

THINGS  
AS THEY  
·ARE·

# *Things As They Are*

A Collection of Talks on the  
Training of the Mind

*Venerable Ācariya  
Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno*

Translated from the Thai  
by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

Copyright © Venerable Ācariya Mahā  
Boowa Ñāṇasampanno 1988

This book is a free gift of Dhamma, and may not be offered for sale, for as the Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa has said, 'Dhamma has a value beyond all wealth and should not be sold like goods in a market place.'

For free distribution

Reproduction of this book, in whole or in part, by any means, for sale or material gain is prohibited. Permission to reprint in whole or in part for free distribution as a gift of Dhamma, however, is hereby granted, and no further permission need be obtained.

Questions about this book may be  
addressed to

Wat Pa Baan Taad  
c/o Songserm Service  
89 Posri Road  
Udorn Thani 41000 Thailand.

*'Just as if there were a pool of water in a mountain glen—clear, limpid, and unsullied—where a man with good eyes standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming about and resting, and it would occur to him, "This pool of water is clear, limpid, and unsullied. Here are these shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also these shoals of fish swimming about and resting;" so too, the monk discerns as it actually is, that "This is stress... This is the origin of stress... This is the stopping of stress... This is the way leading to the stopping of stress... These are mental effluents... This is the origin of mental effluents... This is the stopping of mental effluents... This is the way leading to the stopping of mental effluents." His heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, is released from the effluent of sensuality, released from the effluent of becoming, released from the effluent of unawareness. With release, there is the knowledge, "Released." He discerns that, "Birth is no more, the holy life is fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'*

*'This, great king, is a reward of the contemplative life, visible here and now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime. And as for another visible reward of the contemplative life, higher and more sublime than this, there is none.'*

— *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*  
*Dīgha Nikāya 2*

## Introduction

These talks—except for the first—were originally given extemporaneously to the monks at Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa’s monastery, Wat Pa Baan Taad, in Udorn Thani Province, Thailand. As might be expected, they deal in part with issues particular to the life of Buddhist monks, but they also contain much that is of more general interest. Since the monks who had assembled to listen to these talks were at different stages in their practice, each talk deals with a number of issues on a wide variety of levels. Thus there should be something of use in these pages for every reader interested in the training of the mind.

The title of this collection is taken from a Pāli term that, directly or indirectly, forms the theme of a number of the talks: *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*—knowledge and vision of things as they are. My hope is that these talks will aid and encourage the reader in his or her own efforts to taste the liberation that comes with the reality to which this term refers.

### Note

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

*Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*

Rayong  
June, 1988

# *From Ignorance to Emptiness*

*March 27, 1964*

Today I'd like to take the opportunity to tell you some of my own ignorance and doubts, with the thought that we all come from the land of ignorance and doubt inasmuch as our parents and their ancestors before them were people with the defilements (*kilesa*) that led them to ignorance as well. Even all of us here: There's probably not a one of us who slipped through to be born in the land of intelligence and freedom from doubt. This being the case, we all must be subject to doubts. So today I'd like to take the opportunity to resolve some of the issues that are on your minds by giving a talk instead of answering the questions you have asked from the standpoint of your various doubts, ranging from the most basic to the highest levels—which I'm not sure I can answer or not. But the questions you have asked seem to follow so well on one another that they can provide the framework for a talk instead of a question-and-answer session.

Each of us, before starting the practice and in the beginning stages of the practice, is sure to suffer from ignorance and doubt, as these are the qualities that lead to the states of becoming and birth into which all living beings are born. When we lay the groundwork for the beginning of the practice, we don't have enough starting capital for intelligence to take the lead in every situation, and so ignorance is sure to find an opening to take the lead. And as for this ignorance: If we have never trained our intelligence to show us the way, the ignorance that holds the upper hand in the heart is sure to drag us in the wrong direction as a matter of course.

In the beginning of my own training, I felt doubts about whether the teachings of the Buddha—both the practices to be followed and the results to be obtained—were as complete as he said they were. This was an uncertainty that ran deep in my heart during the period in which I was

debating whether or not to practice for the really high levels of Dhamma—or, to put it bluntly, for the sake of *nibbāna*. Before I had considered practicing for the sake of *nibbāna*, these doubts hardly ever occurred to me, probably because I hadn't yet aimed my compass in this direction. But after I had ordained and studied the Dhamma—and especially the life of the Buddha, which was the story of his great renunciation leading to his Awakening to the paths (*magga*), fruitions (*phala*), and *nibbāna*; and then the lives of the Noble Disciples who, having heard the Dhamma from the Buddha, went off to practice in various places until they too gained Awakening, becoming witnesses to the truth of the Buddha and his teachings—when I had studied to this point, I felt a sense of faith and conviction, and wanted to train myself to be like them.

But the training that would make me be like them: How was I to follow it? The Dhamma—in other words, the practice that would lead the heart to awaken to the higher levels of Dhamma like the Buddha and his disciples: Would it still produce the same sorts of results or would it be fruitless and simply lead to pointless hardship for those who practiced it? Or would it still give the full results in line with the well-taught teachings (*svākkhāta-dhamma*)? This was my primary doubt. But as for believing in the Buddha's Awakening and that of his disciples, of this I was fully convinced in my way as an ordinary run-of-the-mill person. The thing that formed a stumbling block to me in the beginning stages was the doubt as to whether or not the path of practice I would take, following the Buddha and his disciples, would lead to the same point they had reached. Was it now all overgrown with brambles and thorns? Had it changed into something other than the Dhamma that leads away from suffering (*niyyānika-dhamma*), even though the Buddha and his disciples had all followed this very same path to the land of peace and security?

This was my doubt concerning the causes in the practice. As for the results of the practice, I wondered whether the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* still existed as they had in the time of the Buddha. These doubts, which ran deep in my heart, I couldn't tell to anyone else because I felt there was no

one who could resolve them for me and dispel them from my heart.

This is why I had my hopes constantly set on meeting Ven. Ācariya Mun. Even though I had never met him before, I had heard his reputation, which had been spreading from Chiang Mai for quite some time, that he was a monk of distinction. By and large, the people who would tell me about him wouldn't speak of him in terms of the ordinary levels of noble attainments. They'd all speak of his arahantship. This had me convinced that when I had finished my studies in line with the vow I had made, I'd have to make the effort to go out to practice and live under his guidance so as to cut away the doubts running deep in my heart at that time.

The vow I had made to myself was that I would complete the third grade of Pāli studies. As for Dhamma studies, whether or not I would pass the examinations was of no concern to me. As soon as I had passed the third-level Pāli exams, I'd go out to do nothing but practice. I'd absolutely refuse to study or take the exams for the higher levels. This was the vow I had made. So the aim of my education was the third level of Pāli studies. Whether it was my good or bad fortune, though, I can't say, but I failed the Pāli exams for two years, and passed only on the third year. As for the three levels of Dhamma studies, I ended up passing them all, because I was studying and taking the examinations for both subjects together.

When I went up to Chiang Mai, it so happened that Ven. Ācariya Mun had been invited by Ven. Chao Khun Dhammachedi of Udorn Thani to spend the Rains Retreat (*vassa*) in Udorn, and so he had left his seclusion and come to stay at Wat Chedi Luang in Chiang Mai at just about the time of my arrival. As soon as I learned that he was staying there, I was overwhelmed with joy. The next morning, when I returned from my alms round, I learned from one of the other monks that earlier that morning Ven. Ācariya Mun had left for alms on that path and had returned by the very same path. This made me even more eager to see him. Even if I couldn't meet him face to face, I'd be content just to have a glimpse of him before he left for Udorn Thani.

The next morning before Ven. Ācariya Mun went on his alms round, I

hurried out early for alms and then returned to my quarters. There I kept watch along the path by which he would return, as I had been told by the other monks, and before long I saw him coming. I hurried to my quarters and peeked out of my hiding to catch a glimpse of him, with the hunger that had come from having wanted to see him for such a long time. And then I actually saw him. The moment I saw him, a feeling of complete faith in him arose within me. *I hadn't wasted my birth as a human being, I thought, because I now had seen an arahant.* Even though no one had told me that he was an arahant, my heart became firmly convinced the moment I saw him that that was what he was. At the same time, a feeling of sudden ecstasy hard to describe came over me, making my hair stand on end—even though he hadn't yet seen me with his physical eyes.

Not too many days after that, he left Wat Chedi Luang to head for Udorn Thani together with his students. As for me, I stayed on to study there at Wat Chedi Luang. When I had passed my Pāli exams, I returned to Bangkok with the intention of heading out to practice meditation in line with my vow, but when I reached Bangkok a senior monk who out of his kindness wanted to help me further my Pāli studies told me to stay on. I tried to find some way to slip away, in keeping with my intentions and my vow, because I felt that the conditions of my vow had been met the moment I had passed my Pāli exams. Under no terms could I study for or take the next level of Pāli exams.

It's a trait with me to value truthfulness. Once I've made a vow, I won't break it. Even life I don't value as much as a vow. So now I had to try to find some way or another to go out to practice. It so happened during that period that the senior monk who was my teacher was invited out to the provinces, so I got the chance to leave Bangkok. Had he been there, it would have been difficult for me to get away, because I was indebted to him in many ways and probably would have felt such deference for him that I would have had difficulty leaving. But as soon as I saw my chance, I decided to make a vow that night, asking for an omen from the Dhamma that would reinforce my determination in going out this time.

After I had finished my chants, I made my vow, the gist of which was that if my going out to meditate in line with my earlier vow would go smoothly and fulfill my aspirations, I wanted an unusual vision to appear to me, either in my meditation or in a dream. But if I wouldn't get to go out to practice, or if having gone out I'd meet with disappointment, I asked that the vision show the reason why I'd be disappointed and dissatisfied. But if my going out was to fulfill my aspirations, I asked that the vision be extraordinarily strange and amazing. With that, I sat in meditation, but no visions appeared during the long period I sat meditating, so I stopped to rest.

As soon as I fell asleep, though, I dreamed that I was floating high in the sky above a large metropolis. It wasn't Bangkok, but I don't know what metropolis it was. It stretched as far as the eye could see and was very impressive. I floated three times around the metropolis and then returned to earth. As soon as I returned to earth, I woke up. It was four a.m. I quickly got up with a feeling of fullness and contentment in my heart, because while I had been floating around the metropolis, I had seen many strange and amazing things that I can't describe to you in detail. When I woke up, I felt happy, cheerful, and very pleased with my vision, at the same time thinking to myself that my hopes were sure to be fulfilled, because never before had I seen such an amazing vision—and at the same time, it had coincided with my vow. So that night I really marveled at my vision. The next morning, after my meal, I went to take leave of the senior monk who was in charge of the monastery, and he willingly gave permission for me to go.

From there I set out for Nakhorn Ratchasima Province, where I spent the rains in Cakkaraad District. I started practicing concentration (*samādhi*) and was amazed at how my mind developed stillness and calm step by step. I could clearly see my heart settle down in peace. After that the senior monk who was my Pāli teacher asked me to return to Bangkok to continue my studies. He even had the kindness to come after me, and then continued further out into the provinces. On the way back he was going to have me accompany him to Bangkok. I really felt in a bind, so I headed for Udorn

Thani in order to find Ven. Ācariya Mun. The progress I had been making in concentration practice, though, disappeared at my home village of Baan Taad. The reason it disappeared was simply because I made a single klod.<sup>[1]</sup> I hadn't even spent a full month at Baan Taad when I began to feel that my mind wasn't settling down in concentration as snugly as it had before. Sometimes I could get it to settle down, sometimes not. Seeing that things didn't look promising and that I could only lose by staying on, I quickly left.

In coming from Nakhorn Ratchasima to Udorn Thani, my purpose had been to catch up with Ven. Ācariya Mun, who had spent the rains at Wat Noan Nives, Udorn Thani. I didn't reach him in time, though, because he had been invited to Sakon Nakhorn before my arrival, so I went on to stay at Wat Thung Sawaang in Nong Khai for a little more than three months.

In May of that year, 1942, I left Nong Khai for the town of Sakon Nakhorn, and from there went on to the monastery where Ven. Ācariya Mun was staying in Baan Khoak, Tong Khoam Township, Muang District, Sakon Nakhorn Province. When I reached the monastery, I found him doing walking meditation in the late evening dusk. 'Who's that?' he asked, so I told him who I was. He then left his meditation path and went to the meeting hall—he was staying in a room there in the meeting hall—and conversed with me, showing a great deal of kindness and compassion for the incredibly ignorant person who had come to seek him out. He gave me a sermon that first evening, the gist of which I'll relate to you as far as I can remember it. It's a message that remains close to my heart to this day.

'You've already studied a good deal,' he told me, 'at least enough to earn the title of "Mahā." Now I'm going to tell you something that I want you take and think over. Don't go thinking that I underrate the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha, but at the present moment *no matter how much of the Dhamma you've studied, it will serve no purpose* in keeping with your status as a scholar *other than simply being an obstacle to your meditation*, because you won't be able to resist dwelling on it and using it to take the measure of things when you're trying to calm your heart. So for the sake of convenience when fostering stillness in your heart, I want you to take the Dhamma you've

studied and put it away for the time being. When the time comes for it to benefit you, it will all come streaming in to blend perfectly with your practice. At the same time, it will serve as a standard to which you should make the heart conform. But for the time being, I don't want you to concern yourself with the Dhamma you've studied at all. Whatever way you make the mind still or use discernment (*paññā*) to investigate the *khandhas*, I want you first to restrict yourself to the sphere of the body, *because all of the Dhamma in the texts points to the body and mind*, but the mind doesn't yet have any firm evidence and so can't take the Dhamma learned from the texts and put it to good use. The Dhamma will simply become allusions and labels leading you to speculate elsewhere to the point where you become a person with no foundations, because the mind is fixated on theory in a manner that isn't the way of the Lord Buddha. So I want you to take what I've said and think it over. If you set your mind on the practice without retreating, the day will come when these words of mine will impress themselves on your heart.' Of what I can remember him saying that day, this is all I'll ask to tell for now.

