away, one thing after another. When you contemplate this, you'll see *aniccaṁ:* They're inconstant. *Dukkhaṁ:* They're stressful. Why is that? *Anattā:* They're not-self.

This body you're living in, this body sitting and lying here sick, along with the mind that knows pleasure and pain, that knows that the body is sick: Both of these things are called Dhamma.

The mental things with no shape, that can think and feel, are called *nāma*. They're *nāma-dhamma*. The things that have physical shape, that can hurt, that can grow and shrink, back and forth: That's called *rūpa-dhamma*. Mental things are dhamma. Physical things are dhamma. That's why we say we live with the Dhamma. There's nothing there that's really us. It's just Dhamma. Dhamma conditions arise and then pass away. They arise and then pass away. That's how conditions are. They arise and then pass away. We arise and pass away with every moment. This is how conditions are.

This is why, when we think of the Buddha, we can see that he's really worth respecting, really worth bowing down to, for he spoke the truth. He spoke in line with the truth. Once we see that that's the way it is, we see the Dhamma. Some people practice the Dhamma but don't see the Dhamma. Some people study the Dhamma, practice the Dhamma, but don't see the Dhamma. They still don't have any place to stay.

So you have to understand that everybody, all the way down to ants and termites

and all the other little animals, is trying to run away. There's no one who can stay here. Living things stay for a while and then they all go: rich people, poor people, children, old people, even animals. They all keep changing.

So when you sense that the world is like this, you see that it's disenchanting. There's nothing that's really you or yours. You're disenchanted—*nibbidā*. Disenchantment isn't disgust, you know. It's just the heart sobering up. The heart has seen the truth of the way things are: There's no way you can fix them. They're just the way they are. You let them go. You let go without gladness. You let go without sadness. You just let things go as fabrications, seeing with your own discernment that that's the way fabrications are. This is called, *anicca vata saṅkhāra:* Fabrications are inconstant. They change back and forth. That's inconstancy.

To put it in simple terms: Inconstancy is the Buddha. When we really see that these things are inconstant, that's the Buddha. When we look clearly into inconstancy, we'll see that it's constant. How is it constant? It's constant in being that way. It doesn't change into any other way. Human beings and animals, once they're born, are all that way. They're constant in that way—in that they're inconstant. They keep changing, changing from children to young people to old people: That's how they're inconstant. But the fact that everyone is that way: That's constant. That doesn't change. Things keep changing in that way. When you see this, your heart can be at peace, for it's not just you. It's everyone.

When you think in this way, it's disenchanting. Nibbidā arises. It cures you of your lust and desire for sensuality, for the world, for the baits of the world. If you have a lot of them, you abandon a lot. If you have a little, you abandon a little. Look at everyone. Have you seen any of these things since you were born? Have you seen poor people? Have you seen rich people? Have you seen people who die young? Have you seen people who die old? We've *all* seen these things. They're no big deal.

The important point is that the Buddha has us build a home for ourselves, to build a home in the way I've described to you. Build a home so you can let go, so that you can leave things be. Let them go and then leave them be. Let the mind reach peace. Peace is something that doesn't move forward, doesn't move back, doesn't stay in place. That's why its peace. It's peace in that it's free from going forward, free from moving back, free from staying in place.

Pleasure isn't a place for you to stay. Pain isn't a place for you to stay. Pain wears away. Pleasure wears away. Our foremost Teacher said that all fabrications are inconstant. So when we reach this last stage in life, he tells us to let go and leave things be. We can't take them with us. We'll have to let them go anyhow, so wouldn't it be better to let them go beforehand? If we carry them around, they weigh us down. When we sense that they weigh us down, we won't carry them around. Wouldn't it be better to let them go beforehand? So why carry them around? Why be attached to

them? Let your children and grandchildren look after you, while you can rest at your ease.

Those who look after the sick should be virtuous. Those who are sick should give others the opportunity to look after them. Don't give them difficulties. Wherever there's pain, learn how to keep your mind in good shape. Those who look after their parents should have their virtues, too. You have to be patient and tolerant. Don't feel disgust. This is the only time you can really repay your parents. In the beginning you were children, and your parents were adults. It was in dependence on them that you've been able to grow up. The fact that you're all sitting here is because your parents looked after you in every way. You owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

So now you should understand that your mother is a child. Before, you were her children, but now she's your child. Why is that? As people get older, they turn into children. They can't remember things; their eyes can't see things; their ears can't hear things; they make mistakes when they speak, just like children. So you should understand and let go. Don't take offense at what the sick person says and does. Let her have her way, in the same way you'd let a child have its way when it won't listen to its parents. Don't make it cry. Don't make it frustrated.

It's the same with your mother. When people are old, their perceptions get all skewed. They want to call one child, but they say another one's name. They ask for a bowl when they want a plate. They ask for a glass when they want something else. This is the normal way things are, so I ask you to contemplate it for yourself.

At the same time, the sick person should think of those looking after her. Have the virtue of patience and endurance in the face of pain. Make an effort in your heart so that it isn't a turmoil. Don't place too many difficulties on the people looking after you. As for those looking after the sick person, have the virtue of not feeling disgust over mucus and saliva, urine and excrement. Try to do the best you can. All of the children should help in looking after her.

She's now the only mother you have. You've depended on her ever since you were born: to be your teacher, your nurse, your doctor—she was everything for you. This is the benefaction she gave in raising you. She gave you knowledge; she provided for your needs and gave you wealth. Everything you have—the fact that you have children and grandchildren, nice homes, nice occupations, the fact that you can send your children to get an education—the fact that you even have yourself: What does that come from? It comes from the benefaction of your parents who gave you an inheritance so that your family line is the way it is.

The Buddha thus taught benefaction and gratitude. These two qualities complement each other. Benefaction is doing good for others. When we've received that goodness, received that help: Whoever has raised us, whoever has made it possible for us to live, whether it's a man or a woman, a relative or not, that person is our

benefactor.

Gratitude is our response. When we've received help and support from benefactors, we appreciate that benefaction. That's gratitude. Whatever they need, whatever difficulty they're in, we should be willing to make sacrifices for them, to take on the duty of helping them. This is because benefaction and gratitude are two qualities that undergird the world so that your family doesn't scatter, so that it's at peace, so that it's as solid and stable as it is.

Today I've brought you some Dhamma as a gift in your time of illness. I don't have any other gift to give. There's no need to bring you any material gift, for you have plenty of material things in your house, and over time they just cause you difficulties. So I've brought you some Dhamma, something of substance that will never run out. Now that you've heard this Dhamma, you can pass it on to any number of other people, and it'll never run out. It'll never stop. It's the truth of the Dhamma, a truth that always stays as it is.

I'm happy that I've been able to give you this gift of Dhamma so that you'll have the strength of heart to contend with all the things you face.

Still, Flowing Water

OKAY, EVERYONE, BE INTENT. PAY ATTENTION. Even though you're sitting near one another, don't let your mind focus on this person or that. It's as if you're sitting alone on a mountain or in a forest somewhere, all by yourself. You're sitting. What do you have sitting here right now? Just body and mind, that's all. Body and mind. Only these two things. What you have sitting here right now is the body and the mind. Everything sitting in this physical lump here is "body." "Mind" is what thinks, what receives and is aware of preoccupations in the present. Or you can call these two things *nāma* and *rūpa*. *Nāma* means anything that has no *rūpa,* or form. Any thinking about anything at all, or every kind of sensation, is called *nāma*—things like feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness. "Feeling," for instance, means what's aware of pleasure or pain. It doesn't have any substance. These things are *nāma*. When the eye sees forms, those forms are called *rūpa*. The awareness of forms is called *nāma*. Together they're called *nāma-dhamma* and *rūpa-dhamma*—mental phenomena and physical phenomena—or simply body and mind.

Everything that comes out of these two things is a disturbance in many ways, in line with each particular phenomenon. So if you want peace, all you have to know is *rūpa* and *nāma*, or body and mind. That's enough. But the mind as it is right here is still untrained. It's dirty. Unclean. It's not the primal mind. We have to train it by making it still from time to time.

So today, while I'm giving you this advice, don't be irritated by it. You don't have to be irritated. You have to increase the knowledge in your mind.

Suppose that you're sitting in concentration. Concentration isn't just a matter of sitting. When you walk, you can also be in concentration. Some people think that concentration means sitting, but the truth of the matter is that standing, sitting, walking, and lying down are part of the practice, too. You can practice concentration at any time. Concentration literally means, "firm intent." At normalcy, without forgetting. For example, each of you has come from your home here to DiamondLight Cave Mountain. Each of you has come away from your home. But in reality, your mind is already in your home, your resting place. It goes with you everywhere. Wherever it has to end up, that's your home.

Practicing concentration isn't a matter of imprisoning the mind. Some people think, "To practice concentration, I have to go look for some peace, to sit without any issues arising at all. I want to sit in total silence." But that's a dead person, not a living

one. To practice concentration is to give rise to knowledge, to give rise to discernment.

Concentration is a firm intent, focused on a single preoccupation. What kind of object is a single preoccupation? The correct preoccupation. Ordinarily we sit to make the mind totally silent. Some people really suffer over this—especially high school and university students. They come to me and say, "I try to sit in concentration, but my mind won't stay put. First it runs off one place, then it runs off somewhere else. I don't know how to make it stop and stay put." But this is not the sort of thing you can stop. When you say that it's running back and forth, it's not really running. There's simply a sensation that arises right here. It doesn't run back and forth. People complain, "It runs off and I pull it back again, pull it back here; then it walks off over there again and I pull it back..." So they just sit there pulling like this.

They think their mind's running around, but actually the only things that run are our impressions. For example, look at this hall here: "Wow," you say, "it's awfully big!" But the hall isn't what's big, just our impression of it, that's all. This hall isn't big. It's just the size it is. It's neither big nor small, but we run around after our thoughts and impressions of things.

Meditating to find peace: You have to understand what this word "peace" is. If you don't understand it, you won't be peaceful. For example, suppose that today you walked here from wherever and brought along a pen—one that you love, an expensive one that cost 500 or 1000 baht. And suppose that on your way here you happened to put the pen someplace—say, in your front pocket—but later you took it out and put it in your back pocket. Now when you feel for it in your front pocket: It's not there! You panic. You panic because you don't see the truth of the matter. You get all upset. Standing, walking, coming and going, you can't stop worrying, thinking that your pen is lost. But actually it isn't lost. It's in your back pocket. It isn't lost. But because you think that it's lost, you suffer because of your wrong thinking. This wrong thinking is suffering. So you worry: "What a shame! What a shame! I've only had this pen for a few days and now it's lost."

But then you remember, "Oh, of course! When I went to bathe, I put the pen in my back pocket." As soon as you remember this, you feel better already, even without seeing your pen. See that? You're happy already; you've stopped worrying about your pen. You're sure about it now. As you walk along, you run your hand over your back pocket: "There it is." Your mind was lying to you. Your pen wasn't lost, but the mind lied to you that it was. You suffered because you didn't know. The mind was naturally worried. But now when you see the pen and you're sure about it, your worries calm down.

This sort of peace and calm comes from seeing the cause of the problem: *samudaya,* the cause of suffering. You were suffering, and the *samudaya* was the cause giving rise to that suffering. As soon as you're sure that the pen is in your back pocket,

there's *nirodha,* the disbanding of suffering.

It's because of this sort of thing that the mind is always fooled, which is why the Buddha taught us that we have to contemplate to find peace. When we make the mind peaceful through concentration, it's simply the calming of the mind, not the calming of the defilements. It's not the calming of defilements at all. You're just sitting on top of your defilements to calm them, like a rock sitting on the grass. As soon as grass starts growing, you put a rock on top of it. The grass stops because the rock is sitting on top of it. In three, four, five days, six days, seven days you lift up the rock, and the grass starts growing again. That means that the grass didn't really die. It was just suppressed. The same with sitting in concentration: The mind is calmed, but the defilements aren't calmed. This is why concentration isn't for sure. To find real peace you have to contemplate. Concentration is one kind of peace, like the rock sitting on the grass. You can leave it there many days but when you pick it up, the grass starts growing again. That's only temporary peace. Temporary peace.

The peace of discernment is like never lifting up the rock, just leaving it there where it is. The grass can't possibly grow again. That's genuine peace, the calming of the defilements for sure. That's discernment.

We speak of discernment and concentration as separate things, but actually they're one and the same thing. Discernment is just the movement of concentration, that's all. They come from the same mind but they come out separately, with different characteristics, like this mango here. This mango is small, but then it grows larger, then it's ripe, and then it's rotten. It's all the same mango. They're not different ones. When it's small, it's this mango. When it's large, it's this mango. When it's ripe, it's this mango. Only its characteristics change. But it's still the same mango. So don't jump to the conclusion that you're already practicing the Dhamma correctly, that when you practice the Dhamma, one condition is called concentration, another condition is called discernment. Actually, virtue, concentration, and discernment are all the same thing, not different things, just like the one mango. When it's small, it's that same mango. When it's large, it's that same mango. When it's ripe, it's that same mango. It just simply changes its characteristics, and so we keeping running, running, running, running after them.

Actually, in practicing the Dhamma, whatever happens, you have to start from the mind. Begin with the mind. Do you know what your mind is? What is your mind like? Where is it? You're all speechless. Where the mind is, what it's like, nobody knows. *[Laughs]* You don't know anything about it at all. You don't know. All you know is that you want to go over here or over there, the mind feels happy or sad, but the mind itself you can't know. What is the mind? *The mind isn't "is" anything.* What would it "is"? We've come up with the supposition that whatever receives preoccupations—good preoccupations, bad preoccupations, whatever—we call "heart" or "mind." Like the

owner of a house: Whoever receives the guests is the owner of the house. The guests can't receive the owner. The owner has to stay put at home. When guests come to see him, he has to receive them. So who receives preoccupations? Who lets go of preoccupations? Who knows anything? *[Laughs]* That's what we call "mind." But we don't understand it, so we talk, veering off course this way and that: "What is the mind? What is the heart?" We get things way too confused. Don't analyze it so much. What is it that receives preoccupations? Some preoccupations don't satisfy it, and so it doesn't like them. Some preoccupations it likes and some it doesn't. Who is that—who likes and doesn't like? Is there something there? Yes. What's it like? We don't know. Understand? That thing... That thing is what we call the "mind." Don't go looking far away.

Some people have to keep thinking: "What is the mind? What is the heart?"— all kinds of things, keeping at it, back and forth until they go crazy. They don't understand anything. You don't have to think that far. Simply ask yourself, "What do you have in yourself?" There are *rūpa* and *nāma;* or there's a body and there's a mind. That's enough.

Some people ask, "I've heard that the Buddha knew everything. Well, if he knew everything..." They practice the Dhamma and start arguing: "How many roots does a tree have?" The Buddha answers that it has taproots and rootlets. "But how many rootlets does it have?" That shows they're crazy, right? They want an answer about the rootlets: "How many rootlets are there? How many taproots are there?" Why do they ask? "Well, the Buddha knew everything, didn't he? He'd have to know, all the way to the rootlets." Who would be crazy enough to count them? Do you think the Buddha would be stupid like that? He'd say that there are rootlets and taproots, and that would be enough.

It's like cutting our way through the forest. If we felt we had to cut down every tree, all the big trees and all the small trees, we'd be getting out of hand. Would we have to uproot them all in order to get through the forest? We'd cut back just the ones needed to open our way. That's enough. Why would we have to level every tree?

However many rootlets this tree has doesn't matter. Just knowing that it has rootlets, and that it depends on big roots and little rootlets: That's enough, don't you think? It's enough. The Buddha said that it's enough. He doesn't want us to go counting the rootlets of trees. It'd be a waste of time. What purpose would counting them serve? The tree lives because of its roots: That's enough. But some people aren't satisfied. "That can't be the case. The Buddha knew everything." If you had to count all the rootlets, you'd go crazy, that's all. So don't understand things in that way.

In our practice, whether you call it concentration or *vipassanā* (insight) doesn't matter. Let's just call it practicing the Dhamma, that's enough. But you have to start this practice beginning with your own mind. What is the mind? The mind is what

receives preoccupations. When it makes contact with this preoccupation, it's happy. When it makes contact with that preoccupation, it's sad. The thing that receives preoccupations leads us to happiness and suffering, right and wrong, but it isn't a thing. We suppose it to be a thing, but it's really only *nāma-dhamma*. Is goodness a thing? Is evil a thing? Is happiness a thing? Is suffering a thing? You can't see that they are. Are they round or square? How short? How long? Do you know? They're *nāma-dhamma*. They can't be compared to things—but we know that they're there. This is what's meant by *nāma*. Both *rūpa* and *nāma* go together; they depend on each other. So we're taught to use *nāma* to contemplate *rūpa;* use the heart to contemplate the body. Just these two things.

So we're told to begin the practice with the mind: calming the mind; making it aware. If the mind is aware, it'll be at peace. Some people don't go for awareness. They just want to have peace to the point where there's nothing, where they aren't aware of anything. But what could you do without this knower? What could you depend on? It's not short; it's not long; it's not wrong; it's not right. But people these days keep studying, looking to understand rightness and wrongness, goodness and evil, *but they don't know neither-rightness-nor-wrongness*. All they're looking to know is what's right and wrong: "I'm going to take only what's right. I won't take what's wrong. Why should I?" If you try to take only what's right, soon it'll go wrong. *It's right for the sake of wrong*. People keep searching for rightness and wrongness, but they don't try to find what's neither-rightness-nor-wrongness. They keep searching for merit, and all they know is merit and evil, so they study them, but they don't study further over there—where there's neither merit nor evil. They're ignorant of it. All they want are issues of long and short, but the issue of neither long nor short, they don't study. They study just the issues of good and bad: "I'm practicing to take what's good. I don't want bad." You want good and don't want bad, but when there's no bad, there's no good, either. What then?

This knife placed here: It has the edge of its blade, it has the back of its blade, it has its handle—all of its parts. When you lift it up, can you lift just the edge of the blade? Can you pick up just the back of the blade? Just the handle? The handle is the handle of the knife. The back of the blade is the back of the knife's blade. The edge of the blade is the edge of the knife's blade. When you pick up the knife, you also pick up its handle, the back of its blade, and the edge of its blade. Could it split off just the edge of its blade for you?

This is an example. You try to separate out just what's good, but what's bad comes along with it. You want just what's good and to throw away what's bad. You don't learn about what's neither good nor bad, even though it's right there. When that's the case, you won't come to the end of things. When you take what's good, what's bad comes along with it. They keep coming together. If you want pleasure, pain comes

along with it. They're connected.

So when you practice the Dhamma to take just the good and not the bad, it's the Dhamma of children, Dhamma for children to toy around with. Sure, if you want, you can take just this much, but if you grab onto what's good, what's bad will follow. The end of this path gets all cluttered up.

To put it in simple terms: You have children. Now suppose you want to have them only when you love them, and not when you hate them. If that were the case, nobody would have any children. With these two things, if you take the love, hatred will come running in its wake.

So when you set your heart on practicing the Dhamma, use discernment. Use discernment, for these things come along with each other. Study what's good and what's bad, just to see what good is like, what bad is like. Study these things in as much detail as you can. Now, when you're familiar with good and bad, what will you take? "I'll take the good, but not the bad." See that? If you take the good, bad comes running in its wake. You don't study about how to know what's neither good nor bad. The issue that would bring things to an end, you don't study.

"I'm going to be like this," "I'm going to be like that"—but "I'm not going to be anything because there isn't any me": This we don't study. All we want to take is goodness. If we get goodness, goodness, goodness, we don't understand it. We get drunk with goodness. If things get too good, they're not good anymore. They go bad, and so we keep running back and forth like this. We don't get anywhere at all.

We come to a peaceful place to rest and recover, to make the mind peaceful, so as to become familiar with what receives preoccupations, to see what it is. That's why we're told to start with the mind, to start with the knower. Train this mind to be pure. How pure? You can't stop with just pure enough to be good. To be really pure, the mind has to be above and beyond both good and evil, and then pure above and beyond pure. Done. Only then are things over and done.

So when we practice sitting in concentration, it's just temporary peace. Temporary peace. When it's peaceful, issues arise. If there's an issue, there's what knows the issue. There's what investigates the case, interrogates, follows up, passes judgment. If the mind is simply blank, then nothing happens. Some people teach you to imprison the mind, to really imprison it, thinking that that sort of peace is the genuine practice for sure. Peaceful. But peace in the mind is not peaceful in that way. It's peace *apart* from pleasure and *apart* from pain. Before, I wanted just the pleasure and didn't want pain. But as I kept following along in that way, I came to realize, "Oh. Taking just the pleasure turns out to be uncomfortable, too, for these things come along with each other." Only when I was able to make it so that there was no pleasure and no pain in the heart: That's when it was really at peace.

This is a subject that people hardly ever study, hardly ever understand. They want

what's right, but won't take what's wrong. And so they can't get to what has neither right nor wrong. They don't know why they'd study it. They study to know what's right and what's wrong just to take what's right and not what's wrong—so they keep following one another. It's like this knife: "I want to lift up just its blade, but the back of the blade will have to come along as well." Learn to think in this way. Wherever there are causes, things can arise again. They won't stop.

To train the mind in the right way, to make it bright, to develop discernment: Don't think you can do it by sitting and making it just still. That's the rock sitting on the grass. It's drunk. Some people get drunk on it. Actually, you can stand in concentration, sit in concentration, walk in concentration, and lie down in concentration. People jump to the conclusion that concentration is sitting. That's just a name for concentration, but really, if the mind has concentration, walking is concentration, sitting is concentration—concentration with the walking, concentration with the sitting, the standing, the lying down. That's the practice.

Some people complain, "I can't meditate. I get fed up. Whenever I sit down I think of this and that, I think of my house and my family. I can't do it. I've got too much bad *kamma*. I should let my bad *kamma* run out first and then come back and try meditating." Go ahead, just try it. Try waiting until your bad *kamma* runs out.

This is how we think. Why do we think like this? That's what we're studying. As soon as we sit, the mind goes way over there. We track it down and bring it back—and then it goes off again. This is how we study. But most of us skip class.

