

STRAIGHT
FROM THE
HEART

Straight from the Heart

Thirteen Talks on the
Practice of Meditation

*Venerable Ācariya
Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno*

Translated from the Thai
by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

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Introduction

These talks—except for the two marked otherwise—were originally given for the benefit of Mrs. Pow Panga Vathanakul, a follower of Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa who had contracted cancer of the bone marrow and had come to practice meditation at Wat Pa Baan Taad in order to contend with the pain of the disease and the fact of her approaching death. All in all, she stayed at Wat Pa Baan Taad for 102 days, from November 9, 1975 to February 19, 1976; during that period Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa gave 84 impromptu talks for her benefit, all of which were tape-recorded.

After her death in September, 1976, one of her friends, M.R. Sermsri Kasemsri, asked permission of the Venerable Ācariya to transcribe the talks and print them in book form. Seventy-seven of the talks, plus an additional eight talks given on other occasions, were thus printed in two massive volumes together totaling more than 1,000 pages. Six talks from these two volumes have already been translated into English and published in a book entitled *Amata Dhamma*.

The talks in the present collection all deal with the practice of meditation, and particularly with the development of discernment. Because their style of presentation is personal and impromptu, they will probably be best understood if read in conjunction with a more systematic introduction to the techniques of meditation, such as the Venerable Ācariya's own book, *Wisdom Develops Samādhi*, which is available separately or as part of the volume, *Forest Dhamma*.

The title of the present book is taken from a request, frequently made by the Venerable Ācariya to his listeners, that his teachings be taken to heart, because they come straight from the heart.

Note

In these talks,
as in Thai usage in general,
the words 'heart' and 'mind'
are used interchangeably.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

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The Language of the Heart

The Venerable Ācariya Mun taught that all hearts have the same language. No matter what one's language or nationality, the heart has nothing but simple awareness, which is why he said that all hearts have the same language. When a thought arises, we understand it, but when we put it into words, it has to become this or that language, so that we don't really understand one another. The feelings within the heart, though, are the same for everyone. This is why the Dhamma fits the heart perfectly, because the Dhamma isn't any particular language. The Dhamma is the language of the heart. The Dhamma resides with the heart.

Pleasure and pain reside with the heart. The acts that create pleasure and pain are thought up by the heart. The heart is what knows the results that appear as pleasure and pain; and the heart is burdened with the outcome of its own thoughts. This is why the heart and the Dhamma fit perfectly. No matter what our language or nationality, we can all understand the Dhamma because the heart and the Dhamma are a natural pair.

The heart forms the core within the body. It's the core, the substance, the primary essence within the body. It's the basic foundation. The conditions that arise from the mind, such as thought-formations, appear and vanish, again and again. Here I'm referring to the rippling of the mind. When the mind ripples, that's the formation of a thought. Labels, which deal with conjecturing, memorizing, and recognizing, are termed *saññā*. 'Long' thoughts are *saññā*; short thoughts are *sañkhāra*. In other words, when a thought forms—'blip'—that's a *sañkhāra*. *Saññā* refers to labeling and recognizing. *Viññāṇa* refers to the act of taking note when anything external comes and makes contact with the senses, as when visible forms make contact with the eye and cognition results. All of these things are constantly arising and vanishing of their own accord, and so the Buddha called them *khandhas*. Each 'heap' or 'group' is called a *khandha*. These five heaps of *khandhas* are constantly arising and vanishing all the time.

Even arahants have these same conditions—just like ordinary people everywhere—the only difference being that the arahants' *khandhas* are *khandhas* pure and simple, without any defilements giving them orders, making them do this or think that. Instead, their *khandhas* think out of their own free nature, with nothing forcing them to think this or that, unlike the minds of ordinary people in general.

To make a comparison, the *khandhas* of ordinary people are like prisoners, constantly being ordered about. Their various thoughts, labels, assumptions, and interpretations have something that orders and forces them to appear, making them think, assume, and interpret in this way or that. In other words, they have defilements as their boss, their leader, ordering them to appear.

Arahants, however, don't. When a thought forms, it simply forms. Once it forms, it simply disappears. There's no seed to continue it, no seed to weigh the mind down, because there's nothing to force it, unlike the *khandhas* governed by defilements or under the leadership of defilements. This is where the difference lies.

But their basic nature is the same: All the *khandhas* we have mentioned are inconstant (*aniccam*). In other words, instability and changeability are a regular part of their nature, beginning with the *rūpa khandha*, our body, and the *vedanā khandha*, feelings of pleasure, pain, and indifference. These things appear and vanish, again and again. *Saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are also always in a state of appearing and vanishing as a normal part of their nature.

But as for actual awareness—which forms the basis of our knowledge of the various things that arise and vanish—*that doesn't vanish*. We can say that the mind can't vanish. We can say that the mind can't arise. A mind that has been purified thus has no more problems concerning the birth and death of the body and the *khandhas*; and thus there is no more birth here and there, appearing in crude forms such as individuals or as living beings, for those whose minds have been purified.

But those whose minds are not purified: They are the ones who take birth and die, setting their sights on cemeteries without end, all because of this undying mind.

This is why the Lord Buddha taught the world, and in particular the world of human beings, who know right and wrong, good and evil; who know how to foster the one and remedy the other; who understand the language of the Dhamma he taught. This is why he taught the human world above and beyond the other worlds: so that we could try to remedy the things that are harmful and detrimental, removing them from our thoughts, words, and deeds; try to nourish and foster whatever goodness we might already have, and give rise to whatever goodness we don't yet have.

He taught us to foster and develop the goodness we already have so as to nourish the heart, giving it refreshment and well-being, giving it a standard of quality, or goodness, so that when it leaves its present body to head for whatever place or level of being, this mind that has been constantly nourished with goodness will be a good mind. Wherever it fares, it will fare well. Wherever it takes birth, it will be born well. Wherever it lives, it will live well. It will keep on experiencing well-being and happiness until it gains the capacity, the potential, the accumulation of merit it has developed progressively from the past into the present—in other words, yesterday is today's past, today is tomorrow's past, all of which are days in which we have fostered and developed goodness step by step—to the point where the mind has the firm strength and ability, from the supporting power of this goodness, that enables it to pass over and gain release.

Such a mind has no more birth, not even in the most quiet or refined levels of being that contain any latent traces of conventional reality (*sammatti*)—namely, birth and

death as we currently experience it. Such a mind goes completely beyond all such things. Here I'm referring to the minds of the Buddhas and of the arahants.

There's a story about Ven. Vaṅgīsa that has a bearing on this. Ven. Vaṅgīsa, when he was a layman, was very talented in divining the level of being in which the mind of a dead person was reborn—no matter who the person was. You couldn't quite say he was a fortuneteller. Actually he was more a master of psychic skills. When anyone died, he would take that person's skull and knock on it—knock! knock! knock!—focus his mind, and then know that this person was reborn there, that person was reborn here. If the person was reborn in hell or in heaven, as a common animal or a hungry ghost, he could tell in every case, without any hesitation. All he needed was to knock on the skull.

When he heard his friends say that the Buddha was many times more talented than this, he wanted to expand on his knowledge. So he went to the Buddha's presence to ask for further training in this science. When he reached the Buddha, the Buddha gave him the skull of an arahant to knock on.

'All right, see if you can tell where he was reborn.'

Ven. Vaṅgīsa knocked on the skull and listened.

Silence.

He knocked again and listened.

Silence.

He thought for a moment.

Silence.

He focused his mind.

Silence.

He couldn't see where the owner of the skull was reborn. At his wit's end, he confessed frankly that he didn't know where the arahant was reborn.

At first, Ven. Vaṅgīsa had thought himself talented and smart, and had planned to challenge the Buddha before asking for further training. But when he reached the Buddha, the Buddha gave him the skull of an arahant to knock on— and right there he was stymied. So now he genuinely wanted further training. Once he had further training, he'd really be something special. This being the way things stood, he asked to study with the Buddha. So the Buddha taught him the science, taught him the method—in other words, the science of the Dhamma. Ven. Vaṅgīsa practiced and practiced until finally he attained arahantship. From then on he was no longer interested in knocking on anyone's skull except for his own. Once he had known clearly, that was the end of the matter. This is called 'knocking on the right skull.'

Once the Buddha had brought up the topic of the mind that doesn't experience rebirth—the skull of one whose mind was purified—no matter how many times Ven. Vaṅgīsa knocked on it, he couldn't know where the mind was reborn, even though he

had been very talented before, *for the place of a pure mind's rebirth cannot be found.*

The same was true in the case of Ven. Godhika: This story should serve as quite some food for thought. Ven. Godhika went to practice meditation, made progress step by step, but then regressed. They say this happened six times. After the seventh time, he took a razor to slash his throat—he was so depressed—but then came to his senses, contemplated the Dhamma, and became an arahant at the last minute. That's the story in brief. When he died, Māra's hordes searched for his spirit. To put it simply, they stirred up a storm, but couldn't tell where he had been reborn.

So the Lord Buddha said, 'No matter how much you dig or search or investigate to find the spirit of our son, Godhika, who has completely finished his task, you won't be able to find it—even if you turn the world upside down—because such a task lies beyond the scope of conventional reality.' How could they possibly find it? *It's beyond the capacity of people with defilements to know the power of an arahant's mind.*

In the realm of convention, there is no one who can trace the path of an arahant's mind, because an arahant lies beyond convention, even though his is a mind just the same. Think about it: Even our stumbling and crawling mind, when it is continually cleansed without stop, without ceasing, without letting perseverance lag, will gradually become more and more refined until it reaches the limit of refinement. Then the refinement will disappear—because refinement is a matter of conventional reality—leaving a nature of solid gold, or solid Dhamma, called a pure mind. We too will then have no more problems, just like the arahants, because our mind will have become a superlative mind, just like the minds of those who have already gained release.

All minds of this sort are the same, with no distinction between women and men, which is simply a matter of sex or convention. With the mind, there is no distinction between women and men, and thus both women and men have the same capacity in the area of the Dhamma. Both are capable of attaining the various levels of Dhamma all the way to release. There are no restrictions that can be imposed in this area. All that is needed is that we develop enough ability and potential, and then we can all go beyond.

For this reason, we should all make an effort to train our hearts and minds. At the very least, we should get the mind to attain stillness and peace with any of the meditation themes that can lull it into a state of calm, giving rise to peace and well-being within it. For example, mindfulness of breathing, which is one of the primary themes in meditation circles, seems to suit the temperaments of more people than any other theme. But whatever the theme, take it as a governing principle, a refuge, a mainstay for the mind, putting it into practice within your own mind so as to attain rest and peace.

When the mind begins to settle down, we will begin to see its essential nature and worth. We will begin to see what the heart is and how it is. In other words, when the mind gathers all of its currents into a single point, as simple awareness within itself, *this*

is what is called the 'mind' (citta). The gathering in of the mind occurs on different levels, corresponding to the mind's ability and to the different stages of its refinement. Even if the mind is still on a crude level, we can nevertheless know it when it gathers inwardly. When the mind becomes more and more refined, we will know its refinement—“This mind is refined... This mind is radiant... This mind is extremely still... This mind is something extremely amazing’—more and more, step by step, this very same mind!

In cleansing and training the mind for the sake of stillness; in investigating, probing, and solving the problems of the mind with discernment (*paññā*)—which is the way of making the mind progress, or of enabling us to reach the truth of the mind, step by step, through the means already mentioned—no matter how crude the mind may be, don't worry about it. If we get down to making the effort and persevere continually with what diligence and persistence we have, that crudeness will gradually fade away and vanish. Refinement will gradually appear through our own actions or our own striving until we are able to go beyond and gain release by slashing the defilements to bits. This holds true for all of us, men and women alike.

But while we aren't yet able to do so, we shouldn't be anxious. All that is asked is that we make the mind principled so that it can be a refuge and a mainstay for itself. As for this body, we've been relying on it ever since the day we were born. This is something we all can know. We've made it live, lie down, urinate, defecate, work, make a living. We've used it, and it has used us. We order it around, and it orders us around. For instance, we've made it work, and it has made us suffer with aches here and pains there, so that we have to search for medicine to treat it. It's the one that hurts, and it's the one that searches for medicine. It's the one that provides the means. And so we keep supporting each other back and forth in this way.

It's hard to tell who is in charge, the body or us. We can order it around part of the time, but it orders us around all the time. Illness, hunger, thirst, sleepiness: These are all nothing but a heap of suffering and stress in which the body orders us around, and orders us from every side. We can order it around only a little bit, so when the time is right for us to give the orders, we should make it meditate.

So. Get to work. As long as the body is functioning normally, then no matter how much or how heavy the work, get right to it. But if the body isn't functioning normally, if you're ill, you need to be conscious of what it can take. As for the mind, though, keep up the effort within, unflaggingly, because it's your essential duty.

You've depended on the body for a long time. Now that it's wearing down, know that it's wearing down—which parts still work, which parts no longer work. You're the one in charge and you know it full well, so make whatever compromises you should.

But as for the heart, which isn't ill along with the body, it should step up its efforts within, so that it won't lack the benefits it should gain. Make the mind have standards and be principled—principled in its living, principled in its dying. Wherever it's born,

make it have good principles and satisfactory standards. What they call ‘merit’ (*puñña*) won’t betray your hopes or expectations. It will provide you with satisfactory circumstances at all times, in keeping with the fact that you’ve accumulated the merit—the well-being—that all the world wants and of which no one has enough. In other words, what the world wants is well-being, whatever the sort, and in particular the well-being of the mind that will arise step by step from having done things, such as meditation, which are noble and good.

This is the well-being that forms a core or an important essence within the heart. We should strive, then, while the body is still functioning, for when life comes to an end, nothing more can be done. No matter how little or how much we have accomplished, we must stop at that point. We stop our work, put it aside, and then reap its rewards—there, in the next life. Whatever we should be capable of doing, we do. If we can go beyond or gain release, that’s the end of every problem. There will then be nothing to involve us in any turmoil.

Here I’ve been talking about the mind because the mind is the primary issue. That which will make us fare well or badly, meet with pleasure or pain, is nothing else but the mind.

As for what they call bad *kamma*, it lies within the mind that has made it. Whether or not you can remember, these seeds—which lie within the heart—can’t be prevented from bearing fruit, because they are rooted in the mind. You have to accept your *kamma*. Don’t find fault with it. Once it’s done, it’s done, so how can you find fault with it? The hand writes and so the hand must erase. You have to accept it like a good sport. This is the way it is with *kamma* until you can gain release—which will be the end of the problem.

The Marvel of the Dhamma

Those who practice the Dhamma will begin to know the Dhamma or to gain a feel for the Dhamma in the area of meditation more markedly than in other areas, and more extensively. For example, the gratification that comes from being generous is moving in one way, the gratification that comes from maintaining the precepts is moving in another way, the feelings of gratification that come from the different forms of goodness are moving in their own separate ways. This is called finding gratification in skillfulness.

But all of these feelings of gratification converge in the practice of meditation. We begin to feel moved from the moment the mind begins to grow still, when the heart gathers its currents together to stand solely on its own. Even though we may not yet obtain a great deal of stillness from the inward gathering of the mind, we still find ourselves gratified within, in a way we can clearly sense. If the mind or the Dhamma were a material object, there wouldn't be anyone in the world who wouldn't respect the religion, because the goodness, the well-being, and the marvels that arise from the religion and from the practicing in line with the teachings of the religion are things desired the world over.

Goodness, well-being, marvels: These are things the world has always desired from time immemorial—with a desire that has never lost its taste—and they are things that will always be desired until the world loses its meaning, or until people become extinct, having no more sense of good and evil. That's when the world will no longer aspire for these great blessings. The well-being that comes from the marvels—the Dhamma in the area of its results—is something to which all living beings aspire, simply that their abilities differ, so that some attain their aspirations, while others don't.

But the Dhamma can't be displayed for the world to perceive with its senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch in the way other things can. Even though there may be other immaterial phenomena similar to the Dhamma—such as smells—still they aren't like the true Dhamma that is touched by the hearts of those who have practiced it. If the Dhamma could be displayed like material objects, there is no doubt but that the human world would have to respect the religion for the sake of that Dhamma. This is because the Dhamma is something more marvelous than anything else. In all the three levels of existence, there is no greater marvel than in the Dhamma.

The Dhamma can appear as a marvel, conspicuous and clear in the mind. The mind is what knows it—and only the mind. It can't be displayed in general like material objects, as when we take things out to admire or to show off to others. The Dhamma can't possibly be displayed like material objects. This is what makes the world lack interest—and lack the things that could be hoped from the Dhamma—in a way that is

really a shame.

Even those who want the marvel of the Dhamma don't know what the marvel is, or what the profundity of the Dhamma is, because the mind has never had contact with that profundity. The eye has never had contact with the marvel. The ear has never obtained any marvel from the current of the Dhamma, because the Dhamma can't be displayed as a current of sound as other things can. This is one obstacle that prevents people from becoming moved by the Dhamma, that prevents them from fully believing and fully entrusting themselves to the Dhamma in a way consistent with the world's long-felt hunger for well-being and prosperity.

Each of the Buddhas who has gained Awakening and taught the Dhamma to the world has had to reflect to the full extent of his intelligence and ability on the myriad ways of teaching the Dhamma to the world so that the world could see it as a marvel, inasmuch as the Dhamma can't be put in shop windows or in public places. This is because the true Dhamma lies in the heart and reveals itself only in words and deeds, which doesn't excite a gratifying sense of absorption in the same way as touching the Dhamma directly with the heart.

Because there is no way to display the Dhamma directly, the Buddhas display it indirectly through teaching. They point out the causes—the Dhamma of conduct and practices leading to the Dhamma of results at this or that point or this or that level; and at the same time they proclaim the results—the excellence, the marvels of the stages and levels of the Dhamma that can be touched with the heart, all the way to the highest marvel, *vimutti*, the mental release called *nibbāna* within the heart.

Every Buddha has to devise strategies in teaching the Dhamma so as to bring that marvel out to the world by using various modes of speech and conduct—for example, describing the Dhamma and showing the conduct of the Dhamma as being like this and that—but the actual Dhamma can't be shown. It is something known exclusively in the heart, in the way in which each Buddha and each arahant possesses this marvel. None of the Buddhas, none of the arahants who possess this marvel are in any way deficient in this regard.

The marvel lies in their hearts—simply that they can't take the marvel that appears there and display it in the full measure of its wonder. Thus they devise strategies for displaying it in their actions, which are simply attributes of the Dhamma, not the actual Dhamma itself. For instance, the doctrine they teach in the texts is simply an attribute of the Dhamma. Their act of teaching is also just an attribute of the Dhamma. The actual Dhamma is when a meditator or a person who listens to their teachings about the Dhamma follows the Dhamma in practice and touches it stage by stage within his or her own heart. This is called beginning to make contact with the actual Dhamma, step by step. However much contact is made, it gives a sense of gratification felt exclusively within the heart of the person who has gained that contact through his or her own practice.

When it comes to ingenuity in teaching, no one excels the Buddhas. Even so, they reveal only what they see as appropriate for humanity. They can't reveal the actual Dhamma—for example, by taking out the true marvel in their hearts and unfolding it for the world to see, saying, 'This is the marvel of the Tathāgata, of each Buddha. Do you see it?' This can't be done, for here we're talking about the marvel of the purity of a heart that was previously swamped with defilement like a heap of assorted excrement, but now has become a pure, unsullied nature, or a pure, amazing nature because of the practice of constantly and relentlessly cleansing it. They can't show that Dhamma to the world, saying, 'Do you see this? Look at it. Look at it. Feast your eyes till they're full and then strive to make this treasure your own!' So instead, they teach by using various strategies for those who practice, describing the path in full detail, in terms both of causes and of results.

What they bring out to show is simply the current of their voices, the breath of their mouths. That's what they bring out to speak, simply the breath of their mouths. They can't bring out the real thing. For example, when they say, 'It's marvelous like this,' it's just sound. The marvelous nature itself can't be brought out. All they can bring out is the action of saying, 'That nature is marvelous,' so that we can speculate for ourselves as to what that marvel is like. Even though this doesn't remove our doubts, it's better than if we had never heard about it at all.

But the basic principle in making us come to know and see the marvel of the Dhamma is that first we have to speculate and then we follow with practice. This qualifies as following the principles of the Dhamma the Buddha taught, and this is fitting and proper. No matter what the difficulties and hardships encountered in following the path, we shouldn't let them form barriers to our progress, because this is where the path lies. There are no other byways that can take us easily to the goal. If our practice is difficult, we have to stick with it. If it's painful, we have to bear it, because it's a duty we have to perform, a burden we have to carry while working so as to attain our aims.

The Dhamma of a pure mind is like this: The mind is the Dhamma, the Dhamma is the mind. We call it a mind only as long as it is still with the body and *khandhas*. Only then can we call it a pure mind, the mind of a Buddha, or the mind of an arahant. After it passes from the body and *khandhas*, there is no conventional reality to which it can be compared, and so we can't call it anything at all.

No matter how marvelous that nature, no matter how much it may be ours, there is no possible way we can use conventional realities to describe it or to make comparisons, because that Dhamma, that realm of release, has no conventions against which to measure things or make comparisons. It's the same as if we were in outer space: Which way is north, which way is south, we don't know. If we're on Earth, we can say 'east,' 'west,' 'north,' and 'south' because there are things that we can observe and compare so as to tell which direction lies which way. We take the Earth as our

standard. ‘High’ and ‘low’ depend on the Earth as their frame of reference. How much higher than this, lower than this, north of this, south of this: These things we can say.

But if we’re out in outer space, there is no standard by which we can measure things, and so we can’t say. Or as when we go up in an airplane: We can’t tell how fast or how slow we’re going. When we pass a cloud, we can tell that we’re going fast, but if we depend simply on our eyesight, we’re sure to think that the speed of the airplane is nowhere near the speed of a car. We can clearly see how deceptive our eyesight is in just this way. When we ride in a car, the trees on both sides of the road look as if they were falling in together down on the road behind us. Actually, they stay their separate selves. It’s simply that the car runs past them. Since there are things that we sense, that lie close enough for comparison, it seems as if the car were going really fast.

As for the airplane, there’s nothing to make comparisons with, so it looks as if the plane were dawdling along, as if it were going slower than a car, even though it’s actually many times faster.

This is how it is when we compare the mind of an ordinary run-of-the-mill person with the mind of the Buddha. *Whatever the Buddha says is good and excellent, we ordinary people tend to say that it’s not.* Whatever we like, no matter how vile, we say that it’s good. We don’t admit the truth, in the same way as thinking that a car goes faster than an airplane.

The practice of attending to the mind is something very important. Try to develop mindfulness (*sati*) and discernment so that they can keep up with the things that come and entangle the mind. By and large, the heart itself is the instigator, creating trouble continually, relentlessly. We then fall for the preoccupations the heart turns out—and this makes us agitated, upset, and saddened, all because of the thoughts formed by the heart.

These come from the heart itself, and the heart itself is what falls for them, saying that this is this, and that is that, even though the things it names ‘this’ and ‘that’ merely exist in line with their nature. They have no meaning in and of themselves, that they are like ‘this’ or ‘that.’ The mind simply gives them meanings, and then falls for its own meanings, making itself glad or sad over those things without end. Thus the stress and suffering that result from thought-formations have no end, no point of resolution, just as if we were floating adrift in the middle of the sea waiting to breathe our last breath.

The Buddhas all reached Awakening here in this human world because the human world is rich in the Noble Truths. It’s where they are plain to see. The Noble Truth of stress (*dukkha*) lies in the human body. Human beings know about stress—because they’re smarter than common animals. The Noble Truth of the origin of stress: This lies in the human heart. The Noble Truth of the path—the path of practice to cure defilement (*kilesa*), craving (*taṇhā*), and mental effluents (*āsava*), which are the things that produce stress: This, human beings also know. What is the path? To put it briefly:

virtue, concentration, and discernment. These things human beings know and can put into practice. The Noble Truth of the cessation of stress: This, human beings also know. No matter which of these truths, all human beings know them—although they may not know how to behave toward them or take interest in behaving in line with them, in which case there is no way the Dhamma can help them at all.

The Buddhas thus taught the Dhamma in the human world, because the human world lies in the center of all the levels of existence. We have been born in the center of existence, in the midst of the religion. We should conform correctly to the central point of the religion, so as to comprehend the religion's teachings that lie in the center of our heart.

The superlative Dhamma lies right here. It doesn't lie anywhere else. The mind is what can reach the Dhamma. The mind is what knows all dhammas. The affairs of the Dhamma, then, do not lie beyond the mind, which is a fitting vessel for them. Good, evil, pleasure, pain: The mind knows these things before anything else knows them, so we should develop mindfulness and discernment to be resourceful, to keep up with the events that are always becoming involved with the mind in the course of each day.

If we're intent on investigating the origin of stress, which fans out from our various thought-formations, we will find that it arises without stop. It arises right here in the mind. It's fashioned right here. Even though we try to make it quiet, it won't be still. Why? Because of the 'unquietness,' the thoughts with which the mind disturbs itself, which it forms and sends out towards its preoccupations (*ārammaṇa*) all the time. Once the mind sends out its thoughts, it then gathers in stress for itself. It keeps at it, in and out like this. *What goes out is the origin of stress, and what comes back in is stress.* In other words, thoughts form and go out as the origin of stress, and when the results come back to the heart, they're stressful. These things are constantly being manufactured like this all the time.

When we want the mind to have even just a little bit of calm, we really have to force it; and even then these things still manage to drive the mind into forming thoughts whenever we let down our guard. This is how it is with the origin of stress, which is constantly producing suffering. It lies in the heart and is always arising. For this reason, we must use mindfulness and discernment to diagnose and remedy the origin of stress, to keep an eye out for it, and to snuff it out right there, without being negligent. Wherever we sit or stand—whatever our activity—we keep watch over this point, with mindfulness alert to it, and discernment unraveling it so as to know it constantly for what it truly is.

All those who practice to remove defilement practice in this way. In particular, those who are ordained practice by going into the forest to look for a place conducive to their striving in order to wipe out this very enemy. Even when they stay in inhabited areas, or wherever they go, wherever they stay, they keep their attention focused continually, step by step, on the persistent effort to remove and demolish the origin of stress, which

is a splinter, a thorn in the heart. Such people are bound to develop more and more ease and well-being, step by step, in proportion to the persistence of their striving.

We can see clearly when the mind is still and settles down: Thought-formations are still, or don't exist. Turmoil and disturbances don't occur. The stress that would otherwise result doesn't appear. When the mind is quiet, stress is also quiet. When thought-formations are quiet, the origin of stress is also quiet. Stress is also quiet. All that remains at that moment is a feeling of peace and ease.

The war between the mind and the defilements causing stress is like this. We have to keep fighting with persistence. We have to use mindfulness and discernment, conviction and persistence to contend with the war that disturbs and ravages the mind, making it stagger and reel within. The disturbances will then gradually be suppressed. Even when there is only a moment of quiet, we will come to see the harm of the thought-formations that are constantly disturbing us. At the same time, we will see the benefits of mental stillness—that it's a genuine pleasure. Whether there is a lot of stillness or a little, pleasure arises in proportion to the foundation of stillness or the strength of the stillness, which in the texts is called *samādhi*, or concentration.

A mind centered and still is called a mind in concentration, or a mind gathered in concentration. This is what genuine concentration is like inside the heart. The names of the various stages of concentration are everywhere, but actual concentration is inside the heart. The heart is what gives rise to concentration. It produces it, makes it on its own. When concentration is still, the mind experiences cool respite and pleasure. It has its own foundation set firmly and solidly within.

It's as if we were under an eave or under the cooling shade of a tree. We're comfortable when it rains, we're comfortable when the sun is out, because we don't have to be exposed to the sun and rain. The same holds true with a mind that has an inner foundation of stillness: It's not affected by this preoccupation or that, which would otherwise disturb and entangle it repeatedly, without respite. This is because stillness is the heart's dwelling—'concentration,' which is one level of home for the heart.

Discernment (*paññā*) is ingenuity, sound judgment, evaluating causes and effects within and without; above, below, and in between—inside the body—all the way to the currents of the mind that send out thoughts from various angles. Mindfulness and discernment keep track of these things, investigating and evaluating them so as to know causes and effects in terms of the heart's thought-formations, or in terms of the nature of *saṅkhāra* within us, until we see the truth of each of these things.

Don't go investigating these things off target, by being clever with labels and interpretations that go against the truth—because in the investigation of phenomena, we investigate in line with the truth. We don't resist the truth, for that would simply enhance the defilements causing stress at the very moment we think we're investigating phenomena so as to

remove them.

Birth we have already experienced. As for old age, we've been growing old from the day of our birth, older and older, step by step. Whatever our age, that's how long we've been growing old, until we reach the end of life. When we're old to the nth degree, we fall apart. In other words, we've been growing old from the moment of birth—older by the day, the month, the year—older and older continually. We call it 'growing up,' but actually it's growing old.

See? Investigate it for what it really is. This is the great highway—the way of nature. *Don't resist it.* For example, the body is growing old, but we don't want it to be old. We want it always to be young. This is called resisting the truth—which is stress. Even when we try to resist it, we don't get anywhere. What do we hope to gain by resisting it and creating stress for ourselves? Actually, we gain nothing but the stress that comes from resisting the truth.

Use discernment to investigate just like this. Whenever pain arises in any part of the body, if we have medicine to treat it, then we treat it. When the medicine can take care of it, the body recovers. When the medicine can't, it dies. It goes on its own. There's no need for us to force it not to die, or to stay alive for so-and-so many years, for that would be an absurdity. Even if we forced it, it wouldn't stay. We wouldn't get any results and would just be wearing ourselves out in vain. The body has to follow its own natural principles.

When we investigate in line with its truth this way, *we can be at our ease.* Wherever there's pain, keep aware of it continually in line with its truth. Whether it hurts a lot or a little, keep aware of its manifestations until it reaches the ultimate point of pain—the death of the body—and that's as far as it goes.

Know it in line with its truth. Don't resist it. *Don't set up any desires,* because the setting up of desire is a deficiency, a hunger. And hunger, no matter when or what the sort, is pain: Hunger for sleep is pain, hunger for food is pain, hunger for water is pain. When was it ever a good thing?

The hunger, the desires that arise, wanting things to be like this, wanting them to be like that: These are all nothing but disturbances, issues that give rise to stress and pain. *This is why the Buddha doesn't have us resist the truth.*

Use your discernment to investigate, to contemplate in line with the natural principles of things *as they already are.* This is called discernment that doesn't fly in the face of truth—and the heart can then be at ease.

We study the four 'Noble Truths' here in our body. In other words, we study birth, aging, illness, and death, all of which lie in this single heap of elements (*dhātu*) without ever leaving it. Birth is an affair of these elements. Growing up or growing old, it's old right here. When there's illness, it manages to be ill right here, in one part or another. When death comes, it dies right here. So we have to study right here—where else would

we study? We have to study and know the things that involve us directly before we study anything else. We have to study them comprehensively and to completion—studying our own birth, our aging, our illness and pain, *and completing our study of our own death*. That’s when we’ll be wise—wise to all the events around us.

People who know the Dhamma through practicing so that they are wise to the events that occur to themselves, *do not flinch in the face of any of the conventional realities of the world at all*. This is how it is when we study the Dhamma, when we know and see the Dhamma in the area of the heart—in other words, when we know rightly and well. ‘Mindfulness and discernment that are wise all around themselves’ are wise in this way, *not wise simply from being able to remember*. They have to be wise in curing doubt, in curing the recalcitrance of the heart, as well as in curing their own attachments and false assumptions so as to leave only a nature that is pure and simple. That’s when we’ll be really at ease, really relieved.

Let the *khandhas* be *khandhas* pure and simple in their own way, without our messing with them, without our struggling with them for power, without our forcing or coercing them to be like this or like that. The *khandhas* are then *khandhas*, the mind is then the mind, each with its own separate reality, each not infringing on the others as it used to. Each performs its own duties. This is called *khandhas* pure and simple, the mind pure and simple, without any conventional realities adulterating them. What knows is what knows, the elements are elements, the *khandhas* are *khandhas*.

Whatever things may break apart, let them break apart. We have already known them clearly with our discernment. We have no doubts. We’ve known them in advance, even before they die, so when death comes, what doubts can we have?—especially now that they display the truth of their nature for us to see clearly. This is called studying the Dhamma, practicing the Dhamma. To study and practice this way is to follow the same way that sages have practiced and known before us.

All of these conditions are matters of conventional reality—matters of the elements, the *khandhas*, or the sense media (*āyatana*). The four *khandhas*, the five *khandhas*, whatever, are individual conditions, individual conditions that are separated in line with conventions. Discernment is also a condition; and mindfulness, another condition—conditions of the heart—but they’re Dhamma, means of curing the mind that is clouded and obscured, means of washing away the things that cloud and obscure it, until radiance appears through the power of the discernment that cleanses the heart. *Once the heart is radiant, in the next step it becomes pure*.

Why is it pure? Because all impurities have fallen away from it. The various misconstruings that are an affair of defilement are all gone from the heart, so the heart is pure. This pure heart means that we have completed our study of ourselves, in line with the statement of the teaching:

vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ:

‘The task of the religion is done, the holy life is complete, there is no further task to be done.’

When the tasks we have had to do—abandoning and striving—are done to completion, we know right here, because delusion lay right here in the heart. We study and practice simply to cure our own delusion. Once we know right here, and delusion is gone, what else is there to know? —for beyond this there is nothing further to know. What else is there for us to be deluded about? We’re no longer deluded, because we know fully all around.

This very state of mind: When at the beginning I referred to the superlative Dhamma, the marvelous Dhamma, I was referring to this very state of mind, this very Dhamma—but it’s something known exclusively within itself, and exists only within itself. It’s marvelous— this we know within our own mind. It’s superlative—this we also know within our own mind. We can’t take it out or unfurl it like other things for other people to see.

So if you want to have any Noble Treasures to show for yourself, practice. Remove all those dirty stains from the heart, and the superlative things I have mentioned will appear by their own nature—in other words, they will appear in the mind.

This is called completing your study of the Dhamma; and your study of the world is completed right here. The ‘world’ means the world of elements, the world of the *khandhas* that lie right here with each of us, which are more important than the worlds of elements and *khandhas* belonging to other people, because this world of elements and *khandhas* lies with us and has been weighing on the heart all along.

When we have studied the Dhamma to the attainment of release, that’s all there is to study. We’ve studied the world to completion and studied the Dhamma in full. *Our doubts are gone*, and there is nothing that will ever make us doubt again. As the Buddha exclaimed, ‘When dhammas become apparent to the Brahman, earnest and absorbed, doubt comes to an end because the conditions, the factors for continued being and birth, come to an end.’

Once we have reached this level, we can live wherever we like. The war is ended—the war between the mind and defilement, or the war between Dhamma and defilement, is over. This is where we dismantle being and birth. *This is where we dismantle the heap of suffering in the round of rebirth—right here in the heart.* Since the heart is the wanderer through the cycle of rebirth, we have to dismantle things right here, to know them right here. Once we know, that’s the end of all problems right here.

In this whole wide world there are no problems. The only problem was the issue of the heart that was deluded about itself and about the things that became involved with it. Now that it has completely rectified the way it is involved with things, there is nothing left—and that’s the end of the problem.

From this point on, there are no more problems to trouble the heart until the day of

its total *nibbāna*. This is how the Dhamma is studied to completion. The world—the world of elements and *khandhas*—is studied to completion right here.

So keep striving in order to see the marvel described at the beginning, which was described in line with the truth with no aspect to invite any doubt.

The Buddha and the Noble Disciples have Dhamma filling their hearts to the brim. You are a disciple of the Tathāgata, with a mind that can be made to show its marvelousness through the practice of making it pure, just like the Buddha and the Noble Disciples. So try to make it still and radiant, because the heart has long lain buried in the mud. As soon as you can see the harm of the mud and grow tired of it, you should urgently wake up, take notice, and exert yourself till you can manage to make your way free. *Nibbāna* is holding its hand out, waiting for you. Aren't you going to come out?

Rebelliousness is simply distraction. The end of rebelliousness is stillness. When the heart is still, it's at ease. If it's not still, it's as hot as fire. Wherever you are, everything is hot and troubled. Once it is still, then it's cool and peaceful wherever you are—cool right here in the heart. So make the heart cool with the practice, because the heat and trouble lie with the heart. The heat of fire is one thing, but the heat of a troubled heart is hotter than fire. Try to put out the fires of defilement, craving, and mental effluents burning here in the heart, so that only the phenomenon of genuine Dhamma remains. Then you will be cool and at peace, everywhere and always.

And so I'll ask to stop here.

The Prison World vs. the World Outside

Our mind, if we were to make a comparison with the world, is a perpetual prisoner, like a person born in jail who lives in jail, behind bars, with no chance to get out to see the outside world—someone who has grown from childhood to adulthood entirely in a prison cell and so doesn't know what there is outside; someone who has seen pleasure and pain only in the prison and has never been out to see what kind of pleasure, comfort, and freedom they have in the outside world. We have no way of knowing what kind of happiness and enjoyment they have there in the outside world, how they come and go, how they live, because we are kept in prison from the day we are born until the day we die. This is a comparison, an analogy.

We have only the pleasure and pain that the prison has to offer, with nothing special, nothing obtained from the outside world so that when it enters the prison we could see that, 'This is something different from the prison world—this is from the outside world, outside the prison;' so that we could make comparisons and know that, 'This is like this, that is like that; this is better than that, that is better than this.' There is nothing but the affairs of the prison. However much the pleasure and pain, however great the deprivations, the difficulties, the oppression and coercion, that's simply the way it's been all along from the very beginning—and so we don't know where to look for a way out or how to free ourselves. We don't even know where the outside world is, because we have seen only the inside world: the prison where we have always been locked away, oppressed, starved, beaten, tortured, deprived. Even our bedding, food, belongings—everything of every sort—is like that of a prisoner in jail. And yet people like this can still live this way because they have never seen enough of the outside world to be able to make comparisons as to which is better, which is more pleasant, in order to feel inclined to search for a way out to the outside world.

A mind controlled by the power of defilement and mental effluents is like this. It has been imprisoned by various kinds of defilement for eons and eons. For example, in our present lifetime, the defilements that hold sway over the hearts of living beings have been with us since the day of our birth. They have kept us in continual custody, never giving us any freedom within ourselves at all. For this reason, we have difficulty imagining what sort of pleasure there could be above and beyond the way things are, just like a person who was born and has always lived in a prison.

What sort of world is the world outside? Is it a good place to visit? A good place to live? The Dhamma proclaims it loud and clear, but hardly anyone is interested. Still, there are fortunately *some* places where *some* people are interested. In places where no one proclaims it, where no one speaks of what the outside world—a mind with Dhamma in charge—is like, no one knows what the teachings of the religion are like.

No one knows what the happiness that comes from the Dhamma is like. Such people are so surrounded by darkness, so completely drowned in attachment, that not even a single limb shows above the surface, because there is no religion to pull them out. It's as if the outside world didn't exist. They have nothing but the prison, the defilements, holding the heart in custody. Born in this world, they have only the prison as their place to live and to die.

A mind that has never known what could give it greater pleasure, comfort, and freedom than it has at present, if we were to make a different comparison, is like a duck playing in a mud puddle under a shanty. It keeps playing there: splat, splat, splat, splat, splat. No matter how dirty or filthy it is, it's content to play because it has never seen the water of the ocean, of a river, of a lake or a pond large enough for it to swim and immerse its entire body with ease. It has known only the mud puddle that lies stagnant under the shanty, into which things in the shanty get washed down. And so it plays there, thinking it's fun, swimming happily in its way—why? Because it has never seen water wider or deeper than that, enough to give it more enjoyment in coming and going or swimming around than it can find in the mud puddle under the shanty.

As for ducks that live along broad, deep canals, they're very different from the duck under the shanty. They really enjoy themselves along rivers, lakes, canals, and ponds. Wherever their owner herds them, there they go—crossing back and forth over highways and byways, spreading in flocks of hundreds and thousands. Even ducks like these have their happiness.

What do they stand for?

They stand for the mind. A mind that has never seen the pleasure, the comfort, the enjoyment that comes from the Dhamma is like the duck playing in the mud puddle under the shanty, or those that enjoy swimming in canals, rivers, or lakes.

We at present have our pleasure and happiness through the controlling power of the defilements, which is like the happiness of prisoners in jail. When the mind receives training from the outside world—meaning the Dhamma that comes from the transcendent (*lokuttara*) Dhammas, from the 'land' of *nibbāna* on down, level by level to the human world, revealing every level, every realm—we find that *those of us who are inclined*, who are interested in the outside world, in happiness greater than that which exists at present, *still exist*. When we hear the Dhamma step by step, or read books about the outside world—about Dhamma, about releasing ourselves from the pain and suffering we are forced to undergo within our hearts—our minds feel pleasure and enjoyment. Interest. A desire to listen. A desire to practice so as to reap the results step by step. This is where we begin to see the influence of the outside world making itself felt. The heart begins to exert itself, trying to free itself from the tyranny and oppression from within, like that of a prisoner in jail.

Even more so, when we practice in the area of the mind: The more peace we obtain,

then the greater the effort, the greater the exertion we make. Mindfulness and discernment gradually appear. We see the harm of the tyranny and the oppression imposed by the defilements in the heart. We see the value of the Dhamma, which is a means of liberation. The more it frees us, the more ease we feel in the heart. Respite. Relief. This then is a means of increasing our conviction in ascending stages, and of increasing our effort and stamina in its wake. The mindfulness and discernment that used to lie buried in the mud gradually revive and awaken, and begin to contemplate and investigate.

In the past, no matter what assaulted us by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, we were like dead people. We held these things to be ordinary and normal. They never provoked our mindfulness and discernment to investigate and explore, searching for beginnings and ends, causes and effects. Even though these things had been our enemies for a long, long time, making their assaults both day and night, we were never interested.

Now, however, we develop an interest. When the heart begins to enter the current of the Dhamma in which it has been trained to the point of developing a basis for mindfulness and discernment, step by step, it is bound to see clearly both what is beneficial and what is harmful, because these things dwell together—benefits and harm—within this heart. The mind develops agility in contemplating and investigating. The heart develops boldness in its explorations. Seeing harm, it tries to remedy it. Seeing benefits, it tries to open the way for them; it tries to foster them in ascending stages.

This is called the mind gradually gaining release from tyranny and oppression—the prison—within. At the same time, it is gaining a view of the outside world, seeing what sort of world it is, seeing whether it's like the prison that exists at present. Our eyes can see the outside world to some extent, can see how those in the outside world live, how they come and go—and what about us in the prison? What is it like to live overcome by defilements? How does the mind feel as we gain gradual relief from the defilements? We can begin to make comparisons.

Now at last we have an outside world and an inside world to compare! The happiness and ease that come from removing however many of the defilements we can remove, appear. The stress that continues as long as the remaining defilements still exert their influence, we know clearly. We see their harm with our discernment on its various levels and we try continually to remedy the situation without letting our persistence lapse.

This is when mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence stir themselves out to the front lines: when we see both the *outside world*—however much we have been able to liberate the heart from defilement—and the *inside world*, where the defilements keep up their oppression and coercion. Before, we never knew what to use for comparisons, because we had never seen anything other than this. Because we were born buried in pain and suffering this way, no pleasure from the outside world—from

the Dhamma—ever appeared to us.

What did appear was the kind of happiness that had suffering behind the scenes, waiting to stomp in and obliterate that happiness without giving a moment's notice.