I felt an immediate sense of faith and conviction in him as soon as I saw him face to face that night, both because of my conviction in the Dhamma he was so kind to teach me, and because of the assistance he gave in letting me stay under his guidance. I stayed with him with a sense of contentment hard to describe—but also with a stupidity on my own part hard to describe as well. He himself was very kind, helping me with the Dhamma every time I went to see him.

My practice when I first went to stay with him was a matter of progress and regress within the heart. My heart hardly ever settled down firmly for a long period of time. The first rains I spent with him was my ninth rains, in as much as I had spent my first seven rains in study, and one rains in Nakhorn Ratchasima after starting to practice. During that first rains with Ven. Ācariya Mun, there was nothing but progress and regress in the area of my concentration. After the rains, I went up to stay on a mountain for more than two months and then returned to be with him, my mind still

progressing and regressing in the same way. I couldn't figure out why it kept regressing even though I was intent on practicing to the full extent of my ability. Some nights I was unable to sleep all night long out of fear that the mind would regress, and yet it would still manage to regress. And especially when the mind was beginning to settle down in stillness, I'd accelerate my efforts even more, out of fear that it would regress as it had before—and even then it would regress on me. After a while it would progress again and then regress again. When it had progressed, it would stay at that level for only three days and then regress right before my eyes.

This disturbed me and made me wonder: Why was it able to regress? Was it because I had let go of my meditation word? *Perhaps my mindfulness (sati) had lapsed at that point.* So I made a note of this and promised myself that no matter what, I would have to keep the meditation word in charge of my mind at all times. Regardless of where I would go, and regardless of whether I was in or out of concentration—even when I was sweeping the monastery compound or doing any of my chores—I wouldn't allow my mind to slip away from *buddho*, the word I liked to repeat in my meditation.

At this point, when the mind would settle down into stillness, if it could continue to think of the meditation word *buddho* in that stillness, I wouldn't let go of it. If the mind was going to regress in any way, this was where I would have to know.

As soon as I had taken note of this point and had made my promise, I started repeating the word *buddho*. As I was repeating it, the mind was able to settle down quickly, much more quickly than it had before. It would let go of its meditation word only when it had settled snugly into stillness. At that moment, whether or not I would think *buddho*, the awareness of that stillness was already solidly '*buddho*' in and of itself. It wouldn't be forming any thoughts at all. At that point I'd stop my repetition. As soon as the mind made a move to withdraw—in other words, as soon as it rippled slightly—I'd immediately start pumping the meditation word back in again as a means of keeping the mind in place. At the same time, I'd keep watch to see at what point the mind would regress. I abandoned my concern for

the progress or regress of the mind. No matter how far the mind might progress or regress, I wasn't willing to let go of my meditation word. Even if the mind was going to regress, I'd let it regress, because when I had been determined that it not regress, it had still regressed in spite of my determination.

Now, though, I felt no more concern for whether the mind would progress or regress. I'd simply force it to be conscious of *buddho*. I'd try to be aware of progress and regress only in terms of the heart that had *buddho* in charge. *This was where I would know*. This was where I would clearly see. This was the one spot in which I'd place my confidence. I wouldn't have to concern myself with progress or regress.

As time passed, the mind that had once progressed and regressed *didn't regress*. This was what made me realize: *The fact that the mind had kept regressing so often was because of a lapse in its meditation word*; mindfulness must have slipped away at that moment for sure. So from that point on I kept my meditation word continually in place. No matter where I'd go or where I'd stay, I wouldn't let mindfulness lapse. Even if I were to be on the verge of death, I wouldn't let mindfulness slip away from *buddho*. If the mind was going to regress, this was the only place where I'd try to know it. I wouldn't concern myself with the matter in any other way. As a result, the mind was able to establish a foundation for itself because of the meditation word *buddho*.

After that came my second Rains Retreat with Ven. Ācariya Mun. Before the rains began, my mind felt still and firm in its concentration, with no regressing at all. Even then, I refused to let go of my meditation word. This kept up to the point where I was able to sit in meditation without changing to any other position from early night until dawn.

During my second rains with Ven. Ācariya Mun, I held to sitting in meditation until dawn as more important than any other method in my practice. After that I gradually eased back, as I came to see the body as a tool that could wear out if I had no sense of moderation in using it. Still, I found that accelerating my efforts by means of sitting all night until dawn

gave more energy to the heart than any other method.

The period in which I was sitting up all night until dawn was when I gained clear comprehension of the feelings of pain that arise from sitting in meditation for long periods of time, because the pain that arose at that time was strange and exceptional in many ways. The discernment that investigated so as to contend with the pain kept at its work without flagging, until it was able to understand the affairs of every sort of pain in the body—which was a solid mass of pain. At the same time, discernment was able to penetrate in to know the feelings of the heart. This did a great deal to strengthen my mindfulness, my discernment, and my courage in the effort of the practice. At the same time, it made me courageous and confident with regard to the future, in that the pains that would appear at the approach of death *would be no different from the pains I was experiencing and investigating in the present*. There would be nothing about those pains that would be so different or exceptional as to have me deceived or confused at the time of death. This was a further realization. The pain, as soon as discernment had fully comprehended it, disappeared instantaneously, and the mind settled down into total stillness.

Now at a point like this, if you wanted to, you could say that the mind is empty, but it's empty in concentration. When it withdraws from that concentration, the emptiness disappears. From there, the mind resumes its investigations and continues with them until it gains expertise in its concentration. (Here I'll ask to condense things so as to fit them into the time we have left.) Once concentration is strong, discernment steps up its investigation of the various aspects of the body until it sees them all clearly and is able to remove its attachments concerning the body once and for all. At that point the mind begins to be empty, but it doesn't yet display a complete emptiness. There are still images appearing as pictures within it until it gains proficiency from its relentless training. The images within the heart then begin to fade day by day, until finally they are gone. No mental images appear either inside or outside the heart. This is also called an empty mind.

This kind of emptiness is the inherent emptiness of the mind that has reached its own level. It's not the emptiness of concentration, or of sitting and practicing concentration. When we sit in concentration, that's the emptiness of concentration. But when the mind has let go of the body because of the thorough comprehension that comes when its internal images are all gone, and because of the power of its mindfulness and discernment that are fully alert to these things, this is called the emptiness of the mind on its own level.

When this stage is reached, the mind is truly empty. Even though the body appears, there's simply a sense that the body is there. No image of the body appears in the mind at all. Emptiness of this sort is said to be empty on the level of the mind—and it's constantly empty like this at all times. If this emptiness is *nibbāna*, it's the *nibbāna* of that particular meditator or of that stage of the mind, *but it's not yet the nibbāna of the Buddha*. If someone were to take the emptiness of concentration for *nibbāna* when the mind settles down in concentration, it would simply be the *nibbāna* of that particular meditator's concentration. Why is it that these two sorts of emptiness aren't the emptiness of the Buddha's *nibbāna*? Because the mind empty in concentration is unavoidably satisfied with and attached to its concentration. The mind empty in line with its own level as a mind is unavoidably absorbed in and attached to that sort of emptiness. It has to take that emptiness as its object or preoccupation until it can pass beyond it. Anyone who calls this emptiness *nibbāna* can be said to be attached to the *nibbāna* in this emptiness without realizing it. When this is the case, how can this sort of emptiness be *nibbāna*?

If we don't want this level of *nibbāna*, we have to spread out feelings (*vedanā*), labels (*saññā*), thought-fabrications (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) for a thorough look until we see them clearly and in full detail—because the emptiness we're referring to is the emptiness of feeling, in that a feeling of pleasure fills this emptiness. The mind's labels brand it as empty. Thought-fabrications take this emptiness as their preoccupation. Consciousness helps be aware of it within and isn't simply aware of things

outside—and so this emptiness is the emptiness of the mind's preoccupation.

If we investigate these things and this emptiness clearly as *saṅkhāra-dhammas*, or fabrications, this will open the way by which we are sure some day of passing beyond them. When we investigate in this way, these four *khandhas* and this emptiness—which obscure the truth—will gradually unravel and reveal themselves bit by bit until they are fully apparent. The mind is then sure to find a way to shake itself free. Even the underlying basis for *saṅkhāra-dhammas* that's full of these fabricated things will not be able to withstand mindfulness and discernment, because it is interrelated with these things. Mindfulness and discernment of a radical sort will slash their way in—just like a fire that burns without stopping when it meets with fuel—until they have dug up the root of these fabricated things. Only then will they stop their advance.

On this level, what are the adversaries to the *nibbāna* of the Buddha? The things to which the mind is attached: the sense that, 'My heart is empty,' 'My heart is at ease,' 'My heart is clean and clear.' Even though we may see the heart as empty, it's paired with an un-emptiness. The heart may seem to be at ease, but it depends on stress. The heart may seem clean and clear, but it dwells with defilement—*without our being aware of it*. Thus emptiness, ease, and clarity are the qualities that obscure the heart because they are the signs of becoming and birth. Whoever wants to cut off becoming and birth should thus investigate so as to be wise to these things and to let them go. Don't be possessive of them, or they will turn into a fire to burn you. If your discernment digs down into these three lords of becoming as they appear, you will come to the central hub of becoming and birth, and it will be scattered from the heart the moment discernment reaches the foundation on which it is based.

When these things are ended through the power of discernment, that too is a form of emptiness. No signs of any conventional reality (*sammatti*) will appear in this emptiness at all. This is an emptiness different from the forms of emptiness we have passed through. Whether this emptiness can be called

the emptiness of the Buddha, or whose emptiness it is, I'm afraid I can't say, other than that it's an emptiness that each meditator can know directly only for him or herself alone.

This emptiness has no time or season. It's *akālika*—timeless—throughout time. The emptiness of concentration can change, in terms of progress and regress. The emptiness on the formless or image-less (*arūpa*) level, which serves as our path, can change or be transcended. But this emptiness exclusively within oneself doesn't change—*because there is no self within this emptiness, and no sense that this emptiness is oneself*. There is simply the knowledge and vision of things as they are (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*)—seeing this emptiness in line with its natural principles as they actually are, and seeing all phenomena as they actually are, as they pass by and exist in general. Even virtue, concentration, and discernment—the qualities we use to straighten out the heart—are realized for what they are and let go in line with their actuality. Nothing at all remains lurking in the nature of this final stage of emptiness.

I ask that we all reflect on these three kinds of emptiness and try to develop ourselves to attain them—and especially the last form of emptiness, which is an emptiness in the principles of nature, beyond the range where any other person or any conventional reality can become involved with us ever again. Our doubts, ranging from the beginning levels of the Dhamma to this ultimate emptiness, will find resolution, with our own knowledge and vision acting as judge.

So now at the end of this talk—which started out with my telling you of my own ignorance step by step and then strayed off to this final emptiness, which is a quality somewhat beyond my powers to explain any further—I'll ask to stop, as the proper time seems to have come.

May happiness and contentment be with each and every one of you.

Note

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

# *The Tracks of the Ox*

*An excerpt from a talk given July 6, 1982*

...Whichever theme you focus on, be earnest with it, keeping mindfulness in constant touch with the work you are doing. For example, if you're focusing on the repetition of *buddho*, keep constantly aware of the word *buddho, buddho*, as if there were nothing else left in the world for you to become two with this or three with that. There is only one thing: the word *buddho* blending step by step with your awareness. As the mind becomes more and more still, the *buddho* you are repeating will more and more blend into one with your awareness. Then the word *buddho, buddho* will fall silent, leaving only an awareness that's more conspicuous than before. This means that you've reached the mind. To put it in terms of following the tracks of an ox, you've reached the ox and can let go of its tracks. Here you've reached the inner *buddha*, which is like the ox, so now you can let go of the meditation word.

The same holds true if you focus on keeping the breath in mind. Whether the breath is heavy or refined, simply be aware of it as it normally is. *Don't set up any expectations.* Don't force the breath to be like this or that. Keep your awareness with the breath, because in meditating by taking the breath as your preoccupation, you're not after the breath. The breath is simply something for the mind to hold to so that you can reach the real thing, just as when you follow the tracks of an ox: You're not after the tracks of the ox. You follow its tracks because you want to reach the ox. Here you're keeping track of the breath so as to reach the real thing: awareness. If you were to start out just by holding on to awareness, you wouldn't get any results, just as you wouldn't be sure of finding the ox if you simply went around looking for it. But if you follow its tracks, you're

going to find it for sure. Your meditation word has to keep moving in. This is called following the tracks of the ox step by step until you reach the ox, or what knows: namely the mind.

The same holds true with focusing on the breath. If it's heavy, know that it's heavy. Don't get worried or upset about it, and don't be afraid that you'll die because the breath is heavy or because you feel suffocated. When you do heavy work, you feel suffocated—don't think that you feel suffocated only when focusing on the breath. There are a lot of other things more suffocating than this. If you carry a post or lift something heavy, you feel suffocated to death all over the body, not just in the chest or in the breath. The whole body is ready to burst because of the heaviness and great pain, and yet you can take it. You even know that it's because of the heavy object, and that's the way it has to be.

While you focus on keeping the breath in mind when the breath is coarse, it's as if you were lifting something heavy. It's naturally bound to feel suffocating, so don't worry about it. Even if it's suffocating, the important point is to keep track of the breath coming in and out. Eventually the breath will become more and more refined, because mindfulness is focused on the breath and doesn't go anywhere else. When the breath goes in, be aware of it. When it goes out, be aware of it, but there's no need to follow it in and out. That would simply be creating a greater burden for yourself, and your attention might slip away. So focus right on the entry point where the breath goes in and out. In most cases, the tip of the nose is the place to focus on the breath. Keep watch right there. Keep aware right there. Don't waste your time speculating or planning on how the results will appear, or else your mind will wander away from the principle of the cause that will give rise to those results. Keep close watch on the cause—what you are doing—and the breath will become more and more refined.