We don't want to study our lessons. We're like a student who skips class, who doesn't want to study his lessons. When the mind isn't peaceful, we don't want to sit. "I don't want that. It's irritating." But that's study. We're truant. We don't want to see the mind when it's happy; we don't want to see it when it's suffering. We don't want to see it change—*but then what will we ever know? Will we ever know?* You have to stay with the changing like this. Get acquainted with this: "Oh, the mind is like this. One moment it thinks of that; the next moment it thinks of this. That's its ordinary nature." So know it. Know when it thinks. Know when its thoughts are good, when they're bad, when they're right and wrong. Know what it's like. When we know the affairs of the mind, then even if we're simply sitting, thinking about this or that, the mind is still in concentration. If we know what it's up to, we don't get irritated or distracted.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you have a pet monkey at home. My monastery has a pet monkey, too. When you're home and have a pet monkey, the monkey doesn't sit still. Now it grabs this; now it goes there—all kinds of things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to my monastery. I have a monkey here too, and this monkey doesn't sit still either. Now it grabs this; now it goes there, but it doesn't irritate you, does it? Why? Because you've already had a pet monkey. You're

familiar with monkeys. "My monkey at home is just like this monkey here. Staying at your monastery is just like staying at home. It's the same monkey." If you know just one monkey, then no matter how many provinces you go to, you see the same monkey, and it doesn't irritate you, right? That's someone who understands monkeys.

If we understand monkeys then we won't become monkeys. If you don't understand monkeys, then as soon as you see a monkey, you become a monkey yourself, right? When you see it taking this and grabbing that, "Oh!" You're irritated. You're upset at this monkey. That's someone who doesn't understand monkeys. Someone who understands monkeys sees the monkey at home and thinks, "It's the same monkey. The monkey at DiamondLight Cave Monastery is just like this." So why should they irritate you? You understand what monkeys are like, and that's enough. You can be at peace. At peace. If the monkey jumps in front of you and behind you, you can be at your ease. You're not irritated by the monkey. Why? Because you understand monkeys —so you don't become a monkey. If you don't understand monkeys, you get irritated. When you get irritated, you become a monkey—understand? This is how things grow calm.

We have to know preoccupations, observe preoccupations. Some we like; some we don't, but so what? That's their business. That's what they're like—just like monkeys. All monkeys are the same monkey. We understand preoccupations, what their conditions are. Some we like; some we don't. That's what they're like. We have to get familiar with them. When you're familiar with them, let them go: "Oh. Preoccupations aren't for sure. They're all inconstant, stressful, and not-self." We keep looking at them in that way. If they're irritated, if they wiggle around, just watch them—and they're no big deal. Wherever you sit, when preoccupations pop up via the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, you see, "Hmm. They're no big deal." It's like watching monkeys. This monkey is just like the monkey at home. It's no big deal. Then we can be at peace.

When preoccupations arise, get familiar with them. Why run after them? Preoccupations are not for sure. Now they're this way; now they're that way. Sometimes they go back to what they were before. They exist through change. *And all of us here exist through change*. As when you breathe: Sometimes the breath goes out; sometimes it comes back in. It changes like this. You live here through change. Try only breathing in, without breathing out: Can you do that? How many minutes would you last? Or try just breathing out without breathing in. If there were no change, could you survive? You couldn't survive at all. You need to have both the in-breath and the out-breath like this. When you walk to the monastery, if you just held your breath all the way from home, you'd be dead by now. You wouldn't have made it. So understand this.

The same with preoccupations: They have to be there. If they weren't there, you

couldn't develop any discernment. If there were no wrong, there could be no right. You have to be right first before you can see what's wrong. Or you have to be wrong first before you can be right. That's the way things normally are. That's how you gain discernment. The more preoccupations you see, the better—especially if you're a high school or university student.

But here, if you don't like preoccupations, you don't want to deal with them, you don't want to watch them. That's called being a student who skips class, who doesn't want to learn or to listen to what the teacher is teaching. These preoccupations are teaching us. When we know preoccupations in this way, we're practicing Dhamma. We're at peace. We see that preoccupations are no big deal. That's what they're like. It's like seeing monkeys. The monkey at home doesn't irritate you. When you see the monkey here it doesn't irritate you—because you understand monkeys, right? You can be at ease.

It's the same with the practice of Dhamma. This is what the Dhamma is like. It's nothing very far away. It's right with you. The Dhamma isn't about divine beings or anything like that. It's simply about what you're doing, what you're doing right now. Your issues are all issues of the Dhamma. If you look at books, they have your issues written down in them, but you won't understand them. The issues of the Dhamma are all your issues. So contemplate yourself. Sometimes there's happiness, sometimes suffering, sometimes comfort, sometimes irritation; sometimes you love that person, sometimes you hate this person. This is Dhamma, right?

To know this Dhamma, you have to read your preoccupations. Only when you're familiar with them can you let them go, seeing that they're not for sure. That way you can be at ease. When something comes flashing up: "Hmm. This isn't for sure." Then your preoccupations change. Pain arises and something comes flashing up: "This isn't for sure." You can be at your ease, in the same way that you can be at ease when seeing the monkey in your home, and then the monkey at DiamondLight Cave Mountain, for they're the same monkey. You can be at your ease. You won't have any doubts. If you're familiar with preoccupations, you're familiar with the Dhamma. You can let go of preoccupations. You see that there's nothing for sure about preoccupations in any way at all. Have you ever been happy? Have you ever been sad? You don't have to answer, I can answer for you: "Yes." Are these things for sure? "No." This way you know the thing that's all one and the same—that they're not for sure.

This is the Buddha. The Buddha is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is what's not for sure. *Whoever sees that things aren't for sure, sees for sure that that's the way they are*. The way they are doesn't change. But why are they that way? That's what the Dhamma is like. And that's what the Buddha is like. The Buddha is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the Buddha. Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees the Buddha; whoever sees the Buddha, sees the Dhamma. If you know inconstancy, not-for-sure-ness, you'll let things go of

your own accord. You won't grasp onto them.

Suppose you get a glass. You say, "This is mine, and it isn't broken. Look after it well, okay? Don't break my glass, okay?" But can you prevent something breakable from breaking? If it doesn't break now, it'll break later on. If you don't break it, someone else will break it. If someone else doesn't break it, a chicken will break it! The Buddha says to accept this. When he uses this good glass, he penetrates all the way to seeing that this glass is already broken. *He sees this glass that isn't broken, and has us know that it's already broken*. Whenever you pick up the glass, he has you say, "This glass is already broken." Drink from it and put it down: He tells you that it's already broken. Right? The Buddha's understanding was like this. He saw the broken glass in the unbroken one. *Why did he know that it was broken? Because it isn't broken*. That's how he knew it as broken. "Whenever its time is up, it'll break": He developed this attitude and kept on using the glass. One day it slipped out of his hand: "Smash!" No problem. Why no problem? "Because I saw it as broken before it broke." See?

But you say, "My glass is so expensive. Don't ever let it break." Later on the dog breaks it: "Hmm. What if I killed this dog?" If your child breaks it, you hate your child. You're that way with whatever breaks it—because you've dammed yourself up so that the water can't flow. You've made a dam without a spillway. You just dam things up without a spillway, so the only thing the dam can do is burst, right? When you make a dam, you have to make a spillway, too. When the water rises this far, it can flow off to the side. When it's full to the brim, it can flow out that way, right? You need a spillway. The Buddha saw inconstancy, and that's the way things are. He already saw that they're inconstant. When you see things this way, you can be at peace.

That, in short, is the practice of the Dhamma.

So I've learned to hold that whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, I keep on practicing, using mindfulness to watch over and protect the mind. That's concentration. Discernment is concentration; concentration is discernment. You can say that they're both the same thing. They differ only in their characteristics.

We see that when things are inconstant, they're stressful. If we really see inconstancy, which means that things aren't for sure, when we penetrate to see clearly that things aren't for sure, *then what we see is for sure*. Sure in what way? Sure that that's the way they are. They don't change into any other way. Understand? When you know just this much, you know the Buddha. You've bowed down to him. You've bowed down to his Dhamma. Take this principle and mull it over.

As long as you don't abandon the Buddha, you won't suffer. As soon as you abandon him, you'll suffer immediately. You'll suffer as soon as you abandon the principles of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Understand things in this way.

If you can practice just this much, I feel that it's enough. Suffering won't arise, or if it does arise you can disband it easily. And that will be a cause for suffering not to

arise in the future. That's where things finish, at the point where suffering doesn't arise. Why doesn't it arise? It's not there because we've put an end to the cause of suffering, or *samudaya*.

With the cause of suffering, things are ready to break. When they break, suffering arises right away, right? When you know that this is the cause that gives rise to suffering, you have to contemplate it—that it's not for sure. It's not for sure. It's the cause of suffering. When things break—pop!—destroy the cause that would give rise to suffering. All *dhammas* arise from causes. When they disband, it's because we've disbanded these causes.

If suffering arises because this glass breaks—you get angry, you suffer—tell yourself that this glass was already broken. The cause of suffering will disband. It'll no longer be there. As soon as the glass breaks, you've seen that it was broken already. The breaking happens after you saw it—*which means that it's not breaking*. There's no suffering. When there's no suffering, that's *nirodha*—cessation, disbanding. Suffering disbands because you've disbanded the cause of suffering.

This is all there is. There's not much at all. This is all there is, so contemplate it. But don't stray away from the three basic things: body, speech, and mind. Keep working away right here. Contemplate on in. Everything is right here, starting with your own heart and mind. In simple terms, you should all have the five precepts as your foundation. You don't have to go study the Pali Canon. The five precepts are a matter of your body and mind, so watch your five precepts. Keep working at them always. Do this with care. At first you'll make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back, and start over again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. Call yourself back, each and every time, each and every time.

Your mindfulness will reach a higher frequency, like water poured from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little to let the water flow out in drops—*glug … glug … glug*—there are breaks in the flow. If we tilt the kettle a little bit more, the water goes *glug-glug-glug*. If we tilt the kettle even further, the glugs disappear. The water turns into a steady stream. There are no more drops. Where did they go? They didn't go anywhere. They've turned into a steady stream of water. They're so frequent that they're beyond frequency. They meld into one another, right? That's how they're a stream of water.

The Dhamma is just like this, choosing analogies for you to listen to, because the Dhamma doesn't have anything. Does it have a color? Is it round? Does it have corners? Is it short? There's no way to get acquainted with it except through comparisons like this. If you understand this, you understand the Dhamma. That's the way it is.

Don't think that the Dhamma lies far away from you. It lies right with you; it's about you. Take a look. Now happy, now sad, now satisfied, now dissatisfied, now angry at this person, now hating that person: It's all Dhamma.

See yourself in this way. What's trying to give rise to suffering? When you've done something that causes suffering, turn around and undo it. Turn around and undo it. You haven't seen it clearly. When you see it clearly, there's no more suffering. The cause has been disbanded. Once you've killed the cause of suffering, there are no more conditions for it to arise, so suffering can't arise. If suffering is still arising, if you don't really know it; you have to endure it: That's not yet right on target with it. Look at it in really simple terms. That's how I look at it. See where you're still wrong. It's embarrassing to look at that. Whenever there's too much suffering, right there you're wrong. Whenever you're so happy that the mind starts swelling up—there: Wrong again! Whichever side it comes from doesn't matter. Bring everything together to the point that it's wrong. Keep exploring.

If you practice like this, you'll be mindful whether you're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, coming or going, whatever you're doing. If you're always mindful and alert, if you're aware, you're sure to know right and wrong, happiness and sadness. You'll be familiar with everything. When you're familiar with these things, you'll know how to undo them so that there won't be any suffering. You won't let there be suffering.

So long as the mind feels pleasure and pain, it's drunk. Even while practicing the Dhamma, it's drunk, you know. People can get drunk eating rice—there's no need to drink alcohol. If you eat a lot of rice, you can get drunk—drunk on rice. The same with the Dhamma: Don't get drunk on it. When people are drunk on the Dhamma, they don't stop. They keep on talking. If they see anybody coming, they want to grab him by the arm and give him a sermon on the Dhamma. That's a sign that they're drunk on Dhamma. They go after everybody: "I want to teach that person; I want to do this person a favor by teaching him the Dhamma"—and so they do a favor to the entire country by teaching the Dhamma. That's a sign of drunkenness. Being drunk on the Dhamma is no different from being drunk on alcohol. They're really similar. Don't go there. You have to look carefully, again and again, for sometimes something is Dhamma, but it's drunk. That's not right.

When studying concentration, I have people study concentration like this. When it's time to sit in meditation, then sit enough so that you're good at it. That's not wrong. But you have to know that concentration isn't just sitting like this. You have to let the mind spread out to encounter different things. When you're aware of something, contemplate it. When you're aware of something, contemplate it. Contemplate to know what? Contemplate to see, "Oh. That's inconstant. Stressful. Not-self. Not for sure." Everything is not for sure, let me tell you. Not for sure.

"This is so beautiful, I really like it." That's not for sure.

"I don't like this at all." Tell it: "This, too, is not for sure." Right? Absolutely. No mistake. But that's not how you go about it. "That's what I want. It's right for sure."

You've gone off the track already. Don't. However much you like something doesn't matter. You have to adjust the mind. Tell it: "It's not for sure."

When we eat some kinds of food, we think, "Wow. That's awfully delicious. I really like that." There will be that feeling in the heart, but you have to make a protest: "It's not for sure." Do you want to test how it's not for sure? Take your favorite food, something you like for sure every time, and eat it every day. Every, every, every single day, okay? Eventually you'll complain, "This doesn't taste so good anymore." It's not for sure. You'll think, "Actually I prefer that kind of food." Then eat *that* every day. It's not for sure either! Everything has to go from one thing to the next, just like breathing in and out. We have to breathe in and breathe out. We exist through change. Everything exists through change like this.

These things are found right with us, nowhere else. If we no longer have any doubts, then we can sit in comfort, stand in comfort. Concentration isn't just sitting. Some people sit until they fall into a stupor. They might as well be dead. You can't tell whether they're going north or south. Don't hold onto it that far. If you feel fairly sleepy, then walk. Change your posture. Use your discernment. If you're totally sleepy, then lie down. As soon as you wake up, get right up and continue your efforts. Don't let yourself get drunk. If you're a meditator, you have to practice like this. Have reasons for what you do. Know. Know all around. Discernment means knowing all around. You can't *not* know all around. You can't just know one side of things. You have to know all around, in a full circle like this. That's knowing all around. Whatever side things come from, whatever stance they take, you're ready to take them on and fight them off.

When you live in this way, what will you do? What will happen to you? When you live in this way, you contemplate. Whatever your thought fabrications are like, you're ready for them. Whenever they come—whether you're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down—you're ready to take them on. That's how it feels. Whenever fabrications move, you take them on. You have to take a stance like this—and you won't have to cry, you know. You'll be at peace. Don't settle for pleasure, okay? Don't settle for pleasure, for soon it'll disappear. Go for peace, with no need for pleasure, no need for pain. That's what it means to be at peace. Go all the way. Take on issues that are heavier and heavier in this way so as to know them through and through.

Start knowing from your own mind and body. See them as inconstant. They're not for sure, neither body nor mind. The same goes for everything. It's not for sure. Keep this in mind when you think food is so delicious. You have to tell yourself: "It's not for sure!" *You have to punch your likes first. Don't let them punch you first*. You have to punch them right away, right? You have to punch them first. Whatever the mind likes, tell it, "It's not for sure." Punch it first. But usually you just let these things punch you every time, every time. If you don't like something: "I don't like this. I don't like seeing this

suffer"—it's punched you. If you like something: "I like this"—it's punched you every time. You don't punch it at all. You have to understand in this way. Whenever you like anything, say in your heart, "This isn't for sure." Whenever you don't like something, tell yourself, "Hmm. This isn't for sure." Keep at this every day, and you'll see the Dhamma for sure. That's how it has to be.

Practice in all postures: standing, walking, sitting, lying down. You can feel anger in any action, right? Walking you can feel anger, sitting you can feel anger, lying down you can feel anger. You can feel desire with every moment. Sometimes you feel desire while lying down, desire while running, desire while sitting. This is why you have to practice in all four postures— standing, walking, sitting, lying down—consistently, without any front or back. Put it in those terms, as when they say that someone is speaking without any front or back. Keep at it like this. Only then can you know all around.

When you sit to get the mind to settle down and be peaceful: "Oops." That issue comes running in. Tell yourself: "Not for sure." Before it's finished, another one comes running in. And then another one. You start itching all over, and then you're gone. What you have to do is that, when they come running in like this, you tell yourself, "It's not for sure." Whatever comes in doesn't matter. When it comes, "Oh. This is not for sure." You have to keep punching them like this, hitting them first like this.

This is called knowing their weak point. This is important. If you know that all things aren't for sure, then all the thinking in your heart will gradually unravel, gradually unravel, *for you've seen that that's what's sure about it*. With some things, you'll feel really disgusted, but whatever, see that they're not for sure. You've experienced them before—many, many times before. "Hmm. Whatever, it's no big deal." On a later day you contemplate it: "No big deal." That's all there is to it. This thing is no big deal. That thing is no big deal. You can meditate on a single phrase: "No big deal." Whatever arises, you go, "No big deal." Admonish yourself just that much, and it should be enough.

And what else would you look for? Where exactly would you look for the Dhamma? "Oh. I have to look for the Dhamma in books." People go looking in books for the Dhamma who knows where, but it arises right here. If you look for it over there, will you see it? Look for it here. If there's suffering today, look at it to see why there's suffering, and you'll see it right here. "It's because my glass is broken: That's why I'm suffering." Look right here, and you'll see: "Oh." Or, "I'm suffering today because my wife said something I couldn't stand." The cause is right here. "Oh. That's not for sure." Kill it. With everything, keep setting fire to it like that. Keep walking ahead of it. So far you've been walking behind it. These things lie with you. They're nowhere else. If you can sense things in this way, you'll be at peace. At peace. Wherever you go, your mind will be at peace.

But to say it's at peace is not quite right.

Have you ever seen flowing water? Flowing water: Have you ever seen it? Have you ever seen still water? If your mind is peaceful, it's kind of like still, flowing water. Have you ever seen still, flowing water? *[Laughs]* There! You've only seen still water and flowing water. You've never seen still, flowing water. Right there, right where your thinking can't take you: where the mind is still but can develop discernment. When you look at your mind, it'll be kind of like flowing water, and yet it's still. It looks like it's still, it looks like it's flowing, so it's called still, flowing water. That's what it's like. That's where discernment can arise.

So give it a try.

Suppositions & Release

ALL THE THINGS IN THE WORLD are suppositions that we've supposed into being. Once we've supposed them, we fall for our own supposings, so nobody lets them go. They turn into views and pride, into attachment. This attachment is something that never ends. It's an affair of *saṁsāra* that flows without respite, with no way of coming to closure. But if we really know our suppositions, we'll know release. If we really know release, we'll know our suppositions. That's when you know the Dhamma that can come to closure.

Take people, for instance. When we start out, we're born without names. The fact that we have names comes from their being supposed into being. I've thought about this and seen that if you don't really know suppositions, they can cause a lot of harm. Actually, suppositions are simply things for us to use. If we understand what they're for, that's enough. Know that if we didn't have suppositions, there'd be nothing we could say to one another, no language to use with one another.

When I went abroad, I saw Westerners sitting in meditation in row after row. When they got up after sitting, men and women together, sometimes they'd go and touch one another on the head, one person after another! When I saw this I thought, "Hmm, if we set up a supposition anywhere and cling to it, it gives rise to defilements right there." If we're willing to let go of our suppositions, we can be at peace.

Like the generals and colonels, men of rank and position, who come to see me. When they come they say, "Oh, please touch my head": That shows that they're willing, so there's nothing wrong with it. You can rub their heads and they're even glad you did it. But if you tried rubbing their heads in the middle of the street—if you don't think there'd be trouble, just try it and see! This is because of clinging. So I've seen that letting go is really comfortable. When they agree to having their heads touched, they've supposed that there's nothing wrong with it. And there is nothing wrong with it, just like rubbing a head of cabbage or a head of lettuce. But if you rubbed their heads in the middle of the road—no way! For sure.

It's all a matter of willingness—accepting, giving up, letting go. When you can do this, things are light. Wherever you're clinging, there's becoming right there, birth right there, poison and danger right there. The Buddha taught about suppositions and he taught to undo suppositions in the right way, to turn them into release. Don't cling to them.

The things that arise in the world are all suppositions. That's how they come into

being. When they've arisen and been supposed, we shouldn't fall for them, for that leads to suffering. The affairs of supposition and convention are extremely important. Whoever can let them go is free from suffering.

But they're an activity of this world of ours. Take Boonmaa, for instance. He's the District Commissioner. His old friend, Saengchai, isn't a district commissioner, but they've been friends from way back. Now that Boonmaa has been appointed district commissioner, there's a supposition right there, but you have to know how to use it in an appropriate way, because we still live in the world. If Saengchai goes to the district offices and pats Boonmaa on the head, it's not right. Even if Saengchai thinks about all the old times when they worked together as traveling tailors and about that time they almost died, it's still not right for him to go playing around with Boonmaa's head in front of other people. You have to show a little respect and act in line with our social suppositions. Only then can we live together in peace. No matter how long you've been friends, he's now the district commissioner. You have to show him some deference.

When he leaves the district offices and goes home, that's when you can pat him on the head. It's still the district commissioner's head you're patting, but if you were to do it in the government offices in front of a lot of people, it'd be wrong for sure. This is called showing respect. If you know how to use suppositions in this way, they serve a purpose. No matter how long you've been close friends, if you touch him on the head in front of a lot of people, he's sure to get angry—after all, he's now the district commissioner. This is all there is to our behavior in the world: You need a sense of time and place, and of the people you're with.

So we're taught to be intelligent, to have a sense of suppositions and a sense of release. Understand them when you use them. If you use them properly, there's no problem. If you don't use them properly, it's offensive. What does it offend? *It offends people's defilements, that's all*—because people live with defilement. There are suppositions you have to follow with certain groups, certain people, at certain times and places. If you follow them appropriately, you can be said to be smart. You have to know where these things come from and how far they lead. We have to live with suppositions, but we suffer when we cling to them. If you understand suppositions simply as suppositions and explore them until you come to release, there are no problems.

As I've often said, before we were laymen and now we're monks. Before we were supposed to be laymen but now, having gone through the ordination chant, we're supposed to be monks. But we're monks on the level of supposition, not genuine monks, not monks on the level of release. If we practice so that our minds are released from all their fermentations *(āsava)* step by step, as stream-winners, once-returners, non-returners, all the way to arahantship, then all our defilements will be abandoned. Even when we say that someone is an arahant, that's just a supposition—but he's a

genuine monk.