Now, however, we are beginning to know and see. We see the happiness of the outside, that is, of the outside world, of those who have Dhamma reigning in their hearts; and we see the happiness inside the prison, the happiness that lies under the influence of defilement. We also see the suffering and stress that lie under the influence of defilement. We know this all clearly with our own mindfulness and discernment.

The happiness that comes from the outside world—in other words, from the current of the Dhamma seeping deep into the heart—we begin to see, step by step, enough to make comparisons. We see the outside world, the inside world, their benefits and drawbacks. When we take them and compare them, we gain an ever greater understanding—plus greater persistence, greater stamina—to the point that when anything connected with defilement that used to tyrannize and oppress the mind passes our way, we immediately feel called upon to tackle it, remedy it, strip it away, and demolish it step by step through the power of mindfulness and discernment backed by persistent effort.

The mind will set itself spinning. When its awareness of harm is great, its appreciation of what is beneficial is also great. When the desire to know and see the Dhamma is great, when the desire to gain release is great, persistence will have to become greater in their wake. Stamina and resilience will also come in their wake, because they all exist in the same heart. When we see harm, the entire heart is what sees it. When we see benefits, the entire heart is what sees. When we try to make our way with various methods in line with our abilities, it's an affair of the entire heart making the effort to free itself.

This is why these things, such as persistence, that are the mind's tools, the mind's support, come together. For example, *saddhā*, conviction in the paths (*magga*) and their fruitions (*phala*), conviction in the realm beyond suffering and stress; *virīya*, persistence, perseverance in gaining release for oneself step by step; *khanti*, stamina, endurance in order to be unyielding in passing over and beyond: All of these things come together. Mindfulness and discernment, contemplating along the way, seeing what is right and what is wrong, will come in their wake.

If we were to speak in terms of the principles of the formal Dhamma as expressed by the Buddha, this is called the path converging (*magga-samaṅgī*), gradually gathering itself into this single heart. Everything comes together: Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, all the way to Right Concentration, all come gathering into this single heart. They don't go anywhere else.

Right Action: Our only right undertakings are sitting and walking meditation, because we have reached the stage of precision work where the heart gathers together.

The mind is in a state of the path converging—gathering itself into a single heart.

Right View, Right Resolve: These refer to the concerns of discernment, always exploring the affairs of the elements, the *khandhas*, whatever appears or makes contact, arises and vanishes, whether good or evil, past or future, appearing in the heart. Mindfulness and discernment slash these things to bits step by step without bothering to waste time.

Right Action: On the level of the body, this refers to doing sitting and walking meditation, making the effort to abandon the defilements no matter what our posture. On the level of the heart, this refers to persistence within the mind.

Right Speech: We speak only of the Dhamma. Our conversation deals only with the topics of effacement (*sallekha-dhamma*), topics of polishing away or washing away defilements and mental effluents from the heart, telling what methods we can use that will utterly end the defilements: This is Right Speech.

Right Livelihood: When the heart feeds on any object that's its enemy, this is called maintaining a wrong livelihood. Since the object is an enemy of the heart, the heart will have to be clouded. There's nothing good about it at all. It has to lead to greater or lesser amounts of suffering and stress within the heart in proportion to the heart's crudeness or refinement. This is called poison. Wrong livelihood. We have to correct it immediately. Immediately.

Any mental object that's rightful, that leads to happiness, well-being, and ease, is a fitting preoccupation, a fitting food for the heart, providing it with peace and well-being. This is how Right Livelihood is maintained with Dhamma on the ascending levels of training the heart. As for Right Livelihood on the physical level, dealing with food or alms, that applies universally for Buddhists in general to conduct themselves in line with their personal duties.

Right Effort: What sort of effort? This we know. The Buddha taught four kinds of effort: (1) Try to be careful not to let evil arise within yourself. (2) Try to abandon evil that has already arisen. In being careful not to let evil arise, we have to be careful by being mindful. Using mindfulness in trying not to let evil arise means being alert to the mind that thinks and wanders about, gathering suffering and stress into itself. This is because thought-formations of the wrong sort are the origin of stress, and so we should be careful to guard against them. Don't be careless or complacent. (3) Try to develop what is skillful—intelligence—so as to increase it step by step. (4) Try to safeguard the skillful things that have arisen so as to develop them even further and not let them deteriorate. All of these right exertions apply right within us.

Right Mindfulness keeps watch over the heart. Mindfulness and self-awareness keep constant track of its behavior and activities. Whatever makes contact by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, if it doesn't go into the heart, where does it go? The heart is an enormous place, always ready to be informed of various things, both good and evil.

Discernment is what contemplates and deliberates. Mindfulness is what keeps vigilant, inspecting whatever comes in to engage the heart. Whatever the preoccupation, good or evil, mindfulness and discernment contemplate and are selective of what engages the heart. Whatever they see as improper, the mind will reject immediately. Immediately. Discernment is what makes the rejection.

Right Concentration: Our work for the sake of making the defilements quiet through concentration is steady and constant, to the point where the results appear as peace and calm in the heart, as a true place of rest without any distractions coming in to disturb the heart at that moment.

When entering concentration so as to relax the mind, in order to give strength to discernment in its continuing explorations, you should go ahead and really rest—rest in concentration. Enter the calm. Completely stop all thoughts and explorations in the area of discernment. Let the mind settle in and relax. It doesn't have to think or contrive anything at all related to its work. Let the mind rest comfortably by giving it a single preoccupation. If the mind happens to be extremely engrossed in its investigations so that you can't rein it in, use '*buddho*' as a means to drag it in. Make the mind stay with '*buddho, buddho, buddho.*' Even though the meditation word '*buddho*' may be a mental contrivance, it's a contrivance in a single focal idea. Contriving a single focal idea can cause the mind to settle down.

For example, if while we are repeating, '*buddho, buddho, buddho,*' the mind flashes back to its work because it is engrossed in its unfinished business, we should repeat the meditation word even faster so as not to let the mind go back to its work. In other words, when the mind is at the stage where it is engrossed in its work, we could say—to put it in worldly terms—that we can't let down our guard, although on this level it's hard to say that the mind lets down its guard. To get nearer the truth, we should say that we can't loosen our grip. To put it simply, we can't loosen our grip. Otherwise the mind will jump back out to work. So at this point we have to be firm with our meditation word. Force the mind to stay with its single preoccupation —'*buddho*'—as a means of reining the mind in. Repeat '*buddho, buddho, buddho*' in really close frequency; then '*buddho*' and the mind will become one. The heart will be firm and calm down, calm down, relaxing, relaxing, setting aside all its work. The mind will become cool and peaceful. This is Right Concentration.

When the time comes to rest, you have to rest like this for it to qualify as Right Concentration. When you've had enough, when you see that the mind has regained strength, then simply let go—that's all—and the mind will spring immediately back to work. It springs out of oneness, of having a single preoccupation, and returns to being two with its work. At this point, the heart gets back to work without worrying about concentration while it is working. In the same way, when centering the mind for the sake of stillness, you don't have to worry about your work at all.

When resting, you have to rest, in the same way that when eating you don't have to

do any work at all except for the work of eating. When sleeping, sleep peacefully. You shouldn't be concerned with any work at all. But once you have begun work, you shouldn't concern yourself with eating and sleeping. Really set your mind on your work. This is called doing a solid piece of work: work in its proper phases, work at the proper time, in keeping with events, 'Right Action,' work that doesn't overstep its boundaries, appropriate work.

The practice of centering the mind is something you can't neglect. In practicing for the sake of the heart's happiness, the view that centering the mind, keeping still, serves no purpose *is wrong*. If someone is addicted to concentration, unwilling to come out and work, that's improper and should be criticized so that he or she will get down to work. But once the mind has become engrossed in its work, concentration is a necessity in certain areas, at certain times. Ordinarily, if we work without resting or sleeping, we ultimately can't continue with our work. Even though some of our money gets used up when we eat, let it be used up—because the result is that our body gains strength from eating and can return to its work in line with its duties. Even though money gets used up and the food we eat gets used up, still it's used up for a purpose: for energy in the body. Whatever gets consumed, let it be consumed, because it doesn't hurt our purposes. If we don't eat, where are we going to get any strength? Whatever gets spent, let it be spent for the sake of strength, for the sake of giving rise to strength.

The same holds true with resting in concentration: When we're resting so as to give rise to stillness, the stillness is the strength of mind that can reinforce discernment and make it agile. We have to rest so as to have stillness. If there is no stillness, if there's nothing but discernment running, it's like a knife that hasn't been sharpened. We keep chopping away—chock, chock, chock—but it's hard to tell whether we're using the edge of the blade or the back. We simply have the desire to know, to see, to understand, to uproot defilement, whereas discernment hasn't been sharpened by resting in stillness—the reinforcement that gives peace and strength in the heart—and so it's like a knife that hasn't been sharpened. Whatever gets chopped doesn't cut through easily. It's a simple waste of energy.

So for the sake of what's fitting while resting the mind in its 'home of concentration,' we have to let it rest. Resting is thus like using a whetstone to sharpen discernment. Resting the body strengthens the body, and in the same way resting the mind strengthens the mind.

When it comes out this time, now that it has strength, it's like a knife that has been sharpened. The object is the same old object, the discernment is the same old discernment, the person investigating is the same old person, but once we focus our examination, it cuts right through. This time it's like a person who has rested, slept, and eaten at his leisure, and whose knife is fully sharpened. He chops the same old piece of wood, he's the same old person, and it's the same old knife, but it cuts right through with no trouble at all—because the knife is sharp, and the person has strength.

In the same way, the object is the same old object, the discernment is the same old discernment, the person practicing is the same old person, but we've been sharpened. The mind has strength as a reinforcement for discernment and so things cut right through in no time at all—a big difference from when we hadn't rested in concentration!

Thus concentration and discernment are interrelated. They simply do their work at different times. When the time comes to center the mind, center it. When the time comes to investigate in the area of discernment, give it your all—your full alertness, your full strength. Get to the full Dhamma: the full causes and the full effects. In the same way, when resting, give it a full rest. Practice these things at separate times. Don't let them interfere with each other—being worried about concentration when examining with discernment, or being preoccupied with the affairs of discernment when entering concentration—for that would be wrong. Whichever work you're going to do, really make it a solid piece of work. This is the right way, the appropriate way—the way Right Concentration really is.

Once discernment has begun uprooting defilements step by step, the heart develops brightness. The lightness of the mind is one of the benefits that come from removing the things that are hazardous, the things that are filthy. We see the value of this benefit and keep on investigating.

What defilement is, is a weight on the heart. Our mind is like a prisoner constantly overpowered—coerced and tormented—by defilements and mental effluents ever since we were born. When we come right down to it, where is defilement? Where is being and birth? Right here in this same heart. When you investigate, these things gather in, gather in, and enter this single heart. The cycle of rebirth doesn't refer to anything else: It refers to this single heart that spins in circles. It's the only thing that leads us to birth and death. Why? Because the seeds of these things are in the heart.

When we use mindfulness and discernment to investigate, we explore so as to see clearly, and we keep cutting in, step by step, until we reach the mind that is the culprit, harboring unawareness (*avijjā*), which is the important seed of the cycle in the heart. We keep dissecting, keep investigating in, investigating in, so that there is nothing left of 'this is this' or 'that is that.' We focus our investigation on the mind in the same way as we have done with phenomena (*sabhāva-dhamma*) in general.

No matter how much brightness there may be in the heart, we should know that it's simply a place for the heart to rest temporarily as long as we are still unable to investigate it to the point where we can disperse and destroy it. But don't forget that this shining star of a heart is actually unawareness.

So investigate, taking that as the focal point of your investigation.

So then. If this is going to be obliterated until there's no more awareness, leaving nothing at all—to the point where the 'knower' is destroyed along with it—then let's

find out once and for all. We're investigating to find the truth, to know the truth, so we have to get all the way down to causes and effects, to the truth of everything of every sort. Whatever is going to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. Even if ultimately the 'knower' who is investigating will be destroyed as well, then let's find out with our mindfulness and discernment. We don't have to leave anything remaining as an island or a vantage point to deceive ourselves. Whatever is 'us,' whatever is 'ours,' don't leave it standing. Investigate down to the truth of all things together.

What's left, after the defilement of unawareness is absolutely destroyed, is something beyond the range to which convention can reach or destroy. This is called the pure mind, or purity. *The nature of this purity cannot be destroyed by anything at all.*

Defilements are conventional realities that can arise and vanish. Thus they can be cleansed, made to increase, made to decrease, made to disappear, because they are an affair of conventions. But the mind pure and simple—the phenomenon called a released mind—lies beyond the range to which any defilements, which are all conventions, can reach and destroy. If the mind isn't yet pure, it's a conventional reality just like other things, because conventional things have infiltrated it. Once they are entirely removed, the phenomenon of release is one that no defilement can any longer affect—because it lies beyond range. So what *is* destroyed?

Stress stops, because the cause of stress stops. *Nirodha*—the cessation of stress—also stops. The path, the tool that wipes out the cause of stress, also stops. The four Noble Truths all stop together. Stress stops, the cause of stress stops, the path stops, the cessation of stress stops.

But listen! *What knows that 'that stops' is not a Noble Truth. It lies above the Noble Truths.* The investigation of the Noble Truths is an investigation for the sake of this. Once we reach the real thing, the four Noble Truths have no more role to play, no need to be cleansed, remedied, or removed. For example, discernment: Now that we've worked to the full extent, we can let go of discernment, with no need to set rules for it. Both mindfulness and discernment are tools in the battle. Once the war is over, the enemy is wiped out, so these qualities are no longer at issue.

What's left? Purity. The Buddha, in proclaiming the Dhamma to the world, took it from this pure nature. The doctrines of the religion came from this nature, and in the approach he used in teaching, he had to teach about stress because these conditions are directly related to this mind. He taught us to know how to remedy, how to stop, how to strive—everything of every sort—all the way to the goal at the end of the path, after which nothing more need be said. This is purity. The mind has come out to the outside world. It has left the prison and come to the outside world—freedom—never to be imprisoned again.

But no one wants to go to this world, because they have never seen it. This is an important world—*lokuttara*, the transcendent, a realm higher than other worlds—but

we simply call it the outside world, *outside of all conventions*. We call it a 'world' just as a figure of speech, because our world has its conventions, and so we simply talk about it that way.

Think about escaping from this prison. You've been born in prison, live in prison and die in prison. You've never once died outside of prison. So, for once, get your heart out of prison. You'll be really comfortable—really comfortable!—like the Buddha and his Noble Disciples: They were born in prison like you, but they died outside of the prison. They died outside of the world. They didn't die in this world that's so narrow and confining.

I'll ask to stop here.

Birth & Death

People come with questions—some of which I can remember—and everyone has the question that's waiting right at the barn door: Is there a next world after death? The next world, who goes on to the next world: These sorts of things aren't any one person's issue. They're an issue for all of us who are carrying a burden. When people ask this sort of question, I ask them in return, 'Was there a yesterday? Was there a this morning? Is there a present at this moment?' They admit that there was and is. 'Then will there be a tomorrow? A day after tomorrow? A this month? A next month? A this year? A next year and years after that?'

Things in the past that we can remember, we can use to make guesses about the future. Even for things that haven't yet happened, we can make comparisons with things that have already occurred. The future has to follow the way things have been in the past. For example, yesterday has already occurred, today is occurring. These things have followed one after the other. We know this, we remember, we haven't forgotten. This afternoon, this evening, tonight, tomorrow morning: We've already seen that things have been like this. This is the way things have happened, without being otherwise, and so we accept that this is the way they will continue to be.

Doubts about this world and the next, or about things concerning ourselves: This is delusion about ourselves. This is why these things become big issues, causing endless fuss all over the world of rebirth. 'Is there a next world? When people die, are they reborn?' These questions go together, for who is it that takes birth and dies? We ourselves—always dying and taking birth. What comes to this world and goes to the next world is us. Who else would it be? If not for this being of the world, this wanderer, there wouldn't be anyone weighed down with these questions and burdens.

This is the harm of delusion, of being unable to remember. It shows within us, but we can't catch hold of its causes, of why it has come about. Things that have happened, we can't remember. Our own affairs spin us around in circles and get us so tangled up that we don't know which way to go. This is why self-delusion is an endless complication. Being deluded about other things is not so bad, but being deluded about ourselves blocks all the exits. We can't find any way out. The results come right back at us—they don't go anywhere else—bringing us suffering, because these sorts of doubts are questions with which we bind ourselves, not questions by which we set ourselves free. We can have no hope of resolving and understanding these doubts if we don't find confirmation of the Dhamma in the area of meditation.

This is why the Lord Buddha taught us to unravel and look at our own affairs. But unraveling our own affairs is something very critical. If we do it by guessing or

speculating or whatever, we won't succeed. The only way to succeed is to develop goodness step by step as a means of support and of drawing us in to mental development (*bhāvanā*), or meditation, so as to unravel and look at our own affairs, which lie gathered in the range of meditation. This is what will lead us to know clearly and to cut through our doubts, at the same time leading us to satisfactory results. We will be able to stop wondering about death and rebirth or death and annihilation.

What are our own affairs? *The affairs of the heart*. The heart is what acts, creating causes and results for itself all the time: pleasure, pain, complications, and turmoil. For the most part, it ties itself down more than helping itself. If we don't force it into good ways, the hearts reaps trouble as a result, the suffering that comes from being agitated and anxious, thinking restlessly from various angles for no worthwhile reason. The results we receive are an important factor in making us pained and unsettled. This is thus a difficult matter, a heavy matter for all those who are deluded about the world, deluded about themselves, agitated by the world, and agitated about themselves without being interested in confirming the truth about themselves using the principles of the Dhamma, principles that guarantee the truth. For example, once we die, we must be reborn; as long as the seeds of rebirth are in the heart, we have to continue being reborn repeatedly. It can't be otherwise—for instance, being annihilated at death.

The Buddha teaches us to keep watch of the instigator. In other words, we should observe our own heart, which is what causes birth and death. If we don't understand it, he tells us various angles from which to approach until we understand and can deal with it properly. In particular, he teaches us to meditate, using any of the meditation themes, repeating it so that the mind—which has no footing to hold to, which is in such a turmoil of finding no refuge that it dwells in unlimited dreams and infatuations—will gain enough of a footing to get on its feet, will gain quiet and calm, free from the distraction and unsteadiness that would destroy the peace of mind we want.

For example, he teaches us to repeat '*buddho, dhammo, saṅgho,*' or '*aṭṭhī*' (bones), '*kesā*' (hair of the head), '*lomā*' (hair of the body), or whatever phrase suits our temperament, being mindful to keep watch over our meditation theme so as not to become forgetful and send the mind elsewhere, away from it. This is so that the mind, which we used to send in various places, can latch onto or dwell with its Dhamma-theme: its meditation word. Our awareness, which used to be scattered among various preoccupations, will now gather into that point—the mind—which is the gathering place of awareness. All the currents of our awareness will converge at the Dhamma-theme we are repeating or pursuing with interest. This is because the meditation word—which is something for the mind to hold to, so that it can gain a footing—becomes more and more an object of clear and conspicuous awareness. Thus at the beginning stages of meditation, the meditation word is very important.

Once we have seen the intrinsic value of the peace that appears this way, we at the same time see clearly the harm that comes from the agitation and turmoil of the mind that has no

footing to hold to, and that creates havoc for itself. We needn't ask anyone: The benefits of a peaceful mind and the harm of an agitated mind, we see within our own mind from having practiced meditation. This is a step, the first step, by which the Buddha teaches us to know the affairs of the mind.

We then try to make the mind progressively more firmly settled and calm by repeating the meditation word, as already mentioned. We keep at it, again and again, until we become adept, until the mind can become still the way we want it to. The sense of well-being that arises from a calm heart becomes even more prominent and clear all the time. *As soon as the mind becomes still, giving rise to clear and prominent awareness, it is at the same time a gathering in of the defilements into a single spot so that we can see them more clearly* and more easily observe their behavior—so that we can more easily cure them and remove them with the levels of discernment suited to dealing with crude, intermediate, and subtle defilements step by step.

Now, concerning defilements, the things that force the mind to be agitated in countless, inconceivable ways: We can't catch sight of what defilement is, what the mind is, what the Dhamma is, until we first have a firm basis of mental stillness. When the mind gathers in and is still, the defilements gather in and are still as well. When the mind draws into itself, to be itself or to become a point on which we can focus and understand, the affairs of defilement also enter a restricted range in that same point. They gather in at the heart and rarely ever run loose to stir up trouble for the heart as they used to before the mind was still.

Once the mind is still so that it can stand on its feet, we are then taught to use our discernment to investigate, unravel, and contemplate the various parts of the body in which the defilements hide out. What is the mind interested in? When it isn't quiet, with what does it like to involve itself? While the mind is quiet, it doesn't stir up trouble for itself, but a common habit with us human beings is that once we have gained peace and relaxation, we get lazy. We simply want to lie down and rest. We don't want to unravel the body, the elements, or the *khandhas* with our mindfulness and discernment for the sake of seeing the truth and removing the various defilements from the heart. We don't like to reflect on the fact that those who have abandoned and removed the various kinds of defilement that hide out in the body and the *khandhas* have done so by using mindfulness and discernment. *As for mental stillness or concentration, that's simply a gathering together of the defilements into a restricted range. It's not an abandoning or a removal of defilement.* Please remember this and take it to heart.

The heart, when it isn't still, tends to get entangled with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, and to take them as issues for stirring itself up. We can know with our mindfulness and discernment which of the various sights, sounds, etc., the mind tends to favor most strongly. While we are investigating, we can know with our mindfulness and discernment the objects with which the mind is involving itself. We can observe the affairs of the mind because the mind has been still. As soon as it

begins to head out toward its various preoccupations, we know. This is why we are taught to investigate and unravel things with our discernment so as to know what the mind goes to involve itself with. Try to observe so as to know, so as to see clearly with mindfulness and discernment while you are investigating. Only when you are stilling the mind in concentration is there no need for you to investigate, because concentration and discernment take turns working at different times, as I have already explained.

When you are investigating visual objects, with which visual object is the mind most involved? What is the reason? Look at the object. Dissect it. Analyze it into its parts so as to see it clearly for what it truly is. Once you have dissected the object—whatever it is—so as to see it with discernment in line with its truth, at the same time you will see the absurdity, the deceptiveness of the mind that grows attached and misconstrues things in all kinds of ways without any real reason, without any basis in fact. Once you have investigated carefully, you'll see that the object has none of the worth construed and assigned to it by the mind. There are simply the assumptions of the mind that has fallen for the object, that's all. Once you have investigated, separating the various parts of 'their' body or 'your' body so as to see them in detail, you won't see anything of any worth or substance at all. The heart of its own accord will see the harmfulness of its assumptions, its labels and attachments. The more it investigates, the more clearly it sees—not only the various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, but also the acts of the mind involved with those objects—until it fully knows and clearly sees with discernment, because it has been constantly unraveling things both within and without. You fully know and clearly see the acts inside the heart that become involved, knowing that they come about for this reason and that, all of which are thoroughly absurd.

Before, you didn't know why the mind was involved. But now you know clearly that it is involved for this reason and that: namely, delusion and mistaken assumptions. When you investigate in line with the truth and see the true nature of external things, you know clearly within yourself that the mind has construed phenomena to be like this and like that, which is why it has continually developed more and more attachment and clinging, more and more of the defilements of love and hatred. The heart then realizes its own absurdity.

When the heart realizes that it has been deluded and absurd, it withdraws inward, because if it were to continue to think of becoming attached to those things, it would get cut right through by discernment—so what would it gain from becoming attached? To investigate so as to know clearly that this is this, and that is that, in line with the truth of every individual thing of every sort: This is the way to unravel the great mass of problems that, taken together, are results—the mass of suffering inside the heart. This is how we are taught to unravel it.

As discernment constantly keeps unraveling things without letup until it understands clearly and distinctly, we don't have to tell it to let go. Once the mind

knows, it lets go of its own accord. It is bound to let go of its own accord. The mind attached is the mind that doesn't yet know, doesn't yet understand with discernment. Once the full heart knows, it fully lets go, with no concern or regrets. All the concerns that used to bother and disturb the mind vanish of their own accord because discernment sees right through them. Once it sees everything clearly and distinctly, what is there left to grope for? The problems of the heart that used to be broad and wide-ranging now become more and more restricted. Problems concerning outside affairs become less and less, as I have said in previous talks.

The next step is to unravel the mind, the gathering point of subtle defilements, so as to see what it is looking for when it 'blips' out. Where does it 'blip' from? What is there that pressures the mind into forming thoughts of various issues? When mindfulness and discernment can keep up with the thoughts that come 'blipping' out, these thoughts vanish immediately without amounting to anything, without forming issues to entangle us as they did before. This is because mindfulness and discernment are wise to them, and always ready to herd them in and wipe them out as they keep following in on the tracks of the origin of defilement to see exactly where it is. Where do its children and grandchildren—the defilements—come from? Animals have their parents, what are the parents of these defilements? Where are they? Why do they keep forming again and again, thinking again and again? Why do they give rise to assumptions and interpretations, increasing suffering and stress without stop?

Actually, thought-formations are formed at the mind. They don't come from anywhere else. So investigate, following them in, step by step, without losing the trail that will lead you to the truth, to the culprit. This is genuine exploring, observing the affairs of all the defilements, using the power of genuine mindfulness and discernment. Ultimately we will know what the mind is lacking, what it is still connected with, what it is interested in, what it wants to know and to see.

So we follow the connections, follow the seeds on in. Day by day, the defilements become more and more restricted, more and more restricted. This is because the bridges that connect them to sights, sound, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and the various things of the world in general have been cut away from the mind by using continual mindfulness and discernment to the point where we have no more doubts. It's as if the outside world didn't exist. There remain only the preoccupations that form—blip, blip, blip—in the mind. This is where the rebellious monarch lies. The one who concocts and creates, the one who struggles and writhes restlessly in big and little ways, lies right here.

Before, we didn't know in what ways the mind was writhing. All we knew were the results that appeared, unsatisfactory every time, giving us nothing but suffering and stress, which no one in the world wants. Our own heart was so burdened with stress that it couldn't find a way out, because it had no inkling of how to remedy things. But now that we know, these things gradually disappear so that we know and see more and

more clearly at the mind, which is where unawareness is performing as an actor, as an issue-maker, here inside us. It can't find anything to latch onto outside, so it simply acts inside. Why doesn't it latch on? Because mindfulness and discernment understand, and have it surrounded. So how could it latch onto anything? All it does is go 'blip, blip, blip' in the mind. We now see it more clearly and focus our investigation on it, scratch away at it, dig away at it with mindfulness and discernment until we have it surrounded every time the mind makes a move. There are no longer any lapses in alertness as there were in the first stages when mindfulness and discernment were still stumbling and crawling along.

Our persistence at this level is no longer a matter of every activity. It becomes a matter of every mental moment in which the mind ripples. Mindfulness and discernment have to know both when the rippling comes out and when it vanishes—and so there are no issues that can arise in the moment the mind is fashioning a thought, an assumption, or an interpretation. This is because our rocket-fast mindfulness and discernment can keep up with things. As soon as a rippling occurs, we know. When we know, it vanishes. No issues can arise or connect. They vanish the moment they appear. They can't branch out anywhere because the bridges to outside matters have been cut by mindfulness and discernment.

When mindfulness and discernment are exploring earnestly, relentlessly, unflaggingly, they want to know, to see, and to destroy whatever is hazardous. 'What causes us to take birth as individuals and beings? What leads us to wander in the round of rebirth? What are the causes, what are the conditions that connect things? Where are they right now?' This is called scratching away with mindfulness and discernment, digging away at the mind of unawareness. There is no way we can escape knowing, seeing, and severing the important cause and condition that creates suffering and stress for the beings of the world: namely, the defilement of unawareness that has infiltrated the mind in an insidious way. See? This is the power of mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence on this level, something that meditators never imagine will be possible to this extent.

This is where defilements begin to reveal themselves, because they have no place to hide. They no longer have the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations in which they used to hole up, because the bridges have been cut. Their only hideout is in the mind: The mind is the hideout of unawareness. When we go ransacking through the mind until everything is smashed completely to smithereens with nothing left—in the same way that we used discernment to investigate phenomena in general—then when the mind of unawareness is ransacked in this way, ultimately the supreme defilement—unawareness, the emperor of the round of rebirth—is completely obliterated from the mind. At this point, how can we help but know what it is that causes birth on this or that level? As for where we will or won't be reborn, that's not important. What's important is seeing clearly that this is what has caused birth and death.

This is how we prove whether death is followed by rebirth or annihilation. We have to prove it at the mind by practicing in line with the principles of mental development, in the same way the Buddha and his Noble Disciples practiced and knew so that it was clear to their hearts. There is no other way to know. Don't go groping, guessing, scratching at fleas. You'll end up all mangy and dirty, without gaining anything at all. When we reach this point, it's called eliminating birth—whose primary seeds lie within—completely from the mind. From this moment onward, there is nothing that can ever again connect and branch out. Mindfulness and discernment on the level of Dhamma-realization know this completely.

This is the culprit who asks, 'Is there a next world?' This is the one who reserves a place in the next world, the one who reserved our place in past worlds, the one who has been born and has died over and over and over again, unceasingly, relentlessly, to the point where it can't remember the births, the deaths, the pleasures, the pains, the sufferings large and small in its various lives. *This is the one.*

So please remember its face and take it to heart. Probe it and slash it away to smithereens. Don't show it any mercy: You'll simply be feeding and fattening it for it to come back and destroy you.

When we gather the defilements, they come into the one mind. They gather here and we destroy them right here. Once we have finished destroying them so that nothing is left, the questions about birth, death, and the suffering and stress that result from birth and death no longer exist. We can know this clearly and fully for ourselves in a way that is immediately apparent.

There is no more problem about whether or not there is a next world. Our past worlds, we have already abandoned. As for the next world, the bridges have all been sent flying. And as for the present, we're wise to it. There are no conventions, no matter now refined, left in the mind. This is truly a mind with no more problems. This is where we solve the mind's problems. Once they are all solved here, there will never be any problems again.

No matter how wide the world, no matter how many universes there are, they are all a matter of conventional reality, which has no limit. The heart that knows all around itself is no longer involved.

The affairs that have been constantly assaulting us up to the present, and that will do so on into the future, are the affairs of this mind that has hazards buried within itself. That's all there is. When these hazards have been entirely removed, there is nothing left to be dangerous or poisonous ever again. The question of whether or not there is a next world no longer holds any interest, because the realization has gone straight to the heart *that it is done with the question of connecting up with any other world again.* So in studying and solving our own problem, we tackle it right here. This way there's hope that we can put an end to it—at the same time not causing any harm to ourselves or to others at all.

The Lord Buddha solved the problem right here. His arahant disciples solved it right here—knew it right here, severed it completely right here. The proclamation that the Teacher was completely free of suffering and stress, that he was the foremost teacher of the world, came from this knowledge and this freedom from issues. Our study of the world is completed right here at the mind. Our study of the Dhamma reaches full completion right here.

The ‘world’ means the world of living beings. ‘Living beings’ (*satta*) means those who are caught up, caught up right at the mind. This is where we cut through the problem. This is where we study and know. The arahant disciples studied and knew right here with their full hearts—and that was the end of the problem. They solved the problem and it fell away, with nothing remaining.

But as for us, we take on the whole thing: the entire heap of suffering and stress. We take on all problems, but we aren’t willing to solve them. We simply hoard them to weigh ourselves down all the time. Our heart is thus filled with a heap of stress that nothing else can equal, because nothing else is as heavy as a heart heaped with stress. Carrying this heap of stress and problems is heavy on the heart because we haven’t completed our studies. We carry nothing but this heap because of our delusion.

When *vijjā*—true knowledge—has appeared and eradicated all the hazards from the heart, this is what it means to ‘graduate’ in line with natural principles, with none of the conferring of degrees or titles that would cause us to become even more deluded. To complete our study of the Dhamma in the heart means that we have erased it completely of all delusion, with no traces remaining.

At that moment, the three levels of existence—the levels of sensuality, form, and formlessness—become no more problem, because they all lie in the heart. The level of sensuality is a mind composed of sensuality. The levels of form and formlessness are the conventions of the various things in those levels buried in the heart. When the heart removes them, that’s the end of the problem. When we solve the problem, this is where we solve it. This world and the next world lie right here, because that which steps into any world lies right here. This mind is what steps out to receive stress in greater or lesser measure. The motor, the propeller, lies here in the heart and nowhere else.

The Lord Buddha thus taught at the right point, the most appropriate point: the heart, which is the primary culprit. The things I have mentioned here, with whom do they lie if not with each of us? And if we don’t solve them right here, where will we solve them?

Living beings have to go to their various worlds through the power of the good and bad *kamma* within the heart. That which goes to the worlds—to the bonfires—is this very heart. If we don’t solve the problem right here, there is no way of escaping the bonfires of stress and anxiety. If we solve the problem right here, there is no problem as to where the fires are, because we can keep ourselves protected. That’s all there is to it!

All of these things are very heavy worlds for living beings in general. Whatever problems arise, they arise right here. 'Is death followed by rebirth? By annihilation? Is there a next world? Does hell exist? Does heaven? Does evil exist? Does merit?' Everywhere I go, there's the same question: 'Do heaven and hell exist?' I never feel like answering. I don't see any reason to answer it, because that which is burdened with heaven and hell is the heart, which everyone already has. So why waste time answering? After all, I'm not a record-keeper for heaven and hell!

Straighten things out right here at the cause that will go to heaven and hell. Straighten out the bad causes and foster the good. There will then be no stress, if we straighten things out right on target. And how can we miss? The well-taught Dhamma (*svakkhāta-dhamma*) teaches us to solve things right on target, not off-target. The Dhamma that leads (*niyyānika-dhamma*) by means of the well-taught Dhamma, leads out those who are caught up in stress and anxiety through the power of delusion. Where will we solve things if we don't solve them at the heart? The big problems lie solely at the heart, at this awareness. Crudeness is a matter of this awareness. Refinement is a matter of this awareness. That which makes people crude or refined is this awareness, with defilement as the reinforcement. If the mind becomes refined, it's because goodness is the reinforcement, making it refined until it goes beyond the final point of refinement, beyond the final point of conventions, and ends up gaining release from all stress, with no seeds for any further connections.

Another question that people are always asking is how to overcome laziness. If we were to tell them to use laziness to overcome laziness, it would be tantamount to telling them to become an enemy of beds, blankets, and pillows by sleeping without ever waking up. It would be as if they were already dead, because laziness makes you weak and listless like a person ready to die. How can you use laziness to cure laziness? Once you get a nice resting place as a means of lulling you to drown in sleep, it's as if you were already dead—dead right there on the pillow! Even when you wake up, you don't want to get up, because laziness stomps all over you and destroys you, forcing you not to get up. This is how it goes when you use laziness to cure laziness.

If you use energy and persistence to cure laziness, then you get right up, ready to fight. If there's a fight, you have hope of winning. But if you simply lie prostrate, all you can do is lose—although whether we should call it losing or something else is hard to say, because you don't even put up a fight at all, so how can you say that you lose? If there's a fight and you can't win, then you can say that this person wins and that person loses. But here there's no fight at all! You simply lie there groveling. If you don't call this being a servant in the house of defilements, what would you call it? Because that's what it is: being a servant in their house. If you use laziness—to the point of being its servant—to cure defilement, you end up piling on even more defilements. Or what would you say? As things stand, defilements already fill the heart, so if you foster them even more, where are you going to put them? You've got only one heart! The only way

is to remove defilements so that you can begin to breathe, and not let them sit on top of your nose so that you can never gasp a breath at all.

Remove them so that you can begin to see yourself: 'At last, after all the time I've been meditating, I've finally seen a piece of defilement's grandchild—laziness—fall off, just like a chip of bark off a tree. Today at last I can begin to see myself. Up to now there's only been defilement making use of my nose and mouth. It's really infuriating!'

Persistence. Diligence. Exertion in the way of reason that can accomplish our purposes: This is the path that sages have followed. Even though it may be difficult, we're up to the fight. It's like removing a thorn from your foot: Even though it hurts to remove it, you have to bear it. If you let it stay there, your whole foot will become infected and putrid. You won't be able to walk at all, and may even lose the foot. So there's only one reasonable course: Pull it out. No matter how much it hurts, you have to bear it, because you have to get the thing out! This is a line of reasoning you have to accept. Once the thorn is out, it holds no more poison. Put medicine on the wound, and the foot will heal without flaring up as it would if the thorn were still embedded there.

Defilement is just like a thorn. We let it lie buried forever in the heart. As long as it remains, the heart is infected and putrid, there in the midst of the round of rebirth—an endless monotony. Is this what you want? To be a putrid person? Ask yourself. Don't ask the defilements. They'll simply do you more harm. If you don't want this, you have to fight them. Once you fight them, you are sure somehow of finding a way to win. No matter how many times you lose, there will have to come a time when you win. Once you've won, then you can keep on winning, winning and winning until there is nothing left for you to fight because the defilements are completely mauled.

When you win, whom do you defeat? You defeat laziness with diligence. You defeat defilement with energy and persistence. This way you gain release from all stress. This is how you solve the problem of birth and death, right at the heart. There is only this spot that most needs solving. It's the most appropriate spot, the most correct spot to solve. To solve things, you solve them here. There is no way you can solve them anywhere else. Keep on making assumptions and interpretations for eons and eons, and you'll simply continue to be burdened with the problem as it leads you to birth, death, suffering, and stress. So you shouldn't be bold in speculating and guessing, or you'll waste your time and die in vain, because there is no way the problem will be solved with guesses and speculations.

'Does suffering exist, or not? Do merit (*puñña*) and evil exist, or not?' Actually, we are experiencing these things, all of us, with no possible exceptions. 'Evil' is mental darkness and stress. 'Merit' is well-being and ease. These things exist in the body and mind of every person, so how can you deny them? 'Merit' is a name for well-being. The Buddha calls it merit. Stress he calls evil. We are touched by good and evil all the time. Whether we live in this world or the next, we can't help but meet with good and evil.

Hell or not-hell, if there's pain filling the body and mind, who wants it? Who wants to meet with it? This is something we all know, so why ask about hell when it's already with us like this? Wherever pain is burning us, it's as hot as being branded with fire. No matter where you're branded, it all has to be hot in the same way. You can call it hell or not-hell as you like, but nobody wants it, because pain is something we have all known for ourselves.

And where—to trouble your heart—are you going to go looking for heaven? When you meet with the well-being that comes from practicing the Dhamma—and especially with well-being in the heart, beginning with stillness and calm in ascending stages to the point where the mind develops a firm and solid footing within, so that it is sure of itself; and then further, to the point where you gain release—then where are you going to ask about heaven and *nibbāna*? *There's no need to ask.* You know them directly with your heart. You are the owner, in charge of the heart that is clearly the instigator, so where else are you going to look—for the names 'heaven' and 'hell'? What is there to grope for?

You've got the real thing within you. That's all there is to the matter. The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha doesn't delude people into groping for this or that. So take hold of the real thing right here.

Well then. That should be enough for now.

A Taste for the Dhamma

In the basic principles of the doctrine, we are taught that, 'A delight in the Dhamma surpasses all other delights. The flavor of the Dhamma surpasses all other flavors.' This statement was made by a person who had felt delight in the true Dhamma, who had tasted the flavor of the true Dhamma: namely, our Lord Buddha. For this reason, those who take an interest in listening to his teachings find that no matter what the statement, each word, each sentence goes straight to the heart—except, of course, for people who are simply going through the motions of listening without focusing the mind, letting it drift engrossed in various things in line with its original inclinations without gaining anything of any worth.

The teachings of the religion have no meaning in a mind of this sort until it turns to the Dhamma, develops an interest of its own accord, and puts the Dhamma into practice. Only then will the flavor of the Dhamma seep deep into the heart, nurturing it and giving rise to conviction step by step. This is because the heart now has a continuing basis for the Dhamma that supports it in ascending stages.

In particular, when listening to Dhamma dealing with the practice, if our mind doesn't have any experience with meditation, has never taken an interest in the Dhamma, has never taken an interest in practicing the Dhamma, then not even a single statement will arrest the attention. When listening to a talk on the practice dealing with the stages of the mind, the progress of the mind, setting the mind aright in relationship to the defilements or to the path—mindfulness and discernment, or persistent effort—we won't understand. When we don't understand, we become frustrated and turn our attention elsewhere. Perhaps we may become drowsy and want to go to sleep or something of the sort. The talk seems long because it acts as a drag on our defilements, preventing them from roaming around as they please. This is because we have to keep control over the mind while we listen to the talk; and the mind, when kept under control in this way, feels hemmed in, imprisoned within limits it finds oppressive. Annoyed and bored, it doesn't want to listen, except for the purpose of creating useless issues for entangling itself.

But when we keep listening with interest, meditating even while we listen, the mind becomes focused and follows along with the stream of Dhamma being explained. The mind grows still because the awareness making contact with the Dhamma maintains that contact continuously, step by step, without break. The heart has no chance to slip away to any other preoccupations that are its enemies while listening, and so it's able to settle down and be still.

To be able to settle down in this way is to begin building a base, or to scrub our

vessel—the heart—making it clean and fit to receive the Dhamma. The heart will start growing more peaceful and calm, seeing the value of listening to the Dhamma as explained by the Buddha: ‘Listening to the Dhamma has five rewards.’ The fifth reward is the important one: ‘The mind of the listener becomes radiant and calm.’ This one is very important, but it must build on the earlier ones. ‘The listener hears things he or she has never heard’—this is the basis for the rest.

Suppose that we have never listened to anything in the way of the practice or whatever. When we come to listen, we gain an understanding of things we have never heard before. Things that we *have* heard before, but never understood clearly, we gradually come to understand more and more clearly. We can bring our views more correctly into line. And finally we reach the stage where ‘the mind of the listener becomes radiant and calm.’ When results of this sort appear, a delight in the Dhamma will develop of its own accord. The flavor of the Dhamma will begin to appear while we listen and while the mind is stilling itself to listen. Even though this flavor may not yet surpass all others, it is nevertheless absorbing and arresting, and will remain long in the memory, not easily erased.

This is why meditators place great importance on listening to the Dhamma. If you were to call it being attached to one’s teacher, I wouldn’t disagree. Meditating monks always like to listen to their teachers. If they have a teacher they venerate and revere in the area of meditation, in the area of the mind, then wherever he lives they will keep coming to be with him until there is hardly enough room for them to stay.

Venerable Ācariya Mun is an example. Wherever he stayed, students would come continually from near and far to search him out. Even though they couldn’t all stay in the same place with him, inasmuch as there wasn’t enough room, they would still be willing to stay in nearby areas, two, three, four, or seven to eight kilometers away, so that they might conveniently come to hear his teachings on the *uposatha* days and ‘Dhamma meeting’ days.

On the *uposatha* days, after listening to the Pāṭimokkha and to his instructions, anyone who had any doubts or questions about the Dhamma could ask him to resolve them. For this reason, the township where he stayed was filled with nothing but meditating monks and novices. When *uposatha* day came, they would begin gathering together after the morning meal. At 1:00 p.m. they would hear the Pāṭimokkha; and after the Pāṭimokkha, Venerable Ācariya Mun would give his talk—that’s when he’d usually give his talk, after the Pāṭimokkha. This would be an important part of the practice for those who lived with him. During the Rains Retreat (*vassa*) we would meet like this every seven days. Outside of the Rains Retreat, the schedule wasn’t too fixed, but this is how he would usually schedule things for those of us who stayed directly with him. Each time we would listen to his talks we would gain in insight and understanding—without fail. This is why meditation monks are attached to their teachers.