When the breath becomes more refined, that shows that the mind is refined. Even if the breath becomes so refined that it disappears—at the same time that you're aware that it's disappearing—don't be afraid. The breath disappears, but your awareness doesn't disappear. You're meditating

not for the sake of the breath, but for the sake of awareness, so stay with that awareness. You don't have to worry or be afraid that you'll faint or die. As long as the mind is still in charge of the body, then even if the breath disappears, you won't die. The mind will dwell with freedom, with no agitation, no worries, no fears at all. This is how you focus on the breath.

# *The Path of Strength*

*September 30, 1962*

We have gone forth from the household life and are abstainers from all things that are our own enemies and enemies of the common good. That's why we're said to have gone forth: It means that we abstain. 'Abstaining' here means refraining from the things that work to our detriment. Once we have gone forth, our duty is to abstain from things that are unwise and to develop wisdom—intelligence—as much as we can until it is enough to carry us past our obstacles: the entire mass of suffering.

At present we all know that we have gone forth. The world calls us 'people who have gone forth,' so be conscious of your status at all times and in your every movement in thought, word, and deed. You are ordained in the Buddha's religion and have his teachings as your guide. His teachings have both a fence and an open way. The fence is the Vinaya, which prescribes penalties for our errors—major, intermediate, and minor. This is the fence that blocks the wrong paths so that we won't stray down them, and that opens the right path—the Dhamma—so that we can follow it to the goal to which we aspire. The Vinaya is a fence on both sides of the path. If we go astray, it means we've gone wrong. If we go just a little astray, we've gone just a little bit wrong. If we go far astray, we've gone far wrong. If we go so far astray that we can't get back on the path, we've gone absolutely wrong. This is like a person who loses his way: If he gets just a little lost, he can quickly get back on the path. If he gets more lost, it wastes a lot of his time. If he gets really lost, he has no chance of reaching his goal. Thus the Vinaya is like a fence to prevent those who have gone forth from going wrong. This fence has various levels—in line with the differing levels of lay people and those who have ordained—for us to observe in line with our moral duties, beginning with the five precepts and going up to the eight,

the ten, and the 227 precepts.

As for the Dhamma, which is the path to follow as taught by the Buddha, it has *conviction* as its basis—in other words, conviction in the path to be followed for good results—and *persistence* in making the effort to follow the path unflaggingly. *Mindfulness* is what guides our efforts as we follow the path. *Concentration* is firmness of the heart in following the path, in addition to being food for the journey—in other words, mental peace and ease along the way before we reach the goal. And *discernment* is circumspection in following the path step by step from beginning to end. These qualities support and encourage us to stay on the right path. When we have these five qualities—conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment—constantly with us, there’s no need to doubt that the results will appear as our reward, clear to the heart, in line with our strength and abilities. If we develop these five qualities so that they are powerful within our hearts, the results that the Buddha proclaimed as lying at the end of the path—release and *nibbāna*—won’t be able to elude us, because all of these qualities aim at these results.

So I ask that you as meditators nourish your conviction in the Dhamma and in your own capabilities. Make your persistence adequate to the task. Concentration will then appear as a result, so try to make it adequate, and take mindfulness and discernment as your guardians. The results will then appear to your full satisfaction. You don’t have to worry about where the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* lie. Try to nourish the causes I have explained here and make them adequate. *Nothing will then be able to prevent the results that will arise from those causes.*

These five qualities—principles in following the path—are called the five *indriya* or five *bala*. ‘*Indriya*’ means dominant factor. ‘*Bala*’ means strength. As for the Vinaya, it’s a fence guarding both sides of the path to keep us from straying from the way to the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*. The Buddha closed off both sides and then opened the way—the five strengths—for us to follow as much as we like.

*Kāya-viveka*: physical seclusion in your dwelling place. The place where we are staying now is fairly conducive in this respect. *Citta-viveka*: mental seclusion. Those of you aiming for inner seclusion in line with the levels of your concentration have already attained a fair amount. Those of you who are just beginning, who don't have any mental seclusion in your hearts, should try to nourish the five strengths to make them solid. Inner seclusion will gradually appear step by step. Those of you who have attained an adequate amount of inner seclusion should try to make it more and more refined, at the same time developing discernment or circumspection with regard to your seclusion. As for those of you at the higher stages of the practice, you should urgently gather up persistence with discernment so as to make it adequate, and it will bear fruit as *upadhi-viveka*—absolute seclusion from the defilements—appearing clearly to your hearts.

Physical seclusion means finding peace in solitary places. You don't get embroiled in external matters; you don't latch on to work to disturb the body to the point where you turn your temporary dwelling place into a factory, viewing physical work as the basis of the religion and as your occupation as a monk—as we see happening everywhere—to the point where you no longer have any interest in the inner effort of the practice that is a monk's true duty. Mental seclusion refers to the peace of mind endowed with the inner effort of the practice to keep it from running wild with the things that make contact. You rein it in so as to keep it still with watchfulness and restraint at all times. The nature of this level of mental peace is that even though external things may not be making any disturbance, there are still some enemy preoccupations lurking within the mind. This is why this level is termed simply mental seclusion, seclusion from the disturbance of external objects.

As for seclusion from the defilements, this refers to peace with regard to such external things as sights, sounds, smells, and tastes, as well as to peace with regard to internal preoccupations that are the particular enemies of the mind. In other words, *you are free both from external enemies and from internal enemies*. This is absolute seclusion from the defilements, without even the

least thing infiltrating the heart. The heart is in this state at all times. Even though various things may come and make contact, or the *khandhas* may do their work in line with their duties, *these things can't permeate into the heart to cause it any difficulties.*

These are the results that come from the basis of physical and mental seclusion. These three qualities—physical seclusion, mental seclusion, and seclusion with regard to the defilements—are qualities that all of you as meditators should be capable of developing fully within yourselves. There should be nothing blocking your way. All I ask is that you don't abandon your efforts. Be courageous and enthusiastic in searching out lonely, isolated places: places where you can shed your foolishness with regard to yourselves once and for all. This is the way through which the Buddha and all his Noble Disciples passed before reaching the land of *nibbāna*—so how could these places turn into the enemies of those of us who are following the Buddha's example? Don't be worried that you'll lose your lives in such places. If that were to be the case, the Buddha would have had to change his preliminary instructions to us after our ordination from *rukkhamūla-senāsanam*—living in the forest—to something else, in keeping with his compassion for all living beings, human and divine. If living in lonely, solitary places, making the effort in line with the Buddha's example, were to give results other than those corresponding to the Dhamma he taught, he would have had to modify his various teachings to be in keeping with the demands of time and place. The 37 wings to Awakening (*bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma*)—which are like the Buddha's very heart that he gave to us so rightly—would have had to be completely altered.

But these truths are constant and unwavering. The Buddha never changed them. We as meditators should thus modify our thoughts, words, and deeds to fit in with this Dhamma. It would be highly inappropriate for us to modify the Dhamma to conform with the influence of our hearts with their defilements. If we were to do such a thing, we would become Devadatta's in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and our Teacher—the Buddha's right teachings—would be lost to us without our even realizing it.

So try to be persistent, in line with the teachings given by the Buddha. Be brave in contending with the enemies of the heart—both those that come from within and those that come from without—together with the results they bring. Always take an interest in seeing where suffering and stress come from and how they arise. Don't abandon this work or get bored with it. Try to know the causes and effects of the things that come into contact or become involved with the heart to see how they give rise to stress, until you can ultimately see the causes clearly—and in that same moment, you will clearly understand the results.

The most important points, no matter when I teach you—and they are teachings that lie close to my heart—are mindfulness and discernment. These qualities are very important. If you lack mindfulness and discernment, the results of your practice will be erratic. The progress of your efforts will be interrupted and uneven. The techniques of your intelligence for curing defilement will be lacking, and the results—peace and ease—will be sporadic. *If mindfulness and discernment are interrupted, you should know that all the efforts of your practice have been interrupted in the same instant.* So I ask that each of you realize this. Every time I've given a talk, I've never omitted the topics of mindfulness and discernment. You could almost say that I give them the limelight more than any other topic, for I've considered the matter to the best of my ability, from the time I first started the practice until today, and I have never seen any qualities superior to mindfulness and discernment in being able to unravel things within or without so as to make them clear to the heart. For this reason, I teach you these two qualities so that you'll know: To put them in terms of wood, they're the heartwood or the tap root of the tree. In terms of the Dhamma, they're the root, the crucial tools for eliminating all defilements and mental effluents (*āsava*), from the blatant to the most extremely refined levels, once and for all.

If you lack mindfulness, you can't even give rise to concentration. If you lack discernment, your concentration might turn into wrong concentration—for the word 'concentration' is a neutral term. There's no assurance as to

what sort of concentration it may be. If it lacks discernment as its guardian, it's sure to turn into concentration that deviates from the principles of the Dhamma without your realizing it. There are many levels of wrong concentration—those that appear blatantly to the world, as well as intermediate and subtle levels—but here I'll discuss only those forms of wrong concentration that can occur to us in the area of the practice without our realizing it.

For example, when we enter concentration, the mind may gather and rest for a long or a short time, but when we withdraw, we're still attached to that concentration and not at all interested in developing discernment. We may feel that the concentration will turn into the paths, fruitions, or *nibbāna*; or else we are addicted to the concentration and want the mind to stay gathered that way for long periods of time or forever. Sometimes, after the mind gathers into its resting place, it then withdraws a bit, going out to know the various things that make contact, becoming attached and engrossed with its visions. Sometimes it may float out of the body to travel to the Brahmā worlds, heaven, hell, or the world of the hungry shades, without a thought for what's right or wrong, as we become engrossed in our visions and abilities, taking them to be our amazing paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*, and those of the religion as well. When this happens, then even if someone skilled and experienced in this area comes to warn us, we won't be willing to listen at all. All of these things are termed wrong concentration that we don't realize to be wrong.

So what is right concentration like, and how should you practice for the sake of rightness? This is where a few differences lie. When you sit in concentration and the mind gathers to rest—no matter what the level of concentration—how long it stays there depends on the particular strength of that level of concentration. Let the mind rest in line with its level of concentration. There's no need to force it to withdraw. Let it rest as long as it wants, and then it will withdraw on its own. Once it withdraws, try to train yourself to explore with your discernment. Whatever level of discernment corresponds to that level of concentration, use it to investigate

and contemplate the physical properties (*dhātu*) and *khandhas*. Whether you investigate these things within or without is not an issue. All that is asked is that you investigate *for the sake of knowing cause and effect, for the sake of curing or extricating yourself*: Just this much is what's right. Use your discernment to investigate conditions of nature (*sabhāva dhamma*) both within and without, or else exclusively within or exclusively without. Contemplate them in terms of any one of the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) until you are experienced and astute, until you can find the openings by which you can extricate yourself step by step. When you have investigated to the point where you feel tired, and the mind wants to rest in its home of concentration, let it rest as much as it wants. Whether it rests for a long or a short time is not an issue. Let it rest until it withdraws on its own. As soon as it withdraws, continue with your investigation of such phenomena as the body, as before.

This is right concentration. Be aware of the fact that concentration is simply a temporary resting place. When you have investigated a great deal in the area of discernment and feel mentally tired, rest in concentration. Once the mind is strong again, it'll withdraw. If it's in shape to investigate, then continue investigating. Keep practicing this way constantly. Your concentration will go smoothly, and your discernment will always be astute. Things will go evenly, both in the area of concentration and in the area of discernment, because concentration is beneficial in one way, and discernment in another. If you let yourself follow only the path of discernment, you'll go wrong because you won't have concentration as a support. If you let yourself follow only the path of concentration, you'll go even more wrong than by simply following the path of discernment.

To summarize: These two qualities are like a right arm and a left arm, a right leg and a left leg. Wherever a person walks or whatever he does, he needs both arms and both legs. Concentration and discernment are necessary in just the same way. If you feel that concentration is better than discernment, or discernment better than concentration, then you should have only one arm or one leg, not two arms and two legs like everyone else.

In other words, *you don't fit in with the rest of the world*. Whoever doesn't fit in with the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha—criticizing discernment and praising concentration, or criticizing concentration and praising discernment—is the same sort of person.

What's right is that when you are developing concentration, you have to do your duties in terms of concentration and really see the value of concentration. When you are contemplating with discernment, you have to do your duties in terms of discernment and really see the value of discernment. Let each side rest at the right time. Don't get them mixed up together. It's the same as when you walk: When your right foot takes a step, your left foot has to stop. When your left foot takes a step, your right foot has to stop. They don't both step at the same time. Thus both concentration and discernment have their benefits. But when mindfulness and discernment develop enough strength from being trained together, concentration and discernment will then step together—it's not the case that they'll always take turns—in the same way that your right arm and left arm work together.

Here we've discussed the relationship between concentration and discernment for those who tend to develop concentration first, who are usually in danger of their concentration's going out of bounds without seeing discernment as the other side of the practice. If it's a necessary quality, you should use it at the appropriate times. As for those who tend to have discernment fostering their concentration, their minds can't settle down into stillness simply through the power of concentration practice alone. They need to use discernment to put brakes on the mind—which is restless and running wild with its various preoccupations—by keeping track of the restlessness of the heart so as to see *why* it is restless and *what* there is that encourages it to be that way. Discernment has to go ferreting out the various things the mind is labeling and interpreting until the mind surrenders to its discernment and is able to enter stillness. This sort of stillness of mind is said to be still through discernment.

Some people, even when their minds have entered stillness, can at the

same time use discernment to investigate and form thoughts without these things being an enemy to that stillness. Perhaps you may think, ‘If the mind is concentrated, how can it form thoughts?’ and then become doubtful about your concentration. This is called not understanding your own tendencies. These doubts are normal for those who aren’t experienced and don’t know—since no one has given them any directions that they can hold to as authoritative—so they may become uncertain about their practice when this sort of thing happens to them. So here I’d like to take the opportunity to explain: The mind that attains stillness through the method of using discernment as its guardian can continue having thought processes occurring on one level of concentration, but when we reach a fully refined level, no matter which way our concentration is fostered, all thought-fabrications will cease. No labeling of things will be left in that refined concentration; no thought-fabrications or cognizance of various things will appear.