In the beginning we start with suppositions like this. In the ordination ceremony they agree to call you a "monk," but does that mean you suddenly abandon your defilements? No. It's like salt. Suppose you take a fistful of sand and say, "Let's suppose this is salt." Is it salt? Yes, but it's salt only on the level of supposing. It's not genuine salt. If you were to put it into a curry, it wouldn't serve your purpose. If you were to argue that it's genuine salt, the answer would have to be No. That's what's meant by supposition.

Why do we make this supposition? Because there's no salt there. There's only sand. If you suppose sand to be salt, it'd be salt for you, on the level of supposing. But it's not genuine salt, *for it's not salty*. It won't serve any purpose—or it can serve *some* purposes on the level of supposing, but not on the level of release.

The word "release": It's a supposition to call it that, but what release actually is, lies beyond supposition. It's released from suppositions—but we still make a supposition to say it's "release" like this. Can we live without suppositions? No. If we didn't have suppositions, we wouldn't know how to talk with one another. We wouldn't know where things come from and how far they go. We wouldn't have any language to speak with one another.

So suppositions have their purposes—the purposes we're supposed to use them for. For example, people have different names, even though they're all people just the same. If we didn't have names, you wouldn't know how to call the person you wanted. For instance, if you wanted to call a certain person in a crowd and said, "Person! Person!" that would be useless. No one would answer, because they're all "person." But if you called, "Jan! Come here!" then Jan would come. The others wouldn't have to. This is how suppositions serve a purpose. Things get accomplished. So there are ways for us to train ourselves that arise from suppositions.

If we know both supposition and release in the proper way, we can get along. Suppositions have their uses, but in reality there isn't anything there. There isn't even a person there! There's just a set of natural conditions, born of their causal factors. They develop in dependence on their causal factors, stay for a while, and before long they fall apart. You can't stop that from happening. You can't really control it. That's all there is. It's just a supposition, but without suppositions we'd have nothing to say: no names, no practice, no work, no language. Suppositions and conventions are established to give us a language, to make things convenient, that's all.

Take money, for example. In the past there wasn't any paper money. Paper was just paper, without any value. Then people decided that silver money was hard to store, so they turned paper into money. And so it serves as money. Maybe someday in the future a new king will arise who doesn't like paper money. He'll have us use wax droppings instead—take sealing wax, melt it, stamp it into lumps, and suppose it to be

money. We'll be using wax droppings all over the country, getting into debt all because of wax droppings. Let alone wax droppings, we could take chicken droppings and turn them into money! It could happen. All our chicken droppings would be cash. We'd be fighting and killing one another over chicken droppings.

Even when they propose new forms for things, if everybody agrees to the new supposition, it works. As for the silver we started out with, nobody really knows what it is. The ore we call silver: Is it really silver? Nobody knows. Somebody saw what it was like, came up with the supposition of "silver," and that's what it was. That's all there is to the affairs of the world. We suppose something into being, and that's what it is—because these things depend on our suppositions. But to turn these things into release, to get people to know genuine release: That's hard.

Our homes, our money, our possessions, our family, our children, our relatives are ours simply on the level of supposing. But actually, on the level of the Dhamma, they're not really ours. We don't like to hear this, but that's the way they actually are. If we don't have any suppositions around them, they have no value. Or if we suppose them to have no value, they have no value. But if we suppose them to have value, they do have value. This is the way things are. These suppositions are good if we know how to use them. So learn how to use them.

Even this body of ours isn't really us. That's a supposition. If you try to find a genuine self within it, you can't. There are just elements that are born, continue for a while, and then die. Everything is like this. There's no real, true substance to it, but it's proper that we have to use it.

For example, what do we need to stay alive? We need food. If our life depends on food as its nourishment, as a support we need to use, then we should use it to achieve its purpose for our survival, in the same way the Buddha taught new monks. Right from the very beginning, he taught the four supports: clothing, food, shelter, medicine. He taught that we should contemplate these things. If we don't contemplate them in the morning, we should contemplate them in the evening after we've used them.

Why does he have us contemplate them so often? To realize that they're four supports to maintain our body. As long as we're alive we can't escape these things. "You'll use these things all your life," he said, "but don't fall for them. Don't fall for them. They're nothing more than this; they give us nothing more than this."

If we lacked any one of these things, we couldn't meditate, couldn't chant, couldn't contemplate. For the time being, we have to depend on these things, but don't get attached to them. Don't fall for the supposition that they're yours. They're supports for keeping you alive. When the time comes, you'll have to give them up. In the meantime, though, even though the idea that they're yours is just a supposition, you have to take care of them. If you don't take care of them, you suffer. Like a cup,

for instance. Someday in the future the cup will have to break. If it breaks, no big deal —but as long as you're alive you should take good care of it because it's your utensil. If it breaks, you'll be inconvenienced. If it's going to break, let it break in a way that can't be helped.

The same goes for the four supports that we're taught to contemplate. They're requisites for those who've gone forth. Understand them but don't cling to them to the point where the clinging becomes a big lump of craving and defilement in the heart and makes you suffer. Use them just for the purpose of keeping alive, and that's enough.

Suppositions and release are related like this continually. Even though we use suppositions, don't place your trust in their being true. They're true only on the level of supposing. If you cling to them, suffering will arise because you don't understand them in line with what they really are.

The same holds for issues of right and wrong. Some people see wrong as right and right as wrong, but *whose* right and wrong they are, nobody knows. Different people make different suppositions about what's right and wrong with every issue, so be aware. The Buddha was afraid that it would lead to suffering if we got into arguments, because issues of this sort never come to closure. One person says, "right," another says, "wrong." One says "wrong," another says "right." But actually we don't really know right and wrong at all. All we need is to learn how to use them for our comfort, so that we can put them to work in a proper way. Don't let them harm you or harm others. Keep things neutral in this way. That serves our purposes.

In short, both suppositions and release are simply dhammas. One is higher than the other, but they're synonyms. There's no way we can guarantee for sure that this has to be this, or that has to be that, so the Buddha said to just put it down as "not for sure." No matter how much you like something, know that it's not for sure. No matter how much you dislike something, understand that it's not for sure. And these things really *aren't* for sure. Keep practicing until they're dhammas.

Past, present, and future: Make them all an affair of Dhamma practice. And it comes to closure at the point where there's nothing more. You've let go. You've put down your burden. Everything ends.

I'll give you an analogy. One person asks, "Why is the flag flapping? It must be because there's wind." Another person says, "It's flapping because there's a flag." This sort of thing never comes to an end, like the old riddle, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" This never comes to an end. It just keeps spinning around in its circles.

All these things are simply suppositions. They arise from our supposing. So you have to understand suppositions and conventions. If you understand these things, you'll understand inconstancy, stress, and not-self. This is a theme that leads straight to nibbāna.

Training and teaching people to understand is really hard, you know. Some people have their opinions. You tell them something and they say No. No matter how much you tell them the truth, they say No. "I'll take what's right for me; you take what's right for you." There's no end to this. Even if it makes them suffer, they still won't let go.

I've told you before about the four men who go into the forest. They hear a chicken crowing, "*Ekkk-i-ekk-ekkkk!*" One of them comes up with the question, "Who says that's a rooster crowing? Who says it's a hen?" For the fun of it, three of them put their heads together and say it's a hen. The other one says it's a rooster. They argue back and forth like this without stopping. Three of them say it's a hen, and only one of them says it's a rooster. "How could a hen crow like that?" he asks. "Well, it's got a mouth, doesn't it?" they reply. The one person argues until he's in tears. Actually, it was a rooster crowing, in line with our standard suppositions, but the one person had to argue until he was in tears, he was so upset. Yet on the ultimate level they were all wrong.

The words "rooster" and "hen" are just suppositions. If you asked the chicken, "Are you a rooster?" it wouldn't answer. If you asked, "Are you a hen?" it wouldn't give any explanation. But we have our conventions: These features are the features of a rooster; these features, the features of a hen. The rooster's crow is like this; a hen's squawk is like that. These are suppositions that are stuck in our world. But in truth there's no rooster, no hen. To speak on the level of the world's suppositions, the one person was right, but to argue until you're in tears doesn't serve any purpose at all. That's all there is to it.

So the Buddha taught not to cling to things. If we don't cling to things, how can we practice? We practice *because* of not-clinging. To bring your discernment in here is hard. This is why it's hard not to cling. You need to use sharp discernment to contemplate this. Only then will you get anywhere.

When you think about it, for the sake of relieving suffering, it doesn't depend on whether you have a lot of things or a little. Whether you're happy or sad, content or discontent, it starts from your discernment. To go beyond suffering depends on discernment, seeing things in line with their truth.

The Buddha taught us to train ourselves, to contemplate, to meditate. "Meditation" means undoing these problems correctly in line with their issues. And their issues are these: the issues of birth, aging, illness, and death. These are common, ordinary things—really common and ordinary. This is why he has us contemplate them continually. He has us meditate on birth, aging, illness, and death. Some people don't understand why we have to contemplate them. "Birth? We already know we're born," they say. "Death? We already know we'll die." That's the point. They're such ordinary issues—so true.

A person who investigates these things again and again will see. When you see, you can gradually undo these problems. Although you may still have some clinging, if you have the discernment to see that these things are ordinary, you'll be able to relieve suffering. This is why we practice for the sake of undoing suffering.

The basic principles of the Buddha's teaching aren't much: just the issues of suffering arising and suffering passing away. That's why these things are called noble truths. If you don't know them, you suffer. If you argue from pride and opinions, there's no end to it. To get the mind to relieve its suffering and be at ease, you have to contemplate what's happened in the past, what's in the present, what's going to be in the future. Things like birth, aging, illness, and death: What can you do not to be worried about them? There will be *some* worries, but if you can learn to understand them for what they are, suffering will gradually lessen, because you don't hug it to your chest.

In Body & Mind

On August 23, 1978, Sanya Dhammasak, the Chief Privy Councilor, along with his family, visited Wat Nong Pa Pong to pay respect to Ven. Ajahn Chah. In the midst of their Dhamma conversation, Ajahn Chah gave a Dhamma talk that is transcribed and translated here.

... START when these things are still far away. Do your duty when they're still far away.

Yes, sir.

It's like a poisonous snake. If we see it from far away, we're not afraid of it. Even though it's poisonous, we're not afraid of it because we see it first. But if you run into it when you don't have enough time to think... It's the same with feelings. You have to keep on contemplating, keep on meditating so that you can destroy them. You have to start when they're still far away, and keep on contemplating.

This means that you have to start before there's a feeling, or do you start when the feeling's already there?

No. No. Before there's a feeling. Before there's a feeling.

Kind of like recollection of death.

Yes. That's right.

We keep on thinking about death.

But recollection of death and feelings are not the same. They're not the same. When death comes, you simply die. But with these feelings, they fight you. They attack you all of a sudden; they're fighting you right now. You're shooting at each other. With recollection of death, you're already dead.

If there's a really strong feeling, and we...

Regardless of how far it goes, it doesn't matter. Or regardless of which direction it comes from, focus on the body and the mind. Focus on these two things, and everything else gathers right there. For your practice to be correct, for you to know all the things that are right and wrong, it has to come down to the body and the mind. The body and the mind are what lead us to pleasure or to pain. They're connected like the links in a chain.

This is why the practice is so extremely important. It's this way with everything: If

we've known or seen something but don't practice with it, it's like getting just the rind. Suppose we've been given a fruit: Whether it's sour or sweet, if once we get it we don't practice with it, if we just hold it, we don't know how sour or sweet it is. When we're just holding it with in our hand, can our hand sense the sourness? No, it can't. Can it sense the sweetness? No, it can't. Even though we're holding it in our hand, we don't get much benefit from it. We've only heard that it's sour or heard that it's sweet. We simply hold it in our hand, so we don't get the full benefits from it. Why is that? Because we haven't yet practiced with it—in other words, we haven't yet eaten it to the point of knowing its taste.

But once we've eaten the fruit, the fruit will show us its sourness or sweetness, its deliciousness. Only then will we know. Once we know in this way, we become a *sakkhībhūto:* We become our own witness. As long as we don't know for ourselves, we have only outside witnesses: the people who gave us the fruit. They say it's sour, they say it's sweet, but we haven't become a *sakkhībhūto.* The knowledge isn't really our own. We simply believe what other people say.

The Buddha said that he didn't praise those who simply believe what other people say. He praised those who knew *paccattaṁ:* personally, for themselves. It's like the fruit: If you've tasted the fruit for yourself, you don't have to go asking other people whether it's sour or sweet. The problem is over. Why is it over? Because you know in line with the truth. You know the truth. The problem is over. There's no more difficulty. When the problem is over, that's the end of the matter. Why is it the end? You've reached the truth; you know it thoroughly, and your doubts are ended. Your doubts are ended as to whether it's sour or sweet. This is what it means to know the Dhamma, to reach the Dhamma: You're a person who's reached the sourness or sweetness of the fruit. The problem is ended in this way. This is what we can compare it to.

To listen to the Dhamma so as to give rise to knowledge within you—You could say that there are lots of things to explain, but the Buddha has us know just four things: He has us know stress *(dukkha),* know the cause of stress, know the disbanding of stress, and know the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress. That's all there is. All the things we practice come down to these things: to know stress, to know the cause of stress, to know the disbanding of stress, and to know the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress. When you know these four things, that's all there is to it—for you really know stress, you know its cause, you know its disbanding, and you know the path of practice leading to its disbanding. When you know these four things clearly and thoroughly, that's called the end of the problem.

Where do these four things arise? They arise in two things: in this body and mind, that's all. They don't lie anywhere far away. It's like all of you who've come today: Each of you has brought a complete body and mind here. So why did the Buddha analyze

the Dhamma so broadly? So as to explain these things in detail, in all their parts, so that we can take them and focus on knowing them.

For example, with the body, he told us to break it down to hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin—all kinds of things. He told us to analyze it into its different parts so that we can be adept at seeing the body in line with the truth of these conditions. If we don't know in line with the truth, we won't know stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the path of practice leading to its disbanding. When we don't know these things, we won't know the steps of the practice.

So when you listen to the Dhamma here in the present, it's just for you to give rise to the discernment that knows these four things. All four of these things arise right at your own body and mind. That's why the Buddha taught the Dhamma. Where is the Dhamma? The Buddha said that the Dhamma is everywhere. There's nowhere that doesn't have Dhamma. The Dhamma is in every place. Physical things are Dhamma. Mental events are Dhamma. When this is the case, you have to understand that we're all born into the Dhamma. We're right next to the Dhamma at all times.

When we understand in this way, then we'll understand further that we're not at all far from the Buddha. We're already right next to the Buddha. So why don't we see him? Because we're not especially interested in practicing. The Dhamma is the Buddha; the Buddha is the Dhamma. The Buddha told Ven. Ānanda: "Pursue the practice a lot, Ānanda; cultivate the practice a lot. Whoever sees me sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees me." That shows that we're not far from the Buddha, not far from the Dhamma. Whoever sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha; whoever sees the Buddha sees the Dhamma. Which means that we're not far away—for the Buddha is the Dhamma; the Dhamma is the Buddha.

When Prince Siddhartha was first born into the world, he wasn't yet the Buddha because at that point he hadn't yet awakened to the Dhamma. He was an ordinary unenlightened person just like us. It was only when he came to know the things that he needed to know—the noble truths of stress, the cause of stress, the disbanding of stress, and the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress—that's when he practiced and reached the Dhamma. Only then did he call himself the Buddha.

For that reason, when we reach the Dhamma—wherever we are—we know the Dhamma. When we know the Dhamma, we hear the Buddha teaching us, we hear the Dhamma right there. When we understand the Dhamma, the Buddha is in our heart. The Dhamma is in our heart. The practices that give rise to intelligence are in our heart. We've practiced with our body, speech, and mind.

[Break in the recording]

When, as we say, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are in our heart, we're fully convinced that wherever we do good or evil, it's all a matter of the truth. Wherever we do good, even if other people don't see, even if nobody praises us, or if other people criticize us, it doesn't matter. Our action is correct. We see that its correctness is in line with the truth, the truth that the Buddha said was true.

That's why the Buddha cast the world aside: He cast aside praise; he cast aside criticism. Whoever criticized him, he accepted that that's the way things are. Whoever praised him, he accepted, "Oh. That's the way things are"—for both of these things are just an affair of the world. His mind wasn't shaken. Why? Because he understood stress. Both of these things, if he believed them, would give rise to stress.

That's the way it is with stress: The mind is agitated. It's ill at ease. It's in a turmoil. Whether you're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, there's nothing but agitation. That's stress.

What's the cause that gives rise to stress? Not knowing things in line with their truth. That's why stress arises. And when it causes stress to arise, we don't know how to put a stop to that stress. The more we try to put an end to it—"Don't yell at me! Don't be jealous of me!"—the more the stress grows without stop. "Don't do that to me! Don't say that about me! Don't criticize me!" The stress simply gets provoked even more and more.

The Buddha knew the way to practice that leads to the disbanding of stress—in other words, to admit this truth into our minds, that this is the way things really are. All those things are external matters, not internal matters. The truth of what we do, of what we say, of what we intend, nobody else knows. Only we know it in our own minds.

So when we know how to become *sakkhībhūto,* when we're our own witness, the Buddha praises us. When people said he was good, he didn't get carried away. When they said he was evil, he didn't forget himself. He was independent in that way.

Good and evil are an affair of the world. When they're an affair of the world, they're just a preoccupation. If, when we're struck by preoccupations, we're shaken by preoccupations, the mind becomes a world. It keeps grasping all the time. This is called not knowing the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress—which does nothing but provoke even more stress.

So if this is the way we understand things, it means we haven't yet won out over ourselves. We still prefer to win out over other people—and so we just lose out to ourselves. But when we win out over ourselves, we win out not only over ourselves but also over other people; we win out over preoccupations; we win out over sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations.

Here I'm talking about things outside. But we can take things outside and apply them inside as well. We can apply them inside as well.

Some people know outside things but don't know things inside. For example, the Buddha spoke a phrase telling us to "see the body in the body." It's not enough to know the body. We have to know the body in the body as well. We have to contemplate the body, and then contemplate the body in the body. We have to contemplate the mind, and contemplate the mind in the mind, too. If we're a stranger to meditation, we stop right there. We're at a loss to understand this phrase. Why know the body? What's the body in the body? And when we're told to know the mind, what is that mind? What are the things in the mind? We don't understand at all—because we're not acquainted with stress, the cause of stress, the disbanding of stress, or the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress. We don't put an end to the things that would put an end to stress. We're simply too obsessed with the things that don't give rise to... with things that don't itch.

It's like feeling an itch here on your head but scratching down there on your leg. You miss the right spot. You think that you'll make it feel better, so you scratch your leg, even though the itch is on top of your head. This is called not being acquainted with the spot that'll do away with the itch, and so it doesn't work. It's the same when stress arises and you don't know enough to put a stop to it. You don't know the path of practice leading to its disbanding. This sort of thing is what puts us at a loss—because we don't realize that we're focused on the outside.

Form, feeling, perception, fabrications inside... Like these bodies of ours, these bodies that are sitting gathered together here, that we can see with our eyes: We call these things "bodies." If all we see is the outside form of the body, we're said to see only the blatant body. Seeing just this won't be enough to put an end to stress or to the cause of stress at all. Why? Because we don't see the inside of the body. All we see is the outside of the body. We'll see that it's beautiful, something of essence or value—all kinds of things. But the Buddha said that seeing only this far isn't enough, seeing the outside like this with the eyes of the flesh. Even children can see it. Even animals can see it. It's not hard. But as soon as we see it, we get stuck on it. We see it, but we don't know it. We see it, we pounce on it, and it bites us. That's the way it is.

This is why we're told to contemplate the body in the body, to see what's in the body. Explore around to see what's there in the body. When we see just the outside of the body, it's not yet clear. We see hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, whatever, and they're all beautiful. These are dyes that stain the heart. That's why the Buddha said that we don't see clearly, we don't see the body clearly. This is why he has us look inside to see the body in the body.

So look to see what there is in the body in the body—inside the rind of this flesh-and-skin body here. What *is* there? Contemplate carefully, probe on in, and you'll see that there are all kinds of things in this body that we human beings, when we see them, find—startling. If we explore we'll find that it's all startling because there are

things even in your own body that you've never seen before. You haul them around with you everywhere you walk. When you get in a car, you haul them into the car, but you have no idea what they are, because they're all wrapped up like a present. It's as if we've gone to our relatives' house and they give us a present all nicely wrapped. We take it, put it in our basket, and walk right home. We don't stop to open it to see what's inside. When we finally open it, we find, "Oh. It's nothing but poisonous snakes."

Our body is like that. We see just the outside rind and it looks beautiful, it looks pretty, it looks all kinds of things to the point where we forget ourselves, forget inconstancy, forget stress, forget not-self, forget everything. We forget to open it up. But if we look inside, we'll see that it's nothing you'd want to look at—this body of ours. If you put anything clean into it, it just gets dirty.

The outside of the body is dirty in its way; the inside of the body is dirty in its way, too. What's inside the body is even worse. So look inside. What's it like in this body of ours?

If you look in line with the truth, in line with the noble truths without siding with yourself, then whether you look at the outside of the body or the inside of the body—look at it; it's really worth looking at—you'll see that it's enough to get you dismayed, enough to get you disillusioned, enough to get you dis-... all kinds of things. It's enough to give rise to disenchantment.

The word "disenchantment," here, doesn't mean that you go hating it or getting angry at it, you know. It's simply a clearing up: the clearing up of the mind, its letting go. We see that there's not much of value or essence here. We see all these things simply as natural, normal. And that's the way they stay of their own accord. No matter what we want them to be, that's simply the way they stay of their own accord. Whether we cry over them or laugh about them, that's what these fabrications are like. The things that aren't constant aren't constant. The things that aren't beautiful aren't beautiful. That's the way they are. Whether anyone knows about them or doesn't know about them, that's just the way they are of their own accord.

This is why the Buddha said that when sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or ideas arise, we should simply let them go. When the eye sees a sight, let it go back to its home. When the ear hears a sound, let it go. When the nose smells an aroma, let it go. Let just the nose stay. When a flavor arises at the tongue, let it go. When a tactile sensation makes contact with the body, whether it's something you like or don't like, let it go. Let these things go back to where they came from. When an idea arises and makes contact at the mind—without any contact from outside, it just makes contact right at the mind, it's called an idea that arises at the mind. When you hear something right now or see something right now, what makes contact at the mind: Whether it's skillful or unskillful, let it go in line with its own affairs. When we

know all of these things in this way—whether they're pleasant, painful, or whatever—when we see that they all fall into the same pattern, that's called meditation.