Each time we would listen to him, he himself would be like a magnet drawing the

interest of the monks and novices. In all things related to the Dhamma, he would be the major attracting force, inspiring fascination and delight in the Dhamma. There was a delight in seeing him and meeting him each time, and even more so in hearing him speak—talking in general, giving instructions, conversing about ordinary things, joking—*because he himself was entirely Dhamma*. Everything he would do or say in any way would keep revealing Dhamma and reasonability that could be taken as a lesson, so that those who were interested could gain a lesson each time they heard him.

This is why meditating monks find a great deal of enjoyment in the area of the Dhamma by living with a meditation master. They go to be with him of their own accord. When they are far from him, and their minds aren't yet to the stage where they can look after themselves, they are bound to feel lonesome. Or if they come across a problem they can't solve, they are sure to miss him. If they can't work out a solution, they have to run to him for advice so as to save a great deal of the time it would take to figure out a solution on their own—because he has been through everything of every sort. If we would take a problem to him, then as soon as we had finished the last sentence, he would immediately have the solution and we would understand right then and there.

This is why, when living with a master who has realized the truth, there's no delay, no waste of time in dealing with each problem as it arises. This is a great benefit for those who come to study with him. They're never disappointed. The fact that one who has seen the truth is giving the explanation makes all the difference.

A moment ago I began by mentioning a delight in the Dhamma. What I have just been talking about is the same sort of thing: finding pleasure in the Dhamma, continual pleasure, through listening to it constantly. In the same way, when we practice the Dhamma constantly, the results—the flavor and nourishment that come from the practice—increase continually, becoming more and more solid and substantial in the heart.

Especially in the practice of centering the mind: The mind is calm, tranquil, contented, and relaxed. Its thoughts don't go meddling with anything outside. It's as if the world didn't exist, because our attention isn't involved with it. There's simply the Dhamma to be contemplated and practiced so as to give rise to more and more steadiness and strength.

And on the level of discernment, no matter how broad or narrow our investigation of the many phenomena in the world may be, it is exclusively for the sake of the Dhamma, for the sake of self-liberation. We thus become thoroughly engrossed, day and night. The more strongly our heart is set on the Dhamma, the greater its stamina and courage. It has no concern for life itself, no worries about its living conditions or anything external. Its only support is the guiding compass of the Dhamma. Whether we are sitting, lying down, or whatever, the heart is engrossed in its persistent efforts in practicing the Dhamma. On the level of concentration, it is engrossed in its stillness of

mind. On the level of discernment, it is engrossed in its explorations of the Dhamma from various angles for the sake of removing defilement, step by step, as it investigates.

Peace of heart is thus possible in each stage of persisting with the practice. The more quiet and secluded the place, the more conspicuously this awareness stands out. Even knowledge in the area of concentration stands out in our inner awareness. It stands out for its stillness. In the area of discernment, our knowledge stands out for the shrewdness and ingenuity of the mind as it explores without ceasing—except when resting in the stillness of concentration—just as water from an artesian well flows without ceasing during both the wet season and the dry.

When phenomena make contact with the mind—or even when they don't—a mind already inclined to discernment is bound to investigate, peering into every nook and cranny, gaining understanding step by step. For example, when we are first taught mindfulness immersed in the body (*kāyaḡatā-sati*), it seems superficial—because the mind is superficial. It has no footing, no mindfulness, no discernment. It hasn't any principles—any Dhamma—to hold to. Whatever it hears doesn't really go straight to the heart, because the mind is buried way down there, deep under the belly of defilement.

But once it develops principles and reasonability within itself, then—especially when we're sitting in meditation in a quiet place, investigating the body—the whole body seems clear all the way through. That's how it really feels to a person meditating on this level. It's really enthralling. Whether we're contemplating the skin or the body's unattractiveness, it appears extremely clear, because that's the way its nature already is—simply that our mind hasn't fallen in step with the truth and so is constantly taking issue with it.

So. Now that the mind can develop stillness and investigate using its discernment, let's take it on a meditation tour, exploring the body: our five *khandhas*. We can travel up to the head, down to the feet, out to the skin, into the muscles, tendons, and bones to see how all the parts are related and connected by their nature.

As the mind contemplates in this way, step by step, as it gets engrossed in its investigation, the final result is that even though we're investigating the body, the body doesn't appear in our inner sense of feeling at all. The mind feels airy and light. The physical body disappears, despite the fact that we continue investigating the mental image of the body as before. Even though we're using the mental image of the body as the focal point of our investigation, the physical aspect of the body no longer appears. It completely vanishes. We investigate until there's a refinement in the mind's sense of awareness to the point where we can make the body in the image die and disintegrate, step by step. Our awareness is confined solely to the mental image that we are investigating by means of discernment. We see it distinctly because nothing else is coming in to interfere.

The mind feels no hunger or desire to go skipping outside. It's completely engrossed in its work of investigation. Its understanding grows clearer and clearer. The clearer its understanding, the greater its fascination. Ultimately there is simply the mental image, or the idea, and the mind, or discernment. As for the actual body, it disappears. You don't know where it's gone. There's no sense of the body at that moment, even though you are investigating the body until you see its condition disintegrating clearly within the mind—disintegrating until it returns to its original condition as the elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. Once the body in the image returns to its original elements, the mind then withdraws inward, leaving nothing but simple awareness.

Feelings all disappear at this stage. *Saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* aren't involved. There's simply awareness, sufficient for the mind's state at that moment. It enters a really solid stillness, leaving only simple awareness. The body sitting here disappears entirely.

This is something that can occur in the course of investigating, *but please don't plan on it*. Simply listen now for the sake of becoming absorbed and gladdened while listening. This will give rise to the benefits of listening that you will actually see for yourself.

What will happen when you investigate in line with your own personal traits is a completely individual matter that will appear in keeping with your temperament. As for what occurs with other people, you can't make yourself experience what they do, know the way they know, or see the way they see. This is something that depends on each person's individual traits. Let things follow your own inner nature in line with the way you are able to investigate and to know.

This is one point I want to explain.

A second point: When investigating the body in terms of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, then—whether or not you think, 'inconstancy, stress, and not-self'—when discernment makes clear contact with the bodily *khandha*, it will be able to know these things on its own, because things that are inconstant, stressful, and not-self are things that deserve to be relinquished, that inspire dispassion and disenchantment, step by step, until you let go. When the mind has investigated so that it fully understands, it lets go of its own accord without being forced, because each part, each aspect of the body or of the *khandha* being investigated is simply an individual truth. When the mind investigates clearly in this way, it makes the break automatically, because a truth has encountered a truth: The mind is the mind, and each of these individual conditions is a separate condition that hasn't come to involve itself with the mind at all. The mind will then turn around to see its own fault in being attached. 'Here I've really been deluded. Actually things are like this and this.' This is one stage: When the mind hasn't yet made a complete break—when it doesn't yet have adequate strength—it will start out by knowing at intervals in this way.

The next time you investigate, you know in this way again and it keeps seeping in, seeping in, until your knowledge on this level becomes adequate and lets go. Like duckweed that keeps moving in, moving in to cover the water: After you spread it apart, the duckweed comes moving in again, and you spread it apart again. This is how it is when discernment investigates these things, making forays into these things or unraveling them. As soon as discernment retreats, subtle defilements come moving in again, but after you have investigated many, many times, the duckweed—the various types of defilement—begins to thin out. Your investigation of these phenomena becomes more and more effortless, more and more proficient, more and more subtle, step by step, until it reaches a point of sufficiency and the mind extricates itself automatically, as I have already explained.

The mind—when its mindfulness and discernment are sufficiently strong—can extricate itself once and for all. This knowledge is clear to it, without any need to ask anyone else ever again. The heart is sufficient, in and of itself, and sees clearly as ‘*sandiṭṭhiko*’ in the full sense of the term, as proclaimed by the Dhamma, without any issues to invite contradiction.

A third point: Sometimes, when investigating the body, the mind makes contact with a feeling of pain, and so turns to investigate it. This all depends on the mind’s temperament. In the same way, when we turn to investigate the feeling, the mind sends us back to the body. This is because the body and the feeling are interrelated and so must be investigated together at the same time, depending on what comes naturally to us at that particular time, that particular feeling, and that particular part of the body.

When the mind investigates a feeling of pain, the pain is nothing more than ‘a pain.’ The mind looks at it, fixes its attention on it, examines it, and then lets it go right there, turning to look at the body. The body is the body. The feeling is a feeling. Then we turn to look at the mind: The mind is the mind. We investigate and experiment to find the truth of the body, the feeling, and the mind—all three of which are the troublemakers—until we have a solid understanding of how each has its own separate reality.

When the mind pulls back from the body and the feeling, neither the body nor the feeling appears. All that appears is simple awareness. When a mental current flashes out to know, the feeling then appears as a feeling. These currents are the means by which we know what phenomenon has appeared, because this knowledge gives a meaning or a label to the phenomenon as being like this or like that.

If we’re going to think in a way that binds us to ‘ourselves’—in other words, in the way of the origin of stress—we have to make use of this act of labeling as what leads us to grasp, to become attached, to make various assumptions and interpretations. If we’re going to think in the way of discernment, we have to make use of the discernment *that is this very same current of the mind* to investigate, contemplate, until we see clearly by means of discernment and can withdraw inwardly in a way that is full of reason—not in a way that is lazy or weak, or that is groveling in abject surrender with no gumption left

to fight.

In investigating feeling, when a *saññā* flashes out, mindfulness is alert to it. If our investigation of feeling has become refined and precise, then when a *saññā* simply flashes out, we know. When *sañkhāras* form, they are just like fireflies: blip! If no *saññā* labels them or picks up where they leave off, they simply form—blip! blip!—and then vanish, vanish. No matter what they form—good thoughts, bad thoughts, crude thoughts, subtle thoughts, neutral thoughts, whatever—they are simply a rippling of the mind. If they occur on their own, when nothing is making contact with the mind, they're called *sañkhāra*. If they occur when something is making contact, they're called *viññāṇa*.

Here we're talking about the *sañkhāras* that form on their own, without anything else being involved. They form—blip—and then vanish immediately. Blip—and then vanish immediately. We can see this clearly when the mind converges snugly in the subtle levels of concentration and discernment.

The snugness of the mind's convergence won't have anything else involved with it at all. All that remains is simple awareness. When this simple awareness remains stable this way, we will see clearly that it isn't paired with anything else. When the mind begins to withdraw from this state to return to its awareness of phenomena—returning to its ordinary state of mind that can think and form thoughts—there will be a rippling—blip—that vanishes immediately. It will then be empty as before. In a moment it will 'blip' again. The mind will form just a flash of a thought that doesn't yet amount to anything, just a rippling that vanishes immediately the instant it's known. As soon as there's a rippling, we are alert to it because of the power of mindfulness keeping watch at the moment—or because of the strength of concentration that hasn't yet dissipated. But after these ripples have formed two or three times, they come more and more frequently, and soon we return to ordinary consciousness, just as when a baby awakens from sleep: At first it fidgets a bit, and then after this happens a number of times, it finally opens its eyes.

The same is true of the mind. It has calm... Here I'm talking about concentration when discernment is there with it. The various ways of investigating I have mentioned are all classed as discernment. When we have investigated enough, the mind enters stillness, free from mental formations and fashionings and from any sort of disturbance. All that appears is awareness. Even just this has the full flavor of a centered mind, which should already be enough to surpass all other flavors. We never tire of delighting in this stillness. We feel a constant attraction to this stillness and calm in the heart. Wherever we go, wherever we stay, the mind has its own foundation. The heart is at ease, quiet and calm, so that now we must use discernment to investigate the elements and *khandhas*.

The important point to notice is the act of formation in the mind. Once something is formed, *saññā* immediately labels it—as if *sañkhāra* were forming things to hand on to *saññā*, which takes up where the *sañkhāra* leaves off. It then interprets these things from

various angles—and this is where we get deluded. We fall for our own assumptions and interpretations, for our own shadows, which paint picture stories that have us engrossed or upset both day and night. Why are we engrossed? Why are we upset?

Engrossed or upset, it's because of the mind's shadows acting out stories and issues. This story. That story. Future issues. Things yet to come. Things yet to exist—*nothing but the mind painting pictures to delude itself*. We live in our thought-formations, our picture-painting—engrossed and upset by nothing but our own thought-formations, our own picture-painting. In a single day there's not a moment when we're free from painting imaginary pictures to agitate and fool ourselves. Wise people, though, can keep up with the tricks and deceptions of the *khandhas*, which is why they aren't deluded.

The moment when mindfulness and discernment really penetrate down is when we can know that this is actually the way the mind usually is. Like people who have never meditated: When they start meditating, they send their minds astray, without anything to hold on to. For example, they may have a meditation word, like 'buddho,' and there they sit—their eyes vacant, looking at who-knows-what. But their minds are thinking and painting 108 pictures with endless captions. They then become engrossed with them or wander aimlessly in line with the preoccupations they invent for themselves, falling for their preoccupations more than actually focusing on their meditation. They thus find it hard to settle their minds down because they don't have enough mindfulness supervising the work of meditation to make them settle down.

Once we have used our alertness and ingenuity in the areas of concentration and discernment, we will come to know clearly that these conditions come from the mind and then delude the mind whose mindfulness and discernment aren't quick enough to keep up with them. The heart causes us to follow after them deludedly, so that we can't find any peace of mind at all, even though our original aim was to meditate to find peace of mind. These deceptive thoughts engender love, hate, anger, irritation, without letup, no matter whether we are meditators or not—because as meditators we haven't set up mindfulness to supervise our hearts, and the result is that we're just as insane with our thoughts as anyone else. Old Grandfather Boowa has been insane this way himself, and that's no joke!

Sometimes, no matter how many years in the past a certain issue may lie, this aimless, drifting heart wanders until it meets up with it and revives it. If it was something that made us sad, we become sad about it again, all on our own. We keep it smoldering and think it back to life, even though we don't know where the issue lay hidden in the meantime. These are simply the mind's own shadows deceiving it until they seem to take on substance and shape. As what? As anger, greed, anxiety, pain, insanity, all coming from these shadows. What sort of 'path' or 'fruition' is this? Paths and fruitions like this are so heaped all over the world that we can't find any way out.

So in investigating the acts of the mind, the important point is that discernment be quick to keep up with their vagrant ways. When mindfulness and discernment are quick

enough, then whatever forms in the mind, we will see that it comes from the mind itself, which is about to paint pictures to deceive itself, about to label and interpret sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of various kinds. The heart is then up on these preoccupations; and when it is up on them, they vanish immediately, with no chance of taking on substance or shape, of becoming issues or affairs. This is because mindfulness and discernment are wise to them, and so the issues are resolved.

Ultimately, we come to see the harm of which the mind is the sole cause. We don't praise or blame sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations at all. The heart turns and sees the harm that arises in the mind that deceives itself, saying, 'That's worth praising... worth criticizing... worth getting glad about... worth getting sad about.' It sees that the blame lies entirely with the mind. This mind is a cheat, a fraud, a deceiver. If we study it and keep watch of its ways through meditation, we will gain a thorough knowledge of its good and evil doings, until it lies within our grasp and can't escape us at all.

This is how we investigate when we investigate the mind.

Ultimately, other things will come to have no meaning or importance for us. The only important thing is this deceiving mind, so we must investigate this deceiver with mindfulness and discernment so that we can be wise to its tricks and deceits.

In fixing our attention on the mind, we have to act as if it were a culprit. Wherever it goes, we have to keep watch on it with mindfulness and discernment. Whatever thoughts it forms, mindfulness and discernment have to keep watch so as to be up on events. Each event—serious or not—keeps vanishing, vanishing. The heart knows clearly, 'This mind, and nothing else, is the real culprit.'

Visual objects aren't at fault. They don't give benefits or harm. Sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations don't give benefits or harm, because they themselves aren't benefits or harm. Only the mind is what fashions them and dresses them up so as to deceive itself into being gladdened or saddened, pleased or pained through the power of the preoccupations that arise only from the heart. Mindfulness and discernment see more and more clearly into these things, step by step, and then turn to see that all the fault lies with the mind. They no longer praise or blame other things as they used to. Once they have focused solely on the mind, which at the moment is the culprit, the time won't be long before they can catch the culprit and put an end to all our concerns.

So then. Whatever thoughts that may be formed are all an affair of the mind. The 'tigers and elephants' it forms are simply *saṅkhāras* it produces to deceive itself. Mindfulness and discernment are up on events every time. Now the current of the cycle (*vaṭṭa*) keeps spiraling in, day by day, until we can catch the culprit—but we can't yet sentence him. We are now in the stage of deliberation to determine his guilt. Only when we can establish the evidence and the motive can we execute him in accordance with the procedures of 'Dhamma Penetration.' This is where we reach the crucial stage in mindfulness and discernment.

In the beginning, we used the elements and *khandhas* as our objects of investigation, cleansing the mind with elements, using them as a whetstone to sharpen mindfulness and discernment. We cleansed the mind with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, using them as a whetstone to sharpen mindfulness and discernment; and we cleansed the mind itself with automatic mindfulness and discernment. Now at this stage we circle exclusively in on the mind. We don't pay attention to matters of sights, sounds, smells, or tastes, because we have already understood and let go of them, knowing that they aren't the causal factors. They aren't as important as this mind, which is the primary instigator—the culprit renowned throughout the circles of the cycle, the agitator, the disturber of the peace, creating havoc for itself only right here inside.

Mindfulness and discernment probe inward and focus right here. Wherever this mind goes, it's the only thing causing harm. So we watch patiently over this culprit to see what he will do next—and aside from being alert to what he will do, we also have to use discernment to penetrate in and see who is inciting him. Who stands behind him, so that he must be constantly committing crimes? He keeps creating deceptive issues without pause—*why?*

Mindfulness and discernment dig in there, not simply to pounce on or lay siege to his behavior, but also to go right into his lair to see what motivating force lies within it. What is the real instigator? There has to be a cause. If there's no cause, no supporting condition to spin the mind into action, the mind can't simply act on its own.

If it simply acts on its own, then it has to be a matter of *khandhas* pure and simple—but here it's not pure and simple. Whatever behavior the mind displays, whatever issues it forms, all give rise to gladness or sadness. This shows that these conditions aren't 'simply' coming out. There's a cause. There's an underlying condition that sends them out, making them give rise to real pleasure and pain when we fall for them.

While we are exploring inward at this point, we have already seen that the mind is the culprit, so we must consider letting go of all external things. Our burdens grow less and less. There remain only the issues of the mind and the issues of formation and interpretation that arise solely from the mind. Mindfulness and discernment spin whizzing around in there and ultimately come to know what it is that causes the mind to form so many thoughts giving rise to love, anger, and hate. As soon as it appears, the heart knows it; and when the heart knows it, the 'Lord of Conventional Reality,' which is blended with the mind, dissolves away.

At this point the cycle has been destroyed through mindfulness and discernment. The mind is no longer guilty, and turns into a mind absolutely pure. Once the problem of the cycle is ended, there is no way that we can find fault with the mind. When we *could* find fault, that was because the fault was still in the mind. It was hiding in the mind. Just as when criminals or enemies have taken up hiding in a cave: We have to destroy the cave as well, and can't conserve it out of affection for it.

Avijjā—unawareness—is the lord of the three levels of existence that has infiltrated the mind, and thus we have to consider destroying the entire thing. If the mind isn't genuine, it will dissolve together with unawareness. If it's genuine in line with its nature, it will become a pure mind—something peerless—because all things counterfeit have fallen away from it through the use of mindfulness and discernment.

When the counterfeit things that are like rust latching firmly onto the mind finally dissolve away through the power of mindfulness and discernment, the mind becomes genuine Dhamma. You can call it 'the genuine mind' or 'the genuine Dhamma': There's no contradiction, because there is no more reason for contradiction, which is an affair of defilement. You can say 100% that the flavor of the Dhamma has surpassed all other flavors. When the mind is pure Dhamma, it has had enough of all other things. It is absolutely no longer involved with anything else at all. It's one mind, one Dhamma. There is only one. There is only one genuine Dhamma. The mind is Dhamma, the Dhamma is the mind. That's all that can be said.

I ask each of you to take this and contemplate it. This is the basis for the truth of the teachings that the Lord Buddha taught from the beginning until the moment of his total *nibbāna*. The purity of his mind was a deeply felt Dhamma that he experienced with his full heart. He then proclaimed that Dhamma, with the benevolence of his full heart, teaching the world up to the present.

To call his teachings, 'the benevolence of the Lord Buddha' shouldn't be wrong, because he taught the world with true benevolence. When we take those teachings and put them into practice in a way that goes straight to the heart, we will come to see things we have never seen before, never known before, within this heart, step by step, until we reach the full level of practice, know the full level of knowledge, and gain release from suffering and stress with our full hearts, with nothing left latching on. This is called wiping out the cemeteries—the birth and death of the body and mind—for good. What a relief!

And now that we've reached this point, I don't know what more to say, because I'm at a loss for words. I ask that you as meditators practice, train yourselves and explore all Dhammas until you too are at a loss of words like this speaker at his wits' end. Even though we may be stupid, infinitely stupid, I'll ask to express my admiration straight from the heart.

Evam.

Feelings of Pain

In the Discourse on Good Omens (*Maṅgala Sutta*), the Buddha teaches us to associate with sages, and not with fools. The first and foremost fool here is our own heart. *In other words, there are fools outside and fools inside*, and for the most part the fools inside are the ones who keep stirring up trouble all the time. When we live with meditation masters, which is called associating with sages, we keep gaining lessons from sages, because that's what they are. They are wise in the various tactics they teach us. They have practiced and gained knowledge of everything from experience. Their teachings are thus correct, precise, and convincing to those who listen to them, with no room for any doubt.

In particular, Venerable Ācariya Mun: There never was a time when he would teach saying, 'It seems to be like this. It seems to be like that.' There was nothing but, 'This is the way it is for sure, for sure'—and *we* were sure, because he spoke only the absolute truth taken right from a heart that had already known and seen, and from his own well-conducted practice. Especially in the case of illness: If there were any weak-willed cases, he would tell them, 'Whoever is weak, whoever cries and moans, can take his moans as his medicine. There's no need to search out medicine anywhere, no need to have anyone to look after him. His moans are his medicine. If moaning serves any purpose, then why search for medicine to treat the disease?'

Then he would add, 'Keep moaning. Everyone can moan. Even children can moan—if it serves a purpose. But here it doesn't serve any purpose at all other than to annoy those good people who are unflinching in the practice. So you shouldn't moan out of weakness. You're a meditation monk. When you act like this, who can bear to see it? If you were a child or an ordinary person, there wouldn't be anything wrong with it, because they haven't received any training. They don't have any knowledge or understanding of the various ways to contend with the pain, such as contemplating it.

'But you, you already know everything of every sort. Yet when trouble comes, such as illness, you can't find any methods or tactics to care for yourself. You just go all to pieces. This won't do at all. You're a shame to yourself and your fellow meditators.'

Venerable Ācariya Mun was very talented in teaching the heart. When those of his disciples who were intent on studying with him would listen to anything he'd say, it would go straight to the heart. Straight to the heart. The things we should put into practice, we would put into practice. The things we should understand right then, dealing with internal matters, we would understand—every time, step after step.

When we were ill, he would teach us how to contemplate. 'When you have a fever, where did you get it from?' He'd say this so as to serve a purpose, as food for thought

for meditators. ‘From where did you drag out the fever and chills? They arise in this body, don’t they? When they disappear, where do they go, if not back to where they came from? Even if they don’t disappear, they die together with each of us: There are no exceptions at all in this body. Investigate it so as to know it.

‘All stress, all pains are Noble Truths. If we don’t investigate them, what are we going to investigate? The Buddha gained Awakening with the Noble Truths, his disciples gained Awakening with the Noble Truths—so are we going to gain Awakening with weakness? Would that be in keeping with the Dhamma of the Buddha? Then we’ve come to resist the Dhamma!

‘Where does the pain arise? In which part? Ask so as to find out. When it hurts here and aches there, *who is it that hurts?* Who is it that aches? Probe on in to find what instigates it. Where does it come from? Where does it hurt? *What causes it to hurt? What perceives it as pain?* When the body dies and they cremate it, does it hurt? Who is it that deceives itself into thinking that this hurts or that aches? Investigate so as to find its initial causes.

‘If you’re a meditator who doesn’t know initial causes and doesn’t know their effects—this heap of suffering—then how are you going to cure suffering? What is your discernment for? Why don’t you think? Why don’t you find it and put it to use?

‘Your mindfulness and discernment are for keeping things in mind and investigating them—things such as feelings of pain that exist in your body and mind.’

He would keep stressing his points, step by step. If the person listening was intent on listening—and especially if he had any fighting spirit—he’d find it easy to grasp the point, and it would appeal to him immediately. Immediately.

When we’d leave Venerable Ācariya Mun to live in any spot suitable for the practice, his teachings would seem to reverberate through the heart. You could remember every facet of his teachings, every important point that should be used as a tool in the practice. For example, if you were staying in a challenging place, *it was if he were right there in the heart*. The heart would be really audacious and exultant in practicing, knowing the Dhamma, seeing it, understanding it. You would understand with audacity, and with a warrior’s spirit—not by being discouraged, irresolute, or beating a retreat. That’s not the way to make the defilements fear you and disappear from the heart. That’s not at all the way to cure defilement, to know the affairs of defilement or to be able to remove them.

This is the religion! There is nothing to compare with it in being so correct, so precise, so genuine, so true, so indisputable. If we all were to follow the principles of the religion, there would be no need for prisons or jails. What need would they serve? Nobody would be doing any wrong! People would see in line with reason and acknowledge their rightness and wrongness, their good and their evil, using the principles of reason as their standard. We human beings would then be able to live with

one another.

The reason we need laws, prisons, and jails is because we don't admit our wrongs. When we're wrong, we don't admit that we're wrong. Even the moment after we see ourselves do something wrong, we won't admit to it. Even when we're put in jail and are asked, we still say, 'They accused me of stealing this and stealing that'—even though we ourselves actually stole it. This is simply an unwillingness to admit to things in line with reason, in line with the truth. Even within the heart, with things that concern us exclusively, the same holds true: We don't admit to them, which is why we receive so much pain and suffering. If we admit to the principles of the truth, the things that appear in line with the truth can be resolved through the truth. For example, even when pain arises in the body, it won't disrupt the mind because our knowledge is wise to it.

As the principles of the Dhamma say, pains have been appearing in our body and mind ever since we first became aware of things. There is no reason for us to get excited, frightened, or upset by them to the point where they disease the mind.

This is why mental development, or meditation, is an excellent science for gaining knowledge on all fronts: Those who practice consistently are not upset when pain arises in the body. They can even focus on the spot where the pain arises so as to investigate and analyze it in line with its truth until gaining skillful and courageous tactics for dealing with it admirably.

The important point is to associate with sages, wise people, those who are sharp and astute. If we aren't yet able to depend on ourselves, we have to depend on our teachers to instruct us. If we listen often, their teachings gradually seep into us and blend with our temperament until our mind becomes a mind with Dhamma. Our mind becomes a sage, a wise person, and can eventually take care of itself, becoming '*attā hi attano nātho*'—its own mainstay.

So in every activity where we aren't yet capable, we first have to depend on others. In living with those who are good, we are bound to find peace and happiness. Our traits come to mesh with theirs—this is important—until our own traits become good and admirable as well. It's the same as if we were to associate with bad people: At first we aren't bad, but as we associate with them for a long time, our traits blend themselves with theirs until we become bad without being aware of it. When we are fully bad, this makes us even more blind. We feel that we've become even better. No one else can push us around. Otherwise our 'goodness' will jump into action—the 'goodness' of a bad person, an evil that wise people everywhere fear.

Bad people and good people. Evil and good. These things get turned around in this way. Bad people thus can't see the truth that they are bad, and so flatter themselves into thinking, 'I'm good. I'm smart. I'm clever. I'm one of the most renowned operators around.' That's how they twist things!

For this reason, associating with meditation masters, with sages, is important for

anyone who is striving to become a good person, who is hoping to prosper and be happy, because sages will teach us often. Their manners and deportment that we see day after day will gradually seep into and nurture our minds. We can hold to them continually as good examples, for everything they do in every way is all Dhamma.

Especially if they're people devoid of defilement, then there is nothing to compare with them. Like Venerable Ācariya Mun: I'm certain that he was devoid of defilement. After hearing the Dhamma from him, I had no doubts. He himself never said that he was devoid of defilement, you know. He never said that he was an arahant or anything, *but he would say it in his ability to explain the true Dhamma on every level* in a way that would go straight to the heart and erase all doubt for all those who came to study with him. This is why I can dare to say unabashedly that Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera is one of the important arahants of our day and age—an age in which arahants are exceedingly rare, because it's an age sadly lacking in people practicing the Dhamma for the sake of arahantship. Instead, we practice to eliminate arahantship by amassing all kinds of miscellaneous defilements. This holds for all of us, so no one is in a position to criticize anyone else.

Let's return to the subject of feelings: To investigate feelings of pain is very important. This is something I learned from Venerable Ācariya Mun. He took this very seriously whenever any of the meditators in his monastery became ill. Sometimes he would go himself and ask, 'How are you contemplating your illness?' Then he'd really emphasize the Dhamma. 'Go probing right there. Wherever there's pain, investigate so as to see the truth of the pain.' He'd teach how to investigate: 'Don't retreat. To retreat is to enhance the pain.'

'To be a warrior, you have fight using discernment. This is what will bring victory: the ability to keep up with the feeling of pain that you hold to be an important enemy. Actually, that feeling isn't anyone's enemy. It doesn't have any sense of consciousness at all. It's simply a truth—that's all. So investigate on in. You don't have to anticipate it or concern yourself with whether it's a big pain or a small pain. All that's asked is that you know its truth with your own discernment, so that the heart won't deceive you.' That's what he would say.

Actually, our heart is deceit incarnate, because that which deceives is within the heart and fools the heart into making assumptions and interpretations. Stupidity has an easy time believing lies. Clever people have an easy time deceiving stupid people. Deceit has an easy time fooling stupidity. The cleverness of the defilements gets along well with our own stupidity. *This is why the Dhamma teaches us to ferret things out to investigate down to their truth* and then to believe in line with that truth. This is our means of gaining victory step by step. Ferret out the pains that are always with you so as to see them. Don't run away from them. Whether they're big or small, investigate right there. Investigate right there. If you're going to concentrate, concentrate right there. When you are investigating its causes, no matter how great the pain, keep

probing in.

The thing we call pain: What does it depend on as its foundation? It depends on the body as its foundation. It depends on our attention as its means of flaring up—in other words, the attention that labels it in various ways: This is what makes pain flare up. We have to cure this kind of attention by investigating to know both the pain—what it's like—and the place where pain arises, in whatever part of the body. Try to know clearly whether or not that spot is really pain.

For example, if there's pain in the bone, in any part of the skin or flesh, the skin and the flesh are skin and flesh. The pain is a pain. *Even though they dwell together, they are separate things, not one and the same.* The mind—the knower that is aware of these things—is a mind, *but it's a deluded mind*, so it assumes that this is pain, that's pain, and conflates these things into being its 'self,' saying, 'I hurt here. I hurt there. I don't want myself to be pained. I want the pain to vanish.' This desire is a defilement that encourages pain and suffering to arise. The heart is pained. The feeling of pain in the body is pain. The pain in the heart flares up with that pain, because it wants it to follow the heart's desires. These things keep feeding each other. This is our own stupidity, loading us down with suffering.

To be intelligent, we have to investigate, to watch the feeling of pain in the heart. What does it come from? What does it depend on? It depends on the body. Which part of the body? From what spot in the body does the pain arise? *Look at the body and the feeling: Are they one and the same thing?* What kind of shape and features do they have? The feeling doesn't have any shape or features or a posture of any kind. It simply appears as a feeling of pain, that's all.

As for the body, it has a shape, a color, and complexion—and it stays as it was before the pain arose. When the pain arises, it stays just as it was. *Actually, the pain is something separate from this.* It simply depends on a malfunction of the body to arise. The mind is what takes notice of it. If the mind has any discernment, it should notice it in line with its truth. The mind then won't be affected by it. But if the mind is deluded, it latches onto the pain—in other words, it pulls that pain in to be its 'self'—and then wants that pain, which it says is its self, to disappear.

This is why we can't analyze it. Once the pain is our self, how can we separate it out? If it's simply a pain, a separate reality, then the body is a separate reality. They aren't one and the same. Each one exists separately. Each is a separate reality in line with its nature. Only when our awareness is like this can we analyze things.

But as long as we see the pain as our self, then we can analyze it all day long and not get anywhere, because once we hold that, 'This is myself,' how can we analyze it? We haven't separated these things with discernment, so we have to keep holding onto them as our self. When the *khandhas* and the mind blend into one, we can't analyze them. But when we try to use mindfulness and discernment to investigate in to see the truth of

these things—that each exists separately, each has its separate reality, which holds true for us and for everyone else—and this realization goes deep into the heart, then the pain gradually fades away, fades away. At the same time, we know what makes the connection from the pain into the heart, because the connection comes from the heart. When we investigate the pain, it comes retracting into the heart. All the affairs of pain come from the heart that labels or that experiences mental pain because of an insidious connection by way of attachment (*upādāna*) that we don't yet know.

When we investigate so as to see clearly, we follow the feeling of pain inward. We come in knowing, knowing. The pain keeps retracting and retracting, into the heart. Once we know that the heart is what created the attachment, making itself construe the pain to be itself, creating a great deal of suffering—once we know this, the pain disappears.

Or—alternatively—once we know this, the pain stays real, but the heart doesn't latch onto it. Even though the pain may not disappear, the mind is the mind. It doesn't make any connection through attachment. Each is its own separate reality. This is called the mind being its own self—cool, calm, and collected—in the midst of the pain of the *khandhas*. This is to know that the mind is a reality just as each *khandha* is a separate reality.

This is the path for those who are practicing so as to become wise to the five *khandhas*, with feelings of pain as their primary focus.

But for those who understand all the way, to the point of reaching 'the unshakable mind, the unshakable Dhamma' (*akuppa-citta, akuppa-dhamma*) that can't be provoked into being anything else, there is no problem at all. Whether pain is little or great, they have absolutely no problem because their minds are always true. There is never a time when their minds, which are already pure, can become defiled, can become 'worlded.' There's no way it could happen. For this reason, whatever conditions the *khandhas* may display, such people know them in line with the principles of nature. The *khandhas* themselves appear in line with the principles of nature and disappear in line with nature. They remain naturally and then disappear naturally. The mind knows in line with its own nature, without having to be forced or coerced in any way. The minds of those who know totally all-around are like this.

As for those of us who are investigating the *khandhas* to know them and withdraw from them step by step, even though our minds are not yet like that while we are practicing, even though our hopes aren't yet fulfilled, still our investigation of pain is for the purpose of separating the mind from the pain so that it's not entangled in pain, so that whenever pain arises in greater or lesser measure, the mind doesn't cling to the pain as being itself. We do this so as not to gather up the pain as being our self—which would be the same as taking fire to burn ourself. When we can do this, we can be at our ease.

So pain is an excellent whetstone for discernment. However much pain arises, set your mindfulness and discernment focused right there. Turn to look at the mind, and then expand your awareness to encompass the feeling and the body, each of which is already a separate part. The body is one part, the feeling is another, and the mind another. Keep going back and forth among them, investigating with discernment until you understand—and it really goes to the heart—that, ‘Each *khandha* is simply... and that’s all.’ None of them appears to be any such thing as ‘you’ or ‘yours.’ *They are simply different realities that appear, and that’s all.* When you understand clearly like this, *the heart becomes its own free and independent self* at that moment and it knows that the mind and the *khandhas* are separate realities, neither affecting the other.

Even at the moment when you are about to die, the heart will be up on events in the immediate present. It won’t be shaken by pain and death because it is sure that the mind is the mind: a stronghold of awareness. Each *khandha* is simply a condition. The mind thus doesn’t fear death because it is sure of itself that it won’t get destroyed anywhere.

Even though it may not have yet reached the level where it’s absolutely devoid of defilement, the mind has still prepared itself using discernment with the *khandhas* so that it’s supreme. In other words, it lives with the Noble Truths. It lives with its whetstone for discernment. Discernment will spread its power far and wide. The heart will grow more and more radiant, more and more courageous, because discernment is what cleanses it. Even if death comes at that moment, there’s no problem.

For one thing, if you use mindfulness and discernment to investigate pain without retreating, to the point where you understand it, then even when you really are about to die, you’ll know that the pain will disappear first. The mind won’t disappear. It will revert into itself, knowing exclusively within itself, and then pass on at that moment. The phrase, ‘Mindfulness lapses,’ doesn’t exist for a person who has practiced the Dhamma to this level. We can thus be sure that a person with mindfulness, even though he or she may not be devoid of defilement, will still be clearly aware at the moment when pain arises in full force to the point where the *khandhas* can no longer endure and will break apart—will die. The mind will withdraw itself from all that and revert to its ‘mindness’—to being its own independent self—and then pass on. This is a very high, very refined level of Dhamma!

For this reason, meditators who are resolute and unflinching for the sake of knowing every level of the Dhamma tend to be earnest in investigating pain. When the time comes for them to know, the knowledge goes straight to the heart. They regard their pain as a Noble Truth in line with the Buddha’s teaching that all living beings are fellows in pain, birth, aging, illness, and death.

So when investigating the *khandhas* so as to know them in line with their truth, you shouldn’t try to thwart or resist the truth. For example, if the body can’t endure, let it go. You shouldn’t cherish it. As for the pain, it will go on its own. This is called *sugato*—faring well.

This is the way of investigating the mind and training the heart that gives clear results to those who meditate. They have meditated in the way I've described so that when the time of death is really upon them, they don't hope to depend on anyone at all—parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, anyone. *They have to withdraw the mind from all things that entangle and involve it so as to enter that crucial spot where they are engaged in hand-to-hand combat.*

At a time such as this, at the moment when you are about to die, take pain as the focal point for investigation. Don't be willing to retreat—come what may! All that's asked is that you know and understand this point. Don't go thinking that if you die while being embroiled in investigating pain like this—while the mind is in the midst of this commotion—you'll go to a bad bourn. Why should you go to a bad bourn? You're embroiled, but with a noble task. You're embroiled with knowledge, or for the sake of knowledge, *and not because of delusion.* The mind is focused on investigating and probing pain. When the time comes for it really to go, this knowing mind—the mind with mindfulness knows—will withdraw instantly into itself. It will let go immediately of the work at hand and withdraw into itself, to be itself—the mind and nothing but—and then pass on like a '*sugato*' with the full capability of a meditator, even though we may not yet be devoid of defilement.

This is called having full strength to our full capacity, in line with our level of mind and Dhamma. Investigation and mental development are thus important matters, matters on which our life and death depend. We needn't hope to depend on anyone else at all—of this we are certain within ourselves. The heart knows within itself how strong mindfulness and discernment are, and needn't go asking anyone else.

If the heart is able to investigate to the point where it can pass on at that moment, all doubts vanish. There are no problems at all. If you think that because you're a woman or because you're a layperson, you can't realize nibbāna, *that's your own misconception*, which is one kind of defilement deceiving you.

The Dhamma is a truth and everyone's common property. Whether we are men or women, lay or ordained, we can all have mindfulness and discernment. We can all cure our defilements. When we are willing, any man or woman, any monk or layperson can use any of the methods to cure defilement and gain release. We needn't create problems to plague our hearts and waste our time. 'Since when do I have the potential to do that?' Don't think that! You're developing the merit and potential right now! However much or little, you can see it right here in the mind.

We should examine ourselves. Wherever we are stupid, we should develop intelligence: mindfulness and discernment. Only then will we be doing what is genuinely right in terms of the principles of the Lord Buddha's Dhamma.

If we criticize ourselves, thinking, 'That person is on this level or that level while we don't have any level at all; wherever we go, this person gets ahead of us, that person

gets ahead of us,' actually nobody is getting ahead of us except for the defilements that get ahead of us and deceive us into feeling inferior and depressed, into thinking that we have only a little potential. That's simply a misconception aimed at making us discouraged and self-pitying, because defilement is looking for a way to kill us without our realizing it.

We shouldn't think in those ways. We are full of potential—all of us. And why shouldn't we be? We're meditators. We're all devoted to making merit. Potential isn't something we can set out on the market to compete with one another. Every person has potential within him or herself. We're taught not to belittle one another's potential. Even with animals, we're taught not to belittle them—think of that!—because potential lies in the heart of every person and every animal.

So when curing defilement, you needn't waste time thinking those things. They'll simply ruin your morale and your resolve. To think, 'I'm a worthless woman... a worthless man... a worthless monk... a worthless layperson. I don't have any paths or fruitions at all. Other people have them, but I don't. I'm ashamed to show them my face'—these are wrong thoughts that will spoil your resolve in developing the various forms of goodness.

The right way to think is this: 'Right now I'm making an effort, with mindfulness and discernment, to cure defilement and to develop what is good and meritorious step by step, which is the direct way to develop my perfections (*pāramī*). I have the potential. I was born in the midst of the Buddha's teachings and have developed the potential and the perfections to my full capacity all along up to the present.'

Women can have mindfulness and discernment just like men, because women and men both have defilements, and defilements are cured with mindfulness and discernment—backed by persistent effort—both by men and by women. And where do they have defilements? They both have defilements in the heart. When mindfulness and discernment are complete, women and men can both pass over and beyond—with no question of their having to be ordained.

This is the truth of the Noble Truths, which are not particular about status, nationality, or any of the human races, and which are not particular about the male or the female sex. All that's asked is that we strive, because the Dhamma is common to us all. Women and men, lay and ordained, we can all listen to it, understand it, practice it, and cure defilement.

The defilements don't favor men or women. We all have defilements. Even monks have defilements: What do you say to that? Monks thus have to cure their own defilements. If they don't, they lie buried in defilement just like people in general who aren't interested in the Dhamma—or even worse than people in general.

The Dhamma thus doesn't stipulate that it's only for those who are ordained. What is stipulated is that we cure defilement with persistent effort. This is something very

important. We have to be very interested in this point.

As for release from suffering and stress, where do we gain release? We gain it right here, right where there is suffering. If we can cure defilement, we gain release from suffering. If we can't, then no matter what our sex or status, we all have to suffer.

Here. This is where the religion lies, here in the heart. It doesn't lie anywhere else. If we want to be incapable of it, we can be incapable—right here in our heart. Whether lay or ordained, we can be incapable—if we make ourselves incapable. Or we can make the religion flourish in our heart—that we can also do. When the religion flourishes, where does it flourish? In the heart, and nowhere else. *The important point is the heart.* The important point is our practice: the actions, the manners we display. When the heart develops, the various aspects of our behavior develop beautifully. Admirably. In particular, the heart flourishes within itself. It has mindfulness and discernment looking after it constantly. This is called a flourishing heart. The defilements can hardly ever come to damage it: That's when the religion flourishes.