To summarize: The intermediate level of concentration for those whose minds gather quickly—namely, those who start out with concentration—won’t have any thought processes, because the moment thoughts forms, their minds will begin to withdraw from concentration. The concentration attained through the guardian power of discernment, though, can still form thoughts without the mind’s withdrawing from concentration—*and both types of concentration must have mindfulness alert as they gather inward*. Today I’ve explained the differences between wrong and right concentration—enough so that you as meditators will understand and take this as a guide. I’ve stressed that mindfulness and discernment are very important factors. Those of you who are training mindfulness shouldn’t wait to train it only when you are meditating. You must train it at all times. Wherever you go, whatever you do, be mindful. Always take your stance in the effort of the practice. Once there is mindfulness, there also has to be alertness (*sampajañña*), because alertness comes from established mindfulness. If mindfulness is lacking, no alertness appears. So try to develop your basic mindfulness until it is capable and strong enough to be the sort of

mindfulness suitable for the effort of the practice within the heart. From that point it will become super-mindfulness because you have continually fostered it and kept it established.

The same holds true with discernment. Try to contemplate the things that make contact with the mind: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and the thoughts that occur exclusively within. You have to explore these things, ferreting out their causes, until you find it habitual to contemplate and think. When this level of discernment gains strength, it will advance to a higher level, and you will be able to use this higher level of discernment to investigate your doubts about the situation exclusively within the heart. You will be able to see things clearly and cut away your various doubts through the power of discernment, the discernment you have trained in this way so that it becomes super-discernment, just like super-mindfulness. *I've never seen it happen anywhere that anyone who hasn't started out by training discernment in this way has suddenly gained full results through superlative discernment.* Even those who are termed *khippābhiññā*—who have attained Awakening quickly—started out from crude discernment, advancing quickly, step by step, and gained Awakening in the Buddha's presence, as we all know from the texts. So when we train our mindfulness and discernment to follow our every movement, without any thought for whether we're meditating or not, but simply keeping this hidden sort of meditation going at all times, then no matter what, our minds will have to enter stillness, and discernment will begin to appear.

In particular—for those of us who are monks, or who are single-mindedly intent on practicing for the sake of mental peace and release from suffering and stress—mindfulness and discernment are even more necessary. Once we have trained mindfulness and discernment to become so habitual that we're constantly circumspect, then when we focus outside, we'll be intelligent. When we focus inside—on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena—we'll become more and more astute. When we investigate body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness, we'll develop techniques for removing defilement without break. Mindfulness is

especially important. If you lack mindfulness as a protective barrier at any time, discernment will simply turn into labels without your realizing it. Thus mindfulness is the quality with a solidity that helps discernment become astute in a smooth and even way. The power of mindfulness acts like the bank of a river, keeping discernment from going out of bounds. *Discernment that goes out of bounds turns into labels.* If it's true discernment, it doesn't go out of bounds, because it has mindfulness in charge.

If you use discernment to focus within the body, things will catch your attention at every step. Inconstancy (*anicca*), stress (*dukkha*), and not-selfness (*anattā*): One or another of these three characteristics is sure to appear, because all of them are always there in the nature of the body. When mindfulness and discernment reach this level, the mind and its objects will come into the present. You should know that *no Dhamma has ever appeared because of past or future affairs.* It appears only because of the present. Even if you contemplate matters of the past or future, you have to bring them into the scope of the present if you hope to gain any benefit from them. For example, if you see someone die, refer it to yourself: 'I'll have to die as well.' As soon as the word 'I' appears, things come running back to you and appear in the present. Matters of past and future, if you want them to be useful, must always be brought into the present. For example, 'Yesterday that person died. Today or tomorrow I may die in the same way.' With the 'I', you immediately come into the present. External matters have to be brought inward; matters ahead and behind have to be brought into the present if they are to serve any benefit. If you always use mindfulness and discernment to contemplate the conditions of nature—such as the body—all around you, then no matter what, things won't lie beyond your grasp. You'll have to understand them clearly.

In investigating phenomena, such as the body, analyze them into their parts and aspects, and use your discernment to contemplate them until they are clear. Don't let thoughts or allusions drag you away from the phenomenon you are investigating, unless you are using thoughts as a standard for your discernment to follow when it doesn't yet have enough

strength for the investigation. Keep mindfulness firmly in place as a protective fence—and you will come to understand clearly things you never understood before, because the conditions of nature *are already there in full measure*. You don't have to go looking anywhere for inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness. They are qualities filling your body and mind at all times. The only problem is that mindfulness and discernment haven't been able to ferret them out to make them your own wealth. But if you are set on investigating observantly day and night—thinking not about how many times you do it in a day or night, but taking the skill and agility of your discernment as your standard—keeping mindfulness as a steady flow in the present and radiating discernment all around you, then whatever makes a move in any direction, mindfulness and discernment will follow right after it. When we have trained mindfulness and discernment to be sufficient to the task like this, how will their foes be able to withstand them? After all, we haven't made it our purpose to encourage such things as restlessness and distraction. We're trying at all times to practice the Dhamma —the means for stopping such things—so as to keep abreast of the movements of the bandits always lying in wait to rob us at any moment.

We must thus force the mind to investigate in the way we've mentioned. Ferret out each part of the body so as to see it clearly, from the outside into the inside, or take just the inside and bring it out for a look. Look forwards and backwards, up and down, separating the body into pieces. You can imagine fire burning it into ashes and dust, or whatever other ways you can imagine it scattered into pieces, depending on what comes easiest to you. All count as ways in which your discernment is making itself ingenious and astute. When it's sufficiently developed, you'll be wise to all of these things, and they'll be clear to your heart without your having to ask anyone else about them at all.

The more you investigate the body until you understand it clearly, the more clearly you will understand the affairs of feelings, mind, and phenomena, or feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and cognizance, because all these things are whetstones for sharpening discernment step by

step. It's the same as when we bail water out of a fishpond: The more water we bail out, the more clearly we'll see the fish. Or as when clearing a forest: The more vegetation we cut away, the more space we'll see. The things I've just mentioned are the factors that conceal the mind so that we can't clearly see the mental currents that flow out from the heart to its various preoccupations. When you use discernment to contemplate in this way, the currents of the heart will become plain. You'll see the rippling of the mind clearly every moment it occurs—and the heart itself will become plain, because mindfulness is strong and discernment quick. As soon as the mind ripples, mindfulness and discernment—which are there in the same place—will be able to keep track of it and resolve it in time. But be aware that in investigating the five *khandhas* or the four frames of reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*), we aren't trying to take hold of these things as our paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*. We're trying to strip them away so as to see exactly what is the nature of the fish—namely, the heart containing all sorts of defilements.

The more you investigate.... You needn't count how many times you do it in a day. Focus instead on how expert and agile you can make your mind at investigating. The more you investigate—and the more skillful you get at investigating—the more the astuteness of your discernment, which is sharp and flashing as it deals with you yourself and with conditions of nature in general, will develop until it has no limit. You'll eventually have the knowledge and ability to realize that *the conditions of nature you have been investigating in stages*—beginning with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations throughout the cosmos, and turning inward to your own body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness—*are not defilements, cravings, or mental effluents in any way*. The heart alone is what has defilements, cravings, and mental effluents with which it binds itself. *Nothing else has the power to reach into the heart so as to bind it*. Aside from the heart that is ignorant about itself—searching for shackles for its neck and setting the fires of delusion to burn itself to no purpose—*there are no traces of enemies to the heart anywhere at all*. We can compare this to a knife, which is a tool made to benefit intelligent people, but which a foolish person grabs

hold of to kill himself and then accuses the knife of being his enemy. What precedent is there for making such a charge? All conditions of nature in general are like useful tools, but a stupid person grabs hold of them to bind himself and then claims that the conditions of nature throughout the world have put their heads together to abuse him. Who can decide such a case?—for the plaintiff has already killed himself. If we decide that the instrument of death loses the case to the dead plaintiff, what sort of vindication is the plaintiff going to gain to give him any satisfaction?

The heart that's deluded about itself and about its own affairs is in the same sort of predicament. Thus when discernment begins to penetrate in to know the conditions of nature—beginning with the body—it will also have to penetrate into the causal point. It will know clearly with its discernment the objects to which the mind tends to send its mental currents, and how strong or weak, many or few those currents are. It will come to see that the things that it used to see as enemies aren't really enemies at all. This is because of the power of discernment that has contemplated things carefully and correctly. At the same time, it will turn around to perceive the awareness inside itself as being its own enemy. This is because of the power of the discernment that sees clearly and comes in, letting go stage by stage, the things it can no longer hold to. This is why clear understanding through discernment—once it has realized that sights, sounds and so forth, on into the body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and cognizance, are not enemies—must let them go stage by stage until they no longer remain in the heart.

And as for this knowing nature: Before, we weren't able to tell whether it was harmful or beneficial, which is why we went about branding things all over the cosmos as being good or bad, beautiful or ugly, lovable or hateful, so amazing as to make us feel like floating or so dreary as to make us miserable and unable to sleep because of the dreariness: in short, making ourselves pleased, displeased, and endlessly miserable without our realizing it. *What is the cause that makes the mind like a wheel*, turning in cycles around itself, generating the fires of passion, aversion, and delusion to burn itself at

all times? When discernment has contemplated things until they are clear, all conditions of nature, within and without, will be seen to have the same characteristics. None of them are enemies to anyone at all. You will see—the moment discernment removes all the things concealing it—that *the only fault lies with this knowing nature*. At this point, when the knower moves or ripples—blip!—you'll know immediately that the inner wheel is getting into the act. This is the troublemaker, heaping up misery. It's the direct cause of suffering and stress. Aside from this knowing nature, there is no cause of suffering and stress anywhere in the world.

When we reach this level, only this awareness—this entire awareness—is the cause of suffering. When this fact becomes this clear to the heart through discernment, *who would be willing to hold to this knower—this wheel—as his or her self?* This is the subtle discernment, the automatic discernment in the principles of nature, that was trained by our forcing it in the beginning stages. The results now appear as an ingenuity and intelligence sufficient to the task. There's nothing wrong with calling it super-discernment. In addition to knowing the revolving mind that is the cause of stress, this discernment turns inward to know why that mind is a cause of stress, and how. Intent on knowing, it probes in after the reasons that reveal themselves.

But for the most part when we reach this level, if our discernment hasn't really considered things with precision and thoroughness, we're sure to get stuck on this revolving awareness, because it's the supreme cause of the cycle—so deceptive and attractive that we as meditators don't realize our attachment to it. In addition to being deluded and attached without our realizing it, we may even spread this subtle form of delusion, through our misunderstanding, to delude many other people as well.

So to let you know: This knowing nature, in terms of its marvelousness, is more marvelous than anything else. In terms of its radiance, it's more radiant than anything else, which is why we should call it a pit of burning embers secretly lying in wait for us. But no matter what, this knowing nature can't withstand the discernment that is its match in subtlety. We are

sure to learn the truth from our discernment that this knowing nature is the foremost cause of suffering and stress. When we know this, this nature won't be able to stand. It will have to disintegrate immediately, just as when people smash a solid object to pieces with an iron bar.

When this nature disintegrates after having been destroyed by discernment, a nature marvelous far above and beyond any conventional reality will appear in full measure. At the same moment, we will see the harm of what is harmful and the benefits of what is beneficial. The awareness of release will appear as *dhammo padīpo*—the brightness of the Dhamma—in full radiance, like the sun that, when unobscured by clouds, lets the world receive the full radiance of its light. The result is that the awareness of release appears plainly to the heart of the meditator the moment unawareness has disbanded.

This is the result. What the causes are, I've already explained to you: conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. This is the path to follow leading right to this point. It doesn't lead anywhere else. Whether you live at home, in a monastery, or in a forest, whether you're a woman or a man, ordained or not: If you have these five qualities always with you, you're heading toward this point. In other words, *we all have the same full rights in the practice and in the results we'll receive.*

So I ask that all of you as meditators—and you know clearly that you are meditators and abstainers as well—I ask that you practice so as to develop your thoughts, words, and deeds, and that you fully abstain from things that are your enemies until you reach the goal—the release of *nibbāna*—as I've already explained. None of these qualities lie beyond your mindfulness, discernment, and relentless effort. These are the teachings the Buddha gave to us as *svākkhāta-dhamma*—the well-taught Dhamma. In other words, he rightly taught us the path to follow. He taught that the wrong path was really wrong, and the right path really right. And the results—release and *nibbāna*—that come from following the right path were also rightly taught. *The only problem is with those of us following the path: Will we really follow it rightly or not?* If we follow it rightly in line with what the Buddha taught, the

results are sure to appear as *sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati*—right release from all defilements and mental effluents.

So for this reason you should make an effort to train your mindfulness and discernment at every moment and not just in any one particular position. Don't think that this is making too much of an effort. The more you understand, the more ingenious you become, the more you can cure defilement, the more you gain release from suffering and stress: These are the results we all want step by step until we really gain release with nothing left. In other words, *we gain release while we're conscious and aware in this lifetime*, while overseeing these five *khandhas*. This is the most certain Dhamma—because the word *svākkhāta-dhamma*, the Dhamma rightly taught by the Buddha, doesn't mean that it's right only after we die. *It's also right while we're practicing it*, and the results that come in line with our efforts appear clearly to the hearts of meditators while they are alive.

As for the methods or techniques you use to train your hearts, I ask to leave them up to each person's intelligence and ingenuity in the course of making the effort in the practice. You have to notice which positions are most helpful in your practice. Don't simply sit and keep on sitting, or walk and keep on walking. You have to remember to notice what results and benefits you get from your efforts as well, because different people may find themselves more or less suited to the four different positions of sitting, standing, walking, and lying down.