Meditation means making the heart still and, when it's still, making it know. To make it still or to make it know, we have to practice with two things: the body and the mind right here, nothing else.

Actually, all the things I've mentioned here are different things: sights are one sort of thing, sounds are another sort, smells another sort, flavors another sort, tactile sensations another sort, and ideas another sort. Each of these things is separate, and the Buddha has us know them to analyze them. When pleasure arises, it's called a feeling of pleasure. When pain arises, it's called a feeling of pain. Whether it's pleasure or pain, he has us separate them from the mind.

The mind is awareness, what knows. Feeling is simply a condition of pleasure or pain that we like or dislike, that sort of thing. When the mind enters in to feed on these conditions, it's said to cling to them, to label them, or to make assumptions about the pleasure or the pain. The act of labeling or assuming: That's an affair of the mind. The condition of pleasure or pain: That's a condition of feeling. The awareness is the mind. The things that are called pleasure or pain are the feelings. If they're pleasant, they're called feelings of pleasure. If they're painful, feelings of pain.

The Buddha tells us to separate the mind from the feelings. "Separating" here doesn't mean that we tear them apart and throw them in different places. The mind has to know the pleasure; it has to know the pain—although there *are* times when we separate them by making the mind still. For example, when we bring the mind into full concentration, then when the mind senses the pleasure it separates it out. Because the stillness is so overflowing, the pleasure can't enter in. Any pain can't enter in. This is how the feeling separates out. As when we sit in concentration: If the stillness comes first and the feeling arises later, the feeling can't enter in. The mind is oblivious to it. That means it doesn't know the feeling. The feeling separates out on its own.

But at any rate, the feeling is the pleasure. The pleasure is called a feeling of pleasure. If pain arises, it's called a feeling of pain. That's the feeling. When the mind senses a feeling of pleasure, do we enter into it and cling to it? When a feeling of pain arises, do we enter into it and cling to it? We'll know that the mind is like this, the pleasure is like that, the pain is like that, the feeling is like that. They're different sorts of things.

You can compare it to water and oil mixed in a bottle. They're in the same bottle, but they're in separate parts. They can stay in the same bottle but they don't permeate each other. Even though they're mixed together, the oil is oil, the water is water. Why are they like that? Their density is different. Their density is different, which is why they stay separate.

The same with the mind. If the mind is at normalcy, it's neither pleasant nor

painful. It's neither pleasant nor painful, you know. When a feeling enters, pleasure and pain come in. If we're mindful, we'll know: "This is called pleasure." The pleasure is pleasant, but the mind knows that the pleasure is inconstant, so it doesn't cling to it. Is the pleasure there? It's right there, but the mind knows it as outside the mind. It's not buried in the mind. Even then, though, the mind knows it clearly. Or when pain arises, can the mind separate the feeling out? Is it not pained? Does it not recognize the pain? It knows. It recognizes the pain. It recognizes the pain. But it knows that the mind is the mind, the feeling is the feeling, so it isn't able to grab hold of the pain and carry it around as "pain"...

[Break in the recording]

[An earlier Thai transcript fills in this break with this passage: or as "this is pain." This is because it doesn't grab hold of it to make assumptions about it.

The Buddha separated things out with awareness. Did he have any pain? He knew the condition of pain but he didn't make assumptions about it. When he knew in this way, we say that he separated the pain out, he separated the feeling out. Did he know ordinary pleasure? The pleasure was there,]

** ... but he knew that pleasure is poisonous if we don't really know it. So he didn't assume pleasure to be his or to have any substance. Was there pleasure there? It was there through his awareness, but it wasn't there in his mind. This is how we know that he separated pleasure and pain from his mind, separated feelings from his mind, even though these things were together right there.

It's the same as when we hear that our Buddha or our noble ones cut through defilement or killed defilement: It's not actually the case that they killed off all defilement. If they had killed off all defilement, there wouldn't be any defilement left for us, right?—because they killed them all off. But they didn't really kill defilement. They simply knew defilements and let them go in line with their own affairs. So defilements are still around to catch hold of anyone who's stupid. It's not the case that the noble ones killed defilement. They knew specifically in the case of their own minds that these things are poisonous so they brushed their own defilements away, brushed them away, brushed them away. Whatever things gave rise to stress in their minds, they brushed them away. They didn't kill the defilements.

Whoever doesn't know that these are things that the noble ones have brushed away will pounce on them, right? "Ah. This is something good." But actually the Buddha discarded these things. Like pleasure, for example: He brushed it away—yet we see it and, "Hmmm," we pounce on it and put it in our shoulder bag, thinking we've got something good and it's ours. Actually, the Buddha didn't kill these things.

He was wise to them. When pleasure arose, he knew it was pleasure but he didn't take pleasure from it. He knew that this was pleasure but he didn't assume that the pleasure was something of substance, his or anyone else's. That's how he let it go.

The same with pain: When there was pain, he called it "feeling," a "feeling of pain." When pleasure arose, he knew it: "This is a feeling of pleasure." But as for us, even before there's a feeling we go in to savor it. The mind goes in to savor it. In other words, we go in to carry the pain around, to carry the pleasure around.

The truth of the matter is that feelings of pleasure and pain are something different from the mind. It's like when we're sitting here in comfort right now. If there were a piece of lumber that we'd like to have, we'd put it on our shoulder and it'd be heavy. It'd be heavy. The piece of lumber is the feeling. The person who wants the piece of lumber is the mind. When you pick up the lumber to carry it, it's heavy, isn't it? Of course it's heavy. But if you have discernment, then even though the piece of lumber is heavy, you don't have to suffer from it. You know enough to put it down. When it feels really heavy on you, you put it down. If the piece of lumber is really good for something, and you want to take it and put it to use, then if you know in this way, it's not so bad. The lumber won't squash you to death.

It's the same with the mind. The conditions of the mind—feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, anything that's a preoccupation—are part of the world. If the mind knows this, then you can do work that's pleasant, you can do work that's painful. Why? Because you know pleasure and pain for what they really are.

If you're not really acquainted with pleasure and pain, you'll see that pleasure and pain are on different levels, that they have different prices. But those who know say that pleasure and pain are equal in price. They're all equal in price. If you grab hold of pleasure, it's a source of stress. Stress will arise. Why? Because pleasure is inconstant. It changes back and forth. When pleasure disappears, pain arises. That sort of thing.

The Buddha saw that pleasure and pain both have their drawbacks, that they're equal in price. When pain arose, he saw it as being equal to pleasure arising. When pleasure arose, he saw it as being equal to pain arising. That's why he let go of both pleasure and pain—because all of these things were equal in price.

That's why his mind was on the path of right practice. He saw that these things were equally stressful—equal in their drawbacks, equal in their benefits—for both these things are not for sure. They fall under the characteristics that the Dhamma calls inconstancy because they're stressful. They all arise and disband in this way. When the Buddha saw this, right view arose as part of the right path. Whether he was sitting, standing, walking, or lying down; whatever thoughts or feelings arose in his mind, he knew: "This is pleasure. This is pain." Equal. All the time. That's why he didn't grab hold of these things.

Right after our Foremost Teacher's awakening he taught about indulgence in

sensual pleasure *(kamasukhallikānuyoga)* and indulgence in self-affliction *(attakilamathānuyoga)*. He told the monks that indulgence in sensual pleasure is the slack path; indulgence in self-affliction, the taut path. These two things had harassed him all along the way until the day he awakened to the Dhamma because he hadn't let them go. As soon as he caught on to this point, though, he let them go. That's why he gave the first sermon to his disciples, telling them that indulgence in sensual pleasure, clinging to the pleasure in sensuality, is not a path for contemplatives to follow. Whoever thinks about it, whoever mulls it over, whoever makes assumptions about sensuality, gets into a lot of turmoil. There's no peace in that path. The state of a true contemplative can't arise there. Don't follow that path.

As for indulgence in self-affliction, the path that's cruel and torturous: Don't follow that path. No contemplative is found there, either. No peace is found there. No true contemplative has ever arisen there.

In other words, he said that contemplatives shouldn't follow the path of either pleasure or pain. When pleasure arises, don't forget yourself. When pain arises, don't follow it. Be alert to it. When pain arises, know that pain has arisen. When you know pain and stress, you'll know the cause of stress, the disbanding of stress, and the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress. That path is our meditation.

To put it in simple terms, we have to be mindful. Mindfulness means being alert and recollecting at all times: As we're sitting here right now, what are we thinking? What are we doing? What do we have right now? We're alert in this way. We always keep in mind how we are. We're alert to what we have right now, to what we're thinking about, to whether we're feeling pleasure or pain, to whether what we're doing is right or wrong. When we keep these two qualities of mindfulness and alertness together at all times, discernment can arise. We can recollect, we can be alert, and these things go running toward discernment. Discernment arises. We take things on to evaluate and contemplate. Whether we're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, we're alert like this at all times. We'll recognize what's right, what's wrong, what's just right, what's not just right.

When a preoccupation that we like arises, we'll recognize it—and we won't make assumptions about it. It's just pleasure, that's all. When pain arises and we indulge in self-affliction, we can know: "Oh. This isn't the path for a contemplative." So it's just pain, that's all. Pleasure and pain are just "that's all" kinds of things. This is called separating—we can separate the mind and feelings from each other. What does this is the mind.

When the features of pleasure arise and we latch onto them, feeling arises. Regardless of whether it's pleasure or pain, if the mind is intelligent, we won't grab onto these things. We'll simply put them aside. We're just a knower. We know these things for what they are and we let them go in line with their condition. It's like oil

and water mixed in a bottle: They don't permeate each other, even though they're in the same bottle. This is the way it is between the mind and feelings.

Even when we fall sick, we can still sense that feeling is feeling and the mind is the mind. They're still different things. Do we know when something hurts? Yes. Do we know when things are comfortable? Yes—but we don't move in to stay in the comfort or discomfort. We stay in the stillness. What kind of stillness? Stillness undisturbed by the comfort, stillness undisturbed by the pain. The Buddha pointed this out for us to see because there's no substance to these things. There's no way you can stay in them. The mind has to stay this way—in other words, not having pleasure, not having pain. Did he know that there was pleasure? He knew, but he didn't feel pleased or pained by it. Did he know that there was pain? He knew. Pleasure? He knew—but he didn't carry it around, so no feeling arose in his mind.

We ordinary, unenlightened people may see this as strange, but even though we're unenlightened, don't make that an issue. Aim straight at that spot, for that's the way things are. The mind stays in its own territory. Feelings of pleasure and pain are in their own territory. They don't get involved with one another. That's the way they are. They're already separate. It's not the case that they're mixed together. If they seem mixed together, it's because we don't know them thoroughly. Actually, they're already separate.

It's the same with the body and the mind. Even though they're together here, it's like our house and we who live in the house. They're related in the same way. If the house is in danger, the mind suffers because we have to look after it. But if the house catches on fire, we can run out of it. We run out of the house. The same with feeling: When a feeling of pleasure arises, we can run out of it. When a feeling of pain arises, we can run out of it. We're like the owner of the house. When things get really heavy and we know in line with the truth, then when the house catches on fire, we can run out of it—for we're two separate things. One is the owner; the other is the house. That's the normal way these things already are.

So even though we talk about separating the mind from the feeling, they're actually already separate. It's just that when we come to know them in line with their truth, they already know how to separate themselves. That's the way they already are by their nature. The reason we see them as not separate is because we cling to them through our ignorance of the truth. So they're glommed together in that way. They're glommed together.

It's like a spoon we use to eat curry. The curry is one thing. The spoon is something else. If we know that this is the curry, this is the spoon, then things are easy. We use the spoon to eat the curry and then we put it down. It's easy. But if we try to eat the spoon, too, we make things hard. If we don't see the spoon as a spoon, the curry as curry, the feeling as a feeling, and the mind as the mind, then things

simply get all mixed up.

When we realize this, then these things can separate out whether we're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Pleasures and pains keep crisscrossing on many levels at all times.

This is why the Buddha taught us to meditate. The practice of meditation is really important. Simply knowing about these things isn't enough. The knowledge that comes from practice with a still mind and the knowledge that comes from study are really far apart from each other—far, far apart. When we gain knowledge from study, it's not that our mind knows how to let go of it. It knows and then pounces on things to stash them away. Why stash them away? So that they can spoil. When they spoil, we cry. If the mind knows both how to hold on and how to put things down, both how to stash away and how to let go, both how to know and let go, we know that things are simply the way they are. We don't forget ourselves. When pain or illness arises, we won't forget.

Some people say, "Oh, this year I've been sick all year long. I haven't been able to meditate." These are the words of a person who's extremely stupid. People who are sick, people who are dying, should accelerate their meditation even more, no? And yet they say they don't have time to meditate anymore. Stress has arisen, pain has arisen, a lack of trust in these fabrications has come, and yet they think they can't meditate because they don't have the time. The Buddha didn't teach like that. He taught that that's the right spot. You've arrived at the right spot to practice. When you're falling ill, when you're about to die, then the more you accelerate your efforts, the more you know and see. Right then is when the truth appears even more. If you don't think in this way, things are going to be difficult.

Some people say they have no opportunity to practice because of all the work they have to do. I've had lots of teachers coming here and I ask them what they do. They say they teach children and they have so much work that it has them in a tizzy. They don't have any time to meditate. So I ask them, "When you teach your students, do you have time to breathe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh. So why do you have time to breathe when you say your work has you in a tizzy? You're far from understanding anything. Actually, the practice is a matter of the mind, a matter of your awareness. It's not the sort of thing where you have to do this, do that, or jump around a lot. It's simply a matter of your awareness. As for the breath, you can keep on breathing as you work. The nature of the body knows even more about how to do this than you do. It keeps on looking after itself. All you have to do is be more mindful to be alert, that's all. Keep at it so that you see into things more and more clearly. That's the way it is with meditation. If we're aware in this way, then it doesn't matter what kind of work you do, the work won't be spoiled. In fact, you'll be

able to do that work in a way that's always more sensitive to what's right and wrong. So change the way you understand things.

"You have lots of time to meditate. You simply don't understand, that's all. When you're lying down, you can breathe, right? When you're eating, you can breathe, right? You can breathe wherever you are. Why do you have time to do that? If you think in this way, your life has a value equal to your breath. And wherever you are, you'll have time. Our awareness and thoughts are mental matters, not physical matters.

"So contemplate in a new way, think in a new way, explore in a new way. All you have to do is be mindful and you'll know how to be responsible all the time, whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. You'll get value out of your time. You have more than enough time. You're simply not intelligent in the area of your own time, which is why you don't have any time. Actually, you have time all the time. So take this and contemplate it." That's the way it is.

The issue of feelings: Is there anywhere we can run to get away from them? That's why we have to know them. We have to know them clearly. The feeling is just feeling, that's all. Pleasure is just pleasure, that's all. Pain is just pain, that's all. They're all just "that's all" kinds of things, so why latch onto them? If the mind is intelligent, all it has to do is think like this and it can separate the feeling out from the mind. The feeling is just a feeling, that's all. The mind sees that it's just "that's all." Pain is just pain, that's all. Pleasure is just pleasure, that's all. Just let them separate out. Are they there? Yes, they're there, but they're outside the heart. They're outside the heart. They're there without clinging. The mind doesn't make any assumptions about them. They're there sort of as if they're not there, that's all.

Think in this way, contemplate, and don't worry about where it will take you. This is called separating feeling from the mind. Know what the mind is like; know what the feeling is like.

The mind is what enters into the sense of pleasure, and so forth, to see if what we say is pleasure is really true, to see if the pain is for sure. When we follow things in like this, discernment arises in the mind and separates out the pleasure and pain, seeing that the pleasure is just pleasure, that's all. The pain is just pain, that's all. We don't see that there's anything there. Whatever's there is just a "that's all" kind of thing.

When we have this awareness all the way from the beginning to the end, the mind will let go—but it's not letting go from ignorance, you know. It lets go and it knows at the same time. It doesn't let go through stupidity, or from not wanting things to be that way. It lets go because it sees that that's the way things are of their own accord. This is called seeing nature, or seeing what's normal.

When we know in this way, we'll be adept with regard to the mind. We know how to look after the mind. We're intelligent in the area of our own mind, intelligent in looking after the mind. When you're intelligent in the area of the mind, you'll have to

be intelligent in the area of its preoccupations. When you're intelligent in the area of preoccupations, you're sure to be intelligent in the area of the world. This is called *lokavidū:* expert in the affairs of the world. The Buddha was expert in the affairs of the world, right in the midst of things that were complex and confusing, but he knew those things that were complex and confusing. And his knowledge of what's not complex or confusing was right in the same place. The world is a turmoil, so how was he able to know it in an expert way? We have to understand that the Dhamma formulated by the Buddha has nothing that lies beyond our capabilities.

So when we know right at our own mind that the mind is the mind, feelings are feelings, and they separate out from each other—in their own separate parts, their own separate stages—the mind can see that the conditions of preoccupations are just like that, of their own accord. They simply arise and disband. They arise and disband, disband and arise. That's all there is to them. We let them go, in line with their own nature, because they're in separate places.

This is what it means to know and see in line with the way things are. Right here is where the problem comes to an end.

So all of us here: This is the way things are. Whether you're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, this is the way they are with every moment because you incline your mind to the practice. You're mindful and alert at all times. That's all there is to it. When the time comes to sit in concentration, go ahead and do it. Understand that concentration is for the purpose of giving rise to stillness, and the stillness simply strengthens your energy, that's all. It's not for the sake of seeing a lot of other things. So we have to keep practicing concentration steadily.

As for practicing vipassanā, that's the same as practicing concentration. In some places they say, "Now we're doing concentration, and only later will we do vipassanā. Right now we're doing tranquility meditation." That kind of thing. Don't put them far away from each other that way. Tranquility is the source of discernment; discernment, the fruit of tranquility. It's not that now you're going to do tranquility, and later you're going to do vipassanā. You can't really separate them out that way. They're separate only in name. They're like a machete: The edge of the blade is on one side; the back of the blade is on the other. You can't separate them. If you pick up just the handle, both the edge of the blade and the back of the blade come along with it. They don't lie anywhere else.

When there's stillness, discernment arises right there in the stillness. See them as a single chunk of wood. Where do these things come from? They have a mother or father to give birth to them, you know, just as all of us have to come from a mother and father to be sitting here. Where does the Dhamma come from? Virtue is the mother and father of the Dhamma. In the beginning there has to be virtue. And this virtue is stillness—meaning that there's no wrongdoing in terms of your body or mind.

When there's no wrongdoing, there's no trouble because there's no wrong. When there's no trouble, stillness can arise. The mind gives rise to concentration right at the same time. This is why we're taught that virtue, concentration, and discernment—the path by which the noble ones go to nibbāna—are all one and the same thing.

To put it even more briefly: Virtue, concentration, and discernment are one and the same thing—one and the same piece of Dhamma. Virtue is concentration; concentration is virtue. Concentration is discernment; discernment is concentration. It's like a mango. When it's still a flower, we call it a mango flower. When it's a little fruit, we call it a baby mango. When it gets bigger, we call it a biggish mango. When it gets bigger and almost ripe, we call it a half-ripe mango. When it's fully ripe, we call it a ripe mango. It's all the same mango, simply that it keeps changing, changing, changing, changing. When it's big, it's big coming from little. When it's little, it's little heading for big. You could call it different mangos, or you could call it all the same mango.

Virtue, concentration, and discernment are interrelated in just the same way. Ultimately they become the path progressing to the stream to nibbāna. The mango, starting from when it's a flower, progresses to ripeness, and that's enough. See it in this way. When we see it in this way, we don't criticize it.

The same with this fabricated body. Whatever it does, don't get worked up about it. After it's born, it grows old. After it's born, whatever it does, contemplate it.

Some people don't want to grow old. When they grow old, they get despondent. If that's the case, then don't eat ripe mangos! Why do you want the mango to be ripe? When mangos don't ripen fast enough, we force them to ripen, don't we? Yet when we grow old and ripen, we get afraid and despondent. Some people start crying, afraid that they're going to grow old and die. If that's the case, they shouldn't eat ripe mangos. They'd better eat just the mango flowers.

When we can think in this way, the Dhamma becomes clearer. We can be at our ease—and what will we do? We'll simply set our minds on how we have to focus solely on the practice.

That's the Dhamma talk for you, the Chief Privy Councilor and your children and grandchildren who have gathered here today. I've explained the Dhamma for you to hear, and that should be enough for now.

What I've taught you here: I'd like you to take it apart to contemplate. It's not yet right; it's not yet wrong. For it to be right or wrong, you have to contemplate it. That's each person's individual duty. And as for whatever's wrong or inaccurate, give it your forgiveness at the same time. Actually, whether it's right or wrong, it's all something for you to practice with: Whatever's wrong, throw it away; whatever's right, practice in line with it. Practice, okay? Practice abandoning both right and wrong. Ultimately, the practice is a matter of abandoning both right and wrong. You throw

away what's right; you throw away what's wrong. If, whatever's right, you hold onto it as right, and other people say it's wrong, you just keep on quarreling. The Dhamma, though, is a place where there's nothing. Nothing at all.

I once read a story that one of my students brought here. Some Zen students were sitting with their teacher near a flag on a pole. The wind was blowing back and forth, and the flag was flapping. One of the students said, "Eh? Why is the flag flapping? It must be because of the wind." Another student said, "No. It's because there's a flag." So they kept arguing in that way. The teacher was sitting there but didn't say anything. "It's because of the wind." "No. It's because there's a flag." "No. It's because of the wind." "No. It's because there's a flag." They kept on arguing until the teacher said, "No. You're both wrong, which is why the flag is still fluttering and flapping. There is no flag and there is no wind." There. That was the end of that. *[Laughs]*

[Break in the recording]

Question: ...the body in the body until you see the mind disband. Your explanation of seeing the body in the body is clear, but to see the mind in the mind: what exactly does it mean? Could you explain just a little more?—but not so much that it makes you tired.

Ajahn Chah: Even though I'm tired, I have to speak, you know. You can't speak without getting tired. Even when you're tired, you have to speak.

You've asked what the mind is. I have to explain this before I talk about what's in the mind. It's somewhat like knowing that this is a spittoon. Then you can know what's in the spittoon. You're clear about what's in the spittoon. Why? Because you first know what the spittoon is, right? You can't go first to what's in the spittoon. What's the spittoon? This is the spittoon. Then you can look into the spittoon and see what's in it. You see that there's water in the spittoon. That's what the problem is like.