We should make an effort to examine and straighten things out step by step. The defilements, you know, are no wider or greater than the limits of our ability to cure and remove them. They're only here in the heart, so investigate right here. Whether we're men or women, lay or ordained, we all have defilements in our hearts. No matter how thick they may be, if we consider them we can know them. They're like darkness: Even though darkness may have existed for eons, all we have to do is turn on a light, and the darkness disappears completely. The darkness doesn't have any way to brag, saying, 'I've been dark for eons, so there's no way that this puny light can chase my darkness away.' When the causes are ready, the darkness has to disappear completely, and brightness appears in its place. *Even though the darkness may have existed for eons, it all vanishes in that instant.*

Even though the defilements may be thick and may have been lording it over our heart for a long time, we should investigate them thoroughly with mindfulness and discernment. When mindfulness and discernment are capable, they immediately become all-around. The defilements, even though they may have been in the heart for eons, will immediately disintegrate, in the same way that the darkness that had existed vanishes as soon as a light is lit. Brightness arises instead, through the power of mindfulness and discernment. Within the heart it is dazzlingly bright at that moment with '*dhammo padīpo*'—the light of the Dhamma.

This is all there is. This is the important point we have to investigate. Be sure to see it. The religion is marvelous—where is it marvelous? The religion flourishes—where does it flourish? The Buddha says to gain release from stress—where is it gained? It exists only here in the heart. To analyze it, there are the four Noble Truths: stress, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

1. Stress (*dukkha*): We know it's stress because we aren't dead.

2. The origin of stress (*samudaya*): This is what fosters or produces stress. What forms does it take? We're taught, 'Craving... imbued with passion and delight, relishing now here and now there, i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for not-becoming.' This we know. Whatever the mind may love or crave, we should try to straighten it out. It loves and craves the five *khandhas*, and especially the five *khandhas* that it says are 'me.' So try to become wise to these things, step by step.

And then there's more love and craving: love and craving for the mind, attachment to the mind, cherishing the mind. So straighten out the mind. *Wherever it feels love, that's where defilement is.* Keep going in, straightening things out, until you've reached the truth. *Then the heart will have no love or hate, because they are all gone.* The defilements are all gone. The mind has no love, no hate, no anger. It's a pure principle of nature within itself. This is the nature we truly want.

3. Investigating for the sake of Dhamma: This is the path (*magga*), with mindfulness and discernment its important factors.

4. The cessation of stress (*nirodha*): Stress stops, step by step, until the path is fully capable and *nirodha* stops all stress in the heart without leaving a trace. When *nirodha* has finished stopping stress, that which knows that stress has stopped and defilement has stopped... that which knows is 'the pure one.' This pure one lies beyond the Noble Truths as a marvelous, extraordinary Dhamma.

The Noble Truths are activities, conditions, conventions. Even *nirodha* is a convention. It's the activity of stopping stress. It's a conventional reality. When stress is completely stopped, nothing remains. *All that remains is an entirely pure awareness.* This is not a Noble Truth. It's the purity of the mind. If you want, you can call it *nibbāna*. There's nothing against calling it whatever you want. When we reach this level, there are no conflicts—no conflicts, no disagreements with anyone at all. We don't conflict with ourselves; we don't conflict with anything. Our knowledge is wise to everything, so we can say what we like. There are no problems at all. All I ask is that you know this marvelous, extraordinary Dhamma. Its excellence exists of its own accord, without our having to confer titles.

This, then, is the genuine religion. Probe right here. Probe on in. When in the practice of the religion we come to know, we'll know right here. If the religion is to flourish, it will flourish right here. The Buddha, in teaching the beings of the world to gain release from suffering, taught right here—and release is gained right here, nowhere else. We qualify as beings of the world and lie within the net of the Buddha's teachings. We're in the Buddha's following. Each of us has the right to practice and remove defilement so as to go beyond suffering and stress. All of us in the four groups of the Buddha's following (*parisā*) have the right to realize ourselves and reach *nibbāna*.

So. I ask that you contemplate. Investigate. Be brave in fighting the things that should be fought within the heart. Develop courage. Develop mindfulness and

discernment until they are sufficient. Search for various tactics for probing: These we should develop within ourselves. To probe on our own is the right way. It's our own wealth. Teachers lend us bits and pieces, which are merely fragments to serve as hints or as leads for us to contemplate so that they'll grow and branch out into our own wealth.

Any Dhamma that's a wealth coming from our own tactics: *That's truly our own wealth.* We'll never exhaust it. If we can think and probe cunningly in removing defilements until they fall away completely, using the tactics we develop on our own from the ideas our teachers lend us as starting capital, *that's our own Dhamma.* However much may arise, it's all our own Dhamma. What we derive from the texts is the Buddha's—and we borrow it from him. What we get from our teachers, we borrow from them—except when we are listening to them teach and we understand the Dhamma and cure defilement at that moment: That's our wealth while we are listening. After that, we take their tactics to contemplate until they branch out through our own ingenuity. This is our own wealth, in terms both of the causes—our contemplation—and of the outcome, the satisfactory results we gain step by step all the way to release from suffering and stress—and that's entirely ours. It stays with us, and no one can come to divide up any of our share at all.

This is where the excellence becomes excellent. It doesn't become excellent anywhere else. So try to find the excellence, the peerlessness that lies within you, by striving and being energetic. Other than this awareness, there's no excellence at all.

But at present the heart is concealed by things that are filthy and worthless, and so it too has become something that lacks its proper worth. Right now we are washing it, peeling away the various kinds of defilement, step by step. When we have used our full strength to peel them all away until there aren't any left in the heart, then the heart is fully pure. Excellence appears here in this heart—and so the excellence is excellent right here. We don't have to search anywhere for anything more, for we have fully reached the 'land of enough.'

So then. I'll ask to stop here.

Investigating Pain

We human beings are like trees: If we water a tree, fertilize it, and keep looking after it, it will be fresher and grow faster than it normally would if we let it fend for itself without our help. The mind, when we keep looking after it, will become more and more radiant and peaceful, step by step. If it isn't trained, it's like a tree that isn't looked after. Whenever it lacks training, it begins to act tarnished and defiled because the things that tarnish and defile it are already there inside it.

When we look after the mind continually with meditation, it will gradually become more and more calm. When it's calm, it will begin to develop radiance along with its calm. And once it's calm, then when we contemplate anything, we can penetrate into the workings of cause and effect so as to understand in line with the truths that appear both within us and without. But if the mind is clouded and confused, its thoughts are all worthless. Right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes progressively even more wrong.

Thus we are taught to train the mind so that it will be quiet, calm, and radiant, able to see its shadows, just as when water is limpid and clear: We look down into the water and can see clearly whatever plants or animals there are. But if the water is muddy, we can't see anything when we look down into it. No matter what's there in the water—plants, animals, or whatever—we can't see them at all.

The same holds true with the mind. If it's clouded, then we can't see the harm of whatever—big or small—is hidden within it, even though that harm has been bad for the mind all along. This is because the mind isn't radiant. For this reason, a mind clouded with muddy preoccupations can't investigate to the point of seeing anything, which is why we have to train the mind to make it radiant, and then it will see its shadows.

These shadows lie buried in the mind. In other words, they're the various conditions that come out of the mind. They're called shadows—and we're forever deluded into being attached to these shadows that come from the thoughts constantly forming and coming out of the mind at all times. They catch us off guard, so that we think 'this' is us, 'that' is us, anything at all is us, *even though they are simply shadows and not the real thing*. Our belief or delusion, though, turns them into the 'real thing.' As a result, we end up troubled and anxious.

At present, the great respected meditation masters on whom we depend in the area of the practice and in the area of the mind are falling away one by one. Those who are left can barely take care of themselves. Physically, they are wearing out step by step—like Venerable Ācariya Khao. To see him is really heart-rending. When the body reaches its final extremity, it's as if it had never been strong or in radiant health. To lie down is

painful, to sit is painful—whatever the position, it’s painful. When the time comes for pain to come thronging in, the *khandhas* are nothing but pain. But for people like this, it’s simply a matter of the body and the *khandhas*. *In the area of the mind, they have no more problems about the behavior of the body or the khandhas at all.*

But as for us, well, we’re always there welcoming such problems. No matter whether it’s the body or the thoughts of the mind that are acting adversely, the mind begins to act adversely as well. For example, if the body is malfunctioning, the mind begins to malfunction too, even though there is nothing really wrong with it. This is due to the mind’s own fear, caused by the fact that mindfulness and discernment aren’t up on the events surrounding the mind.

This is why we’re taught to train our mindfulness and discernment to be capable and bold, alert to events arising within the mind and around it—namely, in the various aspects of the *khandhas* when they behave in adverse ways. We have to be alert to these things. All that’s needed is for the mind not to be alert, or for it to be deluded by these things, and it will create stress and pain for itself without ceasing. Pain will have to come pouring in to overwhelm it. Even though the body may be pained simply in accordance with its own affairs, in accordance with the principles of nature, *the mind will still grab hold of it* to cause pain for itself, to burn itself, if it hasn’t investigated to see through these things.

If the mind has mindfulness constantly governing and guarding it, then whatever damage arises will be minor, because it arises in a single spot—within the mind—and mindfulness is there at the same spot, alert to the fact that this is arising, that is arising, good or evil is arising within. Discernment is what unravels, contemplates, investigates, and remedies the different preoccupations arising in the mind. Things then begin to calm down. But if mindfulness is lacking, things begin to get drawn out. Even though thought-formations may arise and vanish, one after another, countless times, *saññā*—labels and interpretations—don’t vanish. They connect things into long stretches. Stress and pain will then have to connect into long stretches and gather into the heart.

The heart is what then reaps all this suffering by itself because of the acts (*kamma*) that *saññā* and *saṅkhāra* fashion. The heart is the primary vessel for receiving both pleasure and pain—and for the most part it receives pain. If it lacks mindfulness and discernment, it receives only fakes and scraps. Rubbish. Things toxic and dangerous. But if it’s mindful and discerning, it can pick and choose. Whatever isn’t good, it picks out and throws away, leaving only the things of substance and worth within the heart. The heart is cooled, but not with water. It feels pleasure, but not because of external things. It’s cool from the Dhamma. It feels pleasure in the Dhamma—and the reason is because mindfulness and discernment are looking after it.

To attend to other things is not as difficult as attending to the heart. All the burdens of the world converge at the heart, and so to remove the things that have long been buried within us is very difficult work. We may even become discouraged because we

see almost no results when we first begin. This is because the mind is still drifting while we work. It doesn't really focus on taking its work seriously, and so results don't appear as they should. This makes us discouraged, weak, and dejected. We give up, thinking, 'It'd be better to stop, because we're not getting anywhere'—even though once we have stopped it's not any better, except that the mind has a better chance of filling itself with evil after we've stopped striving toward the good.

The assumption that says 'better' is the work of the defilements, which are all deceivers, tricking us into being discouraged and weak. Actually, even while we are striving, things aren't yet getting good, even though we are practically dying to make them good. Our heart is ready to burst because of the effort—so how can things become good once we stop? If, as we think, things were to get good once we stop, then no one should have to do work of any sort any more. Once we stop, everything of every sort would become good on its own! Both within and without, things would have to be good. We won't have to do much work. It's better to stop.

The Dhamma isn't like the defilements. The defilements say, 'It's better to stop.' It's better, all right—better for the sake of defilement, not for the sake of the Dhamma. The Dhamma is something with which we have to keep persevering until it's good, and then better, and then even better, continually, because we don't stop. This work is our work, which we do for the sake of Dhamma. It's not lazy work, which is the work of the defilements. The results of the work will then appear step by step because we do it without ceasing.

This is how it is with the work of meditation. When it's easy, we do it; when it's hard, we do it—because it's work that ought to be done. If we don't do it, who will do it for us? When the fires of pain and suffering are consuming the heart because of the thoughts we form and accumulate, why don't we complain that it's hard? When we accumulate defilement to cause stress and anxiety to the heart, why don't we feel that it's difficult? Why don't we complain about the stress? Because we're content to do it. We're not bothered with whether it's easy or hard. It simply flows—like water flowing downhill. Whether it's hard or not, it simply flows on its own, so that we don't know whether it's hard or not. But when we force ourselves to do good, it's like rolling a log uphill. It's hard because it goes against the grain.

In relinquishing the sufferings, big and small, to which the mind submits in the course of the cycle of rebirth, some of the work just naturally has to be difficult. Everyone—even those who have attained the paths, the fruitions, and *nibbāna* easily—has found it hard at first. When we reach the stage where it should be easy, it'll have to be easy. When we reach the stage we call hard, it'll have to be hard, but it won't always be hard like this. When the time comes for it to be light or easy, it's easy. And especially when we've come to see results appearing step by step, the difficulty disappears on its own, because we're completely ready for it, with no concern for pleasure or pain. We simply want to know, to see, to understand the things on which our sights are set.

Study. We should study the elements and *khandhas*. We should keep watch on the elements and *khandhas* coming into contact with us. This is an important principle for all meditators. We should keep watch on them all the time because they keep changing all the time. They're '*aniccam*' all the time, '*dukkham*' all the time, without respite, without stop.

Investigate. We should keep trying to see their affairs as they occur within us, until we're adept at it. As we keep investigating again and again, the mind will gradually come to understand more and more profoundly, straight to the heart. The heart will gradually let go, of its own accord. It's not the case that we investigate once and then stop, waiting to rake in the results even though the causes aren't sufficient. *That's not how it works.*

All forms of striving for the good—such as meditating—have to go against the grain of the defilements. All of the great meditation masters, before becoming famous and revered by the world, survived death through great efforts. If this were easy work, how could we say they survived death? It had to be heavy work that required that they exert themselves to the utmost. Most of these masters have since passed away. Only a few are left. We hope to depend on them, but their bodies are '*aniccam*.' We can depend on them only for a period, only for a time, and then we are parted, as we have seen at present.

So we should try to take their teachings inward, as our masters, always teaching us inside. Whatever they have taught, we should take inward and put into practice. This way we can be said to be staying with our teachers at all times, just as if we were to be with the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha everywhere and always.

Our own practice is the primary mainstay on which we can rely with assurance. Depending on a teacher isn't certain or sure. We are bound to be parted. If he doesn't leave, we leave. If he doesn't go, we go—because he and we all live in the same world of inconstancy. There is no difference among us. What we can hold to, though, are the basic principles of his teaching. We hold to them and earnestly put them into practice so as to see the results, so as to seize victory within the heart.

Victory of this sort is the supreme victory, unsurpassed in all the world. No other victory is its equal. We grapple to take victory over ourselves—over the defilements that we have believed to be 'ourselves,' 'us,' 'ours,' for eons and eons. This is an enormous undertaking. If you play at it, like children playing with dolls, the defilements will crush you to bits in no time, because you've been holding onto them for so long. So don't delay. Investigate so as to know clearly and let go, so that the mind will be clear and free of suffering and stress, and not forever in disarray.

We've been accumulating the words 'us' and 'ours' for countless eons. If the defilements were material objects, what in the world could we take for comparison that would be larger than the pile of defilement, craving, and mental effluents, the pile of

‘us,’ the pile of ‘ours’ we’ve been accumulating for so long? There’s so much of it that it would be beyond our strength to drag it out for comparisons. If we were to drag it out just to pass the time between eating and sleeping—to chip at it, hack at it, poke at it, or slash at it once or twice, hoping to break through it—we wouldn’t get anywhere at all. We’d simply be grabbing at handfuls of water, one after another. So we have to give it our all: This is where we will gain our victory.

We’re meditators. We can’t back away from the fight with the defilements lying within us. The word ‘defilement’ means simply this ‘hunk of us.’ The defilements are ‘us,’ ‘ours.’ Everything that’s ‘us’ is actually a pile of defilements. There’s no need to doubt this. If we want to separate them out so as to see them piece by piece for what they actually are in line with their true nature, we have to separate them using persistent effort in the area of mindfulness and discernment as our means of investigating and evaluating them.

We separate the elements (*dhātu*), the four elements. Everyone in the world knows of the four elements, but if we want our knowledge to go straight to the heart, it has to come from the practice. If we investigate using discernment until we see distinctly, it will penetrate the heart of its own accord. Once it has reached the heart, you don’t have to say anything: The heart will let go of its own accord. Once the knowledge goes straight to the heart, relinquishment comes straight from the heart. For us to know straight to the heart and let go straight from the heart, we have to investigate over and over, again and again, until we understand.

Don’t assume that, ‘This we’ve already investigated, that we’ve already investigated,’ by setting up expectations, counting the times without seeing deeply enough to the level of letting go. The work isn’t done with. It really has to reach the level of ‘done with,’ felt deeply within the heart, which then lets go. If it’s really done with, there’s no need to investigate again, because the heart has understood and can let go completely.

The elements are already elements. Cognizance is an element. The things that make contact are also elements. Sights are elements, sounds are elements, all these things are already elements. As for the *khandhas* within us, the body (*rūpa*) is a *khandha*, feelings (*vedanā*) are a *khandha*, labels (*saññā*) are a *khandha*, thought-formations (*saṅkhāra*) are a *khandha*, cognizance (*viññāṇa*) is a *khandha*. They’re groups, aggregates, heaps, bits, pieces, all by their very nature.

As for the mind, know that it’s the ‘knower’ we have to test and comprehend in the same way as the elements and *khandhas* so that we won’t grab hold of it as the self or as belonging to the self, which would simply be creating a heavier burden. We must investigate it with discernment so as to see it for what it truly is, in just the same way. But as I’ve explained the investigation of the mind in a number of talks already, you should have a fair understanding of the matter by now.

In particular, when a pain arises in the body, we should know distinctly that, ‘This is a feeling.’ That’s all. Don’t go labeling or interpreting it, saying that the feeling is us, the feeling is ours, or that anything is ours, for that would simply foster more and more defilements and bring more and more pain in to smother the heart. Then when the feeling doesn’t vanish, that would cause even more pain in the heart, and what could we possibly find to bear it?

Pains arise in the body. They’ve been arising ever since the day we were born. The moment we came from our mother’s womb, the pain was excruciating. Only by surviving this death did we become human beings. If you don’t call that pain, what will you call it? Pains have existed ever since way back when. You can’t force them to change their ways. The way of pain in the body is that it continually has to show itself. Once it arises, it remains and then vanishes. That’s all there is to it—arises, remains, vanishes—regardless of whether it’s an external feeling or an internal feeling, namely a feeling or mood in the mind.

In particular, feelings in the body: Investigate them so as to see them clearly. The body is the body. We’ve seen it clearly, known it clearly ever since the day we were born. We can conjure it into anything—us, ours, a prince, a king, nobility, whatever, however we want to conjure it—but its truth is simply a truth, fixed and unalterable. It doesn’t change in line with what we conjure it up to be. The body is simply the physical *khandha*. It has four elements—earth, water, wind, and fire—gathered together and called a person, a woman, a man, classified in endless ways, given this name and that, but what stays the same is the body: the ‘physical heap.’ All the parts taken together are called the physical heap, which is one reality. Take out any of the parts, and each of them also has its reality. When they’re gathered together, the skin is skin, the flesh is flesh, and the same holds true for the tendons, bones, and so forth. Even though they have names, don’t fall for their names. See them simply as individual realities, as a physical heap.

As for the heap of feelings, it’s not the body. The body isn’t a feeling, such as pain. Feeling is feeling. Whether pleasure appears, or pain or a neutral feeling appears, it’s simply a separate feeling that you can see clearly. These two *khandhas*—the body and feeling—are more prominent than *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*, which arise at intervals and immediately vanish.

Feelings, however, even though they vanish, have a period in which they remain. This you can clearly see in the practice. When pain arises, focus on it as your target, as the point to investigate. *Don’t see the pain as being yourself, for that would be going against the true nature of feelings and the method of investigation*, and you won’t be able to know the truth of the feeling as you should with your discernment. When you don’t know the truth and persist in assuming the pain to be yourself, you’ll increase the pain enormously within the mind, because you are going against the principles of nature, which are the principles of truth the Lord Buddha taught.

He taught us to investigate so as to see pain—in whichever part of the body it may arise—simply as a phenomenon that arises, remains, and then vanishes in its own due course. Don't get entangled in it. Don't fashion or conjure it into being this or that, if you don't want to be forever burdened with pain, with never a moment to put it down. See its truth the moment it arises, remains, and vanishes. That's all there is to feeling. Ferret it out so as to see it clearly with mindfulness and discernment.

When you have focused on a feeling, turn and look at the mind to see if the mind and the feeling are one and the same thing. Then look at the body and the mind: Are they one and the same? Look at them so as to see them clearly. While you are investigating, don't send the mind out anywhere else. Keep it right at that one spot. For example, when investigating, focus on the pain so as to see it distinctly. Then turn to look at the mind so as to see this awareness distinctly. Are they one and the same? Compare them. This awareness and that feeling: Are they the same? Can you make them one and the same? And is the body like the mind? Is it like the feeling? Is it similar enough to be one and the same?

There! This is the way we're taught to separate things so as to see them clearly. The body is the body—how can it be like the mind? The mind is a mental phenomenon, a nature that knows, but the elements of the body are elements that don't know. The earth elements doesn't know, the water element doesn't know, the wind element doesn't know, the fire element doesn't know—but this mental element (*mano-dhātu*) knows. This being the case, how can they be one and the same?

Similarly with the pain: It's an element that doesn't know. It's a phenomenon. These two unknowing elements are also different: The feeling and the body are different sorts of things. They aren't one and the same. How could you make them one and the same?

In making distinctions while investigating, look so as to see clearly the way things actually are. There's no need to fear death. *There is no death to the mind.* Don't create snares to catch yourself and hurt yourself. There is no death, i.e. no death to the mind. There is nothing but awareness, pure and simple. Death doesn't exist in the mind, which is something 100% unalterable and sure.

Death is an assumption that has been conjured up for the mind through the power of the mind's own delusion. The mind has conjured it up to deceive itself. So once we've investigated in line with the truth—that *the mind is not something that dies—what reason will we have to fear death?* What is 'death'? We know that the elements and *khandhas* fall apart. We human beings, when we've stopped breathing, are called 'dead people.' At that moment the 'knower' separates from the elements, so that nothing is left but physical elements with no feelings: That's a 'dead person.'

But actually the knower doesn't die, so we have to investigate in order to see this clearly with discernment. We needn't create the issue of death to stab or snare the heart or to obstruct the path we are following for the sake of seeing and knowing the truth

through investigation. No matter how great or how little the pain, keep your attention well fixed on the affairs of that pain. Use the pain as a whetstone for sharpening discernment. Separate the pain from the mind. Separate the mind from the pain. Be able to compare their every aspect. Be careful not to let your attention wander while investigating, so that you'll be able to see and know the truth while in hand-to-hand combat with that particular *khandha*.

Now, if it should happen that the mind dies as the world supposes—if it should die while you're making your investigation— then make sure you know what dies first and what dies after. When does the feeling vanish? When does the mind vanish? Where does it vanish to? Actually the mind by nature is not something that vanishes. How can anyone come and make it vanish?

Investigate carefully between the mind and the *khandha* until the truth is absolutely clear to the heart and your doubts vanish. This is called training discernment, developing discernment so as to see the truth.

No matter how great the pain arising at that moment, it won't have the power to affect the mind at all. Once we see the mind as the mind, the feeling as feeling—once discernment has seen clearly in this way that the *khandhas* and the mind are real in their own separate ways—they won't infringe on one another at all. The body is simply the body and stays as it is. When the pain appears, the body is still there. When the pain vanishes, every part of the body remains, in accordance with its own nature. If the feeling arises, that's the feeling's business. If it remains, that's the feeling's business. If it vanishes, that's the feeling's business. The mind is the one who knows that the pain arises, remains, and vanishes. The mind isn't the one who arises, remains, and vanishes like the body or the feeling.

Once you have investigated this way until you're adept, then when the chips are down, investigate in the same way. You needn't fear death, because you're a warrior. Fear of death is not the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha. The Dhamma is a matter of courage in the face of the truth. This is the basic principle of the *svakkhāta-dhamma*: the well-taught teaching. Follow in the path of this truth. If the time comes to die, be ready to die. There is no need to fear, because the mind doesn't die—but *be sure to know clearly what is appearing at that moment*. For example, the pain: What is it like? Look at it so as to know its truth. Once you have seen its truth, then the pain is simply a phenomenon. It doesn't have any meaning, good or bad, at all. *And it doesn't act as anyone's enemy*. It's simply its own full reality, displaying itself in line with natural principles. The body is also its own reality, appearing in line with its own principles. The mind is a separate phenomenon that constantly knows and doesn't intermingle with anything else.

When you have investigated so as to know all-around, the mind extricates itself to be its own reality in full measure. The pain has its own fullness in line with its nature; the body has its own fullness in line with its nature, in that the mind doesn't create any turmoil, trying to lay claim to anything of theirs. This being the case, nothing disturbs

anything else. Pain, no matter how great, has no impact on the mind. You can smile even while great pain is arising—you can smile!—because the mind is something separate, not involving itself with the feeling. It doesn't intermingle with the pain so as to burn itself. This way, the heart is at ease.

This, then, is the investigation of pain so as to comprehend it, by taking pain as your battlefield, as a whetstone for discernment, as the place where you temper and sharpen discernment by investigating and dissecting the pains that arise. Single out the body and single out the feeling. Which will vanish first, which will vanish after, try to know in accordance with their truth. Arising and vanishing have always been a part of their nature from time immemorial. Regardless of whether or not you've been aware of it, these have been their inherent characteristics. All you need to do is to investigate so as to see in line with their truth, so as not to resist the Dhamma, and you can live at ease.

So. If the time comes to die, let the body die—as the conventions of the world understand 'dying.' The body falls apart, so let it fall apart. Whatever is going to disintegrate, let it go—but that which doesn't disintegrate remains. *That which doesn't disintegrate is this mind.*

This mind, once it has developed discernment as a standard within itself, is really like this, with no flinching in the face of illness or death. The mind is courageous and capable.

There, then. This is how we investigate our affairs—the affairs of the mind. We needn't fear death. Why fear it? The Buddha taught us not to fear. The Dhamma doesn't teach us to fear. The truth is nothing frightening, because it's the truth. What's frightening or emboldening about it? Courage? There's nothing that calls for courage. Fear? There's nothing that calls for fear. Here I'm talking about the level where we have reached pure truth. There's no trace of the words 'courage' or 'fear' left in the heart at all. There's only purity.

But while investigating so as to reach the truth, we need to have courage. When we are going to seize victory for ourselves, we can't *not* have courage. Otherwise we'll lose. This is because we're following the path. We need courage and daring, with no fear or intimidation in the face of anything at all. Whatever comes our way, we must investigate so as to know and understand it, without growing discouraged or weak, so as to be intent on knowing and seeing it in line with its truth—everything of every sort that comes into the range of our awareness. This is called being a warrior in the combat between the mind and *khandhas*, or between the Dhamma and the defilements.

Courage of this sort is proper and right. Once we've reached the goal, fear disappears, courage disappears, because we have gained full victory. Fear and courage are no longer an issue.

But right now fear and courage are a critical issue for those still on the way. Develop courage with discretion in the areas that call for courage. Be a fighter with the things

that call for fight—such as feelings of pain—so as to see in line with their truth. Don't be afraid. The Buddha taught us not to fear. Fear has the same value as death. When the time comes, things have to fall apart. That's what's called 'death.' But in any event, meditators have to come to know with discernment before these things undergo their transformation. Spread a net of discernment around yourself on all sides. Whatever appears will be caught in the net of discernment, so what is there to fear? What is there to be anxious about? What is there to knock you off balance? Everything simply follows its truth, which you have already investigated.

This is how 'warriors' investigate. Even though they're in the midst of *khandhas* that are a solid mass of flame, they're calm and at ease, with the normalcy of a mind that has completely comprehended, without being deluded by any phenomenon. This is what's meant by one who 'knows all around.'

Whatever the symptoms displayed by the body, if they are endurable, we endure them. We care for the body, look after it, nourish it, make it eat, make it sleep, make it drink, take care of it in accordance with its nature. If its symptoms are unendurable and it's simply going to go, then just let it go in accordance with the ways of nature. It's a truth, so how can you thwart it? Let it go in line with the truth. This is called letting go with knowledge that accords with the truth. The mind feels no attachment, no regrets. This is the basic principle of practice for one who has attained, or is about to attain, victory within the heart.

Previously, the mind has always lost out to defilement and craving. It has never, until now, defeated them. For eons and eons it has lived entirely under the sway of the defilements to the point where it has forgotten to realize that 'The defilements are the boss. We're their servant.'

But now we're going to turn over a new us, using the principles of the Dhamma as means to subjugate the defilements and mental effluents that have been subjugating us, or that have been the ruling elite, the big bosses of the cycle of rebirth, forcing the mind to go here and there for so long. Now we're going to set our hearts on contending with the defilements for victory so as to see the truth of everything of every sort, with nothing to obscure our discernment at all. At the same time, we will take victory for our own—after having been defeated for so long—using the power of unflagging mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and perseverance.

Those who have reached the realm of excellence through perseverance have a dignity that outshines that of others. At the same time, they can take pride in their own perseverance. Those who have reached the realm of excellence through gaining victory over themselves, and no one else, are supreme within themselves, with no creation of animosity—unlike victory in war, with which the world creates endless animosities, like links in a chain. To gain victory over oneself, though, is to gain the foremost victory. As the Dhamma says,

attā have jitaṃ seyyo:

'It is better to gain victory over oneself.'

The things that have created turmoil for the heart, causing it suffering and stress in the past, now come to an absolute stop. In what I have been saying, don't forget that *perseverance is the important factor*, the factor that supports mindfulness and discernment as the trailblazers for the sake of progress in our work. Discernment is very important for investigating and exploring so as to see causes and effects. Mindfulness supervises the work, to keep our attention from straying. When discernment has investigated so as to see the truth of such things as the five *khandhas*, the defilements will have no place to hide and so will come pouring together into one place—into the heart. They have no other place to hold onto, no other place to attach themselves, because all such places have been obliterated by discernment.

The next stage is to lay siege to the heart, where the enemies lie gathered, so as to disperse them from it until nothing is left. There! That's called the death of the defilements. They die right there, *right there in the heart where they've always been*. They've lived there; and when they die, they die there through the power of the most up-to-the-minute 'super-mindfulness' and 'super-discernment.' This is called full victory. The supreme victory is won right here. The teachings of the religion all converge at this point. The final stage in their practice comes to an end right here. We finish our task right here. When we reach the realm of release from suffering and stress, we reach it right here.

Aside from this, there is nothing: no time, no place, no future, no past. As for the present, we are wise to everything of every sort. We have no more issues, no more disputes. There are no more cases in court between defilement and the mind. Super-mindfulness and super-discernment have sat on the bench and handed down a death sentence for defilement and all its tribe. There is nothing left to carry on the lineage of birth and being. At that moment, defilement and all its tribe sink out of sight. This is called reaching *nibbāna*: a heart truly constant and sure.

All the various conditions that used to deceive the mind no longer exist. All that remains is pure awareness. Even though the *khandhas*—*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*—may form in accordance with their nature, they simply go their own way, which has no meaning in terms of defilement at all. The body behaves in its 'body way.' Feelings—pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain, which appear in the body—behave in the way of feelings. *Saññā*—labels, acts of recognition—behave in their own way. *Saṅkhāra*—the various thought-formations—behave in line with their own nature. *Viññāṇa*—acts of noticing when external objects come into contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—notice and vanish, notice and vanish, in line with their nature, without being able to provoke the mind as before, *because the things that cause provocation have all been destroyed without leaving a trace*. These are thus called '*khandhas*

pure and simple.’ The mind has reached *nibbāna* in the midst of *khandhas* pure and simple. This is to reach living *nibbāna*: the mind purified of defilement.

Those who have reached this point, you know, don’t ask where *nibbāna* is. And why should they? What is *nibbāna*, actually? The word *nibbāna* is a name. The nature we call *nibbāna* is the actual thing. When you reach the actual thing, why ask the name? Why ask for traces and signs? What is there left to grope for? Those who really know don’t grope, aren’t hungry, don’t lack—because they have reached ‘enough,’ completely, of everything of every sort.

So. That should be enough explanation for now. I ask that we as meditators take this and contemplate it so as to see the truth I have mentioned. We will then be complete in our hearts, as I have described, without a doubt.

So I’ll ask to stop here.

The Principle of the Present

To practice is to search for principles leading to the truth. To study is like studying a plan—although people for the most part don't follow the plan—but outer plans and inner plans are worlds apart.

With outer plans—like blueprints of a house or a building, or maps that tell where roads and places are located—the builder examines the blueprint and follows it; the traveler follows the routes that appear on the map, but if he gets a map that's out-of-date, there are bound to be things that have come into being or been torn down that don't show on the map. This can cause him to misunderstand and to follow the wrong route.

Inner plans, though—such as the 32 parts of the body, the elements, and the *khandhas*, which the Buddha taught us to study and to put into practice so as to derive benefits from them—are fixed truths, unchanged from the Buddha's time to the present. But with these plans within the mind, we can't act like a builder who follows the blueprint in his hands, *because that would go against the principle of the present, which is where the Dhamma arises*. For example, when we study and understand in line with the texts and then practice, it's hard not to speculate in reference to the texts; and so when we practice or try to develop concentration in the mind, we'll find that the mind has trouble growing still, because of the disturbance.

If, while practicing the Dhamma, we contemplate or reflect on whatever Dhamma we have studied, it's bound to get all confused, because the mind's state is not such that these things can be contemplated, pondered, or compared with the mind at the moment it's gathering itself together to gain strength. This is why we shouldn't bring anything in to disturb it at all. Let there simply be the 'Dhamma theme,' the meditation theme we bring in to supervise the mind, as if we were charging the mind so as to give it inner strength—in other words, so as to make it still.

When the mind is still, it gains inner strength. Regardless of how much or how little knowledge it has, no trouble or confusion results, because the mind has its footing. It's secure. Calm. Peaceful within itself—all because of the stillness, which is a gathering of energy. This isn't in the plan at all—because while we are practicing, we aren't concerned with the texts. We're intent solely on developing concentration in the present until we gain results—peace, well-being, and various other satisfactory states—there in that moment.

If this is in the plan, it's in the part that says, 'Try to make the mind stay with just a single Dhamma theme—its meditation word.' Don't get involved with other topics at that moment. If you let it think of the texts while practicing concentration, it won't be

willing to stick just with that practice. A great deal of extraneous knowledge will interfere, disrupting the mind until everything is a turmoil, and no stillness will result. This is called going against the plan taught by the Buddha.

Whatever plans we've been given, however many, however much Dhamma the Buddha taught, we gather it all to our own confusion. It's as if we were building a hut and yet went around to gather up plans for hundred-story buildings and spread them out for a look. They just don't go together. The plan for a building and the plan for a hut are as different as earth and sky, and yet here we are going to gather the mind into one point, which is like building a hut. Only after we have the strength can we then begin enlarging it into a building.

When we ultimately reach the level where we are ready to investigate, there are no limits as to how broad or restricted it should be. The mind can investigate everything throughout the cosmos. When we reach the level where we should investigate, that's the level where we'll gain firm confirmation in the mind. We'll gain knowledge and all kinds of insights from our own investigation. This is where the fun lies—sifting, choosing with our discernment what is right and what is wrong. We'll go back, exploring through the Dhamma we have already studied and compare it with the causes and results in our practice until they agree, and then we can set the matter to rest. Even though we may have already understood clearly, we still have to gain confirmation to give it further support, for the sake of full conviction and certainty.

This is what's meant by discernment. It's not the case that if we have no doubts then there's no reason to make comparisons. The Dhamma of the doctrine is one thing, the Dhamma of the practice is another. We take the Buddha's wealth and compare it with our own wealth, gained from our practice. If they match, we can accept the matter and put it aside, with no more concern.

In particular, when we practice in line with the four Noble Truths or the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), these are things that the Buddha described as being interconnected. If we practice them one by one, in line with the texts—investigating the body, and then feeling, and then the mind, and then mental events—we'll be wrong the livelong day, because these things by their nature are interconnected at all times. We can investigate whichever aspect we want. Whichever aspect feels most natural to us, we should start with that one first.

By and large, we start out by investigating the body. But when a pain appears, we have to let go of the body and focus on the pain. We then consider the pain in relation to the body, distinguishing between the two so that we understand them clearly. Then we distinguish between the pain in the body and the pain in the mind, comparing them and distinguishing between them again. Body, feeling, mind, and mental events lie together in the same moment. So we separate out the body—in other words, investigate it—and then separate out the feeling so as to know whether or not the body and feeling are one and the same. Then we separate the mind from the mental events within the

mind, so as to see that each of these events is not the same thing as the mind. To say just this much covers all four of the foundations of mindfulness.

We can't divide these things and deal with them one at a time, one after another, the way we take one step after another while walking. To do so is wrong. This is the way it is with the practice: When we investigate one aspect or another of the four foundations of mindfulness or the four Noble Truths, they all become involved of their own accord—because they are interconnected phenomena. The Buddha says, for example,

kāye kāyānupassī viharati:

'Investigate the body within the body.' Now, the phrase, 'the body within the body' means to start out with any one of the many parts of the body. Once we have contemplated that part until we gain an understanding, our investigation then permeates further of its own accord, making us curious about this part and that. This keeps spreading and spreading until it reaches everything in the body. In other words, it covers everything and understands everything.

'The body within the body'—for example, *kesā*, hair of the head: Even though we may contemplate only one hair on the head, it has an impact on our understanding of how many hairs on the head? And then connects up with how many parts of the body? It affects everything. It permeates everything, because everything is interrelated. No matter what we investigate, this is the way it goes, in line with the principles of investigation in the area of the practice that the Noble Ones have followed.

'Feeling': It arises in our body. Focus on whichever one point is very pronounced. Investigate it—whichever point is more painful than the rest. When we focus on that as a starting point, our investigation will spread to all other feelings because no matter where they arise, they all become involved with the one mind. As soon as we investigate a feeling, the mind and the feeling immediately fly toward each other, and then we separate them out, because the four foundations of mindfulness—contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and mental events—are interrelated in this way. 'External feelings' refer to physical feelings, feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain in the various parts of the body. 'Internal feelings' refer to the feelings of pain, pleasure, and neither pleasure nor pain in the heart. These are also counted as feelings that occur in the hearts of ordinary people everywhere.

These three kinds of feelings: Even when we're meditating and the mind enters into stillness, it still has a feeling of pleasure. But ordinarily, people usually have feelings of pain and discontent within the heart. If we don't investigate—for example, if we've never practiced the Dhamma—these three feelings also exist, but they're worldly feelings, not the feelings connected with the Dhamma of those who practice meditation.

When we practice, and the mind is still and calm, there is a feeling of pleasure. If the mind doesn't settle down and grow still as we want it to, feelings of bodily and mental

pain or distress arise. Sometimes the mind is vacant, drifting, indifferent, something of the sort. You can't call it pleasure or pain. It's simply vacant and drifting—something like that—in the mind of the meditator. This doesn't mean vacant and drifting in the sense of someone completely oblivious. It's simply a state in the mind. This is called a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain.

At present, we aren't yet aware of these things—even now, when they're very pronounced. We aren't yet aware because we don't yet have the discernment. When the mind becomes more refined, then whatever appears, whatever state arises, we are bound to know, and to know increasingly, in line with the strength of our own mindfulness and discernment. Actually, these things are the bosses, lording it over the heart: Okay, for once let's call them what they are, because that's what they've actually been all along.

The heart is their vessel, their seat. That's where they sit. Or you could say it's their toilet, because that's where they defecate. Whichever one comes along, it gets right up there on the heart. Now pain jumps up there and defecates. Now pleasure gets up there and defecates. Now a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain gets up there and defecates. They keep defecating like this, and the heart is content to let them do this, because it doesn't have the mindfulness or discernment to shake them off and not let them defecate. This is why we have to develop a great deal of mindfulness and discernment so that we can fight them off.

Mindfulness is crucial. It has to keep track constantly, because it's the supervisor of the work. No matter where discernment goes scrutinizing, no matter what it thinks about, mindfulness sticks right with it. Discernment contemplates and mindfulness follows right along with it. This is why it doesn't turn into *saññā*. As soon as we let mindfulness lapse, discernment turns into *saññā*, in accordance with the weakness of the mind just learning how to explore. But once we become more proficient in the areas of both mindfulness and discernment, the two stick so close together that we can say that there's never a moment when the mind's attention lapses—except when we sleep, at which time mindfulness and discernment don't have to work, and even the defilements take a rest.

Once we reach this level, there is never a moment where the mind's attention lapses. This is thus called super-mindfulness and super-discernment. How could it lapse? It stays right with 'what knows' at all times. Mindfulness and discernment exist together in this one mind and have become one and the same thing. So where could they lapse? Once mindfulness and discernment are continuous, we can speak in this way.

Before, we were never able to know how much the mind scrambled, stumbled, and fell. But when we reach the level where these things become one and the same, then as soon as there's a rippling in the mind, we are right there up on it. Instantly. Instantly. Whatever gets thought, we are progressively more and more up on it. And especially if it's a matter of defilement, then mindfulness and discernment are extra quick. But if the

mind is an ordinary mind, it doesn't know. Even if defilements climb up and defecate on our head from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn, we can't be aware of them.

In the area of the practice, we practice on our own and know on our own. That's when things become clear. Let's see right and wrong clearly within ourselves. Let's know things clearly within ourselves. Only then can we be certain. Once we have practiced and come to know, we can be courageous in what we say and courageous within the heart, with no fear that we might be speaking wrongly or venturing guesses. We're sure of ourselves from having practiced.

To strip away the things that bind the heart has to be difficult. For those who are weak-willed, it's especially difficult. There is no way they can succeed, because they keep creating obstacles for themselves whenever they are about to develop goodness or break away the binding of unawareness and craving from around the heart. To break open the binding of the wheel of rebirth depends mainly on our being earnest and intent: That's what will clear our way. This is why living beings don't want to touch that binding, don't want to break it open.

Our earnest intent is what will lead us to know exactly how extraordinary the things taught by the Buddha really are. When we have this kind of earnest intent toward the Dhamma filling the heart, then no matter how difficult things become, we won't let that difficulty bother us or become an obstacle. We want solely to know, to see, to understand. We feel motivated solely to think, ponder, and investigate in line with the aspects of the Dhamma we want to know and see.

This has us engrossed day and night—engrossed in our desire to know and see, engrossed in the results we obtain step by step, engrossed in probing and cutting away the defilements and mental effluents. These lie nowhere but in the heart—except when the heart grabs hold of external things that are harmful and toxic, and brings them inward to overpower itself to no purpose. The mind thus has to probe, investigate, remedy, and slash away inside itself because these are the things that bind the heart. The heart is what makes itself unruly and reckless, roaming about, collecting these things to burn itself, because it doesn't have the good sense to avoid them or remedy them. For this reason, we need to develop a great deal of mindfulness and discernment.

The Buddha was always teaching mindfulness and discernment.

nisamma karaṇaṃ seyyo:

'Use discernment to consider before doing anything,' in order to guard against error. Both in inner and outer activities, mindfulness and discernment are always important. But usually when the mind thinks of doing anything, we don't consider it first. Even if we don't consider things while we think of doing them, we should at least consider them when the mind has made contact with one matter or another, and trouble arises as a result. But usually we don't see the harm of our own recklessness, and this is why we

never learn. So we keep thinking and acting in our old ways repeatedly, and the results are thus unceasing stress.

We shouldn't guess, we shouldn't anticipate what the practice will be like. Where is heaven? Don't guess about it. Where are the Brahmā worlds? Don't waste your time anticipating. Where is stress? Its cause? Its cessation? The path? Don't anticipate their being anywhere outside the body and mind that are in contact with each other and with these various things at all times. Focus right here, so as to see the truth in line with the principles of the Dhamma.