Today I've explained the Dhamma to all of you from the beginning to the final point of my ability, so I feel that this should be enough for now. I ask that each of you take the Dhamma that I've explained today and that you have encountered in your practice, and make it food for thought or a companion to your practice. The results you will receive can in no way deviate from today's explanation.

So I'll ask to stop here.

*Evam.*

# *The Savor of the Dhamma*

*December 13, 1981*

The mind constantly coerced or oppressed at all times and the mind absolutely released from that coercion and oppression are two very different things—so different that there is no conventional reality that can be compared to the mind released. This sort of mind doesn't lie in the realm of conventional reality in such a way that anything may rightly be compared to it in keeping with the reality of its nature. Even though some comparisons can be made, they're simply a manner of speaking. They aren't really in line with the truth of that nature as it exists. We have to make comparisons simply because the world has its conventions and analogies.

We see prisoners in jail who are coerced and oppressed, who are deprived of their freedom at all times beginning from the day of their imprisonment to the day of their release. What sort of happiness do they have? Even though they may have their laughter, in line with the things that may make them laugh, it's still the laughter of prisoners. Just hearing the word 'prisoner' is enough to tell us that happiness isn't what produces their laughter. Their penalty is what produces their laughter. It keeps coercing and oppressing them. So where can we find any happiness and pleasure among them?

We can take this and compare it inwardly to the state of affairs between the mind and the defilements that coerce and oppress it. These things control and coerce it with every mental moment. Even when the mind isn't forming any thoughts, it's still controlled and coerced in this way, in line with its nature. When this is the case, where can it find any true happiness? The happiness it does have is happiness like the food fed to prisoners. And what sort of food is that? Even though we may never have been imprisoned, we know what sort of food is fed to prisoners. Is there anything satisfying

about it, the food they feed prisoners?

The foods—the temptations—with which the defilements feed the mind, if we were to speak in the way of the world, are simply to keep it from dying, in the same way that prisoners are fed. The defilements feed the mind so that it can be put to work, in the same way that prisoners are fed so that they can be put to work, so that we can get the fruits of their labor. The food for the mind that the defilements bring to sustain us is thus like the food fed to prisoners. There's no difference at all. If we compare them, that's the way they are.

But if we look from a different angle, we can see that prisoners are still better off than we are, because they know that they eat their food out of necessity. They don't eat it out of satisfaction with it or its taste or anything, because there's nothing at all gratifying about the food they are fed. But we meditators are still content to be attached to the flavor of worldly pleasures, so we're said to be stuck. When we're attached to visual objects, it's because we find flavor in them. When we're attached to sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, it's simply because we find flavor in them. *It's not the case that the only flavor is the flavor we taste with the tongue.* All forms of contact—with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—have their flavor, and we've been attached to them in such a way that we haven't even realized our attachment for eons and eons.

The mind is attached, bound, and feels love for these things without knowing that they are flavors that tie us down, that they are all matters of defilement: the flavors of defilement. So we are attached to the point where we will never know the harm of these flavors at all if we don't use mindfulness and discernment to investigate them wisely. Regardless of how many eons may pass, we will have to be attached to these flavors, engrossed in these flavors, without ever coming to our senses. This is the ingenuity, the cleverness of the defilements. How ingenious and clever are they?

If you want to know, then set your heart on the practice. And don't forget what I'm saying here. Someday it's sure to become clear to your heart as a result of your earnest practice. There's no escaping it. Listen carefully

to the Buddha's words: 'The flavor of the Dhamma surpasses all other flavors.' What sort of flavor is the flavor of the Dhamma that it has to surpass all other flavors? Those other flavors are the flavors of the food of prisoners, imprisoned in the wheel of death and rebirth through the power of defilement. They aren't food or flavors that can keep the heart satisfied. They aren't true flavors. They aren't the flavors of the truth. They're the flavors of the counterfeits that the defilements whip up into being for us to touch or to eat. They aren't the flavors of the true Dhamma.

The flavor of the Dhamma will begin to appear when the mind is centered in concentration. As soon as the mind begins to be still, pleasure will begin to appear as its flavor, depending on the amount of stillness in line with the levels of its tranquility. When we say 'levels of tranquility', don't go thinking that they're separate steps, like those of a ladder. It's simply a way of speaking. Actually, they're all connected, from the pleasure of basic concentration progressively up to the levels of refined concentration. The pleasure that arises will become correspondingly more and more refined. This counts as one of the flavors of the Dhamma—the Dhamma of concentration, the Dhamma of peace—in the levels of the stillness of the mind.

As soon as the mind has stillness for its food, it lets go of its concerns for the various flavors of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations step by step, because the flavor of this stillness begins to excel them. Even this is enough to begin excelling all other flavors. Even more so when the mind begins to investigate things with its discernment, analyzing them in terms of the three characteristics or the meditation theme of unattractiveness—because in the beginning we tend to develop the theme of unattractiveness, contemplating every part of our own body and the bodies of others, inside and out, as seems most appropriate and natural for us to investigate, because they all share the same conditions for us to see clearly step by step: The flavor of the Dhamma will then intensify, becoming an ingenious flavor. And in addition to being an ingenious flavor, it's a flavor that comes from being able to let go.

The nature of the mind is such that once it investigates anything to the point of seeing it clearly, it lets go. When it hasn't let go, when it grasps with attachment, these are the chains and fetters with which defilement keeps it bound. The defilements confer titles, telling us, 'This is good. That's pretty. This is beautiful.' They never tell us that the body is filthy, ugly, inconstant, stressful, and not-self—not belonging to us or to anyone else. These are things the defilements never tell us, never mention, never suggest in line with the principles of the truth. Instead, they bring their own principles in to interfere with the Dhamma, telling us just the opposite—that this or that is beautiful, lasting, valuable—denying the truth every step of the way because they are very powerful. For this reason, we need to keep track of their deceits, counteracting and removing them, by using such qualities as mindfulness and discernment.

Our world is entirely stuck in the deceits of defilement. When discernment has investigated inward, in line with the principles of unattractiveness as we have already mentioned, and in line with the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, probing and analyzing back and forth, time and again, the truths that the defilements have kept concealed will be revealed in line with these principles of truth—because these principles are truth pure and simple. There's nothing counterfeit about them. What's counterfeit—our false views—are an affair of defilement, not an affair of the Dhamma.

We will be able truly to see things as they are—without a doubt—once we can remove the counterfeit things that conceal them. For example, beauty: Where, exactly, is the body beautiful? What is there about it that you can claim to be beautiful? If you speak in terms of the principles of the truth, how can you even look at the human body? It's entirely filled with filthiness, both within and without, which is why we have to keep washing it all the time. Even the clothing and other articles on which the body depends have to be dirty because the main part—the body—is a well of filth within and without. Whatever it comes into contact with—robes, clothing, dwelling, bedding—has to become dirty as well. Wherever human beings live becomes dirty, but we don't see the truth, mainly because we

aren't interested in looking.

As meditators we should investigate so as to see this truth. Don't run away from it. This is the genuine truth. The things that fool us into seeing the body as beautiful are counterfeit and false. So. Look into your body. Which part can you claim to be beautiful, to contend with the truth of the Dhamma? *Look for it.* Is there any part that dares claim to be above the Dhamma and more true than the Dhamma—unless it's simply more false than the Dhamma?

The fact that the Dhamma isn't appearing in our heart is because at the moment falseness is more powerful, more established, and conceals things completely. Even though there's filth throughout the body both within and without, we're still able to regard it as beautiful and lasting. The issues between truth and falsity lie within our body and mind, because the defilements themselves lie within the mind and spread their power out throughout the various parts of the body, and then splash out beyond, throughout the world of rebirth, saying that this is us, that's ours, everything is us, ours, beautiful, lasting, enjoyable—depending on the song with which the defilements, the deceivers, fool the mind into jumping, bouncing, and spinning much more than a soccer ball. And what happiness can we find in jumping along with all the deceits we've mentioned here?

If we haven't yet awakened and come to our senses, when will we, and where? If the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha hasn't awakened us meditators, who in the world will be able to awaken us? As they say, '*svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo*': 'The Dhamma of the Buddha is rightly taught'—rightly taught in a way clear to see, with nothing hidden or esoteric. What's hidden about it? If we look with our eyes, we'll see in line with what I've said here.

So. Look on in, from the skin on in. Skin-scum and sweat-scum: Is there anything good about them? Anything clean and beautiful? If they were clean, how could we call them scum? Then look on inside. What is there inside that can contend with the Dhamma and claim to be pretty and beautiful? The Dhamma tells us that there's nothing pretty or beautiful in there, that it's all filthy. So which part is going to contend with the Dhamma

of the Lord Buddha? *If the Dhamma is false, if the Buddha didn't teach it rightly, then find something to prove it wrong.* All of the things that the Dhamma criticizes: When you penetrate into them with discernment, you'll find that that's just how they are. There's no point with which you can argue.

All of these things have been true ever since before we investigated them, but the defilements have closed our eyes to them. Even though we see them, we don't see them for what they are. Even though filth fills the body, the defilements deny it entirely and turn it into something beautiful—and we believe them, without looking at the Dhamma that's waving its arms at us, ready to help us at all times, as if it were calling to us: 'Hold on. Hold on to the Dhamma. Hurry up, and you'll escape from danger. Hurry and let go of the defilements. They're a fire burning you.'

See what happens when you smash the defilements to bits. Fight with them until you have no more breath to breathe. That's when the Dhamma will fully reveal itself in every facet for you to see clearly. This is the way of digging into the things that conceal so as to uncover the truth: the genuine Dhamma. If we see the truth, we begin to see the genuine Dhamma step by step. Even on the level of stillness, we're already not embroiled with anything, because we have the savor of the Dhamma. The heart can drink of the Dhamma: mental peace and calm. The heart doesn't jump or run, isn't vain or proud, restless or distracted, flying out after various preoccupations, because it has found a satisfying food to sustain it.

When we use discernment to investigate—to prepare our food, so to speak—to make it even more exquisite than the food of tranquility, turning it into the food of discernment, this has a flavor even more exquisite and refined, without limit, which comes from investigating and analyzing the body, the theme of our meditation. The basic principle on which we depend to counteract and remove the defilements lies right here, which is why the Buddha focuses his teachings right here. It wouldn't work to focus anywhere else, because this is the primary place where living beings are attached. Attachments outside come second to this. When we have

investigated so as to see in line with this truth, step by step, without retreating in our investigation or letting it lapse until we have clearly understood, then the point of ‘enough’ in our investigation, together with the point where we let go of our attachments, will appear of its own accord through the power of the discernment that has removed all things concealing, has dismantled all things counterfeit so as to see the truth clearly in the heart. Discernment on this level will then stop of its own accord.

As for the affairs of attachment, we needn’t say anything, because they are simply the results of delusion. Wherever knowledge penetrates, delusion will immediately retreat, so how can attachment remain? It will have to retreat without a doubt. The more we investigate in preparing our food—the flavor of the Dhamma—through the power of mindfulness and discernment, unraveling things to see them clearly for what they are, the more the mind becomes light and airy. Disenchanted and dismayed. ‘How long have I been attached this way? Why have I dared to make things up in such a bull-headed way?’

This is the exclamation with which we reproach ourselves—because things actually haven’t been what we’ve made them up to be. So why have we made them up that way? We then immediately see through the make-believe that has led to this state of affairs, because discernment is what penetrates and makes its choices. How will it not know what’s true and what’s not? If we analyze the body to pieces, we can clearly see that it’s a living cemetery. When it dies, it’s a dead cemetery. How can we stand to look at it? Look all over the world: Is there any place where there are no cemeteries? There are cemeteries wherever living beings dwell.

Investigate on down to the truth. Is our discernment for us to make into food? It’s for us to cure our bankruptcy, so that we can escape from being prisoners held in custody by the defilements. Why shouldn’t we be able to escape? The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha is perfectly suited to us human beings, which is why he taught it to the human world. He saw this as the central point of existence, the most appropriate place. There’s no one more

intelligent than the Buddha, the foremost Teacher who taught the Dhamma to the most appropriate place: our human world.

At the moment, what are we? We're human beings. Of this we're certain. In addition, we're monks—meditating monks at that, so why shouldn't we be able to seize the excellence of the flavor of the Dhamma to taste as our own treasure through our own practice? *If we aren't capable, who in the world is capable?* To whom should we hand over this capability? At the moment, whose hearts are being squeezed by suffering and stress? Aren't these things squeezing our own hearts? So to whom are we going to hand over this capability? To whom are we going to hand over all the duties and responsibilities involved in attaining freedom? Should we hand them over to suffering? We already have suffering in our hearts. The only thing to do is to remove suffering and stress through persistent effort.

We're fighters. We have to be defiant. We can't let ourselves say retreat. So. Whatever the pain, however great it may be, we're ready for it. The pain and suffering that come with the effort won't lead us to bankruptcy. They're better than the pain and suffering that are already putting a squeeze on us at all times and serve no purpose at all. So dig on down, meditators. This is one step in the investigation.

The Buddha teaches us to visit cemeteries because we don't yet see the cemetery within. We first have to visit external cemeteries to open the way for bringing the mind into our own internal cemetery. It's full of corpses. Aside from the fact that the body itself is a cemetery, the corpses of all sorts of animals fill our belly. What sorts of things have been stuffed in there? For how long? Why don't we look at this cemetery? Look so as to see it clearly. Unattractiveness, inconstancy, stress, and not-self are all heaped right here. We don't have to go looking for them anywhere else.

When we look in terms of changeability—inconstancy—we can see it clearly. The body keeps changing all the time, from the day it's born to the day it dies. Even feelings keep changing in their way: pleasure, pain, and indifference, both in body and mind. They keep spinning around in this way. When do they ever stop? If we have any mindfulness and discernment,

why don't we see these things as they do their work in line with their natural principles? *If we use our mindfulness and discernment, we have to see, we have to know.* These things can't be kept hidden. They can't be kept hidden from mindfulness and discernment. We have to see right through them. There's no doubt about this.