As for the mind... Actually, there's no substance to the mind. You can't point to where the mind is. But we can describe it in a way that makes it easier to see, so that you can know what the mind is. There's an awareness, an awareness of things. It doesn't know that it's the mind, but we're aware. There's an awareness, the act of bringing in a preoccupation, the act of recognizing all the various preoccupations. When a preoccupation has hit us, that means we've latched onto it. The act of letting go in the act of attachment: What's that? Is there anything there, or not? Right there in the mind, where it's latched on: Is there anything there? The awareness that's aware there: That's the mind. Going deeper into that awareness, is there anything there in that? That's what's in the mind. That's where you know the mind in the mind. The mind is like the spittoon. The only way to make it clear is to explain it in this way. There's no shape to it, so you have to explain it in this way. Once you know that this is

the spittoon, you can look into the spittoon to see what's in it.

The mind is what's aware of preoccupations, what thinks and brings preoccupations into it. Once it's aware, it brings preoccupations into it and then holds them inside. What holds them inside: Can you sense what's in there? There are all kinds of clingings and assumptions, right and wrong in there....

That's not quite right. It's like grabbing hold of something in your fist. "Eh? What have I grabbed in my fist?" You open up your fist to see what's in there. This is what's *in* your fist, right?

It's the same with the mind. If we speak using natural, ordinary words, we can say that it's what brings preoccupations in, what brings preoccupations into our mind: Once they're there—the preoccupations held in the mind—we open it up to see what's in there. Are there right views? Are they wise to pleasure and pain? Try to know what's right there. That's where the path is. The path to knowing is right there, right where you were holding onto things.

This is just a little bit of what the Buddha taught.

It's enough to help me understand.

That should be enough.

I'll take it to think over.

That's right. Take it and continue with it.

Yes, sir. I'll try. I'll try sitting and meditating with it.

You can't awaken to these things simply because other people have told you about them. The fact of the matter is that when you leave here you have to contemplate them for yourself. The Buddha said, "*Akkhātāro Tathāgatā:* The Tathāgatas simply point out the way." In other words, they teach people how to swim, but they can't swim for them. If they do our swimming for us, we drown. It's beyond their ability to do our swimming for us. That's the way it has to be.

The same with nibbāna: Why didn't our Buddha explain nibbāna so that it's totally clear? Because it can't be explained in a way that's totally clear. It's like showing a picture to a blind person. The blind person can't see it clearly. Before it can become clear, the blind person has to treat his eyes until they can see. Only then will the picture be clear.

It's the same sort of thing here. The Buddha wanted so much for us to know and see, but nibbāna is the sort of Dhamma that's *paccattaṁ:* personal. That's as far as he could help. He "*Akkhātāro Tathāgatā:* The Tathāgatas simply point out the way," and then he took his leave. That's the way it is.

Thank you, sir.

Becoming a Samaṇa

TODAY I'm giving special instructions specifically for the monks and novices. Set your hearts on listening. Aside from the practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya, there's nothing else for us to study, talk about, and offer opinions on.

I want each of us to understand that we now have the status of people gone forth, so we should behave in a way that's fitting for monks and novices. We've all passed through the status of lay life. It's a status marked with turmoil, with no clear patterns for our behavior. So now that we've entered the status of *samaṇas* in the Buddha's teachings, we have to change our hearts and minds to be different from those of lay people. Our words, our movements, our comings and goings, our ways of eating, stepping forward, and stepping back—everything has to be in line with those gone forth who are called *samaṇa,* which means people who are peaceful and at respite. Before, we were lay people and didn't know the meaning of *samaṇa*—peace and respite. We all let our bodies and minds find enjoyment in line with our defilements and cravings. When our preoccupations were good, they made us glad. When they were bad, they made us sad. That's called being influenced by preoccupations. When we're influenced by preoccupations, the Buddha said that we're not taking care of ourselves. We don't yet have a refuge, so we let our hearts and minds run loose with enjoyment, with suffering, sorrow, lamentation, and despair. We don't rein ourselves in. We don't contemplate things.

In the Buddha's teachings, when you ordain into the status of a *samaṇa,* you have to make your body that of a *samaṇa*. To begin with, you shave your head. You have to cut your nails. Your clothing is the ochre robe—the banner of the noble ones, the banner of the Buddha, the banner of the arahants. The fact that you've ordained depends on the legacy, the inheritance left behind by our Foremost Teacher. That's why our way of life is enough to get by on. Our dwellings, for instance, come from the merit of the faithful who built them. We don't have to fix our food—and this comes from the legacy, the inheritance left behind by our Foremost Teacher. Our medicine, our clothing: All these things depend on the legacy left behind by the Buddha.

Once you've been ordained in the Buddha's teachings, you've been supposed into being a monk, but you're not yet a genuine monk, you know. You're a monk on the level of supposition—in other words, you're a monk as far as your body: the shaved head, the yellow robes. You're a monk on the level of supposition.

It's the same as when they carve wood, sculpt cement, or mold bronze to be a

Buddha on the level of supposition. It's not the genuine Buddha. It's gold, lead, bronze, wood, lacquer, stone. These things have been supposed into being a Buddha, but they're not the Buddha. They're the Buddha on the level of supposition, not the genuine Buddha.

It's the same with you: You've been formally declared to be monks who have ordained in the Buddha's teachings, but you're not yet monks. You're supposed monks, not genuine monks. What this means is that your hearts are not yet fully endowed with goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. Your purity isn't yet all the way there. You have greed, aversion, and delusion obstructing the arising of genuine monks within you. These things have been with you since way back when: from the day of your birth, from your previous lifetimes. You've been nourished with greed, aversion, and delusion all along up to the present. So when people like you are ordained to be monks, you're still just supposed monks. You still live on the greed, aversion, and delusion in your hearts. Real monks abandon these things. They drive greed out of their hearts, drive aversion out of their hearts, drive delusion out of their hearts. They contain no poison, no danger. If there's still poison, you're not yet a monk. You have to drive these things out so that you can reach purity.

So you have to start trying to destroy greed, aversion, and delusion, which are the dominant defilements in each of you. These things keep you fenced into states of becoming and birth. The reason you can't reach peace is because greed, anger, and delusion are obstacles blocking the *samaṇa,* peace, from arising in your hearts. As long as it can't arise, you're not really monks. In other words, your hearts aren't yet at peace away from greed, aversion, and delusion.

That's why we've come to practice—to practice so as to eradicate greed, aversion, and delusion from our hearts. Once you eradicate greed, aversion, and delusion from your hearts, you'll reach purity. You'll reach genuine monk-ness. At the current level of your practice, you're monks on the level of supposition. It's simply a supposition. You're not yet monks. So build a monk within your heart. You build a monk by *means* of your heart—not by any other means.

In building a monk by means of your heart, you don't use just your heart. Two things—one, your body; two, your speech—also have to be involved. Before your body and speech can do anything, it first has to come out of the heart. For things to exist just in your heart and not come out in your actions and speech: That can't happen, either. So these things are connected with one another.

When we speak of the heart, of the beauty of the heart, the polished smoothness of the heart, it's like speaking of a smooth, polished wooden pillar. The wood we use to make a board or a pillar—before it's smooth and polished and they coat it with shellac to make it beautiful—first has to be cut from a tree. They have to cut off the crude ends and then split it and saw it—all kinds of things. The heart is like a tree.

We have to take it from its crudeness, cutting away its crude parts, cutting away its roots, its branches, its bark, destroying everything that's not smooth and polished. You have to destroy those parts until you reach a state where the wood is beautiful and well proportioned. The fact that it's beautiful and well proportioned comes from having passed through crude activities.

It's the same with those of us who are practicing. To come and make our hearts and minds pure and at peace is something good, but it's hard. We have to start with external things—our body, our speech—and then work inward. Only then will we become smooth, polished, and beautiful. It's like having a finished table or bed. It's beautiful now, but it used to be crude. It was a tree, a trunk. So we cut it—cutting the trunk, cutting away the leaves—because that's the path we have to follow so that it can become a table or bed, so that it can become something beautiful, good, and pure.

In the correct path to peace as formulated by the Buddha, he formulated virtue, concentration, and discernment. This is the path, the path leading to purity, leading to becoming a *samaṇa*. It's the path that can wash greed, aversion, and delusion away. You have to go through the steps of virtue, concentration, and discernment. This isn't different from making a table. When we compare external things and internal things in this way, there isn't any difference.

So when we train your habits—making you listen to the Dhamma, making you chant, making you sit in concentration—these things grate against your heart. They grate because your heart is sloppy and lazy. It doesn't like doing anything that clashes with it, that puts it to difficulties. It doesn't want these things; it won't do them. That's why you have to make an effort to endure. We all have to use the qualities of endurance and persistence to slash our way through and keep trying to do these things.

Our bodies, for instance: We used to do things that were fun and unruly, all kinds of things, so now that we're watching over them, it's difficult. Our speech used to speak without any restraint, so now that we're restraining it, it's difficult. But even though it's difficult, we can't let that stop us. It's like a tree: Before we can make it into a table or a bed, we have to go through difficulties, but we can't let them stop us. We have to go through those stages. To get the table or bed, we have to go through the crude parts.

It's the same with us. When the Buddha taught so that he gained students and disciples whose minds succeeded in gaining awakening, all of them started out as run-of-the-mill people when they ordained—run-of-the-mill people just like us. They had the various parts of their bodies—legs, ears, eyes—just like us; greed and aversion just like us. None of their features were in any way different from ours. That was true of the Buddha himself; that was true of his disciples. In every case, they took what wasn't yet capable and made it capable; what wasn't yet beautiful and made it beautiful; what wasn't yet up to standard and brought it up to standard. This has been true all along

up to us in the present. We ordain the children of householders—farmers, merchants—people who have been embroiled in every variety of sensual preoccupation. These are the people we ordain and train. And we've been able to train them all along.

So understand that you're just like the noble ones of the past. You have the same aggregates. You have a body, just like them. You have feelings—pleasure and pain—just like them. You have perceptions—recognizing and labeling—just like them. You have thought fabrications and consciousness—good and bad: everything, just like them. So each of you is one more person in the same condition in body and mind like the students the Buddha gained in the past. You're not different in any way. His noble disciples started out as run-of-the-mill people. Some of them were troublemakers, some of them were fools, some of them were ordinary run-of-the-mill people, some of them were good people—just like you. They weren't different in any way. So just as he took those people and trained them to practice so as to attain the noble paths and fruitions, we today take the same sort of people to practice—to develop virtue, develop concentration, develop discernment.

Virtue, concentration, and discernment are the names of our practices. When we practice virtue, practice concentration, and practice discernment, we practice right at ourselves. We practice right at ourselves, and that's when we're on target. We're on target with virtue right here, on target with concentration right here. Why? Because the body is right here with us. Virtue is a matter of every part of the body, every part that the Buddha has us look after. With virtue, we're taught to look after our body. We already have a body. How is that? We have feet; we have hands. We've already got a body. This is where we look after virtue. To give rise to virtue, we look after this body we already have. The same with speech: Whether you tell lies or engage in divisive speech, coarse speech, or idle chatter, whether you use your body to kill living beings, steal people's belongings, or engage in sexual misconduct—all the things that the rules on virtue are concerned with are things that lie right with you. You already have a body. You already have speech. These things are already there with you.

So when you exercise restraint, you watch them. You look. For instance, look at killing, stealing, and engaging in sexual misconduct. The Buddha has you look at crude activities of the body. Killing is using your fist or a weapon in your hand to kill animals, big or small. This is something crude—the sort of thing you used to do before you started observing the precepts. You transgressed. And there were the times when you didn't restrain your speech: telling lies, engaging in divisive speech, coarse speech, or idle chatter. Telling lies is misrepresenting the truth. Coarse speech is carelessly insulting people: "You pig! You dog!" Idle chatter is speaking playfully about things that serve no purpose, saying whatever comes into your head. These sorts of things we've all done in the past. We didn't exercise restraint. But now, when we look after our virtue, we look: We look at our body; we look at our speech.

Who's doing the looking? Who are you using to do the looking? When you kill an animal, who knows? Is your hand what knows? Or who is it? When you go to steal something, who knows? Is your hand what knows? Or who is it? When you engage in sexual misconduct, who's the first to know? Is your body what knows? When you tell a lie, who's the first to know? When you use coarse speech or engage in idle chatter, who's the first to know? Your mouth? Or do the words know first? Think about this. Whoever's the one who knows, get *that* one to look after your body and speech. Whoever's the one who knows, get that one to keep watch. Get the one who's been making the others act—making them do good, making them do evil—get that one to look after them. *Catch the thief and make him the village headman*. Get that one to look after the others. Get that one to contemplate.

When we're told to look after the actions of the body, who will do the looking? The body doesn't know anything at all. The body walks, steps on things, goes everywhere. The same with the hand: It doesn't know anything. It catches hold of that, touches this—but only when someone else tells it to. It catches hold of that, then puts it down. It takes it up again, throws this away to take something else. In every case, there has to be someone to tell it to. It doesn't know anything. There has to be someone else to tell it, someone else to give the orders. The same with our mouth: Whether it lies or tells the truth, when it engages in divisive speech or coarse speech, there's someone who tells it to.

For this reason, when we practice, we establish mindfulness—the ability to recollect—right at the knower, the one that's aware. If we're to steal, kill, engage in sexual misconduct, tell lies, speak divisive speech, coarse speech, or idle chatter—any of these things—the knower is what leads the way in acting or speaking. Wherever it is, stay with it. Bring your alertness, your mindfulness always there with the knower, to get *that* one to look after things, to be aware.

This is why the Buddha's rules deal with crude things: Killing is evil; it's against the precepts. Stealing is wrong. Sexual misconduct is wrong. Telling lies is wrong. Using coarse speech or engaging in idle chatter is wrong. These are things for us to remember. These are his rules, the laws of the Lord Buddha. So now we're careful about them. The one who used to break them—who used to order us to kill animals, to steal, to engage in sexual misconduct, to tell lies, to speak divisively, to speak coarsely, to engage in idle chatter, to act without restraint in various ways—singing, dancing, whistling, playing musical instruments: The one who used to order us to do these things has now turned into the one who looks after our behavior. We use mindfulness—alertness, the ability to recollect—to make it exercise restraint, to look after itself, to look after itself well.

If it's able to look after itself, then the body isn't hard to look after, for the body lies under the governance of the mind. Our speech isn't hard to look after, for our

speech lies under the governance of the mind. When that's the case, looking after the precepts—looking after our body and speech—isn't hard. We make ourselves aware in every posture—standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, every step of the way. Make sure that you know what you're doing before you do it, that you know what you're saying before you say it. Don't act or speak before you know what you're doing. Know first, and only then act or speak. Be mindful—recollect—before you act or speak in any way. You have to recollect first. Practice this until you're quick at it. Practice being ahead of the game. Be quick at being able to recollect before you act, to recollect before you speak. Establish mindfulness in your heart like this. Get the knower to look after itself—for it's the one who acts. Because it's the one who acts, things won't work if you have anyone else looking after it. You have to get it to look after itself. If it doesn't look after itself, things won't work.

The Buddha taught that looking after the precepts isn't hard if you look after yourself. If any forms of harm are about to arise by way of your bodily actions or speech, then if mindfulness is in place, you'll recognize them. You'll have a sense of right and wrong. This is how you look after your precepts. Your body and speech depend on you. This is the first step.

If you can look after your bodily actions and speech, then they're beautiful. At ease. Your manners, your comings and goings, your speech, are all beautiful. This kind of beauty is the beauty that comes from having someone shape and mould them—someone who keeps looking after them and contemplating them all the time. It's like our home, our sala, our huts, and their surrounding areas. If there's someone to sweep them and look after them, they're beautiful. They're not dirty—because there's someone to look after them. It's because there's someone looking after them that they can be beautiful.

The same with our bodily actions and speech: If there's someone looking after them, they're beautiful. Evil, obscene, dirty things can't arise. Our practice is beautiful. *fi di-kalyāṇaṁ, majjhe-kalyāṇaṁ, pariyosāna-kalyāṇaṁ:* Beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, beautiful in the end. What does this refer to? One, virtue; two, concentration; three, discernment. These things are beautiful. They start by being beautiful in the beginning. If the beginning is beautiful, then the middle is beautiful. If we can exercise restraint with ease, always being watchful and careful to the point where our mind is firmly established in the act of looking after things and exercising restraint, always intent, always firm, then this quality of being firm in your duties, firm in your restraint, is given a different name. It's called "concentration."

The quality of exercising restraint, always looking after your body, looking after your speech, looking after all the things that would arise in this way: This is called "virtue." The quality of being firm in your restraint is called something else: "concentration," the firm establishing of the mind. It's firm in this preoccupation, firm

in that preoccupation, always restrained. This is called concentration. This level of concentration is external, but it has an internal side as well. Make sure to have this with you always. This has to come first.

When you're firm in these things—when you have virtue and concentration—then you will also have the quality of contemplating what's right and what's wrong. "Is this right?" "Is this wrong?" These questions will arise with every preoccupation that comes into the mind: when sights make contact, when sounds make contact, when smells make contact, when tactile sensations make contact, when ideas make contact. A knower will appear, sometimes happy, sometimes sad, sometimes pleased. It will know good preoccupations, bad preoccupations. You'll get to see all kinds of things. If you're restrained, you'll get to see all kinds of things coming in, as well as the reactions in the mind, in the knower. You'll be able to contemplate them. Because you've exercised restraint and are firm in your restraint, then whatever passes in there, the reactions in terms of your bodily actions, your speech, and your mind will show themselves. Things good or evil, right or wrong will arise. And then when you choose or select the proper preoccupation, this is what's called "a thin layer of discernment." This discernment will appear in your heart. This is called virtue, concentration, and discernment all at once. This is how they first arise.

What arises next will be attachment. This is where you're attached to goodness. You'll be afraid that your mind will be negligent or mistaken in various ways, afraid that your concentration will be destroyed. This will arise because you love your concentration a lot. You're very protective, very diligent, very persistent. When any preoccupation makes contact, you're afraid of it. Wary. Concerned. You see this or that person acting wrongly, and you see everything. You're very possessive. This is a level of virtue, a level of concentration, a level of discernment: the external level. You see things in line with the Buddha's laws. This is a beginning stage. *It has to be established in your mind.* You need to have it in your mind. These qualities arise really strongly in the mind—to the point where, wherever you go, you see everyone acting wrongly. You get happy and sad, you start having doubts, all kinds of things. You're always ready to pounce on other people's mistakes. This is going overboard, but that's not a problem for the time being. Let it go overboard for now. You first have to look after your bodily actions, look after your speech, look after your mind as much as you can. There's nothing wrong with this.

This is called one level of virtue. Virtue, concentration, and discernment are all there together. In terms of the perfections, this is the first level of the perfections: *dāna-pāramī, sīla-pāramī.* That's one level, the one you've already reached. The next level—*dāna-upapāramī, sīla-upapāramī*—is something else that has to grow out of this. It takes things to a level more refined than this. You're distilling something refined out of something crude, that's all. You don't get the next level from anything

else far away.

When you've established this foundation, practicing it in your heart in the first stage, you develop a sense of conscience, a sense of fear both in private and in public places. The heart is really afraid, on edge at all times. The mind takes its sense of right and wrong as its preoccupation at all times. It's preoccupied with exercising restraint over your bodily actions and speech, always firm in this way. It's really firmly attached. This is virtue, concentration, and discernment in line with the Buddha's rules.

As you keep looking after things in this way, keep practicing continually, continually, continually in this way, these qualities will grow full in your heart. But this level of virtue, concentration, and discernment hasn't yet reached the level of jhāna. These things are still fairly crude. They're refined, but they're the refined level of what's crude. They're the refinement of ordinary, run-of-the-mill people who've never done this before, never restrained their behavior before, never meditated, never practiced before. So for them, this level is refined.

It's like five baht or ten baht, which have meaning for poor people. For people who have money by the millions, five or ten baht mean nothing. That's the way it is. If you're poor, you want a baht or two. This has meaning only for people who are poor and lacking. Your ability to abandon gross forms of harm has meaning for ordinary run-of-the-mill people who've never abandoned them before. And you can be proud on this level. You've fully completed this level. You'll see this for yourself. All those who practice have to maintain this in their hearts.

When this is the case, you're said to be walking the path of virtue, the path of concentration, the path of discernment: virtue, concentration, and discernment all at once. They can't separate out. When your virtue is good, the firmness of the mind grows even firmer. When the mind is firm, your discernment gets sharper. These things become synonyms for one another. You practice continually, continually. It's right practice without gaps.

So if you practice in this way, you're said to have entered the first stage of the path of practice. This is a crude level, something a little hard to maintain, but the refined levels of virtue, concentration, and discernment all come out of this. It's as if they're distilled from this same thing. To put it in simple terms, it's like a coconut tree. A coconut tree absorbs ordinary water up through its trunk, but when the water reaches the coconuts, it's sweet and clean. It comes from ordinary water, the trunk, the crude dirt. But as the water gets absorbed up the tree, it gets distilled. It's the same water but when it reaches the coconuts it's cleaner than before. And sweet. In the same way, the virtue, concentration, and discernment of your path are crude, but if the mind contemplates these things until they're more and more refined, their crudeness will disappear. They get more and more refined, so that the area you have to maintain grows smaller and smaller, into the mind. Then it's easy. Things get closer to you.

Now at this stage, you don't make any big mistakes. It's simply that when any issue strikes the heart, a question arises. For example, "Is acting in this way right or wrong?" Or: "Is speaking in this way right?" "Is speaking in this way wrong?": this sort of thing. You abandon things and come closer and closer in—continually, continually closer in. Your concentration is even firmer; your discernment sees even more easily.

The end result is that you see things simply in terms of the mind and its preoccupations. You don't go splitting off to bodily actions or speech. You don't go splitting off to anything at all. When we talk about affairs of body and mind, the body and mind depend on each other. You see what exercises control over the body: the mind. Whatever the body does is because of the mind. Now, before the mind exercises control over the body, the impulse comes from the preoccupations making contact with the mind and then exercising control over the mind. So as you keep on contemplating inwardly, inwardly, your subtlety will gradually develop. The end result is that there's nothing but the mind and its preoccupations. In other words, the body, which is a physical phenomenon, becomes non-physical. The mind no longer grasps at its physicality. It turns its aspect as a physical thing into something non-physical: a mind object or preoccupation that makes contact with the mind. Eventually, everything is just a matter of the mind and its preoccupations—the preoccupations that arise along with our mind.