You'll know what's outside; you'll know what's inside. Especially when you know what's inside, that's when you'll gain insight into everything that exists, in line with your temperament and abilities, without your anticipating it. The mind will simply know of its own accord. Your basic problem is that you don't yet know yourself inside and simply want to know what's outside. This will only make you agitated and confused, without serving any purpose.

If you want to gather matters into yourself so as to see the truth, then: What is hell? And where is it? If you want to know hell, then go ahead. Where is it? Where is the suffering that the defilements dig up, the suffering they produce in ascending stages? If it doesn't lie in the body and mind, where does it lie? If, when you let yourself fall into hell and the fires of hell burn you day and night, you still don't know where hell is, then where else are you going to look for it? Bring things inward in this way so as to know the truth: the Noble Truths that lie within you. Once you know the Noble Truths, you'll understand every pit in hell without having to ask anyone. Think of how much the Buddha and his Noble Disciples knew about hell—and yet who told them about it? How is it that they were able to know and see to the point of teaching us into the present?

'Heaven' is the enjoyment, the sense of exhilaration in the Dhamma, in the goodness and merit that lie within the heart, causing it to be calm and at peace. This is your 'heavenly treasure.' The Brahmā worlds lie with the levels of the mind. No matter which level of the Brahmā worlds you want to reach, they are all levels of the mind that indicate on their own that this mental state corresponds to this level or that and that have the characteristics of those levels. For this reason, you have to put 'this one'—the mind—into good shape, into proper shape. Don't go concerning yourself with anything other than this.

Every day, every night, we should probe into our own minds, together with the things that become involved with them. The important factors are the body—this is very important—and the five *khandhas*. These things are always making contact because they have been together with us since way back when. Things outside—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations—sometimes subside, but the five *khandhas* and the heart are always together and always at issue with one another. There is no one who can decide these issues and put an end to them unless we use mindfulness and

discernment as our judges to make a decision that will put the case to rest.

Normally, *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* lie right with us, with the heart. They are interconnected and interrelated to the point where no one can untangle the case and pass a verdict, because we don't have the discernment to deliberate and decide what verdict to pass. So we simply let issues arise all the time: 'That hurts. This aches. I'm afraid I'll faint. I'm afraid I'll die.' We really are afraid—as if by fearing to the utmost, straight to the heart, we could somehow escape death.

This fear of death: We really fear it and yet we don't know what death is, or who dies. As long as we haven't investigated down to the 'foundation of death,' we'll have to fear it all the livelong day. But once we have investigated down to the foundation of death, what is there to fear?—because nothing in the world dies. There is simply the change, the exchange of the various elements, and that's all. Change is something we already know. The Dhamma has taught us: 'Inconstancy'—things are always changing. 'Stress'—where is there if not right here? 'Not-self'—this already tells us—what is there of any substance, that's 'us' or 'them'? The Dhamma tells us with every word, every phrase, and yet we prefer to fly in the face of the Dhamma. We want that to be us, we want this to be ours. This wanting is an affair of defilement: *That's* not us, it's simply defilement from head to toe—or isn't it?

If it were to become our self as we say it is, wouldn't it be a heap as big as a mountain? If every defilement of every sort were to be gathered together, who knows how many millions of mountains they'd be? We wouldn't be able to carry them at all. What we already have is more than we can handle! So we should investigate these things to see them clearly and then cut them away, one mountain at a time. Otherwise we'll be unable to walk, because we'll be full of the mountains of every person's every sort of defilement, and of every sort of suffering that defilement has created to be borne on top of the heart for such a long, long time. We should learn our lessons, in line with what the Dhamma has taught us, so that we will have some place to put down our burden of suffering.

Feelings—these characters: These are our enemies. All they offer us are feelings of pain or distress arising in the mind—sometimes on their own, with no connection to the body. The body may be perfectly normal, but because of our preoccupations, feelings of pain can manage to arise in the mind. If we think of something that stabs at the heart, a feeling of pain or distress arises. If we think in a way that will extricate us, a feeling of pleasure arises. When the mind rests and stays neutral within itself, that's a feeling of equanimity. See? We can clearly see them like this—if we reflect so as to see them. If we aren't observant, if we don't investigate them, we won't see them to our dying day. We will simply die in vain. Don't go thinking that we can gain knowledge and insight, and free ourselves of suffering, without making an effort to strive and investigate. *Many, many living beings have died in failure because of their complacency.*

In investigating, don't set up any anticipations that you would like to have your

different feelings disappear. That would only be increasing the cause of stress. Simply look inside the feeling itself when it arises. Use your mindfulness and discernment to contemplate without let-up. Investigate until you understand.

Saññā: This is very important. Normally, *saññā* is something very important. When pain arises, the pain is important, but pain doesn't arise all the time. As for *saññā*, it keeps right on labeling. This is very important, very subtle, very delicate and refined. It's deceptive, which is why it has us deceived.

Saṅkhāra is what hands things over to *saññā*, which elaborates on them to the point where they become endless and unstoppable unless we use mindfulness and discernment to act as a block.

Viññāṇa is what takes note.

As for *saññā*—labeling and interpreting—it has a big job to do, running around stirring up all kinds of trouble throughout the body. *Saññā* is what hoodwinks the heart, making it fall for labels until it can't see the harm they wreak in the five *khandhas*. *Saññā* is the primary culprit. Meditation circles are well aware of it, which is why they warn us.

When the mind has things like this burying it, obstructing it, and coercing it, it can't display even the least little bit of ingenious strategy, because they have it overpowered. For this reason, we have to force the mind to investigate and unravel its various preoccupations so that it can see its way clear. Its various labels and interpretations are gradually peeled off or removed, step by step. Mindfulness and discernment are then freed to think and develop more of their own strength. When we reach the stage where mindfulness and discernment come out to investigate, nothing can stay hidden. Mindfulness and discernment will probe into everything, into every nook and cranny, understanding continually more and more—engrossed in their contemplations and explorations, engrossed in the results that keep appearing—because to probe with discernment is a direct way of cutting defilement away so that we see results, step by step, without pause.

Concentration is simply a tactic for herding the various defilements into one focal point so that we can rectify or destroy them more easily. To put it simply, concentration is strength for discernment. When the mind gathers in the levels of concentration, it is content to work from various angles in the area of mindfulness and discernment. When it's working, the results of its work appear. The defilements fall away one after another. The heart becomes engrossed in the results of its work and investigates even more, never having its fill, like spring water flowing continually throughout the rainy season.

So focus right here. Don't go anywhere else. The Noble Truths are right here in the body and heart. Ultimately, they come down solely to the heart. Probe down into the heart. How is it that we don't know? Where did the Buddha know? He knew right here in the area of these four Noble Truths. He knew in the area of these four foundations of mindfulness, which lie in the bodies and hearts of us all. The Buddha knew right here

and he taught right here. So investigate to see clearly right here. Defilement, the paths, the fruitions, and *nibbāna* lie right here. Don't imagine them to be anywhere else. You'll simply be pouncing on shadows outside of yourself and grasping fistfuls of water, without ever meeting with the real Dhamma.

In focusing your investigation when a feeling arises in the mind—as for feelings in the body, we've discussed them at great length already—when a feeling of stress or pain, such as a mood of distress, arises within the mind, focus on that feeling of distress. Take that feeling of distress as the target of your watchfulness and investigation. Keep alert to it. Don't set up any desires for it to vanish once it has appeared in the mind. Make yourself aware that the feeling of distress arising in the mind has to have a cause. It can't just come floating in without a cause. If you don't know its cause, focus on the result—the distress itself—as the heart's preoccupation. Keep aware right at the heart. Focus on contemplating and unraveling the feeling of distress right there. Don't let go of that feeling to go looking or investigating elsewhere. Otherwise you will make the mind waver, without ever being able to establish a foothold and it will become shiftless and irresolute.

However long that distress will have to last, keep looking at it to see if it's really constant, solid, and lasting. Your mind is something more lasting than the feeling, so why won't it be able to investigate it? The feeling arises only for a period and then vanishes when its time is up, when it no longer has any supporting conditions. Since the mind by its nature is something that knows, then even though a feeling of distress arises, it still knows. Whether there is a little distress or a lot, it knows—so why won't it be able to investigate the distress? It has to endure the distress, because the mind is already a fighter and an endurer.

So. However great or little the distress, fix your attention on that spot. Don't set up any desires for it to disappear. Simply know the truth of the feeling as it arises and changes. Know right there and know its every phase, heavy or light, great or little, until it finally disappears.

And when the feeling of distress dissolves away from the heart through your focused investigation, know what feeling arises in its place. Keep knowing step by step. Only then can you be called an investigator. Don't hold fast to any feelings—whether of pleasure or of equanimity. Know that they too are feelings and are individual conditions, separate from the mind—and so they can change. This one comes in, that one dissolves away, this one takes its place: They keep at it like this, in line with the common nature of feelings, because the seeds are constantly in the heart, enabling these three kinds of feelings to appear. Once the mind has absolutely no more seeds of any sort, no feelings or moods of any sort will appear in the mind at all, aside from '*paramaṃ sukhaṃ*'—the ultimate ease that's part of the nature of a pure heart. This doesn't count as a feeling. When the Buddha says, '*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*'—*nibbāna* is the ultimate ease—that's not a feeling of ease, stress, or equanimity, and so it's not subject

to arising and disappearing.

When focusing your investigation on all three of these feelings, take the feelings themselves as your battleground. Focus on watching them carefully and in full detail. Keep watching each one as long as it hasn't yet disappeared. Watch it again. Keep watching until you know its truth. Whether or not it disappears isn't important. What's important is that you know the truth of this feeling—the one appearing in the present. This is called contemplating feeling as a foundation of mindfulness.

Usually this refers to feelings of distress or pain, because these are the ones that are most striking and unsettling to the heart. As for feelings of pleasure, they're a way-station for the mind. You could say that they help us, or that they are the results that come from investigating feelings of distress until the distress disappears and pleasure appears. This is one of the results that comes from investigating feelings of distress or pain.

As for whether or not we should do away with feelings of pleasure, as far as I've noticed I've never seen them being eliminated. Feelings of pain or distress are the important ones within the mind. They arise from the seeds of defilement. Once these seeds are lessened step by step, the feelings of mental pain become more and more refined, more and more refined. They gradually fade away until they disappear without leaving a trace in the mind, because the seeds are gone.

When these seeds are gone, that type of pleasurable feeling also disappears. It disappears because it relies on those seeds to arise. Thus we can say that the feelings of pleasure that arise in the heart from practice, or from the basis of the mind—the stillness of the mind, the radiance of the mind—qualify as '*vihāra-dhamma*,' dwelling places for the mind, way-stations for the mind on its journey. Or we could say that they're the results that come from investigating feelings of pain. Whether or not we investigate this pleasure is not as important as investigating feelings of pain and their causes—which are very important, because they are in a direct sense the origin of stress. They give rise to stress as their direct result.

In the context of the four Noble Truths, the Buddha teaches us to diagnose stress, but why doesn't he teach us to diagnose pleasure? What does pleasure come from? He doesn't say—because it arises from the path doing its duty until the cause of stress disintegrates and pleasure arises in its stead.

Now when the stress that's part and parcel of defilement disappears, this type of pleasure disappears as well, but another kind of pleasure or ease appears along with the heart that has been purified—and this doesn't disappear with anything at all.

Now as for concentration: When you're going to make the mind still, you really have to make it stay with its theme of tranquility meditation. Don't go concerning yourself with the topics you've been investigating, because the mind has to rest. You can't *not* let it rest. When the time comes to rest, it needs rest. No matter how great the results and

accomplishments you get from your practice of investigation, the heart can still grow tired and weary. Your work—your thinking and pondering in the area of discernment or whatever—is all work for the mind. When the mind has been thinking, pondering, and investigating for a long time, it can grow weary and so it has to rest. When the time comes to rest, you shouldn't involve yourself with any work at all. Set your mind solely on performing your duties for the sake of mental stillness. This is called working without overstepping your boundaries; without being worried about what went before or will come after; without overflowing your banks. The heart will then have the strength to continue its work with clear insight and discernment.

When you want stillness of mind so as to provide strength for discernment, you should set your mind on the theme that will make the mind still and then stick right with it until the mind is still, right then and there. Once the mind has been still long enough to gain strength, you can then withdraw from that stillness. Now you start probing. You don't have to concern yourself with stillness. Your duty is to investigate step by step. This is called the correct way—the appropriate way, the uniform way—to follow the path of tranquility and insight all the way to the goal.

All of these are problems I've been through myself. When I would get engrossed in something, I'd be so stuck that I'd get addicted and heedless. I'd get addicted to the stillness, the sense of comfort and ease in concentration. When I'd get engrossed in investigating, I'd be so engrossed that I'd forget myself and wouldn't let the mind rest at all. Neither of these ways is correct. *In other words, neither is in keeping with what is just right.*

The right way is that when the mind feels tired and weary from its work, we have to let it rest in stillness. When the time comes to investigate, we have to investigate. We can't worry about anything else. We have to set our mind on our duties, step by step, in keeping with the job at hand. This is always the appropriate way to proceed with tranquility and insight.

There is no job in the world bigger than the job of removing defilement, of removing oneself from the cycle of wheeling around from birth to death for countless lifetimes. When we think about it, it's really dismaying—circling around from birth to death, carrying a load of nothing but suffering and stress. No matter what the level, the only difference is that the stress is less or more, because all levels have stress inasmuch as they contain the defilements that give rise to stress. So how can they not have stress? All living beings have to suffer stress. The Buddha thus taught us to rid ourselves of all defilement until there is nothing left hidden in the mind. Let there simply be the 'pure meat.' Don't let there be any bones, or they'll be bad for your health.

Defilements, no matter what the sort, need to be cleansed away, peeled away until nothing is left. This is why it's called a very big job. There are times when we have to give it our all—all our skill, all our mindfulness and discernment, even our life—to an extent that we will never forget.

‘So. If we’re going to die, then let’s die. If not, then let’s know it.’ That’s all there is. There can be nothing else. This is when the mind is its own mainstay. *Attā hi attano nātho*: It can take care of itself. In other words, *we leave it to the mind’s own strength*. When the mind is whirling in for the sake of the realm beyond suffering, as if *nibbāna* were always just coming into reach; while what’s behind us keeps pressing in, and we realize more and more its danger and harm, there’s only one way to escape the Great Danger:

‘If we’re going to die, then let’s die. If not, then let’s know the Dhamma.’ Wherever we are, we don’t want to stay. Wherever we’re stuck, we don’t want to be stuck. It’s a waste of our time in gaining release from suffering. *We’ve simply got to reach release from suffering*. This is the only thing that can satisfy such a mind at such times. When the mind is this way, where is it going to find any weakness or laziness? If things get tough, we fight. If they’re easy, we fight. If we’re going to die, we still fight until we have no more breath to breathe—and that’s when the mind finally stays put. It can’t possibly be moved. *Once it knows and reaches the goal, it stays put on its own. No matter where you chase it, it won’t go.*

Discernment—which has been spinning itself in circles even more than a wheel—when the time comes, stops on its own. It simply runs out of duties of its own accord, without our having to turn it off, the way we do with motors. This automatic mindfulness and discernment simply stops or turns off on its own—because it already knows, so what else is there to investigate? It has already let go, so what else is there to let go? It already knows, so what else is there to know? It has had enough, so where else is it going to look for enough? It knows all of this within itself. It knows in an instant and is released. In other words, it knows for the last time. This is where the big job is finished. The job is big, and the results are enormous. Nothing in any of the three worlds can compare.

The results of this big job, this heavy job, you know, excel the world—and how could we say that ultimate ease doesn’t excel the world? When excellence stands out, filling the heart, it’s far different from defilement standing out, filling the heart. Whoever wants to know has to practice for him or herself. No one else can do it for us. When we reach the level of excellence, we excel exclusively within, without disturbing anyone else.

This Dhamma is always timeless (*akāliko*). It has been the guarantor of the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* from the time of the Buddha to the present. No one will ever be able to erase it. The Buddha excelled the world because of this Dhamma. The arahant disciples whom we revere as our refuge all excelled because of this Dhamma of purity—and because of this heavy job. When our Teacher has led us to proceed in this way, what business do we have shilly-shallying around? We can’t act only in line with our preferences, because our Teacher didn’t lead us in that way.

Our foremost Teacher was a genius, an utterly genuine person, unequalled by anyone. But we’re a bunch of show-offs, doing only what our Teacher criticized, and so

we keep meeting only with things worth criticizing. Don't we ever think of changing, or do we feel we're being stylish and up-to-date?

Actually, the path to cure defilement has to be difficult. The path to accumulate defilement is easy—because our preferences fool us into thinking it's easy. (Notice: They fool us into thinking it's easy.) Actually, both paths are hard. Whatever the job, the important point is which job we prefer. We'll see that job as easy. Light. Comfortable.

At first, when we were starting out with the job of curing defilement, we weren't getting anywhere at all. Even though we were set on curing defilement, the work was heavy and we were weak and lazy. Everything bad and worthless was gathered right there. But now that we gradually come to comprehend causes and effects, and to understand the Dhamma, the results have begun to appear. Where has our laziness gone? All that's left is diligence and persistence. We can contend with anything, heavy or light—we can contend with death—because we have begun seeing results. Even though we have been curing defilement all along, the difference is that at one stage we don't see results, and at another we do—and persistence really arises.

So. If things get heavy, we fight. We're disciples of the Tathāgata and so we have to follow in our Teacher's footsteps. Our Teacher met with difficulties, so his disciples will have to meet with difficulties. Our Teacher passed out two or three times. Is there anyone among us who has passed out from the effort of the practice? I don't see anyone who has. So why are we afraid of dying when we've never even passed out? How can we be so stubborn in our fear of death? The Lord Buddha lost consciousness three or four times. What do we have to say to that? When we lose consciousness, it's because we are falling asleep. Why aren't we afraid of dying then? So why are we afraid of dying when we practice meditation? *Exactly what dies?*

When we have explored and seen the truth, we won't fear death—because nothing in the world dies. All there is, is the mind making its assumptions. It deceives itself —'I'm afraid of dying, I'm afraid of dying'—but when it knows the truth of everything of every sort, it's not afraid. It's not afraid of death. It's not afraid of birth—because it has nothing left to be born. So what is there to fear? Why bother with these empty, hollow fears? *The mind is now released from birth*, so why be afraid of birth? There are no more seeds for the birth of a body, a man, or a woman. There is nothing to fear, nothing to be brave about. The mind is even with itself—uniform, unchanging—not 'even' in the ordinary sense of 'coming out even.' It's 'even' in the sense of a mind that has reached sufficiency: 'even' in its excellence.

Here I've been talking about a heavy task, but also about the results as a means of encouragement, as a means of giving the mind something to hold to. The results are superlative, in keeping with the difficulties and hardships of the practice. What do we want in our lives? We all want what is good. Even in external things we want what is good, so especially in the area of the Dhamma, why shouldn't we want what is good?

Then step up your efforts. What does it matter if the cemeteries cry because they miss you? You have been crying over the cemeteries, so what's wrong with letting the cemeteries cry in turn? They have no more hopes now. You aren't coming back to be born or die. The cemeteries' being without hope is better than your being without hope, because there's nothing good about birth and death, circling around, back and forth, with nothing but suffering and stress every lifetime.

So work out solutions—and make them succeed. Whatever things are thorns in the heart, use mindfulness and discernment to explore, to probe on down and remove them completely so that they're all gone. Once they're all gone, that's the result of your work. We've talked about how hard the work is: What are the results like? Are they worth it? Find out for yourself—and then you are free to live wherever you like. The Buddha says,

vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ:

'The holy life is fulfilled, the task of the religion is done.' *This is now completely apparent in every way.* Whatever is stressful is a matter of defilement. When the cause—defilement—is ended, the result—stress—is ended as well. That's all there is. From then on there is nothing but ultimate ease, which nothing will ever again come to disturb throughout eternity.

At the End of One's Rope

Wherever there's the religion, it's cool and peaceful. Wherever a person practicing the religion is lacking, it's hot and troubled. If there's no religion, the heart is as hot as fire. Whenever there's the religion—mindfulness and discernment—investigating, looking after the heart, the heart is cool.

When we first begin suppressing the rebels in the heart, we suffer—because for the most part we're defeated by them—but at least we still have the strength to fight with them. Even though we may lose out to them sometimes, it's better than groveling before them in abject surrender with no way of putting up a fight at all.

The practice in the area of the mind falls into stages—and there are bound to be stages where it's complicated and difficult. Especially at the beginning: It's difficult in that we can't see beginnings or ends, causes or effects. We don't understand anything at all. When we take the rudiments of Dhamma we have gained from the texts or our teachers and put them into practice, sometimes right, sometimes wrong, this is when it's very difficult. The desire to know and see is very strong, but the heart isn't willing to comply.

This is one kind of anxiety I've been through myself. It overflowed the heart. To put it simply, it was as if the desire to see and know the Dhamma in the heart was ready to overflow its banks. But when practicing, the heart didn't comply with the desire to know and see—and that had me upset and disappointed. Sometimes I'd be sitting and the tears would flow because of my self-recriminations: 'You don't have any potential to speak of. You've ordained simply to be a dead weight on the religion. Here you are sitting in meditation and can't find a way in or a way out. You're just sitting buried in a heap of suffering.' The mind would think in all sorts of ways out of self-pity—that I was a hopeless case, that I didn't have any potential to speak of, didn't have the potential for the extraordinary levels of Dhamma, didn't have any potential at all—total confusion!

Actually, my practice wasn't yet right. I was aiming at the results—the income—without paying attention to whether I was doing the work right or wrong. The desire was strong, but when it wasn't fulfilled, it caused suffering. Had I paid some attention to whether my practice was right or wrong, I might have come to my senses enough to have evaluated things, to have abandoned some of my bullheaded attachments, or to have cut back on my desires so that the suffering would have become lighter.

But whenever I'd meditate, whatever I'd focus on, all I wanted was to know and see the paths, the fruitions, and *nibbāna* in line with what I imagined them to be—heaven was like this, the Brahmā worlds were like that, *nibbāna* was like this. I'd imagine. Speculate. The desire was fierce. I wanted to know, to see, to gain release from suffering, but my practice wasn't making any headway. All there was, was simple desire: I would

simply sit wanting, lie down wanting, walk wanting, stand wanting. I'd sit in meditation—wanting—but the mind wasn't working at its meditation. It just wanted. I'd be doing walking meditation, but the mind simply wanted—so much so that I'd forget what I was doing. I wasn't getting any results *because there weren't enough of the causes that would bring about the things I aimed for, so how could I have reached the goal I aimed for?* This is something I've been through. The work of meditation struck me as being more difficult than any other work.

I'd be meditating, *'buddho, buddho, buddho,'* but the desire would always be getting in the way—because I wanted to know, I wanted the mind to be like this or that, and so I'd get engrossed in my desires and forget my work of meditation until I didn't know where *'buddho'* had gone. As a result, I didn't get anywhere at all. I was constantly feeling dreary and disappointed. This is the way things always were in the heart.

But even so, this wasn't anything compared to the stage at which the mind regressed. When the mind regresses, it's really upsetting because you used to see results. You used to gain a sense of ease, mental stillness, and peace appearing clearly as a solid foundation in the heart, but now it's deteriorated. This makes the heart really agitated—so much so that there is nothing to hold it in check. Luckily, though, in spite of my agitation, I didn't retreat. I was simply determined to see things through. I wasn't willing to retreat or to slacken my efforts.

The reason why the mind regressed and couldn't make a comeback was the same sort of thing: desire, nothing mysterious. The mind wanted to know and see as it had before, but its work wasn't coordinated or continuous. All there was, was desire. No matter how much you desire, it doesn't give any results, because that would go against the principle of causality. If you don't make the causes as complete as they should be, how can you expect to know as you want? You can't. Sitting, I'd be agitated. Lying down, I'd be agitated. I'd go into the forest, into the mountains, when the mind had regressed, and nothing was any good at all. I couldn't figure it out.

Of the anxieties I've felt in my life as a monk, the anxiety I felt during that period was the worst. I was agitated because of my desire to attain. I was upset because the mind had regressed and nothing I could do would bring it back. At first it had regressed just a little bit and then it kept regressing, regressing until it was all gone. Nothing was left, not one red cent. It was as if I had never meditated at all.

When I'd sit in this state, I was as agitated as if I were on fire—because of the desire. The disappointment that my attainments had floated away and disappeared, plus the desire to get them back: These two things came thronging in at the same time and so were really strong. Wherever I stayed was unsatisfactory and no help at all. Even though I was suffering, I would simply keep suffering. I didn't know any way out. Even though I wanted, I would simply keep wanting. I didn't know how to get my concentration back. All there was, was desire—regret for the things that had once appeared to my surprise and amazement but now were gone. There was nothing but

disappointment filling the heart, nothing but simple desire, and it couldn't bring back the Dhamma that had disappeared. Finally I came to feel despair—for everything. *This was when the mind gave up on its desire.*

As for the results I had wanted, well, I had wanted them for a long time. As for the suffering, I had suffered immensely because of the desires, but hadn't gained anything from them. So now I wouldn't have anything to do with them. I'd throw them all out. If I was going to know, I'd know. If not, so be it. All I was after was *'buddho.'* Whatever the mind was going to think, I wouldn't be willing to let mindfulness lapse. 'Get with it, then. Can it really be that I'm not going to know? Whatever's going to happen, I'm ready for it.'

As soon as I gave up on my desires, they were no longer so fierce, and so the suffering gradually lessened. I set my mind on my work. Wherever I was, I'd keep repeating, *'buddho, buddho, buddho.'* It had always been a trait with me to be earnest: Whatever I'd do, I would really do it and wouldn't just play around. Now I got to see this trait in action. I didn't let up in my repetition of *'buddho.'* Whether walking or doing my chores, I wouldn't be willing to let it lapse. I'd keep making the effort. While sweeping the monastery compound, I would try to keep up my guard—until the mind let its work lapse for a moment. I was alert to the fact, and the mind got right back to work. *'There. Now that's the way it should be.'*

After giving up its desires, the mind was no longer involved with the past. It stayed in the circle of the present and would do nothing but repeat or meditate on *'buddho.'* Whether or not it would get any results would depend on what *'buddho'* would grant. Finally the mind became still, and *'buddho'* was no longer necessary, so I could let go of the meditation word at that moment—and at that point the mind was willing to settle down. Before, it hadn't been willing.

When the mind had settled down in stillness, there was no need to repeat the word *'buddho.'* All that remained was simple awareness—clear and conspicuous—so the mind stayed with that simple awareness. As soon as it withdrew, I would start pumping *'buddho'* back in. I had no hopes, because I had already hoped in the past. I had no hopes for what would happen, no hopes for what the results would be. *I had already hoped in the past, and it hadn't given me any decent results at all.* I had seen the harm of hopes—the sort of hollow, unreasonable hopes that won't do the work and look only for the results.

So, now I was going to do nothing but work, nothing but work: repeating *'buddho'* without letting up even for a moment. Once the mind had received proper nourishment and care, it became still—gradually more and more still, more and more steady, until it reached the level it had been before it had visibly regressed.

What was strange was that when it reached its old level, I still abandoned my hopes. 'If it's going to regress, let it regress. I've had enough of trying to resist it by using

desire, which hasn't served any purpose, not the least little bit. So, however the mind is going to regress, let it regress, but I won't abandon "*buddho*." I'm always going to keep at it.'

When it reached the day when it would normally regress, it didn't regress! That made me a lot more sure of the causes. So I stepped up the causes—the repetition of '*buddho*'—even more, without stopping. *I would stop only when the mind gathered in stillness*. The mind became progressively more and more firm. Wherever I'd sit, it would be bright. Light. Completely clear. I was sure of myself: 'Now it's not going to regress.' After one day, two days, one month, two months, it still didn't regress.

Before, the mind would regress after two or three days. After two or three days it would come down with a crash, with nothing left to show for itself. I'd have to keep trying to care for it for 14 or 15 days before it would reach its old level, and once it got there it would stay just a day or two and then collapse in a flash, with nothing left at all. All that was left was dreariness and disappointment.

Now: 'If it's going to regress, let it regress. I've hoped in the past, and it hasn't served any purpose. All I'm after is this, just this one thing: "*buddho*.'"

(Speaking of the suffering when the mind regresses, you really feel a lot of anguish, so much so that you're ready to surrender. But I was lucky in one way, that the mind didn't retreat. It was determined to see things through, which was why I was able to bear with it, able to stay. Had the mind become discouraged—'It'd be better to stop'—that would have been the end of me. There would have been nothing more to tell.)

From then on, the mind kept progressing. Month after month, it became more and more stable, more and more firm. As for my meditation word, I wasn't willing to let up on it. This kept up until the mind was always prominent.

That was when I let the meditation word go. In other words, the awareness of the mind was pronounced, and that was enough for the mind to depend on, so there was no need to rely on any meditation word for further support. The mind fully knew itself and could sustain itself. At this point I didn't have to repeat any meditation word because the mind was prominent at all times. I would focus right there. *Wherever I went, I focused right there*. I knew right there, just as I had focused on '*buddho*.' It could form a fine foundation for the mind. I was sure of myself that:

(1) This foundation had become progressively more and more stable until it was more stable than it had been the first time it had progressed and then regressed.

(2) As for focusing on awareness, when awareness was fully pronounced, I should focus on that without let-up, in the same way I had focused on repeating '*buddho*' until the mind became more and more refined. This was a foundation for the mind on which I could depend.

From that point on, I really stepped up my efforts. The time I started sitting in meditation all night until dawn came from this point. I started to sit one night, focusing

on in, focusing on in, and at first the mind had settled down because it was used to settling down. It settled down easily because it 'had a good foundation.' I kept focusing on in, and as long as no enormous pains arose, the meditation went quietly. But when I withdrew, a number of hours had passed, and a huge pain arose, to the point where I almost couldn't bear it. The mind that had been quiet was totally overturned. Its 'good foundation' had collapsed completely. All that was left was pain filling the body—but the mind wasn't agitated. Strange!

The body was so pained that it was quivering all over. *This was the beginning of the hand-to-hand combat in which I was to obtain an important approach*—when really severe pain arose unexpectedly that night. I hadn't yet made up my mind to sit until dawn, you know. I hadn't made any resolutions or anything at all. I was simply sitting in meditation as usual, as usual, but when the pain arose in full force: 'Eh? What's going on here? I'll have to tackle this feeling so as to see results tonight!' So I made a resolution in that very moment: 'Okay, if the time doesn't come to get up, I won't get up. I'll fight until the dawn of the new day. *Tonight for once I'm going to investigate pain* so as to understand it clearly and distinctly. If I don't understand it, then even if I die, let me die. Let me find out. So dig down!' *This is when discernment really began to work in earnest.*

I had never known, never imagined, never dreamed that discernment would become so sharp when it was at the end of its rope, when it was really cornered with no way out. Discernment really started spinning away. It went out digging, exploring, fighting, determined not to withdraw its troops in retreat. *When I was at the end of my rope, discernment arose.* This made me realize, 'We human beings aren't fated to be stupid forever. When we're at the end of our rope, we're sure to manage to find a way to help ourselves.' So it was then: When I was cornered, overwhelmed by severe pain, mindfulness and discernment probed into the pain.

When pain arises in full force like this, it fills the entire body. At first it started in hot flashes along the backs of my hands and feet, which wasn't much to speak of, but then when it really flared up into something big, the entire body was ablaze. All the bones, as they were connected, were fuel feeding the fire in every part of the body. It was as if the body were going to fall apart right then and there. The neck bones were going to come apart. Every bone was going to come apart from its connections. My head was going to fall off and hit the floor. When it's pained, everything is on a par throughout the body. You don't know where to hold it back enough so that you can breathe, because everywhere there's nothing but a mass of fire—pain in full force.

When I couldn't find a safe spot in which to place the mind, mindfulness and discernment dug down into the pain, searching for the spot where the pain was greatest. Wherever the pain was greatest, mindfulness and discernment would investigate and explore right there by ferreting out the pain so as to see clearly, 'Where does this feeling come from? Who is pained?' When they asked each part of the body, each of them

remained in keeping with its nature. The skin was skin, the flesh was flesh, the tendons were tendons, and so forth. They had been that way from the day of birth, but they hadn't been painful all along from the day of birth in the same way that they had been flesh and skin from the day of birth. 'The pain has been arising and vanishing at intervals. It hasn't been lasting like these parts of the body.'

I focused on down. 'Each part of the body that's a physical form is a reality. Whatever is a reality stays that way. Right now where is the feeling arising? If we say that all these things are painful, why is there one point where it's really severe?' So I separated things out. At this point, mindfulness and discernment couldn't slip away anywhere else. They had to run along the areas that hurt, whirling around themselves, separating the feeling from the body, observing the body, observing the feeling, and observing the mind: These three are the important principles.

The mind seemed comfortable. No matter how much pain was arising, the mind wasn't writhing or suffering or anything. But the pain in the body was clearly very strong. The nature of pain and of whatever defilements we have is that they join together. Otherwise the mind won't be troubled or affected by the physical pain that's really severe at that moment. So discernment kept digging down until the body, the feeling, and the mind were all clear, each in line with its individual truth.

The mind was what labeled the feeling as being this or that: This I could see clearly. As soon as this was really clear in this way, the feeling disappeared in a flash. At that moment, the body was simply the body in line with its reality. The feeling was simply a feeling and it disappeared in a flash into the mind. It didn't go anywhere else. *As soon as the feeling disappeared into the mind, the mind knew that the pain had vanished.* The pain had vanished as if it had been snapped off and thrown away.

In addition, the body disappeared from my sense of awareness. At that moment, the body didn't exist in my awareness at all. All that was left was simple awareness, because there was only one thing—awareness—and it was simply aware. That's all. The mind was so refined that you could hardly describe it. It simply knew, because it was extremely delicate and refined within itself. The body had completely disappeared. Feelings had disappeared. No physical feelings were left at all. The body sitting right there in meditation had disappeared from my awareness.

All that was left was 'simple knowingness,' without any thoughts being fashioned about this or that. At that point, the mind wasn't forming any thoughts at all. When it doesn't form thoughts, we say that nothing at all makes the slightest move. The mind is fixed—firmly fixed in its own solitude. It's a mind in its simple form, on the level of a mind centered in stillness—*but mind you, this doesn't mean that there was no unawareness.*

Unawareness had infiltrated right there, because the mind hadn't withdrawn from unawareness. The mind and unawareness were quiet together because unawareness didn't get out to work. When discernment has it surrounded, unawareness shrinks in

and hides out, quiet in the heart, like the sediment in the bottom of a water jar.

At that point, I began to feel amazed. There was no pain left. The body had disappeared. Only one thing hadn't disappeared: an awareness so refined I couldn't describe it. It simply appeared there. You couldn't say anything else about it. The thing that simply appeared there: That was the great marvel at that moment. There was no motion in the heart, no rippling, nothing of anything at all. It stayed fixed and still like that until enough time had elapsed and then it moved. The mind began to withdraw and rippled—blip—and then was quiet.

This rippling happens on its own, you know. We can't intend it. If we intend it, the mind withdraws. What happens is that the mind has had enough, of its own accord. When it ripples in a 'blip' like this, it's aware of the fact. As soon as the 'blip' appears, it vanishes. After a moment it ripples—blip—again, and disappears in the same instant. Then the rippling gradually becomes more and more frequent.

When the mind withdraws after having fully settled down to its foundation, it doesn't withdraw all at once. I could clearly see this at that moment. The mind rippled slightly: A *saṅkhāra* formed in a 'blip' and then disappeared before it had amounted to anything at all. It rippled—blip—and disappeared right then and there. After a moment it rippled—blip—again. Gradually it became more and more frequent until finally I came back to ordinary consciousness, to the ordinary level of the mind. I was aware of the body, but the pain was still gone. When the mind came back out, there was still no pain. It was still quiet until time came for the pain to reappear.

This is where I got my standard and my certainty. I realized that I had arrived at a basic principle in contending with pain: 'So this is how it is. *Pain is actually something separate. The body is separate. The mind is separate, but because of one thing—delusion—all three converge into one*, and the whole mind becomes delusion, the whole mind is the one deluded. Even though pain may simply arise in line with its own nature, if we grab hold of it to burn ourselves, it's hot—because our labeling makes it hot.'

After a fair while, the pain returned, so I had to tackle it again, without retreating. I had to dig on down, exploring again as I had explored before, *but this time I couldn't use the tactics I had used in investigating and remedying the pain the last time around*. I needed fresh tactics, newly devised by mindfulness and discernment so as to keep up with events. It was pain just the same, but the tactics simply had to be pertinent to the moment. I couldn't remedy matters by holding to the old tactics I had used to investigate and know in the past. They had to be fresh, hot tactics devised in the present to cure the present. The mind then settled down firmly in stillness as it had done before.

In that first night, the mind settled down three times, but I had to go through three bouts of hand-to-hand combat. After the third time, dawn came—the end of the final showdown using reason with real mindfulness and discernment. The mind was

audacious, exultant, and had no fear of death. ‘However great the pain may be, that’s its own ordinary business. As long as we don’t enter in and load ourselves down with it, pain has no significance in the heart.’ The mind knew clearly that the body has no significance in terms of itself, in terms of the feeling, or in terms of us—unless the mind *gives* it a significance and then gathers in the suffering to burn itself. There’s nothing else that can come in and make the mind suffer.

Getting up that morning, I felt audacious in an extraordinary way. I wanted to tell Venerable Ācariya Mun of my knowledge and capabilities. This was because I felt daring in a way hard to describe. *How was it that things could be so marvelous like this* in a way I had never encountered before? Ever since I had begun meditating, nothing like this had ever happened. *The mind had completely cut off all connection with any objects and had gathered within itself with real courage.* It had gathered by investigating all around itself, which was why it had calmed itself inwardly like a thoroughbred. When it withdrew, it was still full of courage, with no fear of death at all, owing to its conviction that, ‘I investigated like this and this when pain arose. The next time it comes, I won’t fear it because it’s the same old pain. It’s pain with the same old face. The body is the same old body. Discernment is the same old discernment we’ve used before.’ For this reason, the heart felt no fear of death—so much so that it felt all sorts of things hard to describe. To put it in worldly terms, it was like defying someone right to his face, with no fear of pain or death.

See? When the mind is bold, it’s bold all the way. Daring all the way. It fights without retreating. ‘Okay, I’ll take you on.’ To put it simply and frankly, that’s just how it feels. When the time comes to die, ‘Okay, I’ll take you on.’ The mind doesn’t retreat. ‘When the time comes to die, where will death find any pain for us greater than this? There’s no such thing. The only pain is the pain in the *khandhas*. It can be great or small, but we know it here in the *khandhas*. No matter how much or how heavy the pain may be, it can’t outstrip our knowledge and capabilities. It can’t outstrip our mindfulness and discernment. Mindfulness and discernment are capable of keeping track of it all, as they have already known and removed it in the past.’ This is what made me feel really bold.

When the time would come to die, I didn’t see that there would be any problem, with mindfulness and discernment all around me like this. If the time came to die, then let me die. Birth and death come in a pair. You can’t separate death from birth so as not to die, because they are equal truths.

The next time around, I took on the pain again and knew in the same way. I kept on knowing in the same way and winning every time. Once I had given it all my strength in that way, there was never a day in which I’d say, ‘Last night I stayed up in meditation all night until dawn and didn’t get anything out of it.’ But any night in which the mind had difficulty investigating and settling down, I would come out feeling battered all over my body. I’d be all stiff and sore.

But as for getting tactics and strength of mind, I'd get them every time, until I no longer had any fear of death at all—and where would I get any fear? Death was something ordinary. In other words, discernment had analyzed down to 'What dies?' Hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, bones: They're simply their original element—solidity, the earth element. Since when did the earth element ever die? When they disintegrate, what do they become? If we focus on down, we see that they return to their original properties. The water element returns to its original property. The wind and fire elements simply return to their own original properties. Nothing is annihilated. The elements have simply come together in a lump, and the mind comes in and animates it—this super-deluded one comes in and animates it, that's all—and then carries the entire burden: 'This is my self.' It lays its claims: 'This is me. This is mine.' And so it rakes in every kind of suffering as if contracting for the whole mass, using those assumptions simply to burn itself, and nothing else.

The mind itself is the culprit. The five *khandhas* aren't the culprits. They aren't our enemies or anything. They simply have their own reality, but we make assumptions and carry them as a burden. This is why there's suffering and stress. We manufacture it ourselves. These things don't manufacture it for us. 'There is nothing that comes and gives us suffering': This is how the mind came to understand things. *We* are the ones who misconstrue things. We are the ones who suffer because we misconstrue things. This produces suffering to burn and trouble the heart. I could clearly see that *nothing dies*.

The mind doesn't die. It becomes more pronounced. When we fully investigate the four elements—earth, water, wind, and fire—down to their original properties, the mind becomes even more pronounced and clear. So where is there any death? What dies? None of these conditions die. The four elements—earth, water, wind, and fire: They don't die. And as for the mind, how can it die? It becomes more aware. More pronounced. More conspicuous. This doesn't die, so why does it fear death? We've been fooled all along, fooled for eons and eons, for actually *nothing dies*.

Now, the word 'fooled' doesn't mean that anyone intended to fool us. We've been fooled simply because of our own delusion—fooled into fearing death. Now we see: This is how the world fears death—from not having explored down to its truth, from not knowing what dies. Because look: Nothing dies. Each thing simply has its separate reality. I saw this clearly. The mind proclaimed itself by its very nature. I saw its marvelousness clearly, every time.

Even when the pain was as hot as fire in the body and seemed ready to reach the clouds, it would vanish clear away, with nothing left, due to the power of mindfulness and discernment; even the body would vanish from my sense of consciousness and wouldn't appear at all. When everything disbanded completely as the result of my investigation, *all that remained was simple awareness*, as if floating in mid-space (although I didn't make the comparison at the moment). It was completely empty, but the

awareness knew clearly. There was only one thing. There was only one strange thing in the world: the heart.

Earth, water, wind, and fire made no contact with the heart. The heart thus had no sense of earth, water, wind, fire or any part of the body. All that remained was a solitary awareness, an awareness not involved with anything at all—an amazing awareness, coming from having investigated things with circumspection and then having withdrawn from them. Clear. Outstanding. Astounding.

Once the mind can be settled down like this—for no matter how many days or nights it may last—it has no sense of pain, that the body will fall apart, that it hurts here or aches there: no sense of any of this at all. And what would give it any sense of this? Time and place don't exist in that mental state. This called to mind how the Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and arahant disciples could enter the cessation of feeling and perception for seven days at a time. They could enter for as many days as they liked. If their minds settled down like this to the extent of not being involved with anything at all, leaving just plain awareness without any involvement with time or place, then they could sit for eons if they liked. Even if the body couldn't endure, if it were to break apart, it would simply do so, without having any impact on this nature at all.

This was when my mind accepted—really believed in—the ability of those extraordinary people who enter the cessation of feeling and perception for so-and-so many days. If their minds reached this level without withdrawing back out to anything outside, then for days or months they wouldn't have any perception of anything at all. Where would there be pain and pleasure in their bodies? There wouldn't be any at all. They wouldn't have any sense of the body. They wouldn't have any awareness of feelings. All that would remain would be plain awareness. They could sit for eons, if they liked, as long as the mind was like this.