Stress. Which part of the body gives us any pleasure or ease? There's nothing but stress and pain filling the body. We've constantly had to tend and care for the body so that it has been able to survive this far, so are we still going to be attracted to this mass of fire?

Not-self. The Buddha has already proclaimed it. 'It's not the self. Don't mess with it.' As if he were slapping our wrists: 'Don't reach for it. Don't touch. It's dangerous.' Whenever you say that it's you or yours, your attachment is like grabbing fire, so extricate yourself, using discernment. See these things as being truly inconstant, stressful, and not-self. The mind then won't dare to reach for them or touch them. Step by step it will let go of its burdens—its attachments, which are a heavy weight.

When the mind extricates itself from its attachments, it becomes lighter and lighter, more and more at ease. The savor of the Dhamma will appear step by step, even more exquisite than on the level of concentration. When the flavor of the Dhamma surpasses the flavor of these various defilements, they have to be discarded and trampled underfoot.

The physical *khandha*—the body—is important. It has a really great impact on the mind. To love it is to suffer. To hate it is to suffer. To be angry with it is to suffer. The affairs connected with the body are more prominent than any others. If the mind has no stillness, there's nowhere it can find any relief. There's nowhere we as monks can retreat to find any pleasure. For this reason, we must try to still our minds and make use of the Dhamma to attack our defilements.

*Don't feel any regret for the time it takes.* Don't feel any regret for the cycles of rebirth, for the prison, for our wardens and torturers: the various kinds of defilement. These have been our greatest torturers from time immemorial. Even though we may not remember for how long, simply hold to the

principle of the present as your primary guide and they'll all be scattered. The past, no matter how long, is simply a matter of this same mass of suffering. If we can't shed it, these things will have to continue this way forever.

Don't be interested in any other matters. Keep watch of the truth—which is within you, proclaiming itself at all times—by using mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence. Don't let up or retreat. Don't see anything as having greater value than the effort of extricating yourself from these things that coerce and oppress you. You'll then be able to make something extraordinary of yourself. Whether or not you give yourself titles, make sure at least that you aren't burdened or attached right here. This is where the Buddha says the highest savor is found. Uproot the things that involve and entangle you each step along the way. Keep cutting your way in, beginning with the physical heap—the body—which is one wall or one thick covering.

Once you've passed the physical heap, ransacked this physical heap and known it clearly with understanding, without any remaining ties, it's as if you have amassed a large pile of capital, clear to your heart. You can be certain of progressing to release at one point or another in this present lifetime, with no need to anticipate it as happening in this year or that. Once the mind has attained this level, you can be sure of yourself. *Persistence comes on its own.* The pain and difficulties that come from making the effort are completely erased of their own accord, because the flavor of the Dhamma appearing clearly to the heart has a power far overriding the pains that come from the persistent effort. The heart becomes motivated through the principles of its nature. Persistence keeps spinning in the person who used to be lazy.

Laziness is a matter of the defilements resisting and fighting the Dhamma. When we start out making the effort, then laziness, weakness, discouragement, pain, and difficulty all come thronging in, oppressing us so that we can't take a step, and we finally fall down with a crash. That shows we've been shot. They don't have to shoot us a second time. One shot and

we're down—down on the pillow, snoring away. We keep getting shot by the defilements, again and again, till we're thoroughly mangled. Our efforts don't amount to anything. If this is the way things are, then we'll be sunk in the round of rebirth, sunk in the prison of the wheel of rebirth forever, with never a day when we'll gain release, never a day when we'll be free.

So slash away at the defilements, using the principles of the Dhamma that the Buddha taught and aren't otherwise. You'll then have to gain release from these things that coerce and oppress you without a doubt. The important points are persistence, mindfulness, discernment, and endurance. So. Keep enduring. What's wrong with endurance for the sake of making your way? Other things you can endure. Physical pain to the brink of death: No one else can endure it for you. You have to endure it for yourself. Haven't you already endured it before? So why can't you endure the pains and deprivations that come with the effort of the practice? After all, you endure them for the sake of the effort to extricate yourself from suffering. So why can't you endure them? Make it strong, your heart as a monk, your heart as a meditator. Once you've seen the dangers pointed out by the Dhamma, you'll see the benefits arising through your efforts.

In the beginning, you have to grapple a great deal with the body as your meditation theme. Once you've opened your way and seen causes and results as your starting capital, then the four mental khandhas—*vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*—have already gotten into the act. There are feelings in the body as well as in the mind, so when you're investigating the body, how can these things not rush in to connect? They're related phenomena. It's not the case that you finish investigating the body before you start investigating *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. Don't plan on things being that way, because it's wrong. In the truth of the practice, that's not the way things are. *Once your work is focused on any one point, it has an impact on everything else*, but these things become prominent only after the body has lost its meaning and value for us through the Dhamma. Before, we saw it as having a great deal of meaning and value, but once the Dhamma—the truth—has demolished the falsity of this sort of defilement and

craving, these things lose their meaning and worth. The Dhamma now clearly has a value above and beyond them. This is when *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* become prominent, because they've already opened the way from the stage of the physical body.

What is there to feelings? For the most part, they converge in on feelings of the mind. As for physical feelings, I've already explained them to you before. If you analyze them when you're sick or have been sitting in meditation for a long time, you'll know them. If you want to know them, focus on them today, using mindfulness and discernment, and you'll understand them. You're sure to understand them clearly if you use discernment. *Don't simply endure them.* To contend with pain, you have to use discernment. Simply fighting it, simply enduring it, *doesn't count as the path.* The path is mindfulness and discernment. The greater the pain, the more these things spin into work. You can't let mindfulness and discernment leave the point of the pain. As for the body, each part will be seen clearly as a reality in line with its nature, within the mind, because in accordance with the principles of nature that's what they already are.

No matter how much pain arises in the body, it's its own separate reality. Only the mind is what labels and interprets it. Once the mind has used discernment to investigate the pain to the point of being abreast of it, it will extricate itself from the pain to be its own separate reality on this level, so that each is a separate reality. When each is a separate reality, what harm can they do to each other? What impact can they have on each other? *None at all.* The body is the body, the pain is a pain, the heart is the heart, i.e., the mind is the mind. Each is a separate reality, with no impact on the others. Even if the pain doesn't subside, it has no impact. It has no impact on the mind at all. This is called seeing the truth. After you've done this many times, you'll be able to uproot your attachments to the body, and the pain in the body will be passed by as well. The only issue remaining will be feelings in the mind.

*Saññā* and *saṅkhāra* are important. Once the body, the physical heap, is passed, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra* —thought-fabrications—become prominent

because there are no more problems involving the body. The mind isn't willing to investigate the body again, just as when we've eaten enough of this sort of food, we put it aside and continue eating whatever else still attracts us. When we're completely full, we put it all aside, no matter what kind of food it is, meat dishes or desserts. Our investigation is similar to this. It tells us on its own. When the mind has had enough of anything, it lets go and no longer investigates that thing. It then continues with other things, in the same way that when we've eaten enough of this sort of food, we go on to other sorts until we're completely full. Then we put it all aside. *Our investigation is so that we will have enough and then let go.*

*Saṅkhāra* refers to the thought-fabrications in the mind—good thoughts, bad thoughts, this issue and that. They keep forming all the time. Each of us falls for his or her own issues. Even if other people don't become involved with us, the mind has to paint pictures and form thoughts, past and future: a big turmoil within the heart. We get infatuated with this preoccupation, saddened by that one. Matters that passed months and years ago, we warm up and serve to torment the mind, to oppress and coerce it, because of our delusion, because of the fact that we aren't up on the tricks and deceits of this sort of defilement. This is why we have to investigate them. Whatever issues the mind forms, if they're good, they vanish; if they're bad, they vanish—so what sense or substance can we gain from them? Wherever they arise, probe on down right there.

*Saññā*, labels and interpretations: They come labeling out of the mind. This is how the mind appears when it reaches a refined level. This is the way the natural principles of the investigation are of their own accord. Even if no one tells us, we come to understand on our own. Wherever anything makes contact, mindfulness and discernment spin around right there until they understand and let go.

Once discernment has cut the bridge to the body, it has also cut the bridges to external sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. The only things left in the mind are feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness. These deal entirely with the mind itself. We investigate at that point with

discernment, without becoming intimate with any of these four conditions. For example, feeling: Pleasure arises and vanishes. Pain arises and vanishes, there in the heart. The Buddha thus calls them inconstant and not-self. Inconstant and not-self. They arise and vanish. Labels are also inconstant, stressful, and not-self. What is there to become attached to? They're just like the body. In other words, they're all a heap of the three characteristics.

When we have investigated them time and again, these four conditions shrink into the mind. This is called giving chase to defilement. Probe into that point with discernment until you know and see it clearly. When the defilements can't find any place to hide, they'll go running into the mind. Mindfulness and discernment then come spinning into *mano*: the mind. *This too the Buddha tells us not to hold onto.* Listen! The mind too is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Listen to that! How can the mind *not* share in the three characteristics when the defilements are in there? How can we hold to the mind as being us or ours when the entire army of defilement is in there? If we hold to the mind as being us or ours, it's the same as holding to defilement as being us or ours, so how can we gain release? Very profound, this point of Dhamma, here on the level of investigation.

The mind too is inconstant, stressful, and not-self because the defilements are in there. So strike on down with your investigation. Whatever gets smashed—even if ultimately the mind itself is demolished along with everything else—at least know it clearly with your discernment.

The defilement that forms the essence of the cycle (*vaṭṭa*)—which in Pāli is termed '*avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*,' 'With unawareness as condition, there occur fabrications': This is the seed of becoming and birth, buried here in this mind. When its bridges are cut, it can't find any way out to go looking for food. The bridges out the eyes have been cut. The bridges out the ears, nose, tongue, and body have all been cut by discernment. The defilements can't find any way out to develop love for sights, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations, because all their bridges have been cut. We're abreast of things as they actually occur, so the defilements go running inside. If they try to become attached to the body, that's something we've already investigated

and known with discernment, something we've already let go. Feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness have all been investigated and seen to have the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, so where do the defilements lie? They have to be hiding in the Big Cave: the mind. So discernment goes slashing in.

So now, is the mind us? Is it ours? Slash on down! Whatever is going to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. We feel no regrets. *We want only the truth.* Even if the mind is going to be smashed and destroyed along with everything else, let's at least know with our practice. Strike on down! Ultimately, everything counterfeit gets smashed, while the nature of pure truth, of supreme truth—the pure mind—doesn't die and isn't destroyed. See? So now whether you call it inconstant, stressful, and not-self or not, at least make the mind pure, and it will gain release from all conventional realities. Inconstancy, stress, and not-self lie within the realm of convention. Once the mind has gained release from these things, there's nothing more that can be said—even though we are completely aware. So what is there now to doubt?

This is release from the prison, from the cycle that imprisons living beings, and us in particular—our mind in particular, now extricated right here. Freed right here. All that is needed is for the defilements to be shed entirely from the heart: There is nothing else to pose the heart any problems. This is thus called the timeless heart, the timeless Dhamma, freed from time. It's a pure nature, always fully '*buddho*' like that. At this point, how can we not clearly see the harm of defilement? When such things as mindfulness and discernment have trampled defilement to bits, how can we not see its harm with our whole heart? How can we not see through the happiness that the defilements bring to feed us when we're ready to die, simply to keep us going? 'That's the sugar-coated happiness concocted by the defilements simply to keep us going. That's the flavor of defilement. But the flavor the Dhamma is like this, something else entirely.' How can we help but know? To summarize, the mind that lies under the power of the cycle, with the defilements coercing and oppressing it, is not at all different

from a convict in prison. When it has gained utter release from its prison of defilement, there's no comparison for it. Even so, we praise it as being supreme—a convention, which doesn't really correspond to that reality. But even though it doesn't correspond, you can be assured that the difference is just like that, between the mind imprisoned and the mind released from all coercion, completely free and independent. They're different in just the way that we've said.

So be earnest and intent. You've come here for the purpose of learning and finding things of substance and value for yourselves. Investigate so as to see clearly in line with the principles of inconstancy, stress, and not-self as I have mentioned, because they underlie the way everything is throughout the three levels of the cosmos. There's nothing splendid enough for us to feel regret at leaving it. *The only thing splendid is release.* It's a nature truly splendid. We don't have to confer titles on it, because it's its own nature. It has had enough of everything of every sort. This is what is meant when we say that the flavor of the Dhamma excels all other flavors. Whatever kinds of flavors we may have experienced, the flavor of the Dhamma excels them all, lets them all go, because no other flavor can match it. Even this flavor, it isn't attached to. This flavor we say is supreme isn't attached to itself. It's simply a principle of truth, and that's all.

So. Be earnest, meditators. Don't get discouraged. Give your life to the Buddha. Even though we may have never said that we've given our life to defilement, that's what we've done for an infinitely long time, to the point where we can't count the times. Even in the single lifetime of an individual, we can't count the times. Take the realm of the present that's visible to us and work back to infinity: It's all come from the *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā* embedded here in the heart for countless lifetimes. Nothing else in the cosmos has caused us to experience becoming and birth, and to carry the mass of all sufferings, other than this *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*.

For this reason, when they say the mind of a person who dies is annihilated, just where is it annihilated? Use the practice to get a hold on the matter. Don't speak simply in line with the tricks and deceits of

defilement that close off our ears and eyes. Defilement says that death is followed by annihilation. See? It's blinded us completely. As for the defilement that causes people to take birth and die, where is it annihilated? If we want to see through its tricks and deceits, why don't we take its arrows to shoot it in return? It causes living beings to lie buried in the cycle, so where is defilement annihilated? And what does it coerce, if it doesn't coerce the mind? If the mind is annihilated, how can defilement coerce it? The mind isn't annihilated, which is why defilement has been able to coerce it into birth, ageing, illness, and death all along without ceasing. So why do we fall for the deceits of defilement when it says that death is followed by annihilation, without having the sense to see the harm of its deceits? This sneaky defilement has fooled living beings into falling for it and grabbing at suffering for a long, infinitely long time.