Our mind. This is where we begin to fathom the nature of our mind. Our mind has no issues. It's like a scrap of cloth or a flag that's fastened to the end of a pole and just stays there: Nothing happens. Or like a leaf left to its own nature: It stays still; nothing happens. The fact that the leaf flutters is because of something else: the wind. The nature of the leaf itself is that it stays still and doesn't do anything to anybody. The fact that it moves is because something else comes and makes contact. When the wind makes contact, the leaf flutters back and forth.

It's the same with the nature of our mind. There's no love, no hatred, no blaming of anyone. It stays as it is in that way—a condition that's really pure, clear, and clean. It stays in peace, with no pleasure, no pain, no feelings at all. That's the genuine condition of the mind. The reason we practice is to explore inwardly, explore inwardly, explore inwardly, to contemplate inwardly until we reach the primal mind: the primal mind that's called the pure mind. The pure mind is the mind without any issues. No preoccupations are passing by. In other words, it doesn't go running after preoccupations. It doesn't criticize this or that, doesn't get pleasure in this way or that. It's not happy about this thing or sad about that. And yet the mind is always aware. It knows what's going on.

When the mind is in this state, then when preoccupations come blowing through—good, bad, whatever the preoccupations: When they come blowing or cogitating in, the mind is aware of them but stays as it is. It doesn't have any issues. It doesn't waver.

Why? Because it's aware of itself. It's aware of itself. It's constructed freedom within itself. It's reached its own condition. How has it been able to reconstruct its primal condition? Because the knower has contemplated in a subtle way to see that all things are simply manifestations of properties and elements. There's nobody doing anything to anybody. As when pleasure or pain arises: When pleasure arises, it's just pleasure, that's all. When pain arises, it's just pain, that's all. It doesn't have any owner. The mind doesn't make itself the owner of pleasure, doesn't make itself the owner of pain. It watches these things and sees that there's nothing for it to take. They're separate kinds of things, separate kinds of affairs. Pleasure is just pleasure, that's all. Pain is just pain, that's all. The mind is simply what knows these things.

Before, when there was a basis for greed, aversion, or delusion, the mind would take these things on as soon as it saw them. It would take on pleasure; it would take on pain. It went right into them to feed on them. "We" took pleasure and pain without stop. That's a sign that the mind wasn't aware of what it was doing. It wasn't bright. It didn't have any freedom. It went running after its preoccupations. A mind that runs after its preoccupations is a destitute mind. When it gets a good preoccupation, it's good along with it. When it gets a bad preoccupation, it's bad along with it. It forgets itself, that its primal nature is something neither good nor bad. If the mind is good along with its preoccupations, that's a deluded mind. When bad comes and it's bad, too; when pain comes and it's pained, too; when pleasure comes and it's pleased, too, the mind turns into a world. Its preoccupations are a world. They're stuck with the world. They give rise to pleasure, pain, good, bad—all kinds of things. *And they're all not for sure. If the mind leaves its primal nature, nothing's for sure.* There's nothing but taking birth and dying, quivering and wavering, suffering and lacking—nothing but difficulties for a long, long time. These things have no way of coming to closure. They're all just part of the cycle. When we contemplate them with subtlety, we see that they have to keep on being the way they've been in the past.

As for the mind, it doesn't have any issues. When it *does* have issues, it's because we grasp onto things. Like the praise and blame of human beings: If someone says, "You're evil," why do you suffer? You suffer because you understand that they're criticizing you. So you pick that up and put it in your heart. The act of picking it up—knowing it and taking it on that way—is because you're not wise to what it is, and so you catch hold of it. When you do that, it's called stabbing yourself with clinging. When you've stabbed yourself, there's becoming that gives rise to birth.

With some people's words, if we don't pay them any attention or take them on—when we leave them simply as sounds, that's all—then there are no issues. Say a Khmer person curses you: You hear it, but it's just sounds—Khmer sounds, that's all. They're just sounds. When you don't know their meaning, that they're cursing you, the mind doesn't take them on. In this way, you can be at your ease. Or if Vietnamese or any other people of different languages curse you, all you hear are sounds. You're at

your ease because you don't bring them in to stab the mind.

This mind: Speaking about the arising and passing away of the mind, these things are easy to know when we keep on contemplating in this way continually, continually inward. The mind gradually becomes more and more refined because it has passed through the crude stages of the practice. Your concentration gets even more inwardly firm, more inwardly focused. The more it contemplates inwardly, the more sure it is that this state of mind isn't influenced by anything. The mind like this is really convinced that it isn't influenced by anything, by any preoccupations. Preoccupations are preoccupations; the mind is the mind. The fact that the mind is pleased or pained, good or bad, is because it falls for its preoccupations. If it doesn't fall for its preoccupations, it has no issues. It doesn't waver. This condition is called a condition of awareness. All the things that it knows are manifestations of the properties and elements. They simply arise and pass away, arise and pass away.

Even though you sense this, you can't yet let go. But at this point, whether you can or can't let go doesn't matter. Simply hold to this awareness or this perception as a first stage in dealing with the mind. You keep going inward, grinding down and killing your defilements continually.

And when you then see, the mind withdraws. Our Foremost Teacher or the texts call this the "change-of-lineage mind" *(gotarabhū-citta)*. This is the mind transcending the human lineage—the mind of a run-of-the-mill person—and heading toward being a noble one, which comes out of run-of-the-mill people like us. The *gotarabhū* individual steps into the *nibbāna* mind but can't yet go all the way. He withdraws to continue practicing on another level. To compare this with a person, it's like a person who's trying to cross a stream. One foot is on this bank of the stream; the other foot is on the far bank of the stream. He realizes that there is a this bank and a far bank, but he can't yet get across. So he pulls back. The state of understanding that there is both a this bank and a far bank: That's the *gotarabhū* individual or the *gotarabhū* mind. What this means is that he understands but can't yet get across. He pulls back after realizing that these things exist. Then he carries on, developing his perfections. He sees that this is for sure, that this is the way things are, and that he's going to have to end up going right there.

To put it in simple terms, at this point we see the condition of our practice: that if we really contemplate what's happened, we'll see that the mind has a path it will have to follow. We know the first step of the path is that gladness and sadness are *not* the path for us to follow. We're sure to understand this—and that's the way it really is. If you're glad, it's not the path because it can give rise to stress. If you're sad, it can give rise to stress. We think in these terms, but we can't yet let these things go.

So *where* will we go so that it's right? We take gladness and sadness, put them on either side, and try to walk right down the middle. When we keep this in mind, we're

right on the path. We comprehend this, but we can't yet do it. As long as we can't yet do it, then if we get stuck on pleasure or pain, we always know we're stuck—and that's when we can be right. When the mind is stuck on pleasure in this way, we don't approve of it. When the mind is stuck on pain, we don't despise it. We now get to watch them. Pleasure is wrong. Pain is wrong. We understand that they're not the path. We know, yet even though we know, we can't let them go. We can't let them go, and yet we know. When we know, we don't approve of pleasure, we don't approve of pain. We don't approve of either of them, and we have no doubts, for we know that they're the same in not being the path. This way isn't the path; that way isn't the path —so we take the middle as our constant preoccupation.

If we can gain release from pleasure and pain, this will appear as the path. Our mind will step into it and know, but it can't yet go all the way. So it withdraws to continue practicing.

When pleasure arises and we get stuck on it, we take the pleasure up to contemplate. When pain arises and we get stuck on it, we take the pain up to contemplate—until our knowledge is equal to the pleasure, equal to the pain: That's when the mind will let go of pleasure, let go of pain, let go of gladness, let go of sadness. It lets go of all these worlds. The mind can become *lokavidū,* expert with regard to worlds. When it lets go, when the knower lets go, it settles right down at that spot. Why can it settle there? Because it already entered there before—that spot that it knew but couldn't go to.

So when the mind is stuck on pleasure and pain, and yet we don't fall for them, we keep trying to clear them away: That's when we reach the level of a *yogāvacara*—a person traveling the path but not yet reaching the end.

These conditions are things we can focus on in the moments of our own mind. We don't have to examine any preoccupations at all. When we're stuck on either side, we make ourselves know that they're wrong for sure, because both sides are stuck in the world. Pleasure is stuck in the world. Pain is stuck in the world. When we're stuck in the world, the world can come into being. Why? This world can come into being and get established because our knowledge isn't quick enough. The world doesn't come into being from anything else. And because our knowledge isn't quick enough, we enter in and label things, fabricate fabrications.

Right here is where the practice is fun. Whatever we're stuck on, we attack it right away without letting up. If we're stuck on pleasure, we attack it right away. The mind doesn't let up. If we're stuck on pain, we catch it right away and contemplate it.

This is where the thread is about to enter the eye of the needle. The mind doesn't let up on these preoccupations—and it doesn't resist the practice. Even when we're wrong, we know we're wrong. The mind isn't heedless. That big mind isn't heedless.

It's kind of like walking along and stepping on a thorn. We don't want to step on

thorns, we're as careful as can be, and yet we still step on it. Are we content to step on it? When we step on it, we're not content when we know the path. We know that this is the world, this is stress, this is the cycle. We know—and yet we still step on it anyhow. The mind goes along with pleasure—happy or sad—and yet we're not content. We try to eradicate these things, eradicate the world out of the mind at all times. The mind at this point keeps building, practicing, developing: This is the effort of the practice. The mind contemplates, talks to itself about what's happening inside it.

These sorts of things: When the mind uproots a world, it keeps moving inward, moving inward. At this point all the knowers, when they know, simply know without reacting. Their knowledge is equal to things, totally clear, and they don't take part in anything at all. They're not slaves to anyone. They don't take part in anything. They know, but they don't take. They know and put things down. They know and let go. There's still pleasure there, there's still pain—whatever there is, it's still there, but the mind doesn't take it up.

When we see this, we know: Oh. This is what the mind is like; this is what preoccupations are like. The mind separates from preoccupations. Preoccupations separate from the mind. The mind is the mind. Preoccupations are preoccupations. When you're aware of both these things, then when they make contact, you know right then. When the mind makes contact with preoccupations, you know right then.

When the practice of a *yogāvacara* senses this at all times—whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down—that's called practicing the practice in the shape of a circle. It's right practice. We don't lose presence of mind. We don't look simply at crude things. We look inwardly at things that are refined. We put external matters aside and watch just the mind and the body, or just the mind and its preoccupations. We watch them arise, watch them disband, watch them arise and disband, watch them disband and arise—disbanding, arising, arising, disbanding, disbanding and then arising, arising and then disbanding—until ultimately we watch just the disbanding: *khaya-vaya,* ending, disintegrating. Ending and disintegrating are their normal nature.

When the mind is like this, it doesn't trace things anywhere. It's up on what it's doing. When it sees, it simply sees, that's all. When it knows, it simply knows, that's all. It does this on its own. This is something that can't be fabricated.

So don't go groping around in your practice. Don't have any doubts. This applies to your following the precepts, as I've already said. Contemplate to see what's wrong and what's not. When you've seen that it's wrong, abandon it. Don't have any doubts. The same with your concentration: Keep making the mind quiet, making it peaceful. If there are thoughts, don't worry about it. If there are no thoughts, don't worry about it. Get acquainted with the workings of the mind. Some people want the mind to be peaceful but they don't understand peace. They don't understand the peace of the mind.

There are two kinds of peace: the peace of concentration and the peace of discernment. The peace of concentration is deluded, very deluded. The peace of concentration comes when the mind grows still from not having any preoccupations—and then it gets stuck on the pleasure. But when it meets up with preoccupations, it crumbles. It's afraid of preoccupations, afraid of pleasure, afraid of pain, afraid of criticism, afraid of praise, afraid of sights, sounds, smells, tastes. This kind of concentration is afraid of everything. Once you gain it, you don't want to come out to the rest of the world. A person with this kind of concentration stays only in caves, feeding on pleasure, and doesn't want to come out. Wherever it's quiet, that's where he goes to hide out. It's really stressful, this kind of concentration. You can't come out and live with other people. You can't stand to look at sights, listen to sounds—you can't stand to experience anything. You have to keep staying in a quiet place; you can't let anyone speak. The place has to be quiet.

This kind of peace is useless. When you reach that level of peace, you have to come out. The Buddha never said to practice in that way. If you're practicing in that way, stop. When you're peaceful, come out to contemplate. Use the peace of the mind to contemplate. Apply it to preoccupations. Use it to contemplate sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas. First come out and then use the peace to contemplate. For instance, you can contemplate hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin—these kinds of things. Contemplate inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Contemplate the entire world.

Once you've used the peace of the mind to contemplate, then when the time comes to be quiet, sit in concentration and let the mind grow peaceful inwardly. Then bring the peace out again to contemplate. Use it to train yourself, to cleanse the mind, to contend with things. When you develop awareness, bring it out to contend with things. Use it to train yourself, to practice—because if your awareness stays only in there, you won't know anything. It simply pacifies the mind. Keep bringing it out to contemplate what's outside and then let it go back in to be quiet, like this over and over again until the mind's big level of peace arises.

As for the peace of discernment: When the mind is peaceful and then comes out, discernment isn't afraid of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or ideas. It's fearless. As soon as these things make contact, it knows them. As soon as they make contact, it discards them, puts them down, lets them go. This is the peace of discernment.

When the mind reaches this stage, it's more refined than the peace of concentration. It has lots of strength. When it has lots of strength, it doesn't run away. When it has strength, it's not afraid. Before, we were afraid of these things, but now that we know them, we're not afraid. We know our strength. When we see a sight, we contemplate the sight. When we hear a sound, we contemplate the sound. That's

because we *can* contemplate. We can hold our ground. We're fearless. Brave. Whatever the manifestations of things like sights, sounds, or smells, when we see them today, we let them go today. Whatever they are, we can let them all go. We see pleasure, we let it go. We see pain, we let it go. Wherever we see these things, we let them go right there. Mmm. We let them go right there, discard them right there, continually. We don't take up anything as a preoccupation. We leave things where they are. We've come to our home.

When we see something, we discard it. Whatever we see, we look. When we've looked, we let go. All these things come to have no value. They can't do anything to us. This is the strength of insight *(vipassanā)*. When we reach this stage, we change the name to "insight." We see things clearly in line with the truth. That's it: We see things clearly in line with the truth. This is a higher level of peace: the peace of insight.

The peace that comes through concentration is hard. It's really hard, for it's really afraid. So when the mind is fully peaceful, what do you do? You bring it out to train, to contemplate. Don't be afraid. Don't stay stuck. When you do concentration, you tend to get stuck on nothing but pleasure. Yet you can't just sit there and do nothing. Come out. When there's a battle, you're taught to fight. You can't just stay in a foxhole and avoid the bullets. When the time comes really to do battle, when the guns are firing—boom! boom!—then if you're in a foxhole, you've got to come out. When the time really comes, you can't fight by crouching in a foxhole. It's the same here. You can't let the mind stay there cowering.

This is what you have to pass through in the beginning stages with virtue and concentration. You have to train yourself to explore in line with the established maps and methods. That's the path you have to follow.

At any rate, what I've told you here is just a sketch. When you practice, don't have any doubts. Don't doubt these instructions. When there's pleasure, look at pleasure. When there's pain, look at pain. As you look at it, try to grind it down, kill it, put it down, let it go. When you know preoccupations, keep letting them go. Whether you want to sit in concentration, do walking meditation, or think about things, it doesn't matter. Try to make your awareness up to the moment, equal to what's going on in the mind. If you're thinking a lot, gather all your thoughts together and cut them off in this way: "The things you're thinking, the things you're describing are nothing but thoughts, that's all. All these things are inconstant, stressful, and not-self. None of them are for sure." Discard them right then and there.

In the Shape of a Circle

A talk given to a visiting monk who was getting discouraged in his practice.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE DHAMMA, we have to understand that our opinions are one thing; the Dhamma is something else.

As for the practice, start out by establishing your powers of endurance and then contemplate. Contemplate your activities, your comings and goings. Contemplate what you're up to. Whatever arises, the Buddha has us know all around. Whatever direction things come in from, he has us know all around. If we know all around, whatever comes at us from this way, we see it. Whatever comes at us from that way, we see it. Right we know. Wrong we know. Happy we know. Glad we know. We know all around.

But our minds, when they contemplate, aren't yet all around. We know just this side but leave that side wide open. It's like putting a fence around a field or a house but it doesn't go all around. If we put it up just on this side, thieves will come in that side, the side that the fence hasn't gone around. Why is that? We haven't closed the gate. Our fence isn't yet good. It's normal that they'll have to come through that opening. So we contemplate again, adding more fence, closing things off, continually.

Putting up a fence means establishing mindfulness and always being alert. If we do this, the Dhamma won't go anywhere else. It'll come right here. Good and bad, the Dhamma we should see and should know, will arise right here.

As for whatever we don't need to know, we let it go for the time being. We don't waste our time with the logs we aren't yet strong enough to lift. Wait until we have a tractor or a ten-wheel truck before trying to move them. Focus for the time being just on the things you can lift. Keep at it, using your powers of endurance, bit by bit.

If you stick with this steadily, your happy moods and sad moods, your desirable moods and undesirable moods, will all come in right there. That's when you get to watch them.

Your moods and preoccupations are one thing; the mind is something else. They're two different kinds of things. Usually when a mood hits, one that we like, we go running after it. If it's one we don't like, we turn our backs on it. When this is the case, we don't see our own mind. We just keep running after our moods. The mood is the mood; the mind is the mind. You have to separate them out to see what the mind

is like, what the mood is like.

As when we're sitting here still: We feel at ease. But if someone comes along and insults us, we go running after the mood. We've left our spot. The mind that gets deluded by the mood goes running after the mood. We become a moody person, a person who panders to his moods.

You have to understand that all your moods are lies. There's nothing true to them at all. They're far from the Buddha's teachings. All they can do is lie to us about everything of every sort. The Buddha taught us to meditate to see their truth—the truth of the world.

The world is our moods, our preoccupations. Our preoccupations are the world. If we aren't acquainted with the Dhamma, aren't acquainted with the mind, aren't acquainted with our preoccupations, we grab onto the mind and its preoccupations and get them all mixed up. "Whew! My mind feels no ease." It's like you have many minds, and they're all in a turmoil. Actually, that's not the case. You don't have many minds. You have many moods and preoccupations. We're not acquainted with our own mind, so we keep running after our preoccupations. If you sit meditating like that, things just keep running along in that way.

The Buddha taught us to look at things right there, right where they arise. When they arise, they don't stay. They disband. They disband and then they arise. When they arise, they disband—but we don't want them to be that way. When the mind is quiet, we want it to keep on being quiet. We don't want it to get stirred up. We want to be at our ease. Our views are in opposition to the truth. The Buddha taught us first to see these things all around, from all sides. Only then will the mind really be quiet and still. As long as we don't know these things, as long as we don't understand our moods, we become a moody person. We lay claim to our moods. This turns into stubbornness and pride.

When we see this happening, the Buddha tells us to turn our attention to contemplating right there: "This kind of thinking is thinking; this kind of knowing is knowing; when things are like this, they're like this." Tell yourself that these things simply follow their own nature. This is what moods are like. This is what the mind is like. When this is the way things are, what can you do to be at your ease? What can you do to be at your ease? Well, just contemplate right there.

We don't want things to be like that: That's the reason for our discomfort. No matter where you go to run away from these things, they're still just like that. So we should understand that these things are just the way they are, that's all. That's the truth. To put it simply, that's the Buddha, but we don't see him there. We think it's Devadatta, not the Buddha at all. The inconstancy of the Dhamma—inconstancy, stress, and not-self: There's nothing wrong with these things. They're just the way they are. We place too many labels and intentions on them. When you can see that

happening, it's really good.

To put in simple terms: Suppose that when you sit in concentration today the mind is still. You think to yourself, "Mmm. This is really nice." Just sitting there, you feel at ease. This keeps up for two or three days. "Mmm. I really like this." Then the next day when you sit down to meditate, it's like sitting on a red ants' nest. You can't stay seated. Nothing works. You're all upset. You ask yourself, "Why isn't it like the other day? Why was it so comfortable then?" You can't stop thinking about the other day. You want it to be like the other day. Right there is where you're deluded.

Preoccupations change. They're not constant or sure; they're not stable. They just keep following their nature. The Buddha taught us to see that that's the way they are. Whatever arises is just old stuff coming back. There's nothing to it, but we fix labels and make rules about things: "This I like. This I don't like." Whatever we like makes us happy—happy because of our delusion: happy because of our delusion, not happy because it's right.

When the mind is quiet, the Buddha tells us not to be intoxicated by it. When it's distracted, he tells us not to be intoxicated by it. Things happen in all kinds of ways. There's addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. That's how we can calculate numbers, but we want there to be just multiplication so that we can have lots of everything. We want to do away with addition, do away with subtraction, do away with division—and our calculations will all be stupid. If we had nothing but multiplication, would we have any space to put everything? If that's how we think, we'll stay in a turmoil. The Buddha said that that sort of thinking has no discernment.

Stillness of mind—tranquility—comes from being far away from preoccupations. If you don't hear much of anything, the mind settles down and is still. To get this kind of stillness, you have to go off into seclusion, to a place that's quiet and still. If you can get away from your preoccupations, not seeing this, not knowing about that, the mind can settle down. But that's like a disease, a disease like cancer. There's a swelling but it doesn't yet hurt. It's not yet tormenting us, it doesn't yet hurt, so we seem to be well —as if there were no defilements in the mind.

That's what the mind is like at times like that. As long as you stay there, it's quiet. But when it comes out to look at sights and hear sounds, that's the end of it. It's not at its ease anymore. How can you keep on staying alone like that so as not to see sights, hear sounds, smell aromas, taste flavors, or touch tactile sensations? Where can you go? There's no place in the world like that at all.

The Buddha wanted us to see sights, hear sounds, smell aromas, taste flavors, or touch tactile sensations: hot, cold, hard, soft. He wanted us to be acquainted with everything. He didn't want us to run away and hide. He wanted us to look and, when we've looked, to understand: "Oh. That's the way these things are." He told us to give rise to discernment.

How do we give rise to discernment? The Buddha said that it's not hard—if we keep at it. When distractions arise: "Oh. It's not for sure. It's inconstant." When the mind is still, don't say, "Oh. It's really nice and still." That, too, isn't for sure. If you don't believe me, give it a try.