This made me believe in the stories of the Pacceka Buddhas who entered the cessation of feeling and perception. So I took this as a confirmation in my mind. Whoever says I'm crazy can go ahead and say so. They have mouths; we have ears. If we want to listen, we can. If we don't, we can keep still. We are all free to have our opinions on this matter and that. No one has a monopoly on knowing and seeing!

Even though I didn't sit for a long time, the state of mind that had grown still to that extent for a spell of time was enough to serve as confirmation of those who entered the cessation of feeling and perception for long periods of time, because it had the same characteristics: not involved with anything at all. The body would simply be a body. If it were to fall apart, if it couldn't last—after all, the body is inconstant, stressful, and not-self—then it would simply fall apart without the mind's being aware.

This is a level attained through mindfulness and discernment. It's a level where discernment fosters concentration. The mind reaches the full extent of concentration

like this because discernment has fully investigated down to causes and effects. It then gathers with courage and great refinement. Ordinarily, when the mind filled with just the power of concentration focuses and settles down, it is simply unmoving and nothing else. It isn't as profound and refined as this. But the mind stilled through the power of discernment is refined each time. Once we have gone through hand-to-hand combat in this way to the point where we get results, the mind has to be absolutely quiet, just like this.

This was the basis, or the starting capital, for my courage; the primary seed for my firm conviction in the affairs of the mind. No matter how much anything else might be annihilated, this knowing nature would *not* be annihilated. I could see this clearly. I saw it clearly at the point when nothing else was involved in my sense of awareness. There was simply that single awareness and so it was very pronounced. I couldn't really say whether this was on the level of concentration or of discernment. When the mind actually was that way, that's how it was.

From that point on I kept at it. I kept investigating out in the area of discernment, ranging out widely, then circling back in again. As soon as I would understand, step by step, the mind would let go and circle inward in an ever-narrowing sphere, investigating the *khandhas* and elements, separating the *khandhas* and elements.

This is where it began to be '*samuccheda-pahāna*'—absolute relinquishment, arising from the investigation in the period that followed. As long as the investigation hadn't been absolute, it would win out for only a period of time, just enough to serve as evidence and proof. It still wasn't absolute relinquishment. But when discernment came to a really clear understanding while investigating, then it pulled out and severed all ties, step by step—severed things so that there were no connections left; severed them step by step, leaving just plain awareness.

The body (*rūpa*) was severed from attachment. *Vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* were severed from attachment. Or you could say that the 'heart' was severed from 'them.' Things kept being severed until only awareness was left—in other words, the mind with unawareness buried inside it. So I probed on in, smashed things to bits, slashed them to smithereens with up-to-the-minute mindfulness and discernment. The mind of unawareness broke apart, and when the mind of unawareness broke apart, that was all!

That was when I came to know that all of the marvels I have mentioned here were simply an affair of unawareness. They had simply been a support, a way-station, a seed that had produced conviction step by step, but after that—if you were to say they were good, they were good; but if you're aiming at the subtle Dhamma, this goodness is the goodness of unawareness. It's not genuine goodness, not pure goodness. It's goodness mixed with evil, with suffering and stress, because stress still has a chance to arise. We have to keep slashing in, slashing in until everything is smithereens in the heart. Whatever is a seed of anything counterfeit in the heart, wash it away, scrub it away,

until nothing is left, and that's all. The entire mind that is assumed to be 'this' or 'that' is *all gone*.

This is where the mind reaches absolute purity, where it reaches complete freedom from all conventional realities. That's really 'all'! It's astounding. If it weren't astounding, it wouldn't be release from stress. *This is a Dhamma apart—a Dhamma beyond conventions*.

Whether what I've described here is difficult or not, consider it for yourselves. Sometimes I'd feel ready to pass out. Sometimes I'd feel as if the entire body were on fire. When the pain was really fierce, it seemed to fill the entire body. But ultimately I was able to pass through these things, to resolve them using mindfulness and discernment.

So if we put them to use, mindfulness and discernment are never at the end of their rope. We human beings aren't fated always to be stupid, you know. When we come to the end of our rope, we're sure to be able to save ourselves. Who should be willing to go under when we have the mindfulness and discernment to remedy things, or when there's an opening through which we can escape, through which we can force our way out? Who would willingly be buried to death? We can't help but manage to find a way out.

When the pain is so piled on that we can't see any way to cure it other than using mindfulness and discernment to explore and find a way out, *discernment doesn't depend on this person or that*. When the time comes for the mind to investigate when it's cornered, *it gathers its forces and manages to save itself*.

The Buddha thus taught us to live in 'crucial' places—places where we're cornered, at the end of our rope—where we live simply, so that mindfulness and discernment can work full steam ahead and see their own capabilities, rather than simply waiting for help from others. Time and place can help give rise to mindfulness and discernment. If we live in a scary place, mindfulness is strong. Discernment is sharp. Whatever we investigate, they are adroit and audacious. If we live in a comfortable place, we get lazy. We eat a lot and sleep a lot. This is the way it is with the mind. If we live in ordinary circumstances, we're very lazy, very inert, very apathetic and listless. If we live in places that aren't scary, we become heedless and revert to being complacent, to sleeping like pigs.

If we live in a scary place, we're always alert. When we're alert, we're always self-aware, *because alertness is what it means to be mindful*. Mindfulness appears within us, always self-aware, always engaged in persistent effort. Whatever makes contact, we understand because we're not complacent, because we're always alert. This is why we're taught to live in whatever places are appropriate, because they can give good encouragement or support to our persistent effort.

If we have comfortable huts in which to live—as we have here—everything cares for

our every need. Food overflows our bowls. We're flooded day and night with fruit juice, soft drinks, cocoa, and coffee. Main course dishes and desserts come pouring in from every direction. If we lack mindfulness and discernment, we lie clutching our food, like a pig lying next to its hay and then climbing up to lie on the chopping block. As for the Dhamma, we have no hope of winning it. Any meditation monk who is 'clever' in this way is bound to go under in this way without a doubt.

To have mindfulness and discernment, we have to think. However much of the necessities of life we may have, we must find tactics for keeping the mind in shape, to keep wary and uncomplacent like a deer wary of danger.

In places where you don't have to be wary of food like this, the mind goes about thinking in another way to reform itself. There, where will you get an excess of anything? Everything is lacking. Insufficient. Some days you get enough alms to eat, some days you don't. 'This way there's nothing to be concerned about, because you've been full and been hungry before. Even if you go without food for one or two days, you won't die.'

This is how the heart deals with the problem, and so it isn't concerned about food or anything else. If there's nothing but rice, you eat rice—and you don't see that you're concerned about it. 'After all, you've come to a place like this, so what's wrong with eating whatever's available? Where are you going to find anything to go with the rice? You've been fed rice ever since the day you were born, so what's wrong with eating just rice? Can you eat other things without rice? If eating other things is really special, you've already eaten a lot of them, so why aren't you ever full? You've come looking for the Dhamma, not for food. Why are you so worked up about your stomach? You've already eaten a lot, and yet nothing special has ever come of it. You're looking for the extraordinary Dhamma, so what business do you have getting worked up about food? An expert in Dhamma isn't an expert in eating.' The mind deals with the situation in the flash of an eye, and the end result is that it isn't concerned. This is how a meditation monk subdues himself—or in other words, subdues his greed for the necessities of life.

And as a result of correcting itself in the matter of eating or not eating, the mind keeps spinning. You sit in meditation without getting tired. With no food in your stomach, what is there to get drowsy about? If you don't eat at all, you're not drowsy at all and can meditate with ease.

This is a tactic in teaching monks to practice the Dhamma '*rukhamūla-senāsanam*'—under the shade of trees, in the mountains, in the forest, in lonely places where it's scary—*ahāra-sappaya*, where the food is amenable. 'Amenable' here means that it doesn't disrupt the body, that it isn't harmful or toxic to the body; and that it doesn't disrupt the mind as well. 'Amenable food' means nothing but rice sometimes, or just a little food, so that our meditation goes well. It's amenable for those intent on the Dhamma.

But those of us who are intent on nourishing the stomach for the sake of the body can't do this at all. Otherwise we'll die—don't say I didn't warn you. Normally if we eat a lot, with nothing but good dishes to eat, then we sleep like pigs. How can this be amenable? It's amenable for the defilements, not for winning the Dhamma. It's amenable for the affairs of defilements and the affairs of pigs.

The term 'amenable food' has to refer to eating in a way that serves a purpose. To eat just a little serves a purpose: Wherever we sit in meditation, the mind is really solid. If we're involved with concentration, the mind is solid. If we're involved with discernment, it keeps spinning with much more agility than normal.

The Dhamma tends to arise in places where things are lacking, in difficult places where we're cornered, at the end of our rope. It doesn't arise where things are overflowing, where our needs are met. It doesn't arise in comfortable places because we just get complacent. This is the way we tend to be.

The Lord Buddha lived in a royal palace—for how long?—and then left it to take up the homeless life. Who ever suffered more than he? 'Buddha'—Awakening—tends to arise in situations like that. His disciples came from all sorts of families—the families of kings, financiers, landowners—listen to this—wealthy people. When they went out to become 'sons of the Sakyan, sons of the victorious Buddha,' how did they live? 'If we're going to die, then we die. We're not going to worry or be bothered with anything at all except for the Dhamma.' There! They gained the Dhamma in difficult places, just like the Buddha.

So which way are we going to take? The Buddha has already shown us the way. The Dhamma arises in that sort of place—in tight spots where things are difficult. The Dhamma arises from a heap of suffering. If there's no heap of suffering, then mindfulness and discernment don't arise. If we don't think, we don't gain mindfulness and discernment. The Dhamma doesn't appear. If there's a lot of stress, it's a whetstone for discernment, which probes for clear insight into the affairs of stress. This way we can live through it and come out *superlative people*.

So then. *Evañ.*

The Radiant Mind Is Unawareness

Normally the mind is radiant and always ready to make contact with everything of every sort. Although all phenomena without exception fall under the laws of the three characteristics—stress, inconstancy, and not-self—the true nature of the mind doesn't fall under these laws.

The extent to which the mind *does* follow these laws is because the things that fall under these three characteristics come spinning in and become involved with it, so that it goes spinning along with them. Even then, though, it spins in a way that doesn't disintegrate or fall apart. It spins with the things that have the power to make it spin, but the natural power of the mind itself is that it *knows and does not die*. This deathlessness is something that lies beyond disintegration. This non-disintegration is something that lies beyond the three characteristics and the common laws of nature, but we're not aware of it because conventional realities become involved with the mind and surround it, so that the mind's behavior conforms thoroughly to theirs.

The fact that we're unaware that birth and death are things that have always been with the mind infected by defilement, is because ignorance itself is an affair of defilement. *Birth and death are an affair of defilement*. Our own true affair, *the affair that's ours pure and simple—the affair of the mind pure and simple—is that we don't have the power to be our own true self*. We have been taking all sorts of counterfeit things as our self all along, and so the mind's behavior is not in keeping with its true nature. Its behavior falls under the sway of the deceits of defilement, which make it worry and fear, dreading death, dreading everything. Whatever happens—a little pain, a lot of pain—it's afraid. If even the least little thing disturbs it, it's afraid. As a result, the mind is filled with worries and fears. Even though fear and worry aren't directly an affair of the mind, they still manage to make it tremble.

We'll see—when the mind is cleansed so that it is fully pure and nothing can become involved with it—that no fear appears in the mind at all. Fear doesn't appear. Courage doesn't appear. All that appears is its own nature by itself, just its own timeless nature. That's all. This is the genuine mind. 'Genuine mind' here refers only to the purity or the '*saupādisesa-nibbāna*' of the arahants. Nothing else can be called the 'genuine mind' without reservations or hesitations. I, for one, would feel embarrassed to use the term for anything else at all.

The 'original mind' means the original mind of the round in which the mind finds itself spinning around and about, as in the Buddha's saying, 'Monks, the original mind is radiant'—notice that—'but because of the admixture of defilements' or 'because of the defilements that come passing through, it becomes darkened.'

The original mind here refers to the origin of conventional realities, not to the origin of purity. The Buddha uses the term '*pabhassaram*'—'*pabhassaram-idam cittam bhikkhave*'—which means radiant. It doesn't mean pure. The way he puts it is absolutely right. There is no way you can fault it. Had he said that the original mind is pure, you could immediately take issue: 'If the mind is pure, why is it born? Those who have purified their minds are never reborn. If the mind is already pure, why purify it?' Right here is where you could take issue. What reason would there be to purify it? If the mind is radiant, you can purify it because its radiance is unawareness incarnate, and nothing else. Meditators will see clearly for themselves the moment the mind passes from radiance to mental release: Radiance will no longer appear. Right here is the point where meditators clearly know this, and it's the point that lets them argue—because the truth has to be found true in the individual heart. Once a person knows, he or she can't help but speak with full assurance.

Thus the fact that our mind is surrounded, made to fear, to worry, to love, to hate, or whatever, is caused entirely by the symptoms of conventional reality, the symptoms of defilement. We have no mental power of our own. We have only the power of defilement, craving, and mental effluents pushing and pressuring us day and night while we sit, stand, walk, and lie down. Where are we going to find any happiness and ease as long as these things, which are constantly changing, keep provoking the mind to change along with them without our being aware of the fact?

There can be no ease in this world—none at all—until these things can be completely eradicated from the heart. Until then, we can have no secure ease and relief in any way. We can only shift and change about, or lean this way and that, depending on how much we're provoked by the things that come and involve us. This is why the Buddha teaches us to cleanse the mind, which is the same thing as cleansing ourselves of suffering.

There is no one who has genuinely penetrated the principles of the truth like the Lord Buddha. Only he can be called '*sayambhū*'—one who needs no teaching or training from anyone else. In curing his heart of defilement, he performed the duties of both student and teacher, all by himself, until he awakened to the level of the superlative Dhamma, becoming the superlative person, the superlative Master.

This is not to deny that on the level of concentration—the development of mental stillness—he received training from the two hermits; but that in itself wasn't the way of extrication leading to the level of omniscience (*sabbāññū*). By the time he was to attain omniscience, he had left the two hermits and was striving on his own. He came to know the Dhamma on his own and to see on his own, without anyone else's teaching him. He then brought that Dhamma to teach the world so that it has known good and evil, heaven, hell, and *nibbāna* ever since. Had there been no one to teach us, we of the world would be completely burdened with the mass of fire filling our hearts and would never see the day when we could put our burdens down.

This being the case, we should appreciate the worth of the Dhamma that the Buddha brought to the world after having endured hardships in a way no one else in the world could have managed.

So now, at present, what is it that covers the heart so that we can't find its radiance and purity, even though each of us wants to find purity. What conceals it? To answer in terms of natural principles, we should start with the five *khandhas*. As for the 'mind of unawareness,' we can save that for later. Let's just start out with what's really obvious—the five *khandhas* and their companions: sight, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations.

These make contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, and then link up with the mind, forming the basis for this assumption and that. The mind then takes the objects that have come passing by and uses them to bind itself, entangle itself, or encircle itself so that it is completely darkened with love, hate, anger, and all sorts of other states, all of which come from the things I have mentioned.

But what lies buried deep is our belief that the *khandhas* form our self. From time immemorial, whatever our language, whatever our race—even when we are common animals—we have to believe that these things are us, are ours; that they are a being, the self of a being, our own self. If we become deities, we believe that our divine bodies are ours. If we become hungry ghosts or whatever, the things we dwell in—gross bodies or refined—we take to be us or ours. Even when we become human beings and begin to have some sense of good and evil, we still have to believe that 'This is us,' or 'This is ours.' Of the five *khandhas*, the body (*rūpa*) is 'us.' *Vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are 'us,' are 'ours.' These assumptions lie buried deep within us.

The Buddha thus teaches us to investigate. We investigate these things so as to see their truth clearly and then to uproot our mistaken assumptions and attachments that they are the self. We do this for the sake of freedom and for nothing else.

If we look at these things in their normal state, we might wonder why we should investigate them. Sights are simply sights; sounds are sounds; smells, smells; tastes, tastes; tactile sensations are simply natural phenomena as they've always been. They've never announced that they are our enemies. So why investigate them?

We investigate them to know the truth of each one of them as it actually is, to realize our own delusions by means of this investigation and to extricate ourselves from them through knowledge—for the fact that the mind lays claim to the *khandhas* as its self, as belonging to itself, is because of delusion and nothing else.

Once we have investigated and clearly understood what these things are, the mind withdraws inwardly through knowledge, understanding, and discernment, with no more concern for these things. We investigate whichever *khandha* is most prominent. We needn't conjecture or speculate about the fact that we haven't contemplated the five *khandhas* in their entirety, or each *khandha* in turn. We needn't conjecture at all. All we

need to do is to see which *khandha* is prominent and merits investigation at the moment—which *khandha* we feel best suited to handle—and then investigate and explore it so that it becomes clear.

Take, for instance, the body, whichever aspect of the body is most prominent in your awareness—the aspect that has you most interested, that you want most to investigate. Latch onto that spot and focus on examining it so as to see its truth in terms of the question, ‘What is stress?’

In the texts we are told that stress (*dukkha*) means ‘unendurability,’ but this doesn’t sit well with my own crass tastes, which is why—one man’s meat being another man’s poison—I prefer to translate stress as ‘a constant squeeze.’ This is more in keeping with my tastes, which are very crude. For example, the phrase, ‘*yampiccharā na labhati tampi dukkham,*’ is right in line with my translation. In other words, ‘Not attaining what is desired is stress.’ How is it stress? In that it puts a squeeze on us, or makes us uncomfortable.

If we don’t get what we want, we’re uncomfortable. Even if we get what we want but then lose it, we suffer stress. Stress in this sense fits the translation, ‘a squeeze.’ This squeeze is what’s meant by stress or unendurability. If it can’t endure, let it go its own way. Why mess with it? Actually, no matter which *khandha*, no matter which of the three characteristics, the mind is the one at fault for getting attached, which is why we have to examine the *khandhas* until we have them clear.

Whatever aspect of the body, look so as to see it clearly. If we’re not yet clear about the filthiness in our ‘physical heap,’ we can look at the charnel ground within us so as to see it clearly. When we’re told to visit the charnel ground, this is where we make our visit. Even if we visit a charnel ground outside, the purpose is to reflect inwardly on the inner charnel ground—our own body.

As for the external charnel ground, in the days of the Buddha it was a place where corpses were scattered all over the place. The dead were hardly ever buried or cremated as they are today. So the Buddha taught monks to visit the charnel ground, where old corpses and new were scattered everywhere. He also gave detailed instructions as to the direction from which to enter, in keeping with his sharp intelligence as a self-dependent Buddha, the Teacher of the world. He said to approach from the upwind side and not from the downwind side. Otherwise the stench of the various corpses would be bad for your health.

‘When you encounter corpses in this way, how do you feel? Look at the different types of corpses. How do you feel? Now refer inwardly, to your own body, which is another corpse.’ This is how he taught the monks to investigate. Once we have an eyewitness—ourselves—as to what the corpses in the external charnel ground are like, we can refer inwardly to the internal charnel ground: ourselves again. Once we have grasped the basic principle, the external charnel ground gradually fades out of the picture.

Instead, we investigate our internal charnel ground so that it becomes gradually more and more clear. In other words, we see how this body is a well of filth. Repulsive. Something that constantly has to be washed, bathed, and cleaned.

Is there anything that, once it has become involved with any part of the body, remains clean? Even the food we eat, once we consume it, becomes filthy from the moment it enters the mouth and passes on down. Our clothing is also dirty. It has to be washed and laundered—a lot of fuss and bother. The same holds true for our homes. They constantly have to be cleaned, scrubbed, dusted, and swept. Otherwise they turn into another charnel ground because of the filth and the smell. Everywhere, wherever human beings live, has to be cleaned—because human beings are filthy. And since our bodies are already filthy, everything that comes into contact with them becomes filthy. Even food—delicious, inviting, appealing food—once it becomes mixed with the filth in the body, such as saliva, becomes filthy as well. If you took food of various kinds into your mouth and then spit it out, there'd be no way you could take it back in again. It'd be too disgusting. Revolting. Why? Because the body is filthy by its very nature, and so whatever becomes involved with the body becomes filthy as well.

To contemplate in this way is called investigating the charnel ground, or investigating the theme of loathsomeness.

So. Focus in on seeing its inherent nature. Look at every facet, in whichever way comes most naturally to you. When you've examined one spot, your knowledge gradually seeps into the next spot and the next. If mindfulness and awareness keep in close connection, discernment can't help but go to work and advance unceasingly. You'll feel profoundly moved as you come to see and know truly, step by step. This is discernment on the first level of investigation.

Once you've investigated filthiness, you then investigate the process of change in the body. In other words, filth is in this body. Dry corpses, fresh corpses, raw corpses, cooked corpses, all kinds of corpses are gathered together in this body, but I've never heard the place where they are barbecued, roasted, and stewed called a crematorium. Instead, it's called kitchen. But actually, that's what it is, a crematorium for animals. And then they're all buried here in this stomach, this grave. We're a burial ground for all kinds of animals—yes, us!—if we look at ourselves in all fairness, with impartiality, because we're filled with old corpses and new. Once we have contemplated in this way, then if we don't feel disenchantment, if we don't feel disengagement, what will we feel?—for that's the way the truth actually is.

The Buddha taught us to get to the truth, because this is what the truth is. If we don't resist the truth, we will all be able to unshackle ourselves from our attachments and false assumptions—from our stupidity and foolishness—step by step. The mind will become bright and clear, radiating its brightness with dignity, bravery, and courage in the face of the truth that comes into contact with it at all times. It will be content to accept every facet of the truth with fairness and impartiality. Even though we may not

have yet abandoned our attachments absolutely, we can still find relief in having put them down to at least some extent. We no longer have to be constantly weighed down with our attachments to the *khandhas* to the point where we are always miserable. This is in keeping with the saying, 'Fools, the heavier their burdens, the more they keep piling on. Sages, the lighter their burdens, the more they let go—until nothing is left.'

When we investigate in this way, we should examine the process of change in the *khandhas*. Every piece, every bit, every part of the body undergoes change. There's no exception, not even for a single hair. Everything undergoes change in the same way. So which part is us, which part is ours, to which we should be attached?

The same holds true with the word '*anattā*,' not-self. It drives home even more firmly the fact that these things don't deserve our attachment. '*Anattā*' lies in the same parts as change—the very same parts. They're *anattā*, not ours or anyone else's. *Each one, each one is simply a natural phenomenon mingled with the others in line with its own nature, without any concern for who will like it or hate it, latch onto it or let it go.*

But we human beings are light-fingered and quick. Whatever comes our way, we snatch hold of it, snatch hold of it, with no concern for right or wrong. We're more light-fingered and quick than a hundred monkeys, and yet all of us, all over the world, like to criticize monkeys for not being able to sit contented and still. Actually we ourselves can't stay contented and still in any position. We're full of restlessness—unruly, reckless, overflowing our boundaries—and yet we never think of criticizing ourselves. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is thus like a stick for slapping the hands of this light-fingered, unruly monkey.

With the three characteristics, *anattā* among them, he warns us, strikes our wrists: 'Don't reach!' He slaps us, strikes us: 'Don't reach for it as "me" or "mine."' The phrase, 'The body is not the self,' is just like that. 'Don't reach for it. Don't latch onto it.' This is simply so that we will see that it's already not-self. By its nature it's not-self. It doesn't belong to anyone at all. He's already told us: '*Anattā*: It's not the self.' This is how we investigate the body.

So, now then: Focus on visualizing it as it disintegrates, in whichever way seems most natural to you. This part decomposes. That part decomposes. This part falls off. That part falls off. Let yourself become engrossed in watching it, using your own ingenuity. This falls off, that falls off, until everything has fallen apart—all the bones, from the skull on down. Once the skin that enwraps them has decomposed, the flesh has decomposed, the tendons that hold them together have decomposed, the bones can't help but fall apart, piece by piece, because they are held together only by tendons. Once the tendons decompose, the different parts have to fall off piece by piece in a pile on the ground, scattered all over the place. You can even visualize having vultures, crows, and dogs come to eat and scatter the parts everywhere. How does the mind feel about this?

Well then, look at it. Visualize the liquid parts seeping into the earth and evaporating into the air, then drying away, drying away until they no longer appear. The solid parts, once they've dried, return to the earth from which they came. Earth returns to earth, water to water, wind to wind. Penetrate down into any of four elements—earth, water, wind, or fire—because each gives clear evidence of the Noble Truths.

We don't have to think that we've examined earth clearly, but this element or that element isn't clear. We needn't think that way at all. If we examine any one of them until it's clear, we will penetrate them all, because earth, water, wind, and fire are all already open and aboveboard. They appear to our sight. In our body, we already have water. Wind—for example, the in-and-out breath—is already clearly there, already clear to see. Fire—the warmth in the body—is something we all have here in our bodies. So why don't we accept its truth with right discernment? Once we've investigated it over and over again, we have to accept it. We can't resist the truth, because that's why we're here: We want the truth.

So keep investigating. Look for the part that's 'you' or 'yours.' Look for it! There isn't any—not a one! The whole thing originally belongs to them: to earth, water, wind, and fire. It originally belongs to the different elements.

Now, when you look in this manner, the mind can settle down and grow still. At the same time, these aren't preoccupations that will make the mind proud, conceited, or unruly. Rather, they are themes that calm the heart, which is why the Buddha taught us to investigate them repeatedly until we understand and become adept at them.

When the mind sees clearly with its own discernment, it can't help but withdraw into stillness, firmly centered within, letting go of all its cares. *This is one level in the investigation of the khandhas.*

Now for the next step: Investigate feelings of pain, especially when you are ill or have been sitting in meditation for a long time, and severe pain arises. Take it on, right there. A warrior has to fight when the enemy appears. If there's no enemy, how can you call him a warrior? And what's the enemy? Feelings of pain, the enemy of the heart. When you're ill, where does it hurt? There: You have your enemy. If you're a warrior, how can you run away and hide? You have to fight *until you gain knowledge and then use that knowledge to come out victorious.*

So. What does the pain come from? From the time we were born until we first sat in meditation, it wasn't there. Before we first became ill, it didn't appear. It appears only now that we're ill. Before that, where was it hiding? If it's really 'us,' our mind should have been aware of it at all times, so why hasn't this kind of pain appeared at all times? Why is it appearing now? If the pain is 'us,' then when it vanishes why doesn't the mind vanish with it? If they're really one and the same thing, they have to vanish together. The pain should appear as long as the mind is aware. If they're one and the same thing, the pain shouldn't vanish. You have to look and investigate until this is clear. At the

same time, analyze the body when the pain arises—when, for example, your legs ache or when this or that bone hurts. Fix your attention on the bone if the bone is really hurting.

Is the bone the pain? *Ask yourself! And whatever you're asking about, focus your attention right there.* Don't ask in the abstract or absentmindedly. Ask in a way that focuses the mind right down to see the truth. Focus steadily right on the pain. Stare the mind right down on whichever bone you identify with the pain. Look carefully to see, 'Is this bone the pain?' Fix your attention there. Really observe with your own discernment. If this bone is really the pain, then when the pain vanishes, why doesn't the bone vanish with it? If they really are one and the same thing, then when the pain vanishes, the bone should vanish too. It shouldn't remain.

But look: When the disease goes away, or when we get up from sitting in meditation, the really severe pain vanishes, the stress vanishes. So if they *are* one and the same thing, why doesn't the bone vanish as well? This shows that they aren't one and the same. The feeling isn't the same as the body. The body isn't the same as the feeling. Similarly, the body and the mind aren't one and the same. Each has its own separate reality. Distinguish them so as to see them clearly in line with this truth, and you'll understand their true nature through discernment, with no doubts at all. Feeling will appear in its true nature.

Ultimately, the investigation will come circling in, circling in, circling in to the mind. The pain will gradually shrink into itself, away from the mind's assumptions. In other words, you will see that the mind is the culprit. The mind is the instigator. The physical pain will gradually subside and fade away. The body will simply be there as the body, with the same reality it had before the pain appeared. And now that the pain has vanished, the flesh, skin, tendon, bone or whatever part you had identified as the pain will maintain its reality in the same way. It isn't the pain. The body is the body. The feeling is the feeling. The mind is the mind. Fix your attention on seeing them clearly. Once the mind has penetrated to the truth, the pain will disappear. This is one result.

Another result is that even if the pain doesn't vanish—here I'm referring to the physical pain—still it can't have any impact on the heart and mind. Ultimately, the mind is serene, secure, and majestic, there in the midst of the physical pain. No matter which part of the body you say is pained—even if it's the whole body at once—the mind isn't disturbed or agitated in any way. It's relaxed and at ease because it has seen with discernment right through the pain appearing at the moment. This is another sort of result that comes from investigating pain.

When investigating pain, then the greater the pain, the more important it is that your mindfulness and discernment not retreat. They have to keep advancing so as to know the truth. You needn't aim at making the pain vanish, because such a desire would simply enhance the pain and make it more and more severe. Actually, *you're making an investigation simply to see the truth.* Whether or not the pain vanishes, know the

truth that is the pain or gives rise to the pain by seeing through it with your own discernment: That's enough. Fix your attention there, and these things will keep appearing and disappearing there in the *khandhas*.

The body appears for a certain period and then disintegrates in what we call death. As for feelings of pain, they appear a hundred times in a single day and then disappear a hundred times, a thousand times as well. What's lasting about them? This is the kind of truth they are. Get so you clearly know with discernment the truth of painful feelings as they appear. Don't retreat or let the mind wander adrift.

What is *saññā* labeling at the moment? *Saññā* is the important instigator. As soon as *sañkhāra* fashions anything—*blip!*—*saññā* latches right onto it and labels it this, labels it that—stirring things all up. When we talk about the things that create havoc, provoking this issue and that, we're referring to these characters: *sañkhāras* and *saññās* that label things and stamp meanings on them. 'This is us. This is ours. This is pain. It hurts right here. It hurts right there. I'm afraid of the pain. I'm afraid to die'—afraid of everything of every sort. These are the characters that fool us into fear, making the mind apprehensive, making it give up its efforts and lose. *Is it good to lose?* Even children playing games have a sense of shame when they lose, and try to make up their losses. As for meditators who lose out to defilement, who lose out to pain: If they don't feel embarrassed in the presence of the defilements, the pains and themselves, then they're simply too shameless.

Know that *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sañkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are simply individual conditions displayed by the mind. They appear and vanish. '*Saññā anattā*'—see? They too are not-self, so how can you hold to them? How can you believe them to be you, to be yours, to be true? Keep track of them so that you can know them clearly with mindfulness and discernment: audacious, undaunted, diamond-hearted, decisive in the face of defilement and pain of every sort.

Sañkhāras, mental formations: They form—*blip, blip, blip*—in the heart. The heart ripples for a moment: *blip, blip, blip*. The moment they arise, they vanish. So what substance or truth can you find in these *saññās* and *sañkhāras* ?

Viññāṇa, cognizance: As soon as anything comes into contact, this takes note and vanishes, takes note and vanishes. So ultimately, the *khandhas* are full of nothing but appearing and vanishing. There's nothing lasting about them that can give us any real sustenance or nourishment. There's not even the least bit of substance to them. So use your discernment to investigate until you see clearly in this way, and you will come to see the real Dhamma taught by the Buddha, which has not been otherwise from time immemorial and by the same token will never be otherwise at all.

Once we've investigated to this extent, how can the mind not withdraw into stillness until it is plainly apparent? It has to be still. It has to stand out. The mind's awareness of itself has to be prominent because it has withdrawn inwardly from having seen the truth

of these things. *The mind has to be prominent.* Pain, no matter how horribly severe, will dissolve away through investigation, through the mind's having clearly seen its truth. Or if it doesn't go away, then the pain and the mind will each have their own separate reality. The heart will be inwardly majestic. Undaunted. Unfearing.

When the time comes for death, let it happen. There is no more fear, because death is entirely a matter of *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra,* and *viññāṇa*. It's not a matter of the 'knower'—the heart—breaking apart. It's not the knower—the heart—that dies. Only those other things die. The mind's labels and assumptions have simply fooled it into fear. If we can catch sight of the fact that these labels and assumptions are illusions and not worthy of credence, the mind will withdraw inwardly, no longer believing them, but believing the truth instead, believing the discernment that has investigated things thoroughly.

Now, when the mind has investigated time and again, ceaselessly, relentlessly, it will develop expertise in the affairs of the *khandhas*. The physical *khandha* will be the first to be relinquished through discernment. In the beginning stage of the investigation, discernment will see through the physical *khandha* before seeing through the others and will be able to let it go. From there, the mind will gradually be able to let go of *vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra,* and *viññāṇa* at the same time.

To put the matter simply, once discernment sees through them, it lets go. If it has yet to see through them, it holds on. Once we see through them with discernment, we let them go—let them go completely—because we see that they are simply ripples in the mind—blip, blip, blip—without any substance at all. A good thought appears and vanishes. A bad thought appears and vanishes. Whatever kind of thought appears, it's simply a formation and as such it vanishes. If a hundred formations appear, all hundred of them vanish. There is no permanence to them substantial enough for us to trust.

So then. What is it that keeps supplying us with these things or keeps forcing them out on us? What is it that keeps forcing this thing and that out to fool us? This is where we come to what the Buddha calls the *pabhassara-citta*: the original, radiant mind. 'But monks, because of the admixture of defilement,' or 'because of the defilements that come passing through'—from sights, sound, smells, tastes, tactile sensations; from *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra,* and *viññāṇa*, that our labels and assumptions haul in to burn us—'the mind becomes defiled.' It's defiled with just these very things.

Thus investigation is for the sake of removing these things so as to reveal the mind through clear discernment. We can then see that as long as the mind is at the stage where it hasn't ventured out to become engaged in any object—inasmuch as its instruments, the senses, are still weak and undeveloped—it is quiet and radiant, as in the saying, 'The original mind is the radiant mind.' *But this is the original mind of the round of rebirth*—for example, the mind of a newborn child whose activities are still too undeveloped to take any objects on fully. *It's not the original mind freed from the cycle and fully pure.*

So while we investigate around us stage by stage, the symptoms of defilement that used to run all over the place will be gathered into this single point, becoming a radiance within the mind. And this radiance: Even the tools of super-mindfulness and super-discernment will have to fall for it when they first meet with it, because it's something we have never seen before, never met before, from the beginning of our practice or from the day of our birth. We thus become awed and amazed. It seems for the moment that nothing can compare to it in magnificence.

And why shouldn't it be magnificent? It has been the king of the round of rebirth in all three worlds—the world of sensuality, the world of form, and the world of formlessness—since way back when, for countless eons. It's the one who has wielded power over the mind and ruled the mind all along. As long as the mind doesn't possess the mindfulness and discernment to pull itself out from under this power, how can it not be magnificent? This is why it has been able to drive the mind into experiencing birth on various levels without limit, in dependence on the fruits of the different actions it has performed under the orders of the ephemeral defilements. The fact that living beings wander and stray, taking birth and dying unceasingly, is because this nature leads them to do so.

This being the case, we have to investigate it so as to see it plainly. Actually, radiance and defilement are two sides of the same coin because they are both conventional realities. The radiance that comes from the convergence of the various defilements will form a point, a center, so that we can clearly perceive that 'This is the center of the radiance.' *When any defilement appears*, in correspondence with that state or level of the mind, *a very refined stress will arise in the center we call radiant*. Thus radiance, defilement, and stress—all three—are companions. They go together.

For this reason, the mind possessing this radiance must worry over it, guard it, protect it, maintain it, for fear that something may come to disturb it, jar it, obscure its radiance. Even the most refined adulteration is still an affair of defilement, about which we as meditators should not be complacent. We must investigate it with unflagging discernment.

In order to cut through the burden of your concerns once and for all, you should ask yourself, 'What is this radiance?' Fix your attention on it until you know. There's no need to fear that once this radiance is destroyed, the 'real you' will be destroyed along with it. Focus your investigation right at that center to see clearly that this radiance has the characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self just like all the other phenomena you have already examined. It's not different in any way, aside from the difference in its subtlety.

Thus nothing should be taken for granted. If anything has the nature of conventional reality, let discernment slash away at it. Focus right down on the mind itself. All the really counterfeit things lie in the mind. *This radiance is the ultimate counterfeit* and at that moment it's the most conspicuous point. You hardly want to touch it at all, because you

love it and cherish it more than anything else. In the entire body there is nothing more outstanding than this radiance, which is why you are amazed at it, love it, cherish it, dawdle over it, want nothing to touch it. *But it's the enemy king: unawareness.*

Have you ever seen it? If you haven't, then when you reach this stage in your practice you'll fall for it of your own accord. And then you'll know it of your own accord—no one will have to tell you—when mindfulness and discernment are ready. It's called *avijjā*—unawareness. Right here is the true unawareness. Nothing else is true unawareness. Don't go imagining *avijjā* as a tiger, a leopard, a demon, or a beast. Actually, it's the most beautiful, most alluring Miss Universe the world has ever seen. Genuine unawareness is very different from what we expect it to be.

When we reach genuine unawareness, we don't know what unawareness is and so we get stuck right there. If there's no one to advise us, no one to suggest an approach, we are sure to stay stuck there a long time before we can understand and work ourselves free. But if there is someone to suggest an approach, we can begin to understand it and strike right at that center, without trusting it, by investigating it in the same way we have dealt with all other phenomena.

Once we've investigated it with sharp discernment until we know it clearly, this phenomenon will dissolve away in a completely unexpected way. At the same time, you could call it Awakening, or closing down the cemeteries of the round of rebirth, the round of the mind, under the shade of the Bodhi tree. *Once this phenomenon has dissolved away, something even more amazing that has been concealed by unawareness will be revealed in all its fullness.*

This is what is said to be like the quaking of the cosmos within the heart. *This is a very crucial mental moment: when the heart breaks away from conventions.* This moment, when release and conventional reality break away from each other, is more awesome than can be expressed. The phrase, 'the path of arahantship giving way to the fruition of arahantship' refers to precisely this mental moment, the moment in which unawareness vanishes. As we are taught, when the path is fully developed, it steps onward to the fruition of arahantship, which is the Dhamma—the mind—at its most complete. From that moment on, there are no more problems.

The phrase, 'the one *nibbāna*,'¹ is fully realized in this heart in the moment unawareness is dissolving. We are taught that this is the moment when the path and the fruition—which are a pair—come together and meet. If we were to make a comparison with climbing the stairs to a house, one foot is on the last step, the other foot is on the floor of the house. We haven't yet reached the house with both feet. When both feet are on the floor of the house, we've 'reached the house.' As for the mind, it is said to reach the Dhamma or to attain the ultimate Dhamma, and from the moment of attainment it's called 'the one *nibbāna*.'

In other words, the mind is completely free. It displays no further activity for the

removal of defilement. This is called the one *nibbāna*. If you want, you can call it the fruition of arahantship, for at this stage there are no more defilements to quibble. Or you can call it the one *nibbāna*. But if you want to give it the conventional label most appropriate to the actual principle, so that nothing is deficient in conventional terms, you have to say ‘the one *nibbāna*’ so as to be completely fitting with conventional reality and release in the final phase of wiping out the cemeteries of the mind of unawareness.

The Buddha taught,

n’atthi santi param sukham:

There is no ease other than peace.

This refers to the stage of those who have no more defilements, who have attained *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* alive, such as the arahants.

To practice the religion means to attend to your own heart and mind. Who is it that suffers pain and difficulty? Who is the suspect, forever imprisoned? Who else, if not the mind? And who has it imprisoned, if not all the defilements and mental effluents? To deal with the situation, you have to deal directly with the enemies of the heart, using your discernment, for only sharp discernment is capable of dealing with the defilements until they dissolve away of their own accord, as I have already mentioned. From that point on, there are no more problems.

As for *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*, they’re simply conditions—just conditions—*no longer capable of affecting or provoking the mind*. The same with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations: Each has its separate reality. To each one we say, ‘If it exists, it exists. If not, no matter.’ The only problem has been the mind that makes labels and assumptions through its own stupidity. Once it gains enough intelligence, it becomes real. All phenomena within and without are real. Each has its own separate reality, with no more of the conflicts or issues that used to occur.

When we reach the stage where ‘each has its own separate reality,’ we can say that the war between the mind and defilement is over. When the time comes to part, we part. If not, we live together, like everyone else in the world, but we don’t take issue with each other like everyone else in the world, because we’ve made our investigation.

If the words ‘inconstancy, stress, and not-self’ don’t refer to the *khandhas* for which we are responsible, what do they refer to? So now we have completed our studies—our study of the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*), rather than of the three divisions (*tipiṭaka*) of the Pali Canon, although actually the three divisions are nothing other than the three characteristics, in that the three divisions are a description of the three characteristics throughout.

Inconstancy: the process of change. Stress. Not-self: The *khandhas* are not us—not us while we are living, so when we die what is there to latch onto? When you see the truth in this way, you don’t worry or feel apprehensive over the life or death of the

khandhas. The mind simply perceives the modes in which the *khandhas* behave and break apart, but by its nature it doesn't disband along with the *khandhas*, so there's nothing to fear. If death comes, you don't try to prevent it. If life continues, you don't try to prevent it, for each is a truth.

In completing your study of death, you become the ultimate person—the ultimate you. When you have completed your study of death, you don't fear death—'If life continues, let it continue; if death comes, let it die'—for you have spread a net around yourself with your discernment. You don't tremble over the truths of which the heart is fully aware at all times.

So. That's enough for now. As it happens, we're at the end of the tape...

Note

1. This is an indirect reference to a passage in a Thai Dhamma textbook that reads, 'The transcendent Dhammas are nine: the four paths, the four fruitions, and the one *nibbāna*.'

An Heir to the Dhamma

A talk given to the monks at Wat Pa Baan Taad.

The ordinary mind—no matter whose—when it doesn't yet have any standards and meets up with things that drag it here and there in the wrong directions, will tend to go rolling after those preoccupations without let-up, to the point where it can't find any foundation for sustaining its peace and calm. In terms of the Dhamma, these preoccupations are called defilements.

We can see them when we begin to practice: The mind stumbles and crawls along, not at all willing to follow the Dhamma, because the defilements are strong. This is something I haven't forgotten, from the time I first set out to practice up until now, because it's a truth that lies embedded in the heart. How could I forget?

From the very start of my practice, I was really in earnest—because that's the sort of person I was. I wouldn't just play around. Wherever I would take my stance, that's how it would have to be. When I set out to practice, I had only one book—the Pāṭimokkha—in my shoulder bag. Now I was going for the full path and the full results. I was going to give it my all—give it my life. I wasn't going to hope for anything else. I was going to hope for nothing but release from suffering. I was sure that I would attain release from suffering in this lifetime. All I asked was that there be someone who could show me that the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* were for real. I would give my life to that person and to the Dhamma through the practice, without holding anything back. If I was to die, I'd die with the practice. I wouldn't die with retreat. My heart was set like a stone post.

The first rains after I had set out to practice, I spent in Cakkaraad District, Korat Province, because I hadn't been able to catch up with Venerable Ācariya Mun. I began accelerating my efforts as soon as I got there, and it wasn't long before my mind attained stillness, because I was practicing both day and night. I wasn't willing to do any other work aside from the work of concentration practice—sitting and walking meditation—in my own stumbling and crawling way. My mind was able to quiet down, so I really accelerated my efforts; but then, as I've told you before, it regressed when I was making a *klod*.¹ Up to that point, I was no mean hand at concentration. It was really solid. I was sure that the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* were for real, because the mind was really solid. It wasn't affected by anything at all. But even then it still managed to regress just because I made a single *klod*.