So investigate down to the truth. Find out what is and isn't annihilated. That's when you can be called skilled at the Dhamma, skilled at exploring and investigating down to the truth. That's how the Buddha proclaimed and taught the Dhamma. He taught the Dhamma using the truth he had already practiced by making the causes absolutely complete and attaining results satisfactory to his heart, and then taking that Dhamma to teach the world. So where did he ever say that death is followed by annihilation, just where? He taught nothing but birth, ageing, illness, and death, birth, ageing, illness, and death, over and over. All of the Buddhas taught like this. They never differed, because they all knew and saw the same sort of truth in line with the principles of that truth. So how can you make the mind be annihilated when it's already utterly true?

Birth and death, birth and death without ceasing: What is the cause? The Buddha has taught us, beginning with *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇam*—‘With unawareness as condition, there are fabrications. With fabrications as condition, there is consciousness.’ These are the causes. They're buried in the mind, which is why they cause us to take birth without ceasing. As soon as we destroy *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhāra*, what happens? *Avijjāya tv'eva asesā-virāga-nirodhā saṅkhāra-nirodho*—‘All that is

needed is for unawareness to be completely disbanded from the heart, then *nirodho hoti*—everything else is disbanded.’ What do you say to that? *Evam-etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti*—‘All that is needed is for unawareness to be utterly disbanded, and everything—the entire mass of suffering and stress—is disbanded.’ And that which knows that unawareness is disbanded, *that’s the pure one*. How can that pure one disband or be annihilated? It’s an utter truth.

So look. Listen. We Buddhists take the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha as our refuge, you know. We don’t take the defilements as our refuge. We’re meditators, so we have to probe and explore so as to see the truth. Whoever may bring the entire cosmos to intimidate or take issue with us, we won’t bat an eye. Once we’ve seen and known the truth with our full hearts, how can anyone intimidate us? Think for a minute: The Buddha was a single, solitary person. Why was he able to be the Teacher of all three levels of existence? If he didn’t teach the truth that he had known and seen with his full heart, what did he teach? He taught with courage. There has never been anyone who has excelled him in being thoroughly trained and bringing the pure truth to teach the world. He didn’t teach anything counterfeit or guessed at. To speak out of guesswork, scratching at fleas: That’s the science of unawareness—the science of unawareness that lulls the world into bankruptcy. The principles of the genuine truth don’t teach us to be bankrupt, which is why we say that those other things are counterfeit. The Dhamma is a truth on which we can stake our life without question.

Defilements are false, the whole lot of them. 100 out of 100 are counterfeit. The Dhamma is true—100 percent all true. The Dhamma and defilement pass each other going in opposite directions, which is why they are adversaries. In the effort of the practice, if we don’t fight with the defilements, what will we fight with? These are our adversaries. If we don’t fight with them, what will we fight with? At the moment, the defilements are the adversaries of the Dhamma. They’re our adversaries. If we don’t fight with the defilements that are our adversaries and the Dhamma’s, what will we fight with? Once we know all about the affairs of the defilements,

what doubts will we have about the Dhamma? In particular, what doubts will the mind have about the matter of death and rebirth or death and annihilation? Find out just where things get annihilated, meditators. Whatever we hear is the voice of those filthy defilements. Aren't we tired of washing our ears? Listen to the voice of the foremost Teacher's Dhamma. Our ears will then be clean, and our hearts pure.

So be earnest. Shilly-shallying around, thinking of sleep, thinking of our stomachs: These are habits long embedded in our hearts. They're all an affair of defilement. So flip over a new leaf, making the heart an affair of the Dhamma, in keeping with the fact that we're disciples of the Tathāgata who have given ourselves to be ordained in his religion and to follow the principles of his Dhamma. That's when we'll attain a great treasure of infinite worth to rule our hearts. When the Dhamma rules the heart, how is it different from defilement ruling the heart? As I've said before, the Dhamma ruling the heart is something supreme and magnificent: We're fully free with our full heart—not grasping, not hungry, not searching, not hoping to depend on anything—for the Dhamma has filled the heart and that's plenty enough.

# *The Middleness of the Middle Way*

*Informal remarks after a talk, August 5, 1981.*

I can tell a resolute person when I see him—like our Ven. Ācariya Mun. It was intimidating just to look at him. How could the defilements not be intimidated by him? Even we were intimidated by him, and the defilements are smarter than we are, so how could they not be intimidated? They *had* to be intimidated. That's the way things have to be. A teacher who possesses the Dhamma, who possesses virtue, has to be resolute so as to eliminate evil. He has to be resolute. He can't *not* be resolute. The stronger the evil, then the more resolute, the stronger his goodness has to be. It can't *not* be resolute and strong. Otherwise it'll get knocked out. Suppose this place were dirty: However dirty it might be, we couldn't clean it just by splashing it with a glass of water, could we? So how would we make it clean? We'd have to use a lot of water. If this place were filled with a pile of excrement, we'd have to splash it with a whole bucket—and not just an ordinary bucket. A great big one. A single splash, and all the excrement would be scattered. The place would become clean because the water was stronger.

Being resolute is thus different from being severe, because it means being earnest toward everything of every sort in keeping with reason. Take this and think it over. If you act weakly in training yourself, you're not on the path. You have to be strong in fighting with defilement. Don't let the strong defilements step all over you. If we don't have any way of fighting defilement—if we're weak and irresolute—we're good for nothing at all.

Those who want what is clean and good from the Dhamma: What is the Dhamma like? What did the Buddha teach? What sort of defilements are eliminated by what sort of Dhamma so that it deserves to be called the middle way? The Buddha taught, 'The middle way realized by the

Tathāgata—producing vision, producing realization—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to *nibbāna*.’ This is in the Discourse on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion. The middle way is what can cause all these forms of knowledge to arise. *Realization*: This is penetrative knowledge that’s very subtle and sharp. Even discernment is less penetrating and sharp than it is. *Self-awakening*. *Nibbāna*: This path leads to *nibbāna*. All of these things without exception come from this middle way. They don’t lie beyond range of this middle way at all.

What does it mean, the word ‘middle’? Middleness as it is in reality and the middleness we hear about, study, memorize, and speculate about: Are they different? *Very different*. I’ll give you an example. Suppose there are two soldiers, both of whom have studied the full course of military science. One of them has never been in the battle lines, while the other has had a lot of experience in the battle lines, to point where he has just barely escaped with his life. Which of the two can speak more accurately and fluently about the reality of fighting in a war? We have to agree without hesitation that the soldier who has been in battle can speak of every facet in line with the events he has seen and encountered to the extent that he could come out alive. If he were stupid, he would have had to die. He had to have been ingenious in order to survive.

So the middle way: How is it ‘middle’? We’ve been taught that following the middle way means not being too lax, not being too extreme. So what way do we follow so that it’s not too lax or too extreme, so that we’re in line with the principle of middleness aimed at by the genuine Dhamma? When we’ve sat a little while in meditation, we get afraid that we’ll ache, that we’ll faint, we’ll die, our body will be crippled, or we’ll go crazy, so we tell ourselves, ‘We’re being too extreme.’ See? Understand? If we think of making a donation, we say, ‘No. That’d be a waste. We’d do better to use it for this or that.’ So what is this? Do you understand whose ‘middleness’ this is? If we’re going to follow the way of the Dhamma, we say it’s too extreme, but if we’re going to follow the way of defilement, then we’re ready for anything, without a thought for middleness at all. So whose middleness is

this? It's just the middleness of the defilements, because the defilements have their middleness just like we do.

When people do good, want to go to heaven, want to attain *nibbāna*, they're afraid that it's craving. But when they want to go to hell in this very life, you know, they don't worry about whether it's craving or not. They don't even think about it. When they go into a bar: Is this craving? They don't stop to think about it. When they drink liquor or fool around with the ways to deprivation (*apāya-mukha*): Is this the middle way or not? Is this craving? Is this defilement or not? They don't bother to think. But when they think of turning to the area of the Dhamma, then it becomes too extreme. Everything becomes too extreme.

What is this? Doesn't the thought ever occur to us that these are the opinions of the defilements dragging us along? The defilements dress things up just fine. Their real middleness is in the middle of the pillow, the middle of the sleeping mat. As soon as we do a little walking meditation and think *buddho, dhammo, saṅgho*, it's as if we were being taken to our death, as if we were tied to a leash like a monkey squirming and jumping so that we'll let go of the *buddho* that will lead us beyond their power. Whether we're going to give alms, observe the precepts, or practice meditation, we're afraid that we're going to faint and die. There's nothing but defilement putting up obstacles and blocking our way. We don't realize what the middleness of defilement is like, because it's been lulling us to sleep all along.

Just now I mentioned the two soldiers who had studied military science, one of whom had gone into battle while the other one hadn't. We can compare this to studying the texts. Those who have gone into battle—who have had experience dealing with defilement and fighting with defilement—are the ones who can describe the middle way correctly and accurately. If you simply study and memorize... Here I'm not belittling study. Study all you can. Memorize all you can. I'm not criticizing memorization. But if you simply memorize the names of the defilements—even if you memorize their ancestry—it doesn't mean a thing if you aren't intent on the practice. If you don't practice, it's just like memorizing the names of different criminals.

What this or that gang of criminals does, how it makes its money, what it likes to do, what their names are: We can memorize these things. Not to mention just their names, we can even memorize their ancestry, but if we don't get into action and deal with them, those criminals whose names we can remember will keep on harming the world. So simply memorizing names doesn't serve any purpose. *We have to get into action and lay down a strategy.* Where do those criminals rob and steal? We then take our strategy and put it into practice, lying in wait for them this place and that, until we can catch them. Society can then live in peace. This is the area of the practice.

The same holds true with defilements and mental effluents. We have to practice. Once we know, we put our knowledge into practice. What is it like to give alms? We've already given them. What is it like to observe the precepts? We've already observed them. What is it like to meditate? We've already done it. This is called practice. It's not that we simply memorize that giving alms has results like that, observing the precepts has results like this, meditation has results like that, heaven is like this, *nibbāna* is like that. If we simply say these things and memorize them, without being interested in the practice, we won't get to go there, we won't get any of the results.

So now to focus down on the practice of fighting with defilement: The defilements have been the enemies of the Dhamma from time immemorial. The Buddha has already taught that the defilements are the enemies of the Dhamma. Where do they lie? Right here—in the human heart. Where does the Dhamma lie? In the human heart. This is why human beings have to fight defilement. In fighting the defilements, there has to be some suffering and pain as a matter of course. Whatever weapons they use, whatever their attack, whatever their tactics, the Dhamma has to go spinning on in. The ways of sidestepping, fighting, jabbing, attacking: the ways of eliminating defilement all have to be in line with the policies of the Dhamma—such as Right Views and Right Attitudes—spinning back and forth. Gradually the defilements collapse through our practice. This is what is meant by the middle way.

So. Go ahead and want. Want to gain release from suffering. Want to gain merit. Want to go to heaven. Want to go to *nibbāna*. Go ahead and want as much as you like, because it's all part of the path. *It's not the case that all wanting is craving (taṇhā)*. If we think that all wanting is craving, then if we don't let there be craving, it's as if we were dead. No wanting, no anything: Is that what it means not to have defilement or craving? Is that kind of person anything special? It's nothing special at all, because it's a dead person. They're all over the place. A person who isn't dead has to want this and that—just be careful that you don't go wanting in the wrong direction, that's all. If you want in the wrong direction, it's craving and defilement. If you want in the right direction, it's the path, so make sure you understand this.

The stronger our desire, the more resolute our persistence will be. Desire and determination are part of the path, the way to gain release from stress. When our desire to go heaven, to attain *nibbāna*, to gain release from stress is strong and makes us brave in the fight, then our persistence, our stamina, our fighting spirit are pulled together into a single strength by our desire to attain *nibbāna* and release from stress. They keep spinning away with no concern for day or night, the month or the year. They simply keep at the fight all the time. How about it? Are they resolute now? When the desire gets that strong, we have to be resolute, meditators. No matter how many defilements there are, make them collapse. We can't retreat. We're simply determined to make the defilements collapse. If they don't collapse, then we're prepared to collapse if we're no match for them. But the word 'lose' doesn't exist in the heart. If they kick us out of the ring, we climb right back in to fight again. If they kick us out again, we climb back in again and keep on fighting. After this happens many times, we can start kicking the defilements out of the ring too, you know. After we're been kicked and hit many times, each time is a lesson.

Wherever we lose to defilement, whatever tactics the defilements use to beat us, we use their tactics to counteract them. Eventually we'll be able to stand them off. As the defilements gradually become weaker, the matters of

the Dhamma—concentration, mindfulness, discernment, persistence—become stronger and stronger. This is where the defilements have to grovel, because they're no match. They're no match for the Dhamma. Before, we were the only ones groveling. Wherever we groveled, we'd get kicked by the defilements. Lying down, we'd cry. We'd moan. Sitting, we'd moan. Standing, we'd feel desire. Walking, we'd feel desire and hunger. Wherever we'd go, there'd be nothing but love, hate, and anger filling the heart. There'd be nothing but defilement stomping all over us.

But once these things get struck down by mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence, they don't exist no matter where we go—because the defilements are groveling. They keep on groveling, and we keep on probing for them without let up. Whenever we find one, we kill it. Whenever we find one, we kill it, until the defilements are completely eradicated, with nothing left in the heart. So now when we talk about defilement, no matter what the kind, we can talk without hesitation. Whatever tricks and tactics we employed to shed the defilements, we can describe without hesitation. The purity of the heart that has no more defilements ruining it as before, we can describe without hesitation.