Suppose that you like a certain kind of food and you say, "Boy, do I really like this food!" Try eating it every day. How many months could you keep it up? It won't be too long before you say, "Enough. I'm sick and tired of this." Understand? "I'm really sick and tired of this." You're sick and tired of what you liked.

We depend on change in order to live, so just acquaint yourself with the fact that it's all inconstant. Pleasure isn't for sure; pain isn't for sure; happiness isn't for sure; stillness isn't for sure, distraction isn't for sure. Whatever, it all isn't for sure. Whatever arises, you should tell it: "Don't try to fool me. You're not for sure." That way everything loses its value. If you can think in that way, it's really good. The things you don't like are all not for sure. Everything that comes along isn't for sure. It's as if they were trying to sell you things, but everything has the same price: It's not for sure—not for sure in any way at all. In other words, it's inconstant. It keeps moving back and forth.

To put it simply, that's the Buddha. Inconstancy means that nothing's for sure. That's the truth. Why don't we see the truth? Because we haven't looked to see it clearly. "Whoever sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha." If you see the inconstancy of each and every thing, you give rise to *nibbidā:* disenchantment. "That's all this is: no big deal. That's all that is: no big deal." The concentration in the mind is—no big deal.

When you can do that, it's no longer hard to contemplate. Whatever the preoccupation, you can say in your mind, "No big deal," and it stops right there. Everything becomes empty and in vain: everything that's unsteady, inconstant. It moves around and changes. It's inconstant, stressful, and not-self. It's not for sure.

It's like a piece of iron that's been heated until it's red and glowing: Does it have any spot where it's cool? Try touching it. If you touch it on top, it's hot. If you touch it underneath, it's hot. If you touch it on the sides, it's hot. Why is it hot? Because the whole thing is a piece of red-hot iron. Where could it have a cool spot? That's the way it is. When that's the way it is, we don't have to go touching it. We know it's hot. If you think that "This is good; I really like it," don't give it your seal of guarantee. It's a red-hot piece of iron. Wherever you touch it, wherever you hold onto it, it'll immediately burn you in every way.

So keep on contemplating. Whether you're standing or walking or whatever—even when you're on the toilet or on your almsround: When you eat, don't make it a big deal. When the food comes out the other end, don't make it a big deal. Whatever it is, it's inconstant. It's not for sure. It's not truthful in any way. It's like touching a red-hot

piece of iron. You don't know where you can touch it because it's hot all over. So you just stop touching it. "This is inconstant. That's inconstant." Nothing at all is for sure.

Even our thoughts are inconstant. Why are they inconstant? They're not-self. They're not ours. They have to be the way they are. They're unstable and inconstant. Boil everything down to that. Whatever you like isn't for sure. No matter how much you like it, it isn't for sure. Whatever the preoccupation, no matter how much you like it, you have to tell yourself, "This isn't for sure. This is unstable and inconstant." And keep on watching....

Like this glass: It's really pretty. You want to put it away so that it doesn't break. But it's not for sure. One day you put it right next to yourself and then, when you reach for something, you hit it by mistake. It falls to the floor and breaks. It's not for sure. If it doesn't break today, it'll break tomorrow. If it doesn't break tomorrow, it'll break the next day—for it's breakable. We're taught not to place our trust in things like this, because they're inconstant.

Things that are inconstant: The Buddha taught that they're the truth. Think about it. If you see that there's no truth to things, that's the truth. That's constant. For sure. When there's birth, there has to be aging, illness, and death. That's something constant and for sure.

What's constant comes from things that aren't constant. We say that things are inconstant and not for sure—and that turns everything around: That's what's constant and for sure. It doesn't change. How is it constant? It's constant in that that's the way things keep on being. Even if you try to get in the way, you don't have an effect. Things just keep on being that way. They arise and then they disband, disband and then arise. That's the way it is with inconstancy. That's how it becomes the truth. The Buddha and his noble disciples awakened because of inconstant things.

When you see inconstancy, the result is nibbidā: disenchantment. Disenchantment isn't disgust, you know. If you feel disgust, that's wrong, the wrong kind of disenchantment. Disenchantment isn't like our normal disgust. For example, if you live with your wife and children to the point where you get sick and tired of them, that's not disenchantment. It's actually a big defilement; it squeezes your heart. If you run away from things like that, it's being sick and tired because of defilement. That's not nibbidā. It's actually a heavy defilement, but we think it's disenchantment.

Suppose that you're kind to people. Whatever you have, you want to give to them. You sympathize with them, you see that they're pretty and lovely and good to you. Your defilements are now coming around from the other side. Watch out! That's not kindness through the Dhamma; it's selfish kindness. You want something out of them, which is why you're kind to them.

It's the same with disenchantment. "I'm sick and tired of this. I'm not going to stay any longer. I'm fed up." That's not right at all. It's a big defilement. It's

disenchantment only in name.

The Buddha's disenchantment is something else: leaving things alone, putting them down. You don't kill them, you don't beat them, you don't punish them, you're not nice to them. You just put them down. Everything. The same with everything. That's how it has to be. Only then can you say that your mind has let go, that it's empty: empty of clinging, empty of attachment.

Emptiness doesn't mean nobody exists. Or like this glass: It's not the case that it has to not exist for us to say that it's empty. This thermos exists; people exist; everything exists, but those who know feel in their hearts that these things are truths, they're not for sure, they simply follow their conditions: They're dhammas that arise and disband, that's all.

Take this thermos: If we like it, it doesn't react or say anything. The liking is all on our side. Even if we hate it and throw it into the woods, it still doesn't react. It doesn't respond to us. Why? Because it's just the way it is. We like it or dislike it because of our own attachment. We see that it's good or no good. The view that it's good squeezes our heart. The view that it's no good squeezes our heart. Both are defilements.

So you don't have to run away from things like this. Just understand this principle and keep contemplating. That's all there is to it. The mind will see that these things are no big deal. They're just the way they are. If we hate them, they don't respond. If we like them, they don't respond. We're simply crazy of our own accord. Nothing disturbs us, but we get all worked up. Try to see everything in this way.

It's the same with the body; it's the same with the mind; it's the same with the moods and preoccupations that make contact: See them as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. They're just the way they are. We suffer because we don't want them to be that way. We want to get things that we simply can't get.

Is there something you want?

"*I guess it's like when I want concentration. I want the mind to be quiet.*"

Okay, it's true that you want that. But what's the cause that keeps your mind from being quiet? The Buddha says that all things arise from causes, but we want just the results. We eat watermelons but we've never planted any watermelons. We don't know where they come from. We see when they're sliced open and they're nice and red: "Mmm. Looks sweet." We try eating them, and they taste good and sweet, but that's all we know. Why watermelons are the way they are, we have no idea.

That's because we aren't all-around. All-around in what way? It's like watering vegetables. Wherever we forget to water doesn't grow. Wherever we forget to give fertilizer doesn't grow. Contemplate this principle and you'll give rise to discernment.

When you've finished with things outside, you look at your own mind. Look at

the affairs of your body and mind. Now that we're born, why do we suffer? We suffer from the same old things, but we haven't thought them through. We don't know them thoroughly. We suffer but we don't really *see* suffering. When we live at home, we suffer from our wife and children, but no matter how much we suffer, we don't really see suffering—so we keep on suffering.

It's the same when the mind doesn't get concentrated. We don't know why it won't get concentrated. We don't really see what's actually arising. The Buddha told us to look for the causes of what's arising. All things arise from causes.

It's like putting water in a bottle and giving it to someone to drink. Once he's finished drinking it, he'll have to come back and ask for more—for the water isn't water in a spring. It's water in a bottle. But if you show the spring to the person and tell him to get water there, he can sit there and keep on drinking water and won't ask you for any more, for the water never runs out.

It's the same when we see inconstancy, stress, and not-self. It goes deep, for we really know, we know all the way in. Ordinary knowledge doesn't know all the way in. If we know all the way in, it never grows stale. Whatever arises, it's already right. When it disbands, it's already right. As a result, it's right without stop.

The view that says, "That's the way it is. It's right the way it is": That's when you've got it. That's when you're skilled and at ease. You don't have to suffer. The problems that we get involved with and cling to will gradually unravel. As the Buddha said, see simply that things arise and then disband, disband and then arise, arise and then disband. Keep watching this Dhamma constantly, doing it constantly, developing it constantly, cultivating it constantly, and you'll arrive at a sense of disenchantment. Disenchanted with what? Disenchanted with everything of every sort.

The things that come by way of the ears, we already understand them; by way of the eyes, we already understand them; by way of the nose, we already understand them; by way of the tongue, we already understand them. The things that arise at the mind, we already understand them. They're all the same sort of thing—all of them, the same sort of thing: *eko dhammo,* one Dhamma. This Dhamma is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. You shouldn't cling to anything at all. That way, disenchantment will arise.

When the eye sees a form, you already understand it. When the ear hears a sound, you already understand it. You understand all about it. These things will sometimes make us happy, sometimes sad, sometimes make us feel love, sometimes make us feel hatred. We already know all about these sorts of things. If we cling to them, they turn into issues. If we let them go—let forms go the way of forms, sounds the way of sounds—if we send them back and let them go their own way: When we can stay at this level, the Buddha said that we'll see all about inconstancy. Whatever the preoccupations that arise, they're all empty and in vain. They're all deceptions.

When we see through the things that used to deceive us—when we're intent on

staying at ease, mindful, alert, and discerning—it's not that we see anything else. We simply see that all the preoccupations that arise are simply the way they are. Even if, while we're sitting perfectly still, the mind thinks about this or that, it doesn't matter. It's just an affair of thinking. You don't have to believe what it's thinking about. If the mind is peaceful and you feel, "Ah, it's nice and peaceful," the peace doesn't matter, either. Peace is inconstant, too. There's nothing but things that are inconstant. You can sit and watch the Dhamma right there. Discernment arises: What reason is there to suffer?

We suffer over things that never amount to much. We want to get this, we want it to be like that, we want to be something. If you want to be an arahant, you immediately suffer, right here and now. Arahants have stopped wanting to be like this or like that, but we want to get this and get that, to be this and be that—so we're sure to suffer. If you see that this spot is good or that spot is excellent, it all comes out of you. If you see yourself, that's the end of saying things like that.

I'll give you a simple comparison. This food is good. This tray is worth this many hundreds; that tray, this many tens. They're all nothing but good things. When they're on plates: "This is mine. This is yours." But when they've gone into the stomach and come out the other end, nobody argues over whose is whose—or would you still want to argue? That's what it's like. When you're willing to admit the way things are, that's just what it's like. If we don't really understand, we argue over what's mine and what's yours. But when they all come together as the same sort of thing, nobody lays any claims. They're simply the condition they are. No matter how wonderful the food might be, when it comes out the other end, if you wanted to give it as a gift to your brothers and sisters, no one would want it—or would you still want it? Nobody would fight over it at all.

For this reason, if we gather things together as *eko dhammo*—one single dhamma—and see that their characteristics are all the same, it gives rise to disenchantment. This disenchantment isn't disgust. The mind simply loosens its grip, it's had enough, it's empty, it's sobered up. There's no love, no hatred, no fixating on anything. If you have things, okay. If you don't, it's still okay. You're at ease. At peace.

Nibbānaṁ paramaṁ sukhaṁ
Nibbānaṁ paramaṁ suññaṁ.

Nibbāna is the ultimate happiness. Nibbāna is the ultimate peace, emptiness. Listen carefully. Worldly happiness isn't the ultimate happiness. Worldly emptiness isn't the ultimate emptiness. The ultimate emptiness is empty of clinging. The ultimate happiness is peace. There's peace and then there's emptiness, the ultimate

emptiness. At the moment, though, the mind is at peace but it's not ultimate. It's happy, but it's not ultimate.

This is why the Buddha described nibbāna as the ultimate emptiness, its happiness as the ultimate happiness. It changes the nature of happiness to be peace. It's happy but not fixated on any object. Pains still exist, but you see the pains and pleasures that arise as equal to each other. They have the same price. The objects we like and don't like are equal to each other.

But as for us right now, these things aren't equal. The objects we like are really pleasing. The objects we don't like, we want to smash. That means they're not equal. But their reality is that they're equal. So think in a way that makes them equal. They're not stable. They're not constant—like the food I mentioned just now. "This is good. That's wonderful." But when they're all brought together, they're equal. Nobody says, "Give me a little more. I didn't get enough." It's all been brought together to the way it is.

If we don't drop the principles of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, we're on the path. We see with every moment. We see the eye, we see the mind, we see the body.

Like when you sit in meditation. After a moment the mind goes off in a flash, so you pull it back. No matter what you do, it won't stay. Try holding your breath. Will it go away then? Yyb! It goes, but not far. It's not going to go now. It circles around right here—because your mind feels like it's about to die.

The same with sounds. I once stuffed my ears with beeswax. Noises bothered me, so I stuffed my ears. Things were totally quiet, with just the sound from within my ears themselves. Why did I do it? I contemplated what I was doing; I didn't torment myself just out of stupidity. I thought about the matter. "Oh. If people could become noble ones from not hearing anything, then every deaf person would be a noble one. Every blind person would be a noble one. They'd all be arahants." So I listened to my thoughts, and—Oh!—discernment arose.

"Is there any use in stuffing your ears? In closing your eyes? It's self-torment." But I did learn from it. I learned and then stopped doing it. I stopped trying to close things off.

Don't go wrestling and attacking, don't go cutting down the trunks of trees that have already died. It gets you nowhere. You end up tired and stand there looking like a fool.

They were such a waste, such a real waste, my early years as a meditator. When I think about them, I see that I was really deluded. The Buddha taught us to meditate to gain release from suffering, but I simply scooped up more suffering for myself. I couldn't sit in peace, couldn't lie down in peace.

The reason we live in physical seclusion *(kāya-viveka)* is to get the mind in mental

seclusion *(citta-viveka)* from the objects that stir up its moods. These things are synonyms that follow one after the other. *Upadhi-viveka* refers to seclusion from our defilements: When we know what's what, we can pull out of them; we pull out from whatever the state the mind is in. This is the only purpose of physical seclusion. If you don't have any discernment, you can create difficulties for yourself when you go off into physical seclusion.

When you go live in the wilderness, don't get stuck on the wilderness. If you get stuck on the wilderness, you become a monkey. When you see the trees, you miss the trees. You start jumping around just like the monkey you were before. The Buddha never taught us to *be* this or *be* that. When you live in a peaceful place, the mind becomes peaceful. "Mmm. Peace at last. The mind is at peace." But when you leave the wilderness, is the mind at peace? Not any more. So what do you do then?

The Buddha didn't have us *stay* in the wilderness. He had us use the wilderness as a place to *train*. You go to the wilderness to find some peace so that your meditation will develop, so that you'll develop discernment. That's so that when you go into the city and deal with people, with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, you'll have strength, you'll have your strategies. You'll have your firm foundation for contemplating things, to see how they're not for sure. Going to the wilderness in this way is something that can really help give you strength. If you think that you can live anywhere, that you can live with lots of people, it's like a knife with a double-edged blade. If you don't have inner strength, you can create difficulties for yourself.

It's like monks who study the Abhidhamma. They say that when you study the Abhidhamma you don't have to cling to anything, don't have to fixate on anything. It's nice and easy. You don't have to observe the precepts. You just focus right on the mind. That's what monks who study the Abhidhamma say.

"As for women, what's the matter with getting near them? Women are just like our mothers. We ourselves were born right out of that spot." That's bragging too much. They ordained just yesterday and yet they refuse to be careful around women. That's not the real Abhidhamma. That's not what the Abhidhamma says.

But they say that the Abhidhamma is on a level higher than the human level. "When you're that high, it doesn't matter whether you're near someone or not. There's no near, no far. There's nothing to be afraid of. Women are people just like us. Just pretend that they're men. That way you can get near them, touch them, feel them. Just pretend that they're men."

But is that the sort of thing you can pretend? It's a double-edged blade. If we were talking genuine Abhidhamma, there wouldn't be a problem. But this Abhidhamma is fake.

The Buddha taught us to live in the wilderness. The proper way, when a monk goes into the wilderness, is to stay in a quiet place; to wander in the quiet wilderness;

not to be entangled with friends and companions and other sorts of things. That's the right way to do it. But most of us don't follow the right way. We live in a quiet place and get attached to the quiet. As soon as we see a form, it gives rise to defilement. In our ears there's nothing but defilement. That's going too far. It lacks discernment.

If you bring things together, they come together at the path—the right path, or right view. That's where things come together. If you have right view, you can live with a large group of people and there's no problem. You can live with a small group of people and there's no problem. You can live in the forest or in a cave and there's no problem. But this is something you can't just attain without any effort. You have to get so that's the way the mind really is.

Make the mind know the Dhamma. When it knows the Dhamma, make it see the Dhamma. Practice the Dhamma so that the mind *is* Dhamma. You don't want to be able just to speak about the Dhamma. It's something very different. The Buddha taught all the way to the truth, but we only go halfway, in half measures. That's why progress is difficult.

If we come to live in the wilderness, we get to train ourselves—like training ourselves to grow rice. Once we plant it, it grows gradually. If nothing eats it, it's okay. But what happens? As soon as the rice grains begin to appear, a baby water buffalo comes to eat them. We chase it away and look after the plant, but as soon as more grains appear the baby water buffalo comes to eat them again, keeps on eating as soon as the grains begin to fill out. If that's the case, how are we going to get any rice?

The strategies you'll need will grow from within the mind. Whoever has discernment gains intuitive knowledge. Whoever has intuitive knowledge gains discernment. That's the way it is. Are intuitive knowledge and discernment different from each other? If you say they aren't, why are there two different words? One is called intuitive knowledge; one is called discernment. Can you have only intuitive knowledge? No. You need to have discernment, too. Can you have only discernment? No. You need to have intuitive knowledge, too. Whoever has discernment gains intuitive knowledge. Whoever has intuitive knowledge gains discernment. These things arise from your own experience. You can't go looking for them in this book or that. They arise in your own mind. Don't be timid.

I once read in a Jātaka tale about our Buddha when he was still a bodhisatta. He was like you: He had ordained and encountered a lot of difficulties, but when he thought of disrobing he was ashamed of what other people would think—that he had ordained all these years and yet still wanted to disrobe. Still, things didn't go the way he wanted, so he thought he'd leave. He came across a squirrel whose baby had been blown into the ocean by the wind. He saw the squirrel running down to the water and then back up again. He didn't know what it was doing. It ran down to the water and stuck its tail in the water, and then ran up to the beach and shook out its tail. Then it

ran down and stuck its tail in the water again. So he asked it, "What are you doing?"

"Oh, my baby has fallen into the water. I miss it and I want to fetch it out."

"How are you going to do that?"

"I'm going to use my tail to bail water out of the ocean until it's dry so that I can fetch my baby out."

"Oho. When will the ocean ever go dry?"

"That's not the issue. This is the way it is with the practice. You keep bailing out the water, bailing out the water, and don't care whether it ever goes dry. When you're going to be a Buddha, you can't abandon your efforts."

When the bodhisatta heard this, it flashed in his heart. He got up and pushed through with his efforts. He didn't retreat. That's how he became the Buddha.

It's the same with us. Wherever things aren't going well, that's where they *will* go well. You make them happen where they aren't yet happening. Wherever you're deluded, that's where knowledge will arise. If you don't believe me, spit right here. That'll make it dirty. But when you wipe it away, it'll be clean right here—right where it's dirty. It won't become clean out there in the grounds of the monastery. Keep coming back to the same place over and over again.

Ajahn Thongrat once said to me, "Chah, drill the hole right in line with the dowel."

That's all he said. I had just started practicing and didn't understand what he was saying.

"If it comes low, jump over its head." That's what he said.

"If it comes high, slip under it."

I didn't know what he was saying. So I went off to meditate and kept contemplating it.

Actually, he was telling me how to solve my problems. "Drill the hole right in line with the dowel" means, "Wherever the problem arises, contemplate right there; wherever you're deluded, contemplate right there. If you're attached to a sight, contemplate the sight. Right around right there." That's what it means, "Drill the hole right in line with the dowel." Don't go drilling far away. Drill right there at the dowel.

It's the same as when we step on a thorn. You take a needle and probe right there where the thorn is. Don't go probing anywhere else. Probe right where the thorn is stuck in your foot. Even if it hurts, you have to endure it. Keep probing all around it and then pry it out. That's how you get the thorn out. If the thorn is stuck in your foot, but you go probing around your rear, when will you ever be done with it?

So I contemplated this. "Oh. Teachers meditate in line with the language of their own minds. They don't go groping around in the formulations in the books the way we do. Their own formulations arise from reality."

So what comes low and what comes high?

"If it comes low, jump over its head. If it comes high, slip under it." I kept contemplating this. Here he was talking about my moods and preoccupations. Some of them come low; some of them come high. You have to watch them to see how you can avoid them. If they come low, jump over their heads. If they come high, slip under them. Do what you can so that they don't hit you.

This is the practice. You contemplate right where you're deluded so that you'll know right there. Any other issue is just duck shit and chicken shit. You don't have to go groping after it. That's how you have to take things on in meditation.

But actually, it's not a matter of taking. You take them on by abandoning them. This is how the suppositions of language have things all backwards. You let things go. You practice letting go. You don't have to become a stream-winner or a once-returner. You don't have to make those suppositions. You don't have to be those things. If you *are* anything, it's a turmoil. If you *are* this or *are* that, *you* are a problem. So you don't have to be anything. There's nothing but letting go—letting go and then knowing in line with what things do. When you know in line with what things do in every way, there's no more doubt. And you aren't anything.

Think about it in a simple way. If someone yells at you but you don't rear up in response, that's the end of the matter. It doesn't reach you. But if you grab hold of it and won't let go, you're in bad shape. Why put their words into yourself? If they yell at you, just leave it at that. But if they yell at you over there in the ordination hall and you bring it into your ears while you're sitting here, it's as if you like to suffer. This is called not understanding suffering. You stir things up with your thinking and give rise to all kinds of issues.

The practice is actually something short, and not at all long. If you say it's long, it's longer than long. If you say it's short, it's shorter than short. When it comes to the practice, you can't use your ordinary ways of thinking.

You need to have patience and endurance. You need to make an effort. Whatever happens, you don't have to pick it up and carry it around. When things are a certain way, that's all they are. When we see the Dhamma in this way, we don't hold onto anything. Pleasure we know. Pain we know.