When I reached Venerable Ācariya Mun, he taught me the Dhamma as if it came straight out of his heart. He would never use the words, 'It seems to be...', because it really came right out of his heart—how he had practiced, what he had known and seen.

It was as if he kept saying, 'Right here. Right here.' So did he see or didn't he? Did he know or didn't he? 'Right here.' Where were the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*? 'Right here. Right here.' My mind was convinced, really convinced. From that point on I made a resolution: As long as he was still alive, I wouldn't leave him until either he died or I did. As for going off from time to time to practice on my own, I'd ask to do that as a matter of course, but I'd take him as my base, as if my home were with him. No matter where I'd go, I'd have to return to him. So then I stepped up my efforts full speed.

That dream I had—I'll never forget it. I've told you all this dream before, but it had such an impact on me that it bears telling again. I had come to stay with him and made my resolution with full conviction, with complete faith in him. There was no point on which you could fault him. Whatever he did, inwardly or outwardly, was right in line with the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya. There was nothing roundabout or evasive about him. That was why I had made up my mind to stay with him. If he were alive today, I still wouldn't leave him. I'd have to stay with him, although as a matter of course I'd still go here or there from time to time, as I had told myself.

It was only around the fourth or fifth night after I had gone to stay with him... this dream, you know, was really amazing. I dreamed that I was fully robed, carrying my bowl and *klod*, following an overgrown trail through the jungle. There were no side paths on either side. Both sides were full of thorns and brambles. All I could do was to keep trying to follow the trail, which was just barely a path, all overgrown, just enough to give a hint of where to go.

Finally I reached a point where a thick clump of bamboo had fallen across the trail. I couldn't see which way to go. There was no way around it on either side. How was I going to get past it? I peered here and there until finally I saw an opening—a tiny opening, right along the path, just enough for me to force my way through together with my bowl.

Since there was no other way, I removed my outer robe—that's how clear the dream was, as if I weren't dreaming at all—I removed my outer robe and folded it away, just as we keep our robes folded here. I removed my bowl strap from my shoulder and crawled through the opening, dragging my bowl by its strap and pulling my *klod* just within reach behind me. I was able to force my way through, dragging my bowl, my *klod* and my robe behind me, but it was really difficult. I kept at it for a long time until finally I worked my way free. I pulled my bowl, and my bowl came free. I pulled my *klod*, and my *klod* came free. I pulled my robe, and my robe came free. As soon as I was entirely free, I put on my robe again—that's how clear the dream was—I put on my robe, slung my bowl over my shoulder, and told myself, 'Now I can go on.' I kept following that trail—it was really overgrown—for about another 40 meters, wearing my robe, carrying my bowl and *klod*.

Looking ahead, there was wide open space. In front of me was the ocean. Looking across, there was no further shore. All I could see was the shore on which I was standing

and a tiny island, way out in the distance, a black speck on the edge of the horizon. I was going to that island. As soon as I walked down to the water's edge, a boat—I don't know where it came from and I didn't notice whether it was a speedboat or a rowboat or whatever—a boat came up to the shore and I got in. The boatsman didn't say anything to me. As soon as I sat down in the boat and got my bowl and other things in, the boat sped out to the island, without my having to say a word. I don't know how it happened. It kept speeding, speeding out to the island. There didn't seem to be any dangers or waves or anything at all. We went silently and in no time at all we arrived—because, after all, it was a dream.

As soon as I reached the island, I got my things out of the boat and went ashore. The boat disappeared completely, without my saying even a word to the boatsman. I slung my bowl over my shoulder and climbed up the island. I kept climbing until I saw Venerable Ācariya Mun sitting on a small bench, pounding his betel nut and watching me climb up towards him. 'Mahā,' he said, 'how did you get here? Since when has anyone come that way? How were you able to make it here?'

'I came by boat.'

'Oho. That trail is really difficult. Nobody dares risk his life coming that way. Very well then, now that you're here, pound my betel for me.' He handed me his betel pounder, and so I pounded away—chock, chock, chock. After the second or third chock, I woke up. I felt really disappointed. I wished I could have continued with the dream to see at least how it ended.

That morning I went to tell my dream to Venerable Ācariya Mun. He interpreted it very well. 'This dream, you know,' he said, 'is very auspicious. It shows the pattern for your practice without any deviations. Follow the practice in the way that you've dreamed. In the beginning, it'll be extremely difficult.' That's what he said. 'You have to give it your best. Don't retreat. The beginning will be difficult. The part where you made it through the clump of bamboo: That's the difficult part. So give it your best. Don't you ever retreat. Once you get past that, it's all wide open. You'll get to the island without any trouble. That's not the hard point. The hard point is right here.'

I listened to him, really listened to him, and it went straight to the heart. '*Even if it kills you, don't retreat at this point.* Here at the beginning is the hardest part—where the mind advances and regresses. This part is so hard that you'll want to go smash your head against that mountain over there out of frustration. The mind advances and regresses, over and over again. Once you get past this point, though, you'll make progress easily, without any obstacles at all. That's all there is to it. Give it your best at the beginning and don't retreat. Understand?' That's what he said. 'If you retreat here, you won't get anywhere. So give it your life. Strike your way through right here. After all, your vision says you can make it. No matter how difficult it gets, you can make it. So don't retreat.'

I remembered his words and took them to heart—happy and pleased. I kept practicing until that following April in line with what he had said. The mind had regressed ever since December the previous year until December of that year and then on into April. It still hadn't advanced. It would advance to full strength and then deteriorate, again and again, for a year. It wasn't until April that I found a new approach, focusing on my meditation theme in a new way so that it was really solid. From that point on I was able to sit in meditation all night long. The mind was able to settle down in full measure, which is why I accelerated my efforts from then on. Speaking of the difficulty, that's how difficult it really was for me.

From there on in, the mind was centered and never regressed. The way it had regressed before was an excellent teacher. I'd absolutely refuse to let it regress again: That was how I felt. *If it regressed again, I'd die.* I couldn't stand to stay in the world bearing the mass of suffering that would come if it regressed again, because I had already been through it once—more than a year of the most acute suffering. There's no suffering that burns more than the suffering that comes when the mind regresses. If it were to regress again, it'd kill me, which was why I was really meticulous in keeping watch over myself from then on. I wouldn't let the mind regress, and so it kept on progressing.

The first time I saw the marvelousness of the mind was when I began sitting in meditation all night—right from the very first night. I was investigating pain, and was it ever severe! At first I hadn't planned on sitting until dawn, you know. I was simply sitting along, and the pain began to grow. No matter how I contemplated it, I didn't get anywhere at all. 'Eh. What is this? Okay, if I'm going to die today, let me die.' So I made resolution in that moment: 'From this moment on, I won't get up until dawn. So. If I survive, so be it. If not, so be it.'

I struck right into the pain, to the point where the mind, which had never examined anything in that way... Discernment had never moved into action that way, you know, but when it was really cornered, at the end of its rope, discernment stirred itself into action, keeping up with events from every angle until it was fully alert to the pain, alert to the body, and understood the affairs of the mind. Each was a separate reality. They then split away from one another and disappeared completely, even though nothing like that had ever happened to me before. The body disappeared from my sense of awareness. The pain completely vanished. *All that was left was an awareness that was simply aware.* It wasn't the sort of outstanding awareness we might imagine it to be. It was just simple awareness, but very subtle, very refined, and very amazing in that moment.

When I retreated from that state, I renewed my investigation, but when I used the strategies I had used before, I didn't get any results, because they were now allusions to the past. *I had to come up with new strategies to keep up with the events of the moment.* The mind then settled down again. That night, it settled down three times, and then dawn

came. Was I ever amazed at myself!

That morning when I got the chance, I went to tell Venerable Ācariya Mun. Normally, I'd be very intimidated by him, but that morning I wasn't intimidated at all. I wanted to tell him the truth, so that he could see the results of my being true—how I had practiced so that things had occurred that way. I spoke with audacity, even though I had never spoken that way with him before. I really told it to him straight—crash! bang!—and after he had listened, he said, 'That's the way it's got to be.' That's just what he said! He really let me have it. He explained things to my complete satisfaction. It was as if I were a dog: As soon as he praised and spurred me on, this stupid dog I was, was all raring to bark and bite.

After one or two more days, I sat up in meditation all night again. After another two or three more days, I did it again, until the mind was thoroughly amazed. The affairs of death, you know, disappear when the mind really knows. When you separate the elements (*dhātu*) and *khandhas* to look at life and death, the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire dissolve down into their original properties as earth, water, wind, and fire. Space returns to its original property as space. The mind that used to fear death becomes even more prominent. So what is there to die? When it knows so prominently in this way, how can it die? *The mind doesn't die*. So what does it fear? We've been lied to. The world of defilements has been lying to us. ('Lying,' here, means that defilement has lied to the living beings of the world, making them fear death, even though actually nothing dies.)

When I'd investigate one day, I'd get one approach; another day, I'd get another approach, but they were all hard-hitting and amazing. The mind was more and more amazing and brave, to the point where I felt, 'When the time comes to die, what sort of pain do they think they're going to bring out to fool me? Every facet of today's pain is complete in every way. Beyond this, there's simply death. I've seen all these pains, understood them all, and dealt with them all. So when the time comes to die, what sort of pain are they going to bring out to deceive me? There's no way they can deceive me. The pain will have to be just this sort of pain. As for death, nothing dies. So what is there to fear aside from the defilements that lie to us, making us fall for their fake tricks and deceptions? From this point on, I'll never fall for their tricks again.'

That's the way the mind is when it knows, and it knew clearly right from the very first night. As for the mental state that had progressed and regressed, up to that first night it hadn't regressed. Beginning that previous April, it hadn't regressed but it still wasn't clear. That first night, though, it became clear: 'Oh. This is how it's supposed to be, the mind that doesn't regress.' It was as if it had been climbing up and falling down, climbing up and falling down, until finally it climbed up and grabbed hold tight, 100 per cent sure that it wouldn't regress. This was why I stepped up my efforts full speed.

During that Rains Retreat (*vassa*), I sat up all night in meditation nine or ten times, but never two nights in a row. Sometimes I'd skip two or three nights, sometimes six or

seven. I got to the point where I was completely sure about pain—heavy or light, big or small. I understood how to deal with pain, how to sidestep it, how to cure it right in time, without being shaken by it. I wasn't even afraid of death, because I had investigated it with the most completely adroit strategies. Mindfulness and discernment were completely up on death in every way.

Speaking of effort in the practice, my tenth rains—beginning from the April after my ninth rains—was when I made the most all-out effort. In all my life, I have never made a more vigorous effort, in terms of the body, than I did during my tenth rains. The mind went all out, and so did the body. From that point on, I kept making progress until the mind was like rock. In other words, I was skilled enough in the solidity and stability of my concentration that the mind was like a slab of rock. It couldn't easily be affected by anything at all—*and then I was stuck on that concentration for five full years.*

Once I was able to get past that concentration, thanks to the hard-hitting Dhamma of Venerable Ācariya Mun, I set out to investigate. When I began to investigate with discernment, things went quickly and easily because my concentration was fully prepared. It was as if all the materials for building a house were right at hand, but I hadn't yet put them together into a house, and so they were just useless pieces of wood. My concentration simply stopped at concentration that way. When I didn't put it together into mindfulness and discernment, it couldn't support anything at all, which is why I had to set out investigating in the way with which Venerable Ācariya Mun hit me over the head.

As soon as he hit me, I set out; and no sooner had I set out than I began to know what was what. I was able to kill off that defilement, cut this one down, step by step. I began to wake up: 'Here I've been lying in concentration as if I were dead—for all these months, all these years—and it hasn't accomplished a thing!' So now I stepped up my efforts at discernment, making it spin day and night without anything to put a brake on it at all.

But, you know, I'm the sort of person who goes to extremes. Whatever tack I set out on, that's the only tack I take. When I began following the path of discernment, I started criticizing concentration as being like lying down dead. Actually, concentration is a means for resting the mind. If you practice just right, that's the way it is. But instead, I criticized concentration as being like lying down dead. 'All these years, and it hasn't given rise to discernment.'

So I stepped up my efforts at discernment, beginning first with the body. When I contemplated unattractiveness, it was remarkable, you know. Really remarkable. The mind, when it contemplated, was adroit and audacious. I could perceive right through whatever I looked at—man, woman, no matter how young. To tell you frankly how really audacious the mind was (and here I have to ask the forgiveness of both the men and women involved if it's wrong to speak too frankly), it wouldn't have to be a question of old women, you know. If the gathering was full of young women, I could

march right in without any sign of lust appearing at all. That's how daring the mind was because of its contemplation of unattractiveness.

Looking at a person, there would just be the bones wrapped up in skin, nothing but flesh all glaring and red. So where could I see any beauty? The power of the unattractiveness was really strong. No matter whose body I looked at, that's how I'd perceive it. So where would there be any beauty to make me feel desire? This was why I'd dare march right in... really beautiful young women, you know. (I'll have to keep asking forgiveness until I've finished with this 'forest madness.') I could march right in with no trouble at all when I felt daring like this, because I was sure of my strength.

But this daring wasn't right, in terms of the point at which the mind really had its fill of lust, which is why I criticized myself afterwards, after the mind had passed this point. This daring was a kind of madness, but while I was following the path, it was right, because that was how I had to follow it through. This is like criticizing food after you've eaten your fill. Right or wrong, it's the same sort of thing.

I contemplated unattractiveness until no physical desire appeared at all. It gradually faded away, all on its own, without giving any reason at any specific time or place. It didn't give me any assurance that lust or passion for the male or female body had disappeared at this or that point in time and place, so I had to deliberate again. I wouldn't go along with this simple fading away on its own. That is, my mind wouldn't accept it. If lust had been wiped out at any particular point, there should have been some sort of indication, so that I could know clearly that it was all gone for this or that reason, at this or that moment, this or that place. It should have had its moment.

So now the mind had to back up and contemplate to find various approaches to remedy the situation. *If it were really all gone, why hadn't there been a clear indication that it had been wiped out at this or that moment?* As soon as I saw a person's body, I would perceive right through it. There would be nothing but flesh and bones in that body. It wouldn't be a beautiful woman or a beautiful person or anything, because the power of my contemplation of unattractiveness was so strong that I'd perceive everyone as a pile of bones. What would there be to make the mind feel attraction or desire when it's in a state like that?

I now had to turn around and take a new approach. If physical desire had ended without leaving a trace at a particular moment, using a particular strategy, why hadn't there been a clear indication? I turned around and contemplated another way. I brought attractiveness in to force out the unattractiveness—the pile of bones—covering it with skin to make it beautiful. I had to force the mind, you know. Otherwise it would immediately break through to unattractiveness, because it was so adept that way. I forced the mind to visualize the bones covered with skin so that they'd be beautiful, and then had that beautiful body cling right to mine. That was how I contemplated. I'd do walking meditation visualizing the beauty of that body clinging to mine, clinging right to mine as I walked back and forth. So. How much time would it take? If there was any

desire still left, it would have to show. If not, then let me know that it was gone.

I practiced this way for four full days without any physical attraction or desire appearing at all. Even though it was an extremely beautiful body, nothing appeared. The image kept trying to change into a pile of bones wrapped in skin, but I forced the mind to stay just at the skin level.

The fourth night, tears began to flow. 'I've had enough. I give in.' In other words, the mind wasn't feeling any pleasure. It said that it had had enough, so I tested it again: 'Enough of what? If you admit that there's no more desire, then let me know. I won't accept your giving in like this. To give in like this is just a ruse. I won't go along with it.'

I kept on contemplating every facet to find which facet would make the mind feel desire, to see at which moment the desire would arise, so that I could then take whatever might appear and focus on it as the object to be contemplated and uprooted. The night got later and later, and I kept on focusing in—but I wasn't focused on contemplating unattractiveness at that point. I was contemplating nothing but attractiveness for those entire four days, because I was determined to find an approach to test and learn the truth of the situation.

After about 9 or 10 p.m. the night of the fourth day, there was a flickering, as if the mind was going to feel lust for that beautiful body that had been clinging to me constantly during that period. It was a peculiar sort of flickering. Mindfulness was alert to it, because mindfulness was there all the time. As soon as the flickering appeared, I kept encouraging it. 'See that flickering? We've caught the criminal who has been in hiding. See? So how can it be gone? If it's gone, why does it have to behave like this?' I focused in on it. That flickering was simply a condition of the mind that appeared only slightly, with no effect on the body at all. It was inside the mind. When I encouraged it, it would flicker again, which proved that it wasn't all gone.

So now that it wasn't all gone, what was I supposed to do?

I now had to take a new approach, by alternating my tactics. Since this was a path I had never taken before, something I had never known before, it was very difficult to proceed. As soon as I'd focus on unattractiveness, attractiveness would vanish in the flash of an eye. It would vanish extremely fast because I was already adept at unattractiveness. As soon as I'd focus on unattractiveness, the body would turn immediately into a pile of bones, so I would have to focus on attractiveness to make it beautiful again. I kept changing back and forth between the two this way. This took a long time because it was a path I had never trod. I didn't understand, so I had to try out different methods until I could be sure and settle on one path or another.

I finally came to the truth when I was sitting visualizing an image of unattractiveness right in front of me. The mind focused on unattractiveness standing still right there. I wouldn't let it move or change in any way. I had it stay right there like that. If it was an image of bones wrapped in skin or a pile of bones with the skin

removed, I had it stay right there in front of me. The mind stared right at it, with mindfulness focused, waiting to learn the truth from that image of unattractiveness, to see what it would do, how this pile of unattractiveness would move or change.

However I stared at it, that's how it would stay, because of the adeptness of the mind. If I wouldn't have it destroy the image, it wouldn't destroy it. I forced it not to destroy it. If I had focused on destroying it, it would have been demolished in an instant because of the speed of discernment. But I didn't let the mind destroy it. I had it stay right there in front of me in order to exercise and experiment to find the truth of which I could be certain.

As I kept focusing in, the image of unattractiveness standing there before me was gradually sucked into the mind, absorbed into the mind, so that I finally realized that unattractiveness was a matter of the mind itself. The state of mind that had fixed on the idea of unattractiveness sucked it in—*which meant that attractiveness and unattractiveness were simply a matter of the mind deceiving itself.*

The mind then let go in a flash. It let go of external unattractiveness. It understood now because it had made the break. 'This is how it's supposed to be. It's been simply a matter of the mind painting pictures to deceive itself, getting excited over its shadows. Those external things aren't passion, aversion, and delusion. The *mind* is what has passion, aversion, and delusion.' As soon as the mind knew this clearly, it extricated itself from external affairs and came inward. As soon as the mind would 'blip' outward, it knew that these inner affairs were displaying themselves. So now the image of unattractiveness appeared exclusively within the mind.

I then focused and investigated within the mind. But now it wasn't a matter of that sort of passion. It was something very different. The affairs of worldly passion now were all gone. The mind understood clearly that things had to make the break that way. It had passed its verdict. It had understood. So now that there was the image appearing within, the mind focused within. As soon as it focused within, it knew clearly that this internal image came from the mind. When it disappeared, it disappeared here and didn't go anywhere else. The instant after I'd focus on making it appear, it would vanish. Before I had focused on it for long, it would vanish.

After that, it was just like a lightning flash: As soon as I focused on making an image, it would vanish immediately, so there was no time to elaborate on its being attractive or anything at all, because of the speed of the arising and disappearing. The instant it would appear—blip!—it would vanish.

From that point on, there were no more images in the mind. The mind became a completely empty mind. As for external unattractiveness, that problem had already been taken care of. I had understood it from the moment it was sucked in toward the mind, and the mind had immediately let go of external unattractiveness. It let go of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, everything external—because the mind was what had

been the deceiver. Once I understood this point clearly, those other things were no longer a problem. The mind had understood immediately and let go of external things once and for all.

After the internal images had all disappeared, the mind was empty. Completely empty. Whatever I focused on was completely empty. I'd look at trees, mountains, buildings, and see them simply as shades, as shadows. The major part—the mind—was empty all through. Even when I'd look at my own body, I'd see it simply as a shadow. As for the mind itself, it was empty clear through—to the point where I exclaimed to myself, 'Is the mind really this empty?' It was empty at all times. Nothing passed into it.

Even though it was that empty, I would form mental pictures as a way of exercising it. Whatever image I'd form would be a means of exercising the mind to make it even more adept at emptiness, to the point where after a single blip it'd be empty—a single blip and it'd be empty. The moment anything was formed—blip!—it'd be empty right then.

At this point—the point where the mind was empty in full measure—this awareness was also prominent in full measure. It fully comprehended *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*. It fully let go of them on its own, without anything left. All that was left was awareness. There was a feeling of relatedness and intimacy, a very subtle sensitivity for this awareness that is hard to describe in line with its reality. There was a feeling of absorption exclusively for this awareness. Any other condition that arose would vanish in the same instant.

I kept watch over it. Mindfulness and discernment on this level: If this were the time of the Buddha, we would call them super-mindfulness and super-discernment, but in our day and age we shouldn't reach for those labels. It's enough for our purposes to call them automatic mindfulness and discernment. That's appropriate enough for them. There's no need to call them anything more exalted than that, for this doesn't deviate at all from the truth as it exists. This is why the mind was prominent, and this prominence made it bright all the way through.

One day I was doing walking meditation on the western side of Wat Doi Dhammachedi. I had gone without food for three or four days, and that day was the lunar sabbath, so people were coming to the monastery to give alms. I went off to do walking meditation from daybreak and came back only when it was time to receive alms in front of the main hall. When I was standing in contemplation on the meditation path, an uncanny feeling of wonder arose, to the point where I exclaimed, 'Why is it that this mind is so amazing? Whatever I look at—even the earth on which I'm treading and see clearly with my eyes—why is it that the mind, which is the major part, is completely empty? There are no trees or mountains in the mind. It's completely empty, with nothing left. There's nothing but emptiness filling the heart.'

I stood there contemplating for a moment, when a kind of realization appeared: 'If

there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of becoming. That's what it said, and I was bewildered.

Actually, the word 'point' referred to that point of the knower. If I had understood this problem in terms of the truth that appeared to warn me, things would have been able to disband right then and there. But instead of understanding, I was bewildered—because it was something I had never before known or seen. If there was a point, it would be the point of the knower. If there was a center, it would mean the center of the knower. Where was it? *There in that knowing mind.* That was the essence of a becoming. The statement that appeared in the mind already said so clearly. There was nothing at all wrong about it, but I was simply bewildered—'What is this?'—so for the time being I didn't get any benefit from it at all. I let more than three months pass by in vain, even though the problem was still weighing on the mind. I couldn't set it down.

When the time came for me to know, I was contemplating just the mind—nothing wide-ranging or anything—because the mind had already known everything on the blatant level. Whatever sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations there might be throughout the cosmos, the mind had already known, understood and let go. It wasn't interested in investigating them. It wasn't even willing to investigate *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, or viññāṇa* at all. It was interested only in that conspicuous awareness, together with the subtle feelings within the mind.

Mindfulness and discernment kept making contact with that awareness, examining it back and forth. But you should know that the 'point' I referred to was still a conventional reality. No matter how magnificent it might be, it was still magnificence in the realm of convention. No matter how radiant or splendid it might be, *it was still radiance and splendor in the realm of convention, because there was still unawareness (avijjā) within it.*

Unawareness forms the essence of conventional reality. The point of that prominence eventually began to show its ups and downs—in keeping with the very refined level of the mind—so that I was able to catch sight of them. Sometimes it was a little tarnished, sometimes radiant, sometimes stressful, sometimes at ease, in line with the refinement of the mind on this level, enough for me to detect its irregularities.

Mindfulness and discernment on this level were very meticulous guardians of this state of mind, you know. Instead of aiming my guns—mindfulness and discernment—in on the mind, I had aimed them outside, as unawareness had deceived me into doing. This is why unawareness is said to be really cunning. There is nothing more cunning than unawareness, which is the final point.

Greed, for example, is something blatant, easy to understand and plainly harmful, and yet world is still content to feel greed. Think about it! Anger is also blatant, and yet the world is still content to feel anger. Infatuation, love, hate: All these things are blatant, easy to understand and plainly harmful, and yet the world is still content to feel

them.

But this was not the same sort of thing at all. It had gone way beyond. It had let go of all those other things, but why was it still attached to this radiance, this marvel? Now that it was inside, it would become tarnished, just a little. It would display stress, just a little—which was a form of change and nothing constant or trustworthy—so that I could catch sight of it, using mindfulness and discernment that were continually focused there at all times without letup, trying to know and see how this state of mind would behave.

Ultimately, there was no escaping it: I had to see that this state of mind was nothing to be trusted, so I came to reflect, ‘Why is it that this state of mind can be so changeable? Now it’s defiled, now it’s radiant, now it’s easeful, now it’s stressful. It’s not always constant and true. Why is it that a mind as refined as this can still show such a variety of conditions?’

As soon as mindfulness and discernment had turned to take an interest in investigating this state of mind, a totally unexpected realization sprang up within the mind: *‘Defilement, radiance, ease, and stress: These are all conventional realities. They’re all anattā—not-self.’*

That was enough. Mindfulness and discernment realized that that state of mind immersed in unawareness was a conventional reality that should simply be let go. It shouldn’t be held to. A moment after this realization arose to warn mindfulness and discernment, which were acting as the sentinels at that moment, it was as if the mind, mindfulness, and discernment each became impartial and impassive, not stirring themselves to perform any duty at all. At that moment the mind was neutral, not focused on anything, not alluding absentmindedly to anything anywhere. Discernment didn’t do any work. Mindfulness was alert in its normal way, without being focused on anything.

That moment—when the mind, mindfulness, and discernment were each impassive and impartial—was the moment when the cosmos in the mind over which unawareness held sway trembled and quaked. Unawareness was thrown down from its throne on the heart. In its place, the pure mind appeared at the same moment that unawareness was toppled, smashed, and eradicated through the power of triumphant mindfulness and discernment—the moment when the sky came crashing down and the cosmos (within) trembled and quaked, showing its final marvel on the border between convention and release. Judgment was passed in the court of justice, with knowledge and vision of release acting as judge. The middle way, the truth of the path, was declared absolute winner, while the truth of the origin of stress was knocked out and carried off on a stretcher, with no way of reviving ever again.

I was utterly astounded and exclaimed, ‘Isn’t it amazing? Isn’t it amazing? Where has this Dhamma been hiding? How is it that the genuine Dhamma, this amazing Dhamma, exceeding all expectations—exceeding all the world—has now appeared in

the mind and is one with the mind? And before where were the Buddha and Noble Saṅgha? How is it that these tremendously amazing refuges have now become one with the heart? Is this what the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are like?' They didn't fit in with any guesses or speculations at all, but were simply a pure truth dwelling with a pure truth.

Then I reflected with discouragement back on my fellow living beings with regard to the Dhamma that was in my heart: 'Since this is what the genuine Dhamma is like, how could it be brought out and taught so that others would know and understand? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to live alone until the day the body breaks apart, rather than try to teach anyone?'

As soon as I considered this, a kind of realization suddenly appeared to me: 'The Lord Buddha knew this amazing Dhamma all by himself but was able to become the Teacher of living beings throughout the three levels of the cosmos. How is it that I have been able to teach myself and yet get discouraged at the thought of being able to teach others? The way to teach, the way to know isn't hidden or mysterious.' When I realized this, my discouragement at the thought of teaching my friends gradually faded away.

This event made me think of the first moments after the Buddha's Awakening, when he wearied at the thought of taking the excellent Dhamma in his heart and teaching it to the world because he felt that it lay beyond the capability of other people to realize it. Even though he had aspired to be a Teacher, to instruct the world, he felt that the Dhamma he had realized was a Dhamma beyond reach, that it would be hopeless to encourage the world to accept it and practice so as to know it. But when he reflected on the path he had followed to Awakening, he realized that the Dhamma wasn't beyond reach or beyond hope, that there would be infinite benefits for the world if he were to teach the way of the Dhamma whose results he had come to see beyond a doubt. This was why he made up his mind to teach the world from that point on.

The reason I had felt the same way was because it was a Dhamma I had never before seen or known, and it was a Dhamma utterly amazing. When I looked solely at the results in the present, without reflecting back on the causes—the path I had followed—I felt disheartened and abandoned the idea of telling or teaching anyone about this Dhamma. But since reflecting back on the path I had followed, I have felt more like speaking and acting out the various facets of the Dhamma, in line with the various levels of people who have become involved with me, who have studied and trained with me ever since, to the point where I have become a sham *Ācariya* as decreed by monks, novices and people in general. This being the case, I've had to speak, teach, preach, and scold, heavily or lightly as events may call for.

I have to beg the forgiveness of my listeners and readers for speaking in an uncouth way to the point of being ugly, but when this scrap of a monk was hiding out in the forest and mountains, he suffered mightily while training himself by struggling in various ways on the verge of death—because of all sorts of sufferings—without anyone

to provide him with a funeral. No one knew or was interested, except for a few of those people in the forest and mountains on whom I depended to keep my life going from one day to the next, who may have known of some aspects of some of my sufferings.

For this reason, the statement that the Buddha practiced to the point of losing consciousness before gaining Awakening is a truth that those who practice wholeheartedly for the sake of the Dhamma, the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*, have to believe wholeheartedly without any doubt. Only those who have never practiced or had any interest in practice, or who practice by tying pillows to the backs of their heads and waiting for defilement to die, or dig graves for defilement by lying down and waiting to rake in the paths, fruitions and *nibbāna*, won't believe in the difficulty with which the Buddha and his Noble Disciples practiced.

Especially at present, when people are very clever: Whatever would fly in the face of their already being wise and all-knowing, no matter how right or good or fantastic that thing might be, they aren't willing to use it to take the measure of their own wisdom. *As a result, their wisdom can't escape creating a lot of foolishness for themselves and the common good.* For this reason, the path leading to depravity for the mind and the path leading to Dhamma within the mind are very different.

Those who practice, the Dhamma says, are those who investigate and reflect on every facet of the world and the Dhamma without being complacent. No matter what posture we are in, no matter where, we should always use mindfulness and discernment to look after ourselves. We shouldn't be concerned with the deficient or developed manners, the good or bad behavior of other people, the points they give us or take away, more than we are concerned with our own deficient or developed manners, our own good or bad behavior and the points we give or take away from ourselves. This is the path of the Dhamma for those who practice the Dhamma, who are always imbued with Dhamma. The opposite way is the low path for those with low minds, with no righteousness infiltrating them at all. This is a warning for all those meditators who have come here for training to understand and take to heart.

* * *

The Dhamma I have related today is mostly personal and isn't appropriate to be made public to people at large whose sensitivities may vary. I myself might be open to criticism, and it might be harmful to the attitudes of those who hear or read when the tape is transcribed onto paper—except for restricted circles of people who would understand. To make this talk public thus goes against the grain with me, but the extent to which I have made it public is out of sympathy for those who have come for training in all rectitude and who have pleaded with me to make it public as an example that those who practice may follow for a long time to come.

If this is wrong in any way, I ask the forgiveness of all my readers. It's with the

thought that there will be many people endowed with rectitude in the practice of meditation, both now and the future, who might get some benefit from this outlandish talk, that I put up with the embarrassment of having exposed my own stupidity in it.

Note

1. A small umbrella-like tent used by meditating monks.

Unawareness Converges, Concealing the True

Dhamma, the True Mind

This Dhamma talk was given as an answer to a question posed by one of the more important senior monks of our day and age. The gist is as follows:

This was when I began to investigate into the converging point of the cycle of defilement—namely, unawareness. While I was investigating, I didn't know that I was investigating unawareness. I was simply thinking, 'What is this?' There was an uncertainty right there, so I focused the mind there, directed my attention to investigate what it was, where it came from, where it was going.

It so happened I hit the right spot: I say this because I didn't know that it was called, or what unawareness was. Actually, unawareness and its name are very different. We see its currents spreading out all over the world, but those are only its branches. It's like trying to catch an outlaw: At first all we can catch are his henchmen. Whoever we catch is just a henchman. We don't know where the chief outlaw is, or what he looks like, because we have never seen him.

We catch lots of his henchmen, closing in on him, encircling him. This is called laying siege to the outlaw. Our police force is very large and very strong. Each person on the force helps the others, so they have a lot of strength, surrounding the spot where the outlaw lies, catching this person, tying up that one. Ordinarily when they're asked, outlaws won't tell who their chief is. Whenever we catch an outlaw, we tie him up until no one is left inside our siege line. The last person left is the chief outlaw. The last person lies in a strategic place, because his henchmen have to guard him well on all sides so that no one can easily slip in to see him.

The henchmen keep getting captured one after another until we reach the cave in which the chief outlaw is hiding, and then we kill everyone in there. This is when we know clearly that the wily outlaw has been wiped out for good.

This is simply an analogy. To put it in other words, the mind's involvement with anything is a branch of delusion. Regardless of whether the delusion leads in a good or a bad direction, it's nothing but an affair of unawareness and the branches of unawareness, but actual unawareness itself doesn't lie there. So the tactics for investigating it, if we were to use another analogy, are like bailing water out of a pond to catch the fish in it. If there's a lot of water, we don't know how many fish it contains. So we keep bailing out the water until it starts receding lower and lower. The fish gather together. Each fish, wherever it is, swims down deeper into the water. The water keeps

getting bailed out, and the fish keep gathering together. We can see where each fish is going, because the water keeps receding until at last, when the water is dry, the fish have nowhere to hide, and so we can catch them.

Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, together with the mental acts that intermingle with them: These are like the water in which the fish live. To investigate these things is not for the purpose of taking possession of them but for the purpose of killing defilement, in the same way that a person bails out the water, not because he wants the water but because he wants the fish. To investigate these things is not for the purpose of taking possession of them but for the purpose of knowing them, stage by stage. As soon as we know to a certain point, we are no longer concerned with that point. We know the things with which we are involved, as well as the fact that we are the one at fault for being involved, that our own misunderstanding is what deludes us into loving and hating these things.

At this point, the scope of our investigation keeps narrowing in, narrowing in, just as the water keeps receding. Whatever elements or *khandhas* we investigate, they are just like external things in general. There are no differences. On the material side, the elements are the same elements. The difference lies in the acts of the mind that display themselves—but we aren't yet aware of them, so we go labeling things in line with them, which is still one of the branches of unawareness. But as our investigation seeps deeper and deeper into the central area, the more clearly we see the things that come to be involved with us, the more clearly we see the mind as it goes out to become involved each time—in the same way that the more the water recedes, the more clearly we see the fish.

As we investigate, the more clearly we see phenomena outside and inside the body, as well as our own mental concomitants (*cetasika*), then the more clearly we see the point where the chief culprit lies. As our investigation keeps closing in, the mind's focus grows narrower and narrower. Its concerns grow less and less. The currents sent out by the mind grow shorter. As soon as it stirs itself to become involved with any object, we investigate both that object and the stirring of the mind as it goes out to act. We see both aspects. We see the causes and results on both sides, namely (1) the side with which the mind involves itself, the things with which it is involved; and (2) the one who becomes involved. Discernment keeps moving in, step by step.

When it moves in and reaches unawareness itself, meditators for the most part—if no teacher has warned them in advance—are bound to hold to that as their real self. This is because they have investigated and seen all things clearly in the heart, so that they are fully wise to those things and have let them go, with nothing remaining—but *what is it that knows those things?* This is what they take and cherish. This is termed unawareness converging, but it turns into their 'self' without their realizing it. The mind gets deluded there. *The term 'unawareness' refers to this very delusion about oneself.* Delusions about outside things are not matters of actual unawareness.

Because of our delusion about this, because of our delusion about that which knows all other things, we forget to investigate and pass judgment on what it is—because when the scope of the mind narrows, it gathers itself into a point. The point of the mind that appears at this stage is a radiant mind, bright, cheerful, and bold. All happiness seems to be gathered right there. What do these things come from? If you were to call them results, I'd have to admit that they are results. We could say that they're results of the practice—if we aren't deluded about this point. If we're still deluded, these things are still the origin of stress. This is the central point of the origin of stress.

But if we're meditators who are always interested in investigating whatever comes our way, we won't overlook this. No matter what, we can't help but become interested in investigating this point—because we have already investigated and understood all things of every sort to the point where the mind won't make contact with them. If we take the mind out to investigate anything, it won't make contact, because it has already had enough of that thing.

Now, every mental act that arises, arises from this point. Thoughts that form, form from this point. The happiness that appears, appears here. The happiness that appears undergoes changes we can see: This is what makes us begin investigating again, because this is a level in which we are very observant. When we observe the happiness, we see that it isn't steady, for the happiness produced by unawareness is a conventional reality. Sometimes it gets tarnished a little—just a little—enough for us to know that it isn't uniform. It keeps changing in that way, in line with its status as a refined phenomenon.

This is the point that we trust and believe in. Even those who practice with intensity and extreme interest will fall for this point and become attached to it if no one has explained it to them in advance. But even though we trust in it, we can't help observing it if we are interested, because that's all there is that attracts the heart. This is what causes us to be attracted to it, to be content with what appears. As long as we have been investigating, that's the way it has been—to the extent that we don't know what unawareness is—and so we believe that this will be *nibbāna*, this point that is bright and clear all the time.

'All the time' here means all the time for those meditators who are persistent in cleansing it and who aren't entirely complacent in their trust for it, who are very protective of this point and won't let anything touch it. Such people use a great deal of caution. As soon as anything touches that point, they will rectify it immediately.

But they don't know what it is that they love and cherish. Even though that love and cherishing is clearly a burden, they don't realize the fact at that moment. Only when enough time has passed for them to be ready to know will they become interested in investigating this point. 'What is this? We've investigated everything of every sort, but what is this?' Now the mind focuses in on that point. Discernment probes in. 'What is this, for sure? Is it true yet or not? Is it awareness or unawareness?' These doubts keep nagging at the mind.

But we keep on investigating and contemplating, using discernment without ceasing—because this is something we have never seen, never met with before—to see why we love it, why we are protective of it. If it's something true, why do we have to love and protect it? Why do we have to care for it? *To care for something is a burden*, in which case this must be a hazard for the person who cherishes and cares for it, or something that shouldn't be trusted—even though at that moment we still don't know what it is, whether it's really unawareness or not, because we have never seen how true awareness differs from unawareness, or how release differs from conventional reality. This is where discernment becomes interested in investigating.

Now, I'd say that this is something very elaborate and involved. If I were to describe it in line with how I investigated it, or to condense it so as to give the gist in a reasonable amount of time, I'd summarize quickly by saying *whatever makes an appearance, investigate it*. Whatever makes an appearance is a matter of conventional reality—I'm referring here to the refined phenomena that appear in the heart. Ultimately, even that very point with its brightness is the point of genuine unawareness. Focus down on it, using discernment. Just as all phenomena in general are simply phenomena, this nature is also simply a phenomenon in exactly the same way. We can't latch onto it as being 'us' or 'ours'—*but our protectiveness shows that we hold to it as being us or ours, which is a mistake*.

Discernment probes inward to see just what this is, as if we were to turn around to look at ourselves. We look outside and see the earth, the sky, the air. Whatever passes into our range of vision, we see. But if we don't look back at ourselves, we won't see ourselves. Discernment at this stage is very quick. It looks back and forth, back and forth, to see this last point or this last stage, and its investigation is just like its investigation of things in general. It investigates not to take possession of its object but simply to know its object for what it truly is.

When this disbands, it's not like other things disbanding. When other things disband, they go with a feeling that we understand them. But this isn't like that. When it disbands, it disintegrates in an instant, like a lightning flash. There's an instant where it acts of its own accord—or you could say that it flips over. It flips over and disappears completely. When it disappears, that's when we know that it was genuine unawareness—because once this has disappeared, nothing more appears for us to doubt.

What remains is nothing like it at all. It's a pure nature. Even though we have never seen it before, when it appears in that moment, there is nothing to doubt—and that's how the burden is all gone.

The word 'I' refers to this genuine unawareness. It means that this unawareness is still standing. Whatever we have been investigating has been for its sake. Whatever we say we know, this 'I' is what knows. Radiant? 'I'm' radiant. Light? 'I'm' light. Happy? 'I'm' happy. 'Me,' 'I,' they refer to this. This is genuine unawareness. Whatever we do is for its sake. Once it disintegrates, there is nothing more for anything's sake. It's all gone.

If we were to make an analogy, it's like a water jar whose bottom has been smashed. No matter how much water we may pour into it, nothing stays in the jar. Everything that may be formed in line with the nature of the *khandhas* can still be formed, but nothing sticks because the vessel—unawareness, the chief culprit—has disintegrated. As soon as *saṅkhāras* form—blip!—they vanish. They simply pass by, disappearing, disappearing, because there's no place to keep them, no one who owns them. The nature that realizes that nothing is its owner *is a nature that has reached its fullness*. It is thus a genuinely pure nature and no longer a burden that needs to be watched over or protected from danger ever again.

This unawareness is what has been concealing the true Dhamma, the true mind, all along. This is why we haven't seen the true, natural marvelousness of the mind. For this reason, meditators who reach the stage of this pitfall latch onto it as something marvelous, love it, cherish it, are protective of it, and regard it as 'me' or 'mine': 'My mind is radiant. My mind is courageous and brave. My mind is happy. My mind knows everything of every sort'—*but this nature doesn't know itself, which is why the Buddha called it genuine unawareness*. Once we turn around and know it, it disintegrates. Once it disintegrates, it's just like opening the lid of a pot: Whatever is in the pot, we can see it all. Only unawareness keeps the mind concealed.

This purity is a truth that lies beyond the truths of stress, its origin, its cessation and the path. It's a truth beyond the four Noble Truths. Of the four truths, one pair binds, the other unbinds and stops. What do they bind and unbind? They bind the heart, or keep it covered; and they unbind the heart, or uncover it. They open up the things that cover it so as to reveal its purity in line with its truth. Its truth is already there, but the two truths of stress and its origin keep it concealed, just as the lid of a pot conceals whatever is in the pot so that we can't see it. The path—the practice—opens it. The path and the cessation of stress open the pot so that we can see clearly what's inside. Even though the purity is already there, it's concealed by the first two truths and revealed by the truths that unbind. This is what is bound, this is what is revealed. Once it's revealed, there are no more problems.

Both pairs of truths are activities. Both are conventional realities. The path and the cessation of stress are conventional realities. Once they have performed their duties, they pass. Stress and the origin of stress are also conventional realities. Once the two conventional realities remedy the two conventional realities, that pure nature is a nature that stays fixed.

What we see at that point is called release. Things are opened so that we see release, or natural purity. The burden of the task is ended right here. When the mind is pure, it doesn't confer any titles on itself. As for external things, the worldly phenomena (*loka-dhamma*) connected with external things, they're far away. The worldly phenomena that we used to say were good or bad, pleasant or painful in the heart, are no longer a problem once that point has disintegrated.

When we investigate to this level, it's not wide-ranging. If we can derive an approach from the explanations given by a meditation master who has known and passed this stage, we can make quick progress—but it's important that we not set up any expectations. *Expectations are not the path.* Whatever appears, keep investigating and understanding that point—each successive thing as it appears. That's the correct path.

'Unawareness' refers to the nature I have just explained. That's genuine unawareness. All other things are just its branches. Like a vine whose stem grows in one place but that creeps to who-knows-where: No matter how long it is, it keeps creeping and climbing. When we catch hold of it, we follow it in, follow it in, until we reach its stem. Here's the stem. Here's the root. Once we pull up the root, the whole thing dies.