The Buddha and his arahant disciples, when they gain awakening: It's not the case that coconut-milk sweets aren't sweet for them. They're sweet in the same way they're sweet for us. When the noble ones eat a sour tamarind, they squeeze their eyes shut just like us. Do you understand? Things are just the same way they were before, simply that noble ones don't hold onto them or get fixated on them. If you argue with them that the tamarind is sour, they'll say, "Sour is fine. Sweet is fine. Neither sour nor sweet is fine." That's what they'll say.

The same principle applies here. When people come and say wrong things, we can

hear them and it doesn't matter. We just leave it at that. If you can do this, then even though you're as old as you are now, you can be young. You can get a lot younger.

You don't have to carry these things over your shoulder. I've seen some old monks wandering *dhutaṅga*-style, but I don't know what they're going for. They carry huge umbrella tents. Old monks don't like small umbrella tents the way young monks do, you know. They like to carry around big umbrella tents. In the morning they fold up their umbrella tents. As soon as the sun comes up, they fold up their tents. They can't leave them up in the open fields to protect themselves from the wind, for the tents won't stand up to the wind. So they fold up their tents and carry them off under the hot sun. Then in the evening they put their umbrella tents up again. I don't know why —there's no more sun. They wake up the next day and fold up their tents and carry them off under the hot sun again.

I did this sort of thing until I got sick and tired of it. I went wandering *dhutaṅga*-style but ended up suffering in the jungle. Then I realized that it wasn't for the purpose of suffering in the jungle, so I kept finding my way out of the jungle. That's why I became a find-your-way-out-of-the-jungle monk. [Here Ajahn Chah is playing with the Thai words for *dhutaṅga (thudong),* suffering in the jungle *(thukdong),* and finding your way through the jungle *(thaludong).]*

Actually, the reason why the Buddha taught us to go into the wilderness is for us to gain discernment. You encounter suffering, you encounter reality, so that you can see and understand it, and eventually you get tired of the actions that cause it. It's not that going into the wilderness isn't good. It *is* good. It gives rise to discernment.

Speaking of *dhutaṅga,* it's not a matter of slinging your bowl and umbrella tent over your shoulder, exposing yourself to the sun and wind until you're about to die, the way farmers go to sell water buffaloes in the Central Plains. It's a matter of the practice. You learn to be content with little. You learn a sense of moderation in eating, a sense of moderation in sleep. You get to grow thin, to make things shrink, make them shorter, gather them in well. It's like casting a net for fish. You gather one end firmly under your belt and then you gradually gather the net in, gather it in, gradually, gradually. You tie off one end and then, when you've got your fish, you quickly tie off the other. Tie up the fish behind the gills and you've got it.

You don't have to look elsewhere. You don't have to read a lot of books. Watch your own mind. The basic principles lie right here. This way you can meditate without getting deluded.

If people speak to you in a way that grates against your ears, that makes you mad, tell yourself, "It's not for sure. It's inconstant." If you eat something delicious and think, "Mmm. It's really good," remind yourself that it's not for sure. Whatever comes your way, tell yourself, "It's not for sure." Why? Because that's where the Dhamma lies. Gather things in, in the direction of the Buddha, the direction of inconstancy.

Inconstancy—that things aren't for sure: That's the Buddha on the level of the mind.

If you really see inconstancy, you see the Dhamma. Why wouldn't you see it?—for the truth lies right there. If you see the Dhamma, you see the Buddha. These things go in both directions. If you see the Buddha, you see the Dhamma. When you see in this way, you can live anywhere at all. When you sit, the Buddha is giving you a sermon. When you lie down, he's giving you a sermon. Whatever you do, he's giving you a sermon. The Dhamma arises and the Dhamma looks after those who practice it, so that they don't fall into the evil path.

When the Dhamma is in charge, the mind is always aware of things. It knows that "This is wrong. This is right. This is good. This is evil. This is suffering. This is the cause of suffering. This is the disbanding of suffering. This is the practice that reaches the disbanding of suffering."

That's the path. Everything gathers into the path. As you strengthen the path, your defilements decrease. The defilements are like an army, you know. If they increase, the path decreases. If the path gets strengthened, the defilements gradually go away, go away. Their strength decreases. You stay only with what's right. Whatever's wrong, you give it up, give it all up, and the wrong path peters out.

That's when the right path gets established, and you can live wherever you want. Gaining is the same as losing; losing, the same as gaining. There's no problem any more. The mind is at peace—at peace through discernment. When you see in this way, you're not fixated on this or that. If someone brings you something to trade this for that, you're not interested. You don't believe them. That's when things are for sure. Remember this point well.

It's like knowing fruits: This is an olive, this is a guava, this is a mango. Once you know them, people can pour them all into a tray and someone can pick them up one by one and ask you what they are.

"What's this?"

"A guava."

"What's this?"

"An olive."

"What's this?"

"A mango."

The person can keep doing this for a hundred trays of fruit, a thousand trays of fruit, and you won't be deceived by any of them. You see a mango as a mango, a guava as a guava—whatever it is, you see it for what it is. That's when things are for sure. Nobody can deceive you. You can't wander off the path, for everything in the mind is the right path. When you're sitting, you have right view. When you're walking, you have right view. When you're lying down, you have right view. The mind is all the

same, always like it has been: at ease, at peace. These sorts of things are hard to describe.

Pleasure isn't the highest level of Dhamma. It's peace because it's no longer disturbed by pleasure or pain. It's empty. It stays unfixated, unattached. Wherever you go, it keeps staying that way.

For instance, if somebody's mood comes to hit you—"You know, venerable father, you're just like a dog"—you stay at your ease. Once you're sure of yourself, that's the way it is. But if they call you a dog and you really *become* a dog, biting them, that shows you're not sure of yourself. You're not for sure. Once you're for sure, you're not anything. Why would you want to *be* anything? Venerable Father Sii, Venerable Father Saa, Venerable Father Maa: It's not the case that you've had these names all along. They were given to you not all that long ago.

Like that eight-precept man over there: Where did he come from? Was he born with a label affixed to him? His parents gave him a name just a little while ago. If they call you a person, what's there to get so happy about? If they call you a dog, what's there to get so upset about? Isn't that a sign you're already in sad shape?

So we keep on contemplating, keep on looking, until we keep on getting it right, getting it right. You get it right while you're sitting down, right while you're lying down. Whatever you do, it's right. It keeps on staying right. But if you start arguing about the Dhamma, you can't escape suffering.

It's like the piece of iron that's red-hot all over. It doesn't have any cool spot. If you touch it on top, it's hot. If you touch it underneath, it's hot. If you touch it on the sides, it's hot. Why is it hot? Because the whole thing is a piece of red-hot iron. *Where* would it be cool?

It's the same here. Once you latch onto anything—whatever it is—you're immediately wrong. Everything is wrong, everything is suffering. If you latch onto what's evil, you suffer. If you latch onto what's good, you suffer.

For the most part, the good things are what lead people to be very deluded. They're deluded by what's good. When good isn't just right, it's not good, you know. Have you noticed the rainfall this year? It was so good that it went past just right, flooding people's houses. This is what happens when good goes past just right.

The Buddha taught us to be intelligent.

"If it comes high, slip under it."

"If it comes low, jump over its head."

"Drill the hole right in line with the dowel."

Take these three principles with you. Focus right there, and the problem won't get away from you. This is the genuine truth. This is what it's like. Don't focus on whether you're old or young, or how many days and nights have passed, or which day

of the week it is. Just keep working on your mind in this way.

In practicing, don't think that you have to sit in order for it to be meditation, that you have to walk back and forth in order for it to be meditation. Don't think like that. Meditation is simply a matter of practice. Whether you're giving a sermon, sitting here listening, or going away from here, keep up the practice in your heart. Be alert to what's proper and what's not.

Don't decide that it's okay to observe the *dhutaṅga* practices during the Rains retreat and then drop them when the retreat is over. It's not okay. Things don't balance out in that way. It's like clearing a field. We keep cutting away, cutting away, and then stop to rest when we're tired. We put away our hoe and then come back a month or two later. The weeds are now all taller than the stumps. If we try to clear away the area we cleared away before, it's too much for us.

Ajaan Mun once said that we have to make our practice the shape of a circle. A circle never comes to an end. Keep it going continually. Keep the practice going continually without stop. I listened to him and I thought, "When I've finished listening to this talk, what should I do?"

The answer is to make your alertness *akāliko:* timeless. Make sure that the mind knows and sees what's proper and what's not, at all times.

It's like the water in this kettle. If you tilt it so that there's a long time between the drops—*glug* ... *glug*—those are called water drops. If you tilt it a little further, the drops become more frequent: *glug-glug-glug*. If you tilt it a little bit further, the water flows in a stream. What does the stream of water stream come from? It comes from the drops of water. If they're not continuous, they're called drops of water.

The water here is like our awareness. If you accelerate your efforts, if your awareness is continuous, your mindfulness will become full. Both by day and by night, it'll keep staying full like that. It becomes a stream of water. As we're taught, the noble ones have continuous mindfulness. The water is a stream of water. Make your awareness continuous. Whenever there's anything wrong or lacking in any way, you'll know immediately. Your awareness will be a circle, all around. That's the shape of the practice.

It's not that you have to drive yourself really hard. Some people get really earnest when they sit in concentration: "Let my blood drain away, let my skin split open, if I don't gain awakening I'm willing to die." They've read that in the biography of the Buddha, but when it comes to them, the body starts pulsating in pain all the way up to the base of the skull. Their determination gradually deflates, until they finally open their eyes to look at the incense stick burning in front of them.

"Gosh, I thought it'd be almost burned out, but there's still a lot left!"

So they take a deep breath and make the determination that as long as the incense

stick hasn't burned all the way out, they won't open their eyes no matter what. But after a while the pain gets really heavy and dull at the base of the skull, so they open their eyes.

"Gosh, I thought it'd be all burned out, but there's still a lot left!"

Eventually, they give up even before the incense has burned out. Later they sit and think, "I'm really a sad case." They don't know who to get mad at, so they get mad at themselves. "I'm not true to my word." They curse themselves.

"There's no hope for me. I'm making a lot of bad kamma. I'm a denizen of hell." All kinds of things.

"Why should I stay on as a monk if I can't even do this? All my bad kamma is going to eat up my head." They've given themselves a reason to jump ship.

"Wouldn't it be better to live as a layperson and observe the five precepts?" They think to themselves and don't tell anyone else. The more they think, the more convinced they are.

Why should we set goals for ourselves like that? The Buddha taught that when we meditate, we should have a sense of ourselves. Like merchants when they put merchandise into their carts: They have a sense of what they're doing—how many oxen they have, how big and strong the oxen are, how big their carts are. They know that sort of thing: how many sacks of rice they can put in each cart. They know how much to put in, in line with the strength of their oxen and the strength of their carts.

When you practice, it has to be in line with your own strength. Here you have a single cart and your ox is the size of your fist, and yet you want the cart to carry as much as a ten-wheeled truck. You see ten-wheeled trucks passing you on the road and you want to be like them. But you're not a ten-wheeled truck. You're just a cart. It's sure to break down. You're what's called a fruit that's ripe even before it's half-ripe, food that's burned even before it's cooked.

So in the end those earnest meditators end up disrobing. After they've disrobed, they start thinking again. "You know, back when I was ordained things were going a lot better than they are now. Maybe I should ordain again. That path was a lot brighter. It wasn't as dark as this." After they think about it for a while, they ordain again. Make a fresh start. At first they look like they're going to do well, like a new boxer who doesn't yet need water. Their strength is good, they're diligent, they make good progress. But then they gradually grow weaker, weaker.

"It looks like I'm going to fail again. This is my second time around and still it looks like I won't make it. If I stay in the robes, I'm going to break down even more. I'd better disrobe. I'm not going to get anywhere. Some of the Buddha's disciples ordained and disrobed up to seven times." They're now taking those who ordained and disrobed seven times as their model. Don't take their bad example as your model.

"They had to wait until their seventh time before they gained awakening. Maybe if I give it my all seven times I'll gain awakening like them." They keep on talking nonsense.

There's nothing in the Dhamma taught by the Buddha that lies beyond human capabilities. Don't go focusing on things you can't see: heaven or nibbāna up there in the sky. All the Dhammas we need to know and see, the Buddha explained in full. As for things you can't see, don't pay them any mind. Don't pay them any attention. Look instead at the present. How are you leading your life? If suffering arises, why is there suffering? What's going on? How can you settle the problem right there? What are you stuck on? It's attachment and fixation. You grasp at the idea that you're better than other people, or equal to other people, or worse than other people. All kinds of things. When you live with other people, you get disgusted with them. "This person is acting badly. That person is acting badly." You go off to live by yourself and don't know who to get disgusted with, so you end up disgusted with yourself.

Just like you said.

The Knower

An excerpt from a recorded conversation between Ven. Ajahn Chah and some of his Western monk disciples.

AJAHN CHAH: Do you know how some people think? "Do tranquility to the end point of tranquility. Observe the precepts to the end point of the precepts. Do concentration to the end point of concentration." But where the end point of these things is, they have no idea. Actually, you don't have to keep pounding away at anything a lot. If you have discernment, then once you strip away the suppositions that people suppose into being, once you strip them away then that's the end of the matter. It's release. Empty of suppositions. Things that are supposed to be this or that, we strip them away so as to see release. That's when you gain release from all of those things. So get acquainted with your own mind. You don't have to follow a lot of things. Just this is enough.

This problem is really complicated. Some people create difficulties for themselves. They think too far, so they miss the main point. They think that if you do things a lot, it'll be good. Actually, everything's good, but they have no idea of what's too much and what's too little. It's like people—rich people and poor people. Rich people are good, but how are they good? Poor people are good, but how are they poor? When you come right down to it, they're equal. Rich people and poor people are equal. That's the way it has to be when you come right down to it. It's the same with this.

Question: Just now you spoke about getting the mind quiet enough and then contemplating fabrications. I've heard you talk many times about contemplating fabrications, such as contemplating the 32 parts of the body. If you use perceptions and thought-fabrications to do this, will it give rise to insight?

Ajahn Chah: That's right. You have to use those things at first, start with those things first. But when you get down to the way things are, then it's not a matter of those things at all. It's not a matter of thinking—thinking good, thinking bad—at all. If you were to use those things all the time, would you come to the end of them? And how *will* you come to the end of them? When I think out loud for people to listen, when I speak for children to listen, I say that you have to do this and do that. But in actuality, when you come to the end of the matter, there's nothing left. Don't follow your thought-fabrications. When you *see* the activity of fabrications, that's discernment. But if you keep on running to get inside them, it's all just fabrication.

That kind of knowing isn't really you, so you have to discard that, too. Consciousness is just consciousness, that's all. It's not a being, not a person, not a self, not "us" or "them." So you discard it, too. That's the end of the matter. And what else would you want? Where would you go from there? You'd just be putting yourself to difficulties, you know.

Question: Excuse me, sir, but when you say "quiet enough," how quiet is that?

Ajahn Chah: Enough to be able to contemplate. Enough to have mindfulness; enough to be able to contemplate.

Question: You stay with the present without thinking about past or future?

Ajahn Chah: You can think about the past or future, but you don't take it seriously. You can think all kinds of things, but you don't take them seriously. It's just a matter of thinking, so don't follow it. If you follow the issues of fabrication, they'll keep on fabricating issues all the time. Will they run out that way? Not at all. When you see that the mind is just the mind, that's all—not a being, not a person, not a self, not "us" or "them"—that's called *cittānupassanā:* keeping track of the mind. It's not ours, right? Pleasure is just pleasure, that's all. Pain is just pain, that's all. They're all just "that's all" kinds of things. If you see into that, if your contemplation takes you that far, then there will be no doubts.

Question: When contemplating this way, as we normally say, it really is contemplation, right? You have to use thought-fabrications. You have to use thinking.

Ajahn Chah: You use thinking, but you also see. You see above and beyond your thinking right there. And then you don't believe in line with that kind of thing any more. Do you understand? Your sensations are just sensations, that's all. But what you've reached doesn't arise, doesn't disband. It's just the way it is. It doesn't arise and it doesn't die. In simple terms, as with our mind: We suppose that the mind knows sensations. But when we really speak about the mind, this is something above the mind. Whatever the mind arises from, we call it the mind. The mind arises and disbands. It arises and disbands, this mind.

But this other thing isn't the mind that arises and disbands. It's a different experience. All the things that are that truth: They don't arise and don't disband. They're just the way they are. They go past the issues of arising and disbanding. But when you call them the mind, it's just in terms of suppositions. When you speak in terms of suppositions, you believe in your own mind—and then what happens? Where does this mind come from? You've believed in this mind for so long, and there's no ease. Right?

In the beginning you know about inconstancy, stress, and not-self. These are issues of the mind. But that reality doesn't have any issues. It lets go. It lets go of the things that the mind arises with and depends on, but it doesn't arise or disband at all.

The things that arise and disband depend on perceptions and fabrications. We think that because contemplation uses perceptions, then they must be discernment. And so we latch onto fabrications, thinking they're discernment. But that's not genuine discernment. Genuine discernment puts an end to issues. It knows, and that's the end of issues. There are still fabrications, but you don't follow in line with them. There are sensations, you're aware of them, but you don't follow in line with them. You keep knowing that they're not the path any more.

Question: What do we do to find this point, the point of the genuine mind?

Ajahn Chah: You keep track of *this* mind, first. You see that it's inconstant, not for sure. See that clearly. You see that there's nothing to take hold of, and so you let go. The mind lets go of itself. It understands itself. It lets go of this mind. At that point, there's no more need to fabricate it, but there are no more doubts about anything. That's called... Whatever name you call it, it's a matter of supposition and formulation. You make suppositions about it for people to learn about it, but that nature is just the way it is. It's like the ground. What spins around is on top of the ground. But this thing is the ground. What doesn't arise or disband is the ground. What arises and runs around on top, we call "the mind," or "perception," or "fabrication." To put it in simple terms, there are no forms, feelings, perceptions, fabrications, or consciousness in the ground. In terms of supposition, form, feelings, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness arise and disband. But they're not in this. They disband.

It's like the question that Ven. Sāriputta asked Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta. Have you ever read that? Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta was going out into the forest to follow the ascetic practices. His teacher had taught him about the ascetic practices. So Ven. Sāriputta asked him, "Puṇṇa Mantāniputta, when you go out into the forest, suppose someone asks you this question, 'When an arahant dies, what is he?' How would you answer?"

That's because this had already happened.

Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta said, "I'll answer that form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness arise and disband. That's all."

Ven. Sāriputta said, "That'll do. That'll do."

When you understand this much, that's the end of issues. When you understand it, you take it to contemplate so as to give rise to discernment. See clearly all the way in. It's not just a matter of simply arising and disbanding, you know. That's not the case at all. *You have to look into the causes within your own mind.* You're just the same way: arising and disbanding. Look until there's no pleasure or pain. Keep following in until there's nothing: no attachment. That's how you go beyond these things. Really see it that way; see your mind in that way. This is not just something to talk about. Get so that wherever you are, there's nothing. Things arise and disband, arise and disband, and that's all. You don't depend on fabrications. You don't run after

fabrications. But normally, we monks fabricate in one way; lay people fabricate in crude ways. But it's all a matter of fabrication. If we always follow in line with them, if we don't know, they grow more and more until we don't know up from down.

Question: But there's still the primal mind, right?

Ajahn Chah: What?

Question: Just now when you were speaking, it sounded as if there were something aside from the five aggregates. What else is there? You spoke as if there were something. What would you call it? The primal mind? Or what?

Ajahn Chah: You don't call it anything. Everything ends right there. There's no more calling it "primal." That ends right there. "What's primal" ends.

Question: Would you call it the primal mind?

Ajahn Chah: You can give it that supposition if you want. When there are no suppositions, there's no way to talk. There are no words to talk. But there's nothing there, no issues. It's primal; it's old. There are no issues at all. But what I'm saying here is just suppositions. "Old," "new": These are just affairs of supposition. If there were no suppositions, we wouldn't understand anything. We'd just sit here silent without understanding one another. So understand that.

Question: To reach this, what amount of concentration is needed?

Ajahn Chah: Concentration has to be in control. With no concentration, what could you do? If you have no concentration, you can't get this far at all. You need enough concentration to know, to give rise to discernment. But I don't know how you'd measure the amount of mental stillness needed. Just develop the amount where there are no doubts, that's all. If you ask, that's the way it is.

Question: The primal mind and the knower: Are they the same thing?

Ajahn Chah: Not at all. The knower can change. It's your awareness. Everyone has a knower.

Question: But not everyone has a primal mind?

Ajahn Chah: Everyone has one. Everyone has a knower, but it hasn't reached the end of its issues, the knower.

Question: But everyone has both?

Ajahn Chah: Yes. Everyone has both, but they haven't explored all the way into the other one.

Question: Does the knower have a self?

Ajahn Chah: No. Does it feel like it has one? Has it felt that way from the very beginning?

Question: When people sleep soundly, is there still a knower there?

Ajahn Chah: There is. It doesn't stop. Even in the *bhavaṅga* of sleep.

Question: Oh. The *bhavaṅga*.

Ajahn Chah: The *bhavaṅga* of sleep.

These sorts of thing, if you keep studying about them, keep tying you up in complications. They don't come to an end in this way. They keep getting complicated. With the Dhamma, it's not the case that you'll awaken because someone else tells you about it. You already know that you can't get serious about asking whether this is that or that is this. These things are really personal. We talk just enough for you to contemplate...

It's like a child who's never seen anything. He comes out to the countryside and sees a chicken. "Daddy, what's that over there?" He sees a duck. "Daddy, what's that?" He sees a pig. "Daddy, what's that over there?" The father gets tired of answering. The more he answers, the more the child keeps asking—because he's never seen these things. After a while, the father simply says, "Hmm." If you keep playing along with the child's every question, you die of fatigue. The child doesn't get fatigued. Whatever it sees, "What's that? What's this?" It never comes to an end. Finally the father says, "When you grow bigger, you'll know for yourself."

That's the way it is with meditation. I used to be like that. I really was. But when you understand, there are none of those questions. You've grown up. So be intent on contemplating until you understand, and things will gradually unravel themselves. That's the way it is. Keep watch over yourself as much as you can. Keep watch over yourself as much as you can, to see if you're lying to yourself. That's what's called keeping watch over yourself.

NOTE

With two exceptions—"Becoming a Samaṇa" and "In the Shape of a Circle"—the talks in this book have all been previously translated. In four cases—"A Gift of Dhamma," "Still, Flowing Water," "Suppositions & Release," and "In Body & Mind"—the translations here are based on entirely new transcriptions of the original talks.

Table of Contents