In the same way, the branches of unawareness are many and long, so that when we actually reach unawareness, we don't know what it is. But we investigate it. Discernment probes on in. Even though we don't know that this is unawareness, our investigation is on the right path, and so unawareness opens up of its own accord, in the same way as when we eat: Fullness appears clearly for us to see step by step all on its own.

So to summarize the issue of whether unawareness is a factor of rebirth or a factor of *kamma*: It creates levels of being, it creates *kamma* relentlessly. These are both matters of the same cycle. It keeps creating levels of being within itself. The mind can't lie still. It simply keeps creating being and birth all the time. It works at accumulating these things for itself, but for the most part it accumulates things that weigh it down constantly, making it sink to lower levels.

When people talk about destroying the wheel of *kamma*, this unawareness is what's destroyed. Once this is destroyed, there are no more connections to create further levels of being and birth. Even though the things that used to be involved with us continue to become involved as they normally did, they pass by. They don't seep in. They don't set up house and move into this spot the way they used to. They simply pass by. And we know that this pure nature doesn't connect with anything. We have seen the connections of the mind, step by step, and when we reach the level where it doesn't connect with anything, we know.

As for knowing the question of levels of being and birth, as to whether or not we'll be reborn, there is no need to speculate, because the present already tells us clearly that when there are no connections to levels of being and birth inside us, as we plainly see, there are no levels of being or birth to continue into the future. The factory has been destroyed, and there is no way it can rebuild itself. There is no way it can produce issues as it used to. The factory that produced suffering has been destroyed once and for all.

The phrase '*khandhas* pure and simple' refers to this stage. The *khandhas* are *khandhas* pure and simple, without any defilements. If the mind isn't defiled, the *khandhas* aren't defiled. They are simply tools. If the central part—the mind—is defiled, each *khandha*

follows it in being defiled. The body becomes a means for increasing defilement in the heart. *Vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* all become means for increasing defilement in the heart. If the mind is pure, the *khandhas* for their part are also pure. Nothing is defiled. But if the mind is defiled, the *khandhas* are defiled all the livelong day. This is the way the truth is.

The creation of being and birth is a matter of the mind that keeps producing itself. It can't stay still. A mind that has the cycle in charge of its work or supervising its work will have to keep itself spinning all the time. Whatever thoughts it spins are for the sake of creating being and birth. As soon as the cycle disintegrates, there is nothing to create being and birth any more.

Those whose minds have attained realization exclaim spontaneously in the heart to proclaim the Dhamma unabashedly to the world, saying that there are no more levels of being in which they are to be reborn—as when the Buddha exclaimed, '*aneka-jāti-saṃsāraṃ...*'¹ because he knew right in the present that there was nothing creating itself. Goodness stayed in its own territory and didn't seep in, didn't mingle. Evil stayed in its own territory and didn't seep in or mingle. They didn't come running in. When we say that they didn't come running in, it's not that he forced them not to. It was simply their own nature. When these things come running in we don't force them to. There's simply a medium along which they run. When there's no more medium, they disconnect of their own accord.

It seemed to me when I was investigating this—when unawareness disappeared—that there was a moment that let me know very clearly. It was a moment—an instant I hadn't anticipated or expected. It was an instant that grabbed my attention. The instant unawareness disappeared was an instant in which it displayed itself, as if it flipped itself over into a new world (if you were to call it a world). It flipped in the flash of an eye and vanished in the same instant, although this wasn't anything I had anticipated. I hadn't intended for it to flip. It happened of its own accord. This is something very subtle that is impossible for me to describe correctly in line with the truth of that instant.

In practicing the religion, if we practice it really to gain release from suffering, there are two intricate points. To separate the attachments between the mind and the body: This is one intricate point; and then this second intricate point that was the final point of my ability. Other than that there's nothing devious.

Once, when I went to practice at Wat Doi Dhammachedi, the problem of unawareness had me bewildered for quite some time. At that stage the mind was so radiant that I came to marvel at its radiance. Everything of every sort that could make me marvel seemed to have gathered there in the mind, to the point where I began to marvel at myself, 'Why is it that my mind is so marvelous?' Looking at the body, I couldn't see it at all. It was all space—empty. The mind was radiant in full force.

But luckily, as soon as I began to marvel at myself to the point of exclaiming

deludedly in the heart without being conscious of it—if we speak on the level of refined Dhamma, it was a kind of delusion; it was amazed at itself, ‘Why has my mind come so far?’—at that moment, a statement of Dhamma spontaneously arose. This too I hadn’t anticipated. It suddenly appeared, as if someone were speaking in the heart, although there was no one there speaking. It simply appeared as a statement: *‘If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of a level of being.’* That’s what it said.

That phenomenon actually was a point: the point of knowledge, the point of radiance. It really was a point, just as the statement had said. But I didn’t take into consideration what the ‘point’ was and so I was bewildered. Instead of gaining an approach from the warning that had appeared, I took the problem to chew over until I came to consider the part about the ‘point.’ That was what ended the problem. I then came back to understand clearly the matter of, ‘If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of a level of being.’ That was when I understood, ‘Oh—I see. The words “point” and “center” refer to just this.’ Before, I hadn’t understood. It really was a point. No matter how marvelous, it was the point of the marvelousness. It was a point there to be known. Once that disintegrated, there were no more points, because every point is a conventional reality. No matter how refined, each is a conventional reality.

This is why I am always teaching my fellow meditators: ‘Once you’ve reached that point, don’t be protective of anything. Investigate on in. Even if the mind should actually be demolished by that investigation, let it be demolished. Whatever is left to be aware of the purity, let it be aware—or if everything is going to be demolished so that there is nothing left to be aware of purity, then at least find out. Don’t be protective of anything at all.’ I say this out of fear that they’ll be protective of this thing. If they aren’t warned that forcefully, then no matter what, they’re bound to get stuck. All I ask is that they find out: ‘Whatever is going to vanish, let it vanish. Even if the mind is going to vanish from the power of the investigation, let it vanish. There’s no need to protect it.’ When investigating, you have to take it that far.

But there’s no escaping the truth: Whatever arises has to vanish; whatever is true, whatever is a natural principle in and of itself, *won’t vanish*. In other words, the pure mind won’t vanish. Everything of every sort may vanish, but that which knows their vanishing doesn’t vanish. *This vanishes, that vanishes, but the one that knows their vanishing doesn’t vanish*. Whether or not we try to leave it untouched, it keeps on knowing. But to try to protect it is tantamount to protecting unawareness, because unawareness is subtle. It’s there in the mind. To be protective of the mind is tantamount to being protective of unawareness.

So then. If the mind is going to be destroyed along with it, let it be destroyed. To make a comparison with slashing, slash right on down. Don’t let there be anything left. Let everything in there close up shop and leave. To take it that far is just right.

If you’re hesitant, then you are sure to get stuck at this level. That’s why you can’t

let yourself be hesitant. You have to take the defilements all out. Whatever is going to vanish, let it all vanish. As for that which is in no position to vanish, it won't vanish no matter what. To put it simply, it's as if bandits had gotten into this house. If you're protective of the house where the bandits are, then—Bang!—they'll shoot you dead. So if you should burn the whole house down, then burn it down. If you let the bandits stay there, they'll go on to destroy things that have more value than the house. So be willing to sacrifice the house. Set fire to it. This is called setting fire to unawareness. If the mind is really going to vanish, let it vanish.

But actually the mind doesn't vanish. Only when you have burned that thing will you know: 'Oh—the thing of value has been lying beneath the power of unawareness. Unawareness has had it covered.' The instant unawareness vanishes, this other thing is revealed. Instead of vanishing too, it doesn't vanish, *but if you're protective of it you'll be stuck and will never get free.*

The period when I was investigating this point was after Venerable Ācariya Mun had passed away. I really felt at the end of my rope. I couldn't stay with my fellow meditators. I couldn't stay with anyone at all. They'd get in the way. They'd spoil the fun of my internal efforts at investigation—because at that time the mind was really spinning. It had reached the level where it would spin and spin without stopping. At the time, I called it 'spinning as a wheel of Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka*), not as a wheel of rebirth (*vaṭṭa-cakka*).' It spun to release itself. It spun all the time. And as soon as it fully reached a state of enough, it stopped—completely and unexpectedly.

For a while, at first, I had been getting annoyed. 'The more I've investigated this mind—and the more refined it has become—why has the burden, instead of growing lighter, become so heavy like this? And it doesn't have any sense of day or night—why is it?' I was getting a little concerned and annoyed. But even though I was annoyed, the mind didn't let up. It kept spinning there, right before my eyes. It kept spinning, scratching, and digging, looking for things that I hadn't yet known or seen. Wherever I was caught up at any point, it would keep digging and scratching its way away. As soon as it made contact, it would immediately latch on and stick with it. As soon as it understood, the matter would pass and disappear. The mind would then continue probing. Had Venerable Ācariya Mun been alive at that point, things would have gone more quickly.

This is why I have taught my fellow meditators that I'll give them my all. If I can't solve their problems, I'll take them to a teacher who can. Those are the lengths I'll go to—so that my fellow meditators can put their minds to rest. And for this reason, I'm not willing to have some of my talks recorded, because I let everything out. As soon as I've finished, the sound vanishes. I talk just for those who are there. People who didn't understand those matters would think I was bragging. Actually, I speak in line with the truth and to encourage my students: 'It has to be like this. You have to slash into it like this.' That's just how I put it. It's as if I give myself as a guarantee so that my students

can be confident that what I say isn't wrong and so that they'll feel inspired to apply themselves to the effort with strength and resilience. Other people, though, who didn't understand my motives or anything, would think I was bragging. Instead of benefiting, they'd be harmed. Even if I weren't harmed, they might be, so I have to be careful.

For this reason, on some occasions and with some people where I should really pull out all the stops, that's what I do. Otherwise I can't put my mind to rest about them. We really have to give and take. It's as if we both open up and give it our all to the point where we keep nothing back, not even a cent. This is the way it sometimes is, on some occasions, but not always. It depends on the situation, how far we should go. If we go that far, then if other people listened in, they'd think we were crazy.

I myself, when listening to Venerable Ācariya Mun talk: If he'd take it that far, it'd go straight to the heart. For three days afterwards I would feel as if the leaves on the trees weren't moving. The atmosphere would seem absolutely still. The power of his Dhamma blanketed everything—because the people listening were really intent on listening, the person speaking was really intent on speaking, and so they reached each other. As for us, even when we're told, 'This. This. It's like this,' we still don't see. It's like pointing out things to the blind—pitiful, when you think about it.

For this reason, wherever I am, if I haven't bowed down to Venerable Ācariya Mun, I can't lie down to sleep, no matter where I am. Even if I'm about to do walking meditation, I first face in his direction and pay him homage. If there's a picture of him as a conventional focus, I pay homage to his picture. If there's nothing, I take his virtues and form them into a convention to which I pay respect. His virtues will never fade for me. It's as if he hadn't passed away: a nature that stays like that, as if he were watching me all the time.

This is why all the Noble Disciples who have seen the principles of the truth of the Lord Buddha with their full hearts submit to him. That is, they submit to the principles of the truth that are principles of nature; they don't submit to his person or anything like that. *They submit in that the principles of the truth are now the same for them and will never fade.* No matter how far they may be from him, that truth will never fade, because the truth is the same for all of them. Even though the Buddha may have entered total *nibbāna* more than 2,500 years ago, this is not a problem that has an impact on the truth appearing in our hearts. It's simply the passage of conventional time or of the body—that's all—but the principle of that truth is unmoving: always one who is pure. Whether alive or totally *nibbāna*-ed, it's one who is pure.

This is a truth that is fixed. Those who know this principle of the truth all trust it in the same way, because the true Buddha, the true Dhamma, and the true Saṅgha lie in the heart. The heart truly pure is the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha in full measure, untouched and undisturbed by time or place, unlike conventional realities in general.

Note

1. A reference to the *Dhammapada*, verses 153–54:

Through the round of many births
I wandered without finding
The house builder I was seeking:
Painful is birth again and again.
House builder, you are seen!
You will not build a house again.
All your rafters broken,
The ridgepole destroyed,
Immersed in dismantling, the mind
Has attained the end of craving.

The Conventional Mind, the Mind Released

Once the mind has been well-cleansed so that it's constantly radiant, then when we're in a quiet place, without any sounds—for instance, late in the still of the night—even if the mind hasn't gathered in concentration, we find that when we focus on that center of awareness, it is so exceedingly delicate and refined that it's hard to describe. This refinement then becomes like a radiance that spreads all around us in every direction. Nothing appears to be making contact with the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and feeling at that moment, even though the mind hasn't gathered into the factors of concentration. Instead, this is the firm foundation of the mind that has been well-cleansed and displays a striking awareness, magnificence, and sensitivity within itself.

With this type of awareness, it's as if we weren't dwelling in a body at all. This is a very refined awareness, pronounced within itself. Even though the mind hasn't gathered in concentration, still—because of the refinement of the mind, because of the pronounced nature of the mind—it becomes a pronounced awareness, without any visions or images appearing at all. This awareness is preeminent exclusively in itself. This is one stage of the mind.

Another stage is when this well-cleansed mind gathers into stillness, not thinking, not forming any thoughts at all. It rests from its activity—its rippling. All thought-formations within the mind rest completely. All that remains is simple awareness—which is called the mind entering into stillness. Here even more so, nothing appears at all. All that appears is awareness, as if it were blanketing the entire cosmos—because the currents of the mind aren't like the currents of light. The currents of light have their end, near or far, depending on the strength of the light. For example, with electric light, if the candlepower is high, it will shine for a long distance. If low, it will shine for a short distance.

But the currents of the mind aren't like that. They have no 'near' or 'far.' To put it simply, there is no time or place. The mind can blanket everything. Far is like near. 'Near,' 'far': They don't really apply. All that appears is that awareness blanketing everything to the ends of the universe. It's as if all that appears in the entire world is this single awareness, as if there were nothing in our consciousness at all, even though everything still exists as it always has. This is what it's like: the power of the mind, the current of the mind that has been cleansed of things that cloud and obscure it.

Even more so when the mind is completely pure: This is even harder to describe. I wouldn't know how to label it, because it's not something to be labeled. It's not something that can be expressed like conventional things in general, because it's not a conventional reality. It lies solely within the range of those who are non-conventional,

who know their own non-conventionality. For this reason, it can't be described.

Now, the world is full of conventions. Whatever we say, we need to use a conventional picture, a supposition, to make comparisons in every case. 'It seems like this. It seems like that.' Or, 'It's like this. It's like that. It's similar to that.' For example, take the word, '*nibbāna*.' Ordinary defilement—our ordinary mind—requires that we think of *nibbāna* as broad and spacious, with nothing appearing in it. But we forget that the word *nibbāna*, which is a conventional word, still has some conventionality to it. We might even think that there's nothing in *nibbāna* but pure people milling around—both men and women, because they both can reach purity: *Nibbāna* has nothing but those who are pure, milling around to and fro, or sitting around in comfort and peace without being disturbed by sadness, discontent, or loneliness as we are in our conventional world so full of turmoil and stress.

Actually, we don't realize that this picture—of pure men and women milling or sitting around happily at their leisure without anything disturbing them—is simply a convention that can't have anything to do with the release of actual *nibbāna* at all. When we talk about things that are beyond the range of convention—even though they may not be beyond the range of the speaker's awareness, even though they may be well within that person's range—they can't be expressed in conventional terms. Whatever is expressed is bound to be interpreted wrongly, because ordinarily the mind is always ready to be wrong, or continues to be wrong within itself. As soon as anything comes flashing out, we have to speculate and guess in line with our incorrect and uncertain understanding—like Ven. Yamaka saying to Ven. Sāriputta that an arahant no longer exists after death.

Ven. Yamaka was still an ordinary, run-of-the-mill person, but even though Ven. Sāriputta, who was an arahant, tried to explain things to him, he still wouldn't understand, until the Lord Buddha had to come and explain things himself. Even then—if I'm not mistaken—Ven. Yamaka still didn't understand in line with the truth the Buddha explained to him. As I remember, the texts say that Ven. Yamaka didn't attain any of the paths and fruitions or *nibbāna* or anything. Still, there must have been a reason for the Buddha's explanation. If there were nothing to be gained by teaching, the Buddha wouldn't teach. In some cases, even when the person being taught didn't benefit much from the Dhamma, other people involved would. This is one of the traits of the Lord Buddha. There had to be a reason for everything he'd say. If there was something that would benefit his listeners, he'd speak. If not, he wouldn't. This is the nature of the Buddha: fully reasonable, fully accomplished in everything of every sort. He wouldn't make empty pronouncements in the way of the rest of the world.

So when he spoke to Ven. Yamaka, I'm afraid I've forgotten the details¹—because it's been so long since I read it—to the point where I've forgotten who benefited on that occasion, or maybe Ven. Yamaka did benefit. I'm not really sure. At any rate, let's focus on the statement, 'An arahant doesn't exist after death,' as the important point.

The Buddha asked, ‘Is the arahant his body, so that when he dies he is annihilated with the body? Is he *vedanā*? *Saññā*? *Saṅkhāra*? *Viññāṇa*? Is he earth, water, wind, or fire, so that when he dies he’s annihilated with these things?’ He kept asking in this way, until he reached the conclusion that the body is inconstant and so disbands. *Vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are inconstant and so disband. Whatever is a matter of convention follows these conventional ways.

But whatever is a matter of release—of purity—cannot be made to follow those ways, because it is not the same sort of thing. To take release or a released mind and confuse or compound it with the five *khandhas*, which are an affair of conventional reality, is wrong. It can’t be done. The five *khandhas* are one level of conventional reality; the ordinary mind is also a level of conventional reality.

The refinement of the mind—so refined that it is marvelous even when there are still things entangling it—displays its marvelousness in line with its level for us to see clearly. Even more so when the things entangling it are entirely gone, the mind becomes Dhamma. The Dhamma is the mind. The mind is Dhamma. The entire Dhamma is the entire mind. The entire mind is the entire Dhamma. *At this point, no conventions can be supposed, because the mind is pure Dhamma.* Even though such people may still be alive, directing their *khandhas*, that nature stays that way in full measure.

Their *khandhas* are *khandhas* just like ours. Their appearance, manners, and traits appear in line with their characteristics, in line with the affairs of conventional reality that appear in those ways, which is why these things cannot be mixed together to become one with that nature. When the mind is released, the nature of release is one thing; the world of the *khandhas* is another world entirely. Even though the pure heart may dwell in the midst of the world of the *khandhas*, it is still always a mind released. To call it a transcendent mind wouldn’t be wrong, because it lies above conventional reality—above the elements and *khandhas*.

The transcendent Dhamma is a Dhamma above the world. This is why people of this sort can know the issue of connection in the mind. Once the mind is cleansed stage by stage, they can see its beginning points and end points. They can see the mind’s behavior, the direction towards which it tends most heavily, and whether there is anything left that involves the mind or acts as a means of connection. These things they know, and they know them clearly. When they know clearly, they find a way to cut, to remove from the mind the things that lead to connection, step by step.

When the defilements come thick and fast, there is total darkness in the mind. When this happens, we don’t know what the mind is or what the things entangling it are, and so we assume them to be one and the same. The things that come to entangle the mind, and the mind itself, become mixed into one, so there’s no way to know.

But once the mind is cleansed step by step, we come to know in stages until we can know clearly exactly how much there is still remaining in the mind. Even if there’s just a

bit, we know there's a bit, because the act of connection lets us see plainly that, 'This is the seed that will cause us to be reborn in one place or another.' We can tell this clearly within the mind. When we know this clearly, we have to try to rectify the situation, using the various methods of mindfulness and discernment until that thing is cut away from the mind with no more connections. The mind will then become an entirely pure mind, with no more means of connection or continuation. We can see this clearly. *This is the one who is released. This is the one who doesn't die.*

Our Lord Buddha—from having practiced truly, from having truly known in line with the principles of the truth, seeing them clearly in the heart—spoke truly, acted truly, and knew truly. He taught what he had truly known and truly seen—and so how could he be wrong? At first, he didn't know how many times he had been born, or what various things he had been born as. Even concerning the present, he didn't know what his mind was attached to or involved with, because he had many, many defilements at that stage.

But after he had striven and gained Awakening, so that the entire Dhamma appeared in his heart, he knew clearly. When he knew clearly, he took that truth to proclaim the Dhamma to the world and with intuitive insight knew who would be able to comprehend this sort of Dhamma quickly, as when he knew that the two hermits and the five brethren were already in a position to attain the Dhamma. He then went to teach the five brethren and attained the aim he foresaw.

All five of them attained the Dhamma stage by stage to the level of arahantship. Since the Buddha was teaching the truth to those aiming at the truth with their full hearts, they were able to communicate easily. They, looking for the truth, and he, teaching the truth, were right for each other. When he taught in line with the principles of the truth, they were able to comprehend quickly and to know step by step following him until they penetrated the truth clear through. Their defilements, however many or few they had, all dissolved completely away. The cycle of rebirth was overturned to their complete relief.

This is how it is when a person who truly knows and truly sees explains the Dhamma. Whether it's an aspect of the Dhamma dealing with the world or with the Dhamma itself, what he says is bound to be certain because he has seen it directly with his own eyes, heard it with his own ears, touched it with his own heart. So when he remembers it and teaches it, how can he be wrong? He can't be wrong. For example, the taste of salt: Once we have known with our tongue that it's salty and we speak directly from the saltiness of the salt, how can we be wrong? Or the taste of hot peppers: The pepper is hot. It touches our tongue and we know, 'This pepper is hot.' When we speak with the truth—'This pepper is hot'—just where can we be wrong?

So it is with knowing the Dhamma. When we practice to the stage where we should know, we have to know, step by step. Knowing the Dhamma happens at the same moment as abandoning defilement. When defilement dissolves away, the brightness

that has been obscured will appear in that very instant. The truth appears clearly. Defilement, which is a truth, we know clearly. We then cut it away with the path—mindfulness and discernment—which is a principle of the truth, and then we take the truth and teach it so that those who are intent on listening will be sure to understand.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma in 84,000 sections (*khandha*), but they aren't in excess of our five *khandhas* with the mind in charge, responsible for good and evil and for dealing with everything that makes contact. Even though there may be as many as 84,000 sections to the Dhamma, they were taught in line with the attributes of the mind, of defilement, and of the Dhamma itself for the sake of living beings with their differing temperaments. The Buddha taught extensively—84,000 sections of the Dhamma—so that those of differing temperaments could put them into practice and straighten out their defilements.

And we should make ourselves realize that those who listen to the Dhamma from those who have truly known and truly seen—from the mouth of the Buddha, the arahants, or meditation masters—should be able to straighten out their defilements and mental effluents at the same time they are listening. This is a point that doesn't depend on time or place.

All the Dhamma comes down to the mind. The mind is a highly appropriate vessel for each level of the Dhamma. In teaching the Dhamma, what are the things entangling and embroiling the mind that are necessary to describe so that those who listen can understand and let go? There are elements, *khandhas*, and the unlimited sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations outside us, which make contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and heart within us. Thus it is necessary to teach both about things outside and about things inside, because the mind can become deluded and attached both outside and inside. It can love and hate both the outside and the inside.

When we teach in line with the causes and effects both inside and out, in accordance with the principles of the truth, the mind that contemplates or investigates exclusively in line with the principles of truth has to know, step by step, and be able to let go. Once we *know* something, we can let it go. That puts an end to our problem of having to prove or investigate the matter again. Whatever we understand is no longer a problem because once we have understood, we let go. We keep letting go, because our understanding has reached the truth of those various things in full measure.

The investigation of the Dhamma, on the levels in which it should be narrow, has to be narrow. On the levels in which it should be wide-ranging, it has to be wide-ranging in line with the full level of the mind and the Dhamma. So when the heart of the meditator should stay in a restricted range, it has to be kept in that range. For example, in the beginning stages of the training, the mind is filled with nothing but cloudiness and confusion at all times and can't find any peace or contentment. We thus have to force it to stay in a restricted range—for example, with the meditation word, '*buddho*,' or with the in-and-out breath—so as to gain a footing with its meditation theme, so that

stillness can form a basis or a foundation for the heart, so that it can set itself up for the practice that is to follow. We first have to teach the mind to withdraw itself from its various preoccupations, using whichever meditation theme it finds appealing, so that it can find a place of rest and relaxation through the stillness.

Once we have obtained enough stillness from our meditation theme to form an opening onto the way, we begin to investigate. Discernment and awareness begin to branch out in stages or to widen their scope until they have no limit. When we reach an appropriate time to rest the mind through the development of concentration, we focus on tranquility using our meditation theme as we have done before, without having to pay attention to discernment in any way at that moment. We set our sights on giving rise to stillness with the meditation theme that has previously been coupled with the heart or that we have previously practiced for the sake of stillness. We focus in on that theme step by step with mindfulness in charge until stillness appears, giving peace and contentment. This is called resting the mind by developing concentration.

When the mind withdraws from its resting place, discernment has to unravel and investigate things. Let it investigate whatever it should at that particular time or stage, until it understands the matter. When discernment begins to move into action as a result of its being reinforced by the strength of concentration, its investigations have to grow more and more wide-ranging, step by step. This is where discernment is wide-ranging. This is where the Dhamma is wide-ranging. The more resourceful our discernment, the more its investigations spread until it knows the causes and effects of phenomena as they truly are. Its doubts then disappear, and it lets go in stages, in line with the levels of mindfulness and discernment suited to removing the various kinds of defilement step by step from the heart.

The mind then gradually retreats into a more restricted range, as it sees necessary, all on its own without needing to be forced as before—because once it has investigated and known in line with the way things really are, what is there left to be entangled with? To be concerned about? The extent to which it is concerned or troubled is because of its lack of understanding. When it understands with the discernment that investigates and unravels to see the truth of each particular thing, the mind withdraws and lets go of its concerns. It goes further and further inward until its scope grows more and more restricted—to the elements, the *khandhas*, and then exclusively to the mind itself. At this stage, the mind works in a restricted scope because it has cut away its burdens in stages.

What is there in the elements and the *khandhas*? Analyze them down into their parts—body, feelings, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*—until you have removed your doubts about any one of them. For example, when you investigate the body, an understanding of feeling automatically follows. Or when you investigate feelings, this leads straight to the body, to *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*, which have the same sorts of characteristics—because they come from the same current of the mind. To put it briefly, the Buddha

taught that each of the five *khandhas* is a complete treasury or complete heap of the three characteristics.

What do they have that's worth holding on to? The physical elements, the physical heap, all physical forms, are simply heaps of the elements. *Vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are all mere mental phenomena. They appear—blip, blip, blip—and disappear in an instant. What value or substance can you get from them? Discernment penetrates further and further in. It knows the truth, which goes straight to the heart, and it lets go with that straight-to-the-heart knowledge. In other words, it lets go straight from the heart. When the knowledge goes straight to the heart, it lets go straight from the heart. Our job narrows in, narrows in, as the work of discernment dictates.

This is the way it is when investigating and knowing the path of the mind that involves itself with various preoccupations. We come in knowing, we come in letting go step by step, cutting off the paths of the tigers that used to roam about looking for food—as in the phrase from the Dhamma textbooks: 'Cutting off the paths of the tigers that roam about looking for food.' We cut them out from the paths of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body along which they used to roam, involving themselves with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, gathering up poisonous food and bringing it in to burn the heart.

Discernment thus has to roam about investigating the body, feelings, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* by probing inward, probing inward along the paths that the tigers and leopards like to follow, so as to cut off the paths along which they used to go looking for food. The Buddha teaches us to probe inward, cutting off the paths until we have the tigers caged. In other words, unawareness, which is like a tiger, converges in at the one mind. All defilements and mental effluents converge in at the one mind. They can't go out roaming freely looking for food as they did before.

The mind of unawareness: You could say that it's like a football, because discernment unravels it—stomps on it, kicks it back and forth—until it is smashed to bits: until the defilement of unawareness is smashed inside. This is the level of the mind where defilement converges, so when discernment unravels it, it's just like a football that is stomped and kicked. It gets kicked back and forth among the *khandhas* until it's smashed apart by discernment. *When the conventional mind is smashed apart, the mind released is fully revealed.*

Why do we say the 'conventional mind' and the 'mind released'? Do they become two separate minds? Not at all. It's still the same mind. When conventional realities—defilements and mental effluents—rule it, that's one state of the mind; but when it's washed and wrung out by discernment until that state of mind is smashed apart, then the true mind, the true Dhamma, which can stand the test, doesn't disappear with it. The only things that disappear are the things inconstant, stressful, and not-self that had infiltrated the mind—because defilements and mental effluents, no matter how refined, are simply conventions: inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

When these things disappear, the true mind, above and beyond convention, can then appear to its full extent. This is what's called the mind released. This is what's called the pure mind, completely cut off from all connections and continuations. All that remains is simple awareness, utterly pure.

We can't say at what point in our body this simple awareness is centered. Before, it was a prominent point that we could know and see clearly. For example, in concentration we knew that it was centered in the middle of the chest. Our awareness was pronounced right there. The stillness was pronounced right there. The brightness, the radiance of the mind was pronounced right there. We could see it clearly without having to ask anyone. All those whose minds have centered into the foundation of concentration find that the center of 'what knows' is really pronounced right here in the middle of the chest. They won't argue that it's in the brain or whatever, as those who have never experienced the practice of concentration are always saying.

But when the mind becomes a pure mind, that center disappears, and so we can't say that the mind is above or below or in any particular spot, because it's an awareness that is pure, an awareness that is subtle and profound above and beyond any and all conventions. Even so, we are still veering off into conventions when we say that it's 'extremely refined,' which doesn't really fit the truth, because of course the notion of extreme refinement is a convention. We can't say that this awareness lies high or low, or where it has a point or a center—because it doesn't have one at all. All there is, is awareness with nothing else infiltrating it. Even though it's in the midst of the elements and *khandhas* with which it used to be mixed, it's not that way any more. It now lies world apart.

We now can know clearly that the *khandhas* are *khandhas*, the mind is the mind, the body is the body; *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are each separate *khandhas*. But as for feelings in that mind, they no longer exist, ever since the mind gained release from all defilement. Therefore the three characteristics, which are convention incarnate, don't exist in that mind. The mind doesn't partake of feeling, apart from the ultimate ease (*paramam sukham*) that is its own nature—and the ultimate ease here is not a feeling of ease.

When the Buddha teaches that *nibbāna* is the ultimate ease, the term 'ultimate ease' is not a feeling of ease like the feelings or moods of the mind still defiled, or the feelings of the body that are constantly appearing as stress and ease. The ultimate ease is not a feeling like that. Those who practice should take this point to heart and practice so as to know it for themselves. That will be the end of the question, in line with the Dhamma that the Buddha says is *sandiṭṭhiko*—to be seen for oneself—and on which he lays no exclusive claims.

Thus we cannot say that the mind absolutely pure has any feeling. *This mind has no feeling.* The term 'ultimate ease' refers to an ease by the very nature of purity, and so there can't be anything inconstant, stressful, or not-self found infiltrating that ultimate

ease at all.

Nibbāna is constant. The ultimate ease is constant. They are one and the same. The Buddha says that *nibbāna* is constant, the ultimate ease is constant, the ultimate void is constant. They're all the same thing—but the void of *nibbāna* lies beyond convention. It's not void in the way the world supposes it to be.

If we know clearly, we can describe and analyze anything at all. If we don't understand, we can talk from morning till night and be wrong from morning till night. There is no way we can be right, because the mind isn't right. No matter how much we may speak in line with what we understand to be right in accordance with the Dhamma, if the mind that is acting isn't right, how can we be right? It's as if we were to say, 'Nibbāna is the ultimate ease; *nibbāna* is the ultimate void,' to the point where the words are always in our mouth and in our heart: If the mind is a mind with defilements, it can't be right. When the mind isn't right, nothing can be right.

Once the mind is right, though, then even when we don't say anything, we're right—because that nature is already right. Whether or not we speak, we're right. Once we reach the level where we're right, there's no wrong. This is the marvel that comes from the practice of the religion.

The Buddha taught only as far as this level and didn't teach anything further. It's in every way the end of conventions, the end of formulations, the end of defilement, the end of suffering and stress. This is why he didn't teach anything further, because this is the point at which he fully aimed: the full level of the mind and of the Dhamma.

Before he totally entered *nibbāna*, his last instructions were, 'Monks, I exhort you. Formations are constantly arising and ceasing. Investigate formations that are arising and disbanding, or arising and ceasing, with non-complacency.'

That was all. He closed his mouth and never said anything again.

In this teaching, which has the rank of a final instruction, how should we understand or interpret the word 'formation' (*saṅkhāra*)? What kind of formations does it refer to? We could take it as referring to outer formations or inner formations and we wouldn't be wrong. But at that moment, we can be fairly certain that those who had come to listen to the Buddha's final instructions at the final hour were practicing monks with high levels of mental attainment, from arahants on down. So I would think that the main point to which the Buddha was referring was inner formations that form thoughts in the mind and disrupt the mind at all times. He taught to investigate the arising and ceasing of these formations with non-complacency—in other words, to investigate with mindfulness and discernment at all times. *These formations cover the cosmos!*

We could, if we wanted to, analyze the word 'formations' as outer formations—trees, mountains, animals, people—but this wouldn't be in keeping with the level of the monks gathered there, nor would it be in keeping with the occasion: the Buddha's last moments before total *nibbāna* in which he gave his exhortation to the Saṅgha: the

ultimate teaching at the final hour.

His final exhortation dealing with formations, given as he was about to enter total *nibbāna*, must thus refer specifically to the most refined formations in the heart. Once we comprehend these inner formations, how can we help but understand their basis—what they arise from. We'll have to penetrate into the well-spring of the cycle of rebirth: the mind of unawareness. This is the way to penetrate to the important point. Those who have reached this level have to know this. Those who are approaching it in stages, who haven't fully reached it, still know this clearly because they are investigating the matter, which is what the Buddha's instructions—given in the midst of that important stage of events—were all about.

This, I think, would be in keeping with the occasion in which the Buddha spoke. Why? Because ordinarily when the mind has investigated to higher and higher levels, these inner formations—the various thoughts that form in the mind—are very crucial to the investigation because they appear day and night, and are at work every moment inside the mind. A mind reaching the level where it should investigate inner phenomena must thus take these inner formations as the focal point of its investigation. This is a matter directly related to the Buddha's final instructions.

The ability to overthrow unawareness must follow on an investigation focused primarily on inner formations. Once we have focused in, focused in, down to the root of defilement and have then destroyed it, these formations no longer play any role in giving rise to defilement again. Their only function is to serve the purposes of the Dhamma. We use them to formulate Dhamma for the benefit of the world. In teaching Dhamma we have to use thought-formations, and so formations of this sort become tools of the Dhamma.

Now that we have given the *khandhas* a new ruler, the thought-formations which were forced into service by unawareness have now become tools of the Dhamma—tools of a pure heart. The Buddha used these thought-formations to teach the world, to formulate various expressions of the Dhamma.

The Dhamma we have mentioned here doesn't exist solely in the past, in the time of the Buddha, or solely in the future in a way that would deny hope to those who practice rightly and properly. It lies among our own *khandhas* and mind, in our body and mind. It doesn't lie anywhere else other than in the bodies and minds of human beings, women and men. The defilements, the path, and purity all lie right here in the heart. They don't lie in that time or period way back when, or with that person or this. They lie with the person who practices, who is using mindfulness and discernment to investigate right now.

Why? Because we are all aiming at the Dhamma. We are aiming at the truth, just like the Dhamma, the truth, that the Buddha taught then and that always holds to the principle of being '*majjhima*'—in the center—not leaning toward that time or this, not leaning toward that period or this place. It's a Dhamma always keeping to an even keel

because it lies in the center of our elements and *khandhas*. *Majjhima*: in the center, or always just right for curing defilement.

So please practice correctly in line with this Dhamma. You will see the results of ‘*majjhima*’—a Dhamma just right, always and everywhere—appearing as I have said. *Nibbāna*, the ultimate ease, will not in any way lie beyond this knowing heart.

And so I’ll ask to stop here.

Note

1. See the *Yamaka Sutta* and *Anurādha Sutta* in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22:85–86).

Postscript

An excerpt from a letter written by Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa to Mrs. Pow Phanga Vathanakul, dated February 26, 1976.

The practice of the Dhamma in keeping with the Dhamma that he gave with utter compassion unequaled by that of anyone else in the world: This is the true homage to the Buddha. The seeing of the truth that lies within you, using discernment step by step at all times: This is the seeing of the Buddha step by step. The seeing of the truth with the full heart using discernment: This is the seeing of the Buddha in full. The true Buddha, the true Dhamma, lie with the heart. To attend to your own heart is to attend to the Buddha. To watch over your own heart with mindfulness and discernment is truly to see the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

The king of death warns and assaults the bodies of the world's living beings in line with the principles of his truth. You have to greet his warnings and assaults with mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and unflagging persistence, and take out your treasures—the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*—to flaunt in his face, braving death in the course of persistent effort. You and he, who have regarded each other as enemies for such a long time, will then become true friends—neither of you to take advantage of the other ever again.

The body and the *khandhas* are things that the world must relinquish in spite of its regrets. You should relinquish them with mindfulness and discernment before the time comes to relinquish them in the way of the world. This is the supreme letting-go, second to nothing.

Please take this to heart, because it is written straight from the heart.

Evam.

Glossary

Ācariya: Teacher; mentor.

Anattā: Not-self; ownerless.

Aniccaṃ: Inconstant; unsteady; impermanent.

Arahant: A person whose heart is free of mental effluents (see *āsava*) and who is thus not destined for future rebirth. An epithet for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.

Ārammaṇa: Preoccupation; mental object.

Āsava: Mental effluent, pollutant, or fermentation—sensuality, states of becoming, views, and unawareness.

Avijjā: Unawareness; ignorance; obscured awareness; delusion about the nature of the mind.

Āyatana: Sense medium. The inner sense media are the sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The outer sense media are their respective objects.

Brahmā: ‘Great One’—an inhabitant of the heavens of form or formlessness.

Brahman: Used in the Buddha sense, this term is synonymous with arahant.

Buddho: Awake; enlightened. An epithet for the Buddha.

Cetasika: Mental concomitant (see *vedanā*, *saññā*, and *saṅkhāra*).

Dhamma (dharma): Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles underlying their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, ‘Dhamma’ is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of *nibbāna*, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

Dhātu: Element; property, impersonal condition. The four physical elements or properties are earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (motion), and fire (heat). The six elements include the above four plus space and cognizance.

Dukkha(m): Stress; suffering; pain; distress; discontent.

Evam: Thus; in this way. This term is used in Thailand as a formal closing to a sermon.

Kamma (karma): Intentional acts that result in states of being and birth.

Kāyagatā-sati: Mindfulness immersed in the body. This is a blanket term covering

several meditation themes: keeping the breath in mind; being mindful of the body's posture; being mindful of one's activities; analyzing the body into its parts; analyzing the body into its physical properties (see *dhātu*); contemplating the fact that the body is inevitably subject to death and disintegration.

Khandha: Heap; group; aggregate. Physical and mental components of the personality and of sensory experience in general (see *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*).

Kilesa: Defilement—passion, aversion, and delusion in their various forms, which include such things as greed, malevolence, anger, rancor, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, miserliness, dishonesty, boastfulness, obstinacy, violence, pride, conceit, intoxication, and complacency.

Loka-dhamma: Worldly phenomenon—fortune, loss of fortune, status, disgrace, praise, censure, pleasure, and pain.

Lokuttara: Transcendent; supramundane (see *magga*, *phala*, and *nibbāna*).

Magga: Path. Specifically, the path to the cessation of suffering and stress. The four transcendent paths—or rather, one path with four levels of refinement—are the path to stream entry (entering the stream to *nibbāna*, which ensures that one will be reborn at most only seven more times), the path to once-returning, the path to non-returning, and the path to arahantship.

Māra: Temptation; mortality personified.

Nibbāna (*nirvāṇa*): Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from mental effluents, defilements, and the round of rebirth (see *āsava*, *kilesa*, and *vatta*). As this term is used to denote also the extinguishing of fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burning fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound.)

Paññā: Discernment; insight; wisdom; intelligence; common sense; ingenuity.

Pāramī: Perfection of the character—generosity, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, forbearance, truthfulness, determination, good will, and equanimity.

Parisā: Following; assembly. The four groups of the Buddha's following are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

Pāṭimokkha: The basic code of 227 precepts observed by Buddhist monks, chanted every half-month in each assembly of monks numbering four or more.

Phala: Fruition. Specifically, the fruition of any of the four transcendent paths (see *magga*).

Puñña: Merit; worth; the inner sense of well-being that comes from having acted rightly or well.

Rūpa: Body; physical phenomenon; sense datum.

Sabhāva-dhamma: Phenomenon; an event, property, or quality as experienced in and

of itself.

Sallekha-dhamma: Topics of effacement (effacing defilement)—modesty, being content with what one has, seclusion, unentanglement in companionship, persistence, virtue, concentration, discernment, release, and the direct knowing and seeing of release.

Samādhi: Concentration; the practice of centering the mind in a single sensation or preoccupation.

Sammati: Conventional reality; convention; relative truth; supposition; anything conjured into being by the mind.

Sandiṭṭhiko: Self-evident, visible here and now.

Saṅgha: The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, this refers to the Buddhist monkhood. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the transcendent paths (see *magga*) culminating in *nibbāna*.

Saṅkhāra: Formation. This can denote anything formed or fashioned by conditions, or—as one of the five *khandhas*—specifically thought-formations within the mind.

Saññā: Label; perception; allusion; act of memory or recognition; interpretation.

Sati: Mindfulness; alertness; self-collectedness; powers of reference and retention.

Satipaṭṭhāna: Foundation of mindfulness; frame of reference—body, feelings, mind, and mental events, viewed in and of themselves as they occur.

Sa-upādisesa-nibbāna: *Nibbāna* with fuel remaining (the analogy is to an extinguished fire whose embers are still glowing)—liberation as experienced in this lifetime by an arahant.

Sugato: Well-faring; going (or gone) to a good destination. An epithet for the Buddha.

Taṇhā: Craving, the cause of stress, which takes three forms—craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for not-becoming.

Tathāgata: One who has become true. A title for the Buddha.

Tilakkhaṇa: Three characteristics inherent in all conditioned phenomena—being inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

Tipiṭaka (tripiṭaka): The Buddhist Canon; literally, the three 'baskets'—disciplinary rules, discourses, and abstract philosophical treatises.

Uposatha: Observance day, corresponding to the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist lay people gather to listen to the Dhamma and to observe special precepts. Monks assemble to hear the Pāṭimokkha on the new-moon and full-moon *uposatha* days.

Vassa: Rains Retreat. A period from July to October, corresponding roughly to the

rainy season, in which each monk is required to live settled in a single place and not wander freely about.

Vaṭṭa: The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This denotes both the death and rebirth of living beings and the death and rebirth of defilement within the mind.

Vedanā: Feeling—pleasure (ease), pain (stress), or neither pleasure nor pain.

Vijjā: Clear knowledge; genuine awareness; science (specifically, the cognitive powers developed through the practice of concentration and discernment).

Vimutti: Release; freedom from the fabrications and conventions of the mind.

Vinaya: The disciplinary rules of the monastic order.

Viññāṇa: Cognizance; consciousness; the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur.

* * *

If anything in this translation is inaccurate or misleading, I ask forgiveness of the author and reader for having unwittingly stood in their way. As for whatever may be accurate, I hope the reader will make the best use of it, translating it a few steps further, into the heart, so as to attain the truth to which it points.

The translator

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