This is like the person who has gone into battle and can speak without hesitation. It's not the same as when we simply memorize. If we simply memorize, we can speak only in line with the texts. We can't elaborate the least little bit. We don't know how. But a person who has gone into battle knows all the ins and outs—not simply that military science says to do things like this or to follow that route. He can make his way through every nook and cranny, every zig and zag, depending on what he needs to do to get to safety or gain victory. A fighter takes whatever means he can get.

It's the same with us in fighting defilement. Whatever approach we should use to win, the Buddha provides all the weapons of the Dhamma for us to think up with our own mindfulness and discernment. We people never run out of rope, you know. When we really come to the end of our rope, then mindfulness and discernment produce ways for us to help ourselves so that we can bash the defilements to bits, until no more defilements are left.

From that point on, wherever the defilements bring in their armies, in whoever's heart, we know them all—because they've been entirely eliminated from ours.

This is the practice. This is what's called the middle way. When the defilements come swashbuckling in, the middle way goes swashbuckling out. If they bring in a big army, the middle way has to fight them off with a big army. If they're hard-hitting, we're hard-hitting. If they're daredevils, we're daredevils. This is what's meant by the middle way: the appropriate way, appropriate for defeating the armies of the enemy. If their army is large while ours is small and our efforts few, it just won't work. We'll have to lose. However large their army, however many their weapons, our army has to be larger and our weapons more. Only then will we win. This is what's called the army of the Dhamma. However large the army of defilement may be, mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence have to go spinning in and treat them with a heavy hand. Finally, the defilements fall flat on their backs, and we won't have to chant a funeral service for them. We've gained the superlative Dhamma.

When the defilements have fallen flat on their backs, we aren't worried about where we'll live in the cosmos. Why ask? We're not interested in whether we'll be reborn in heaven, in the Brahmā worlds, or in hell after we die. There is nothing that knows more than the heart. Normally, the heart is already a knower, so now that it knows clearly in line with reason, in line with the Dhamma, what is there to wonder about?

This is why there is only one Buddha at a time—because a Buddha arises with difficulty, gains release with difficulty. He's the first to gain Awakening, making his way all by himself past the enemy army of defilement, craving, and mental effluents, to proclaim the Dhamma to the world so that we can study it and put it into practice, which is our great good fortune. We've been born right in the midst of the Buddha's teachings, so be earnest in practicing them so as to profit from them. The teachings of the Lord Buddha aren't a child's doll or plaything, you know.

The Dhamma is *sanditṭhiko*—directly visible. The teachings of the

Buddha are the open market of the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*. They're never out of date—unless we're out of date, which is why we let the defilements fool us into thinking that the Dhamma is out of date; that people who practice the Dhamma are old-fashioned and out of date; that people who enter monasteries are old-fashioned and out of date; that the teachings of the religion have no paths or fruitions any more; that the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* don't exist; that no matter how much you practice, you'll just wear yourself out in vain. These things are nothing but defilement deceiving us—and we believe everything it says, so we keep going bankrupt without even a scrap of good to our names. Why are we willing to believe it so thoroughly?

'*Kilesaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*'—I go to defilement for refuge.' We've never said it. All we say is '*Buddhaṃ dhammaṃ saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*'—I go to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha for refuge,' but when the defilements give us a single blow, we fall flat on our backs. What good does it accomplish? What does '*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*' mean? Nothing but *Kilesaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. Even though we never say it, our beliefs fall in line with defilement without our even thinking about it. This is called *Kilesaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. The grandchildren of defilement we *saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. The grandparents of defilement we *saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. Everything about the defilements we grovel and *saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. We're all a bunch of *kilesaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. Think it over.

So be resolute, meditators. Desire to see the truth. It's there in the heart of every person. The Buddha didn't lay any exclusive claims to it. All that's needed is that you practice. Don't doubt the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*. When are the defilements ever out of date? They're in our hearts at all times. Why don't we ever see them being accused of being out of date? 'Every kind of defilement is old-fashioned. The defilements are out of style, so don't have anything to do with them.' I don't see us ever give a thought to criticizing them. So how is it that the Dhamma that remedies defilement is out of existence? The Dhamma is a pair with defilement, but defilement simply lulls us to sleep so that we won't use the Dhamma to defeat it. It's

afraid of losing its power—because defilement is intimidated by the Dhamma, which is why it deceives us into not heading towards the Dhamma. So remember this.

Very well, then. I'm tired of preaching to meditators who *Kilesam saraṇam gacchāmi*.

## *The Simile of the Horse*

*Excerpted from informal remarks after a talk, July 23, 1981*

...I don't know where my courage came from. Just think—the fear I used to feel for Ven. Ācariya Mun, I didn't feel at all. I was bold. I wanted to speak. I wanted to tell him what I had experienced. The mind was impetuous and spoke right up without any fear. That was when he got to see my true nature. Before that, I had never shown anything at all. No matter what the mind had been like, I had never behaved that way; but once this awareness arose, I went up to see him when there were just the two of us and told him right away. It was as if he were the master of a dog, urging me on to bite the defilements. Ven. Ācariya Mun—who could be more astute than he? As soon as I went up to see him, I started right in speaking without any fear.

Once the mind knows the truth, together with how it has contemplated, it can describe it all, including the results that appear. It can describe them in full detail. While I was speaking, he listened in silence. As for me, I kept right on going. 'This crazy guy doesn't just fool around'—that's probably what he was thinking. 'When his madness is on the rise, he's really in earnest.' That's probably what he said to himself.

As soon as I had finished, he burst right out: 'That's the way it's got to be!' He really got going, and I bowed down and listened. 'We don't die up to five times in a single lifetime,' he said. 'We die only once. So keep on striking away. You've finally caught on to the basic principle. You've finally got it, so keep wrestling with it.' I was like a dog he spurred on—I was so happy. Coming away from him, I was ready to bark and to bite. I kept fighting away. That is, I continued sitting all night in meditation and kept telling him the Dhamma I had gained. Sitting in meditation all night—I did it more than nine or ten times that Rains Retreat, and I wasn't just sitting as

normal, because I was wrestling with my full strength, both because of the marvels I was seeing and because of my frustration over the way my mind had regressed earlier. These two got added together, so that the mind had the full strength of frustration and daring. As time passed though, Ven. Ācariya Mun finally gave me a warning—a single flash: *‘The defilements don’t lie in the body,’* he said. *‘They lie in the heart.’*

He then gave a comparison with a horse. ‘When a horse is unruly and won’t listen to its master, the master has to give it really harsh treatment. If he has to make it starve, he should make it starve—really treat it harshly until it can’t make a move. Once it finally stops being rebellious, though, he can let up on the harsh treatment. When its rebelliousness weakens, the harsh treatment can be relaxed.’ That’s all he said—and I understood immediately. If he had said more than that... He knew what sort of person I was: He was afraid I’d go completely limp. So he gave just a flash of a warning, and I understood....

# *Principles in the Practice, Principles in the Heart*

*January 19, 1977*

The important point for a meditating monk is to have principles in the heart. ‘Principles in the heart’ means the various stages of concentration and levels of discernment, all the way to the level of arahantship. These are called the principles in the heart for meditating monks. If the principles in the heart are good, every aspect of the principles in our practice will be good as well, because the heart is what gives the orders. This is why we see the heart as having primary importance.

*When a person with principles in the heart practices, it's very different from a person without principles in the heart. When a person with principles in the heart makes compromises in line with events at some times, in some places, and with some individuals, and when he is strict with himself at normal times, he does so with reason—which is different from a person who is simply determined, without having principles in the heart. Even though such a person may be resolute and courageous, he's pervaded with error, pride, and conceit. He's not as even as he should be in his ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*), which are means of cleansing away the defilements of pride and conceit fermenting inside him. The body is an affair of the world, like the world in general. It has to be involved with the world, which requires compromises with certain people, in certain places, and on certain occasions. But if, when we have to make compromises, we can't do so for fear that we're sacrificing our strictness or our ascetic practices; or if once we compromise we can't return to our strictness, it's a matter of pride in either case and can't help but have an impact on ourselves and on others both when we should be strict and when we should make compromises in*

line with events.

When a person with principles in the heart sees fitting, in line with reason, he makes compromises when he should with certain individuals, places, and events that may happen from time to time. But when that necessity is past, he returns to his original strictness without any difficulty in forcing himself. This is because reason, the Dhamma, is already in charge of his heart, so he has no difficulties both when making compromises and when following the ascetic practices strictly as he is accustomed to.

All of this is something I practiced when living with Ven. Ācariya Mun. For example, I'd vow to follow a particular practice or several practices without telling him—although he would know perfectly well, because I couldn't keep it secret from him. But because of my great respect for him, I'd have to make compromises, even though it bothered me (bothered my defilements).

As a rule, I wouldn't be willing to make compromises at all. That was a feeling set up like a barrier in the mind, because my intentions were really determined like that. I wouldn't let anything pass without my working right through it with this determination of mine.

The first year I went to stay with him, I heard him talk about the ascetic practices—such as the practice of accepting only the food received on one's alms round—because he himself was very strict in observing them. From that point on, I'd vow to take on special ascetic practices during the Rains Retreat, without ever slacking. I'd vow to eat only the food I got while on my alms round. If anyone else would try to put food in my bowl aside from the food I had received on my round, I wouldn't accept it and wouldn't be interested in it. Ever since then, I've kept to this without fail. I'd be sure that I for one wouldn't let this vow be broken. Once the Rains Retreat came, I'd have to make this vow as a rule in my heart, without missing even a single year.

The years we spent the rains at Baan Naa Mon, Ven. Ācariya Mun was really observant and astute. Of all the sages of our day and age, who could be sharper than he? He knew I had vowed not to accept food that came

afterwards, but on the occasions he would come to put food in my bowl, he'd say, 'Mahā, please let me put a little food in your bowl. This is a gift from one contemplative to another.' That's what he'd say. 'This is a gift from a fellow contemplative. Please accept it.' That meant he was giving me the food himself.

Sometimes there'd be groups of lay people from Nong Khai, Sakon Nakhorn, or other places who would come to Baan Naa Mon to present food to Ven. Ācariya Mun and the other monks in the monastery. This would happen once in a long, long while, because in those days there were no cars or buses. You'd have to travel on foot or by cart. These people would hire ox-carts to come and would spend a night or two—but they wouldn't stay with the monks in the monastery. They'd stay in the shack in Yom Phaeng's rice field. When morning came, they'd prepare food and, instead of waiting outside the monastery to place the food in our bowls as we returned from our alms round, they'd bring it into the monastery to present it to us. I wouldn't dare accept their food, for fear that my observance would be broken. I'd walk right past them. As I noticed, though, Ven. Ācariya Mun would accept their food out of pity for them.

There would be a lot of food left over from presenting it to the monks, so they'd bring it to the meeting hall—fruit, individual servings of food wrapped in banana leaves—but we wouldn't take any of it. It'd get passed around without making a ripple. No one, except sometimes one or two of the monks, would take any of it. It must have looked not just a little strange to the lay people. As for me, I wouldn't dare take any of it, for fear that my observance of this ascetic practice would be broken. Several days later, Ven. Ācariya Mun asked to put food in my bowl, saying, 'This is a gift from a fellow contemplative. Please let me put it in your bowl.' And then he put it in my bowl. He did it himself, you know. Normally—who would I let put anything in my bowl! I'd be afraid that my observance would be broken or at the very least wouldn't be complete. But he probably saw that there was pride lurking in my vow to observe this practice, so he helped bend it a little to give me a number of things to think about, so that I wouldn't be simply a straight-arrow type.

This was why he'd find various ways to teach me both directly and indirectly. I in particular was very straight-arrow. I was very set on things in that way, which is why I wouldn't let anyone destroy my ascetic practice by putting food in my bowl—except for Ven. Ācariya Mun, whom I respected with all my heart. With him, I'd give in and let him put food in my bowl the times he saw fit. I was solidly determined not to let this observance be deficient, not even the least little bit. This was something that kept chafing in the heart. I'd have to be complete both in terms of the observance I was following and in terms of my determination, but because of my love and respect for him, I'd accept his gifts even though I didn't feel comfortable about it. This is the difference between a principle in the practice and a principle in the heart.

I admit that I was right in the earnestness of my practice, *but I wasn't right in terms of the levels of Dhamma that were higher and more subtle than that.* Looking at myself and looking at Ven. Ācariya Mun, I could see that we were very different. Ven. Ācariya Mun, when looking at something, would see it thoroughly, in a way that was just right from every angle in the heart—which wasn't like the rest of us, who would view things in our stupid way from one side only. We didn't use discernment the way he did. That was something we'd have to admit. Here I've been talking about practicing the Dhamma with Ven. Ācariya Mun at Baan Naa Mon.

When we moved to Baan Nong Phue, I vowed again to observe this particular practice. Wherever I'd go, I'd stick to my guns as far as this practice was concerned and wouldn't retreat. I wouldn't let it be broken. Coming back from my alms round, I'd quickly put my bowl in order, taking just a little of whatever I'd eat—because during the rains I'd never eat my fill. I'd never eat my fill at all. I'd tell myself to take only so-and-so much, around 60 to 70 percent. For example, out of 100 percent full, I'd cut back about 30 to 40 percent, which seemed about right, because there were a number of us living together as a group. If I were to go without food altogether, it wouldn't be convenient, because we always had duties involved with the group. I myself was like one of the senior members of the

group, in a behind-the-scenes sort of way, though I never let on. I was involved in looking after the peace and order within the group in the monastery. I didn't have much seniority—just over ten rains in the monkhood—but it seemed that Ven. Ācariya Mun was kind enough to trust me—also behind the scenes—in helping him look after the monks and novices.

When the rains would begin, all of us in the monastery would vow to observe different ascetic practices, and after not too many days this or that person would fall back. This showed how earnest or lackadaisical the members of the group were, and made me even more meticulous and determined in my duties and my ascetic practices. When I'd see my fellow meditators acting like this, I'd feel disillusioned with them in many ways. My mind would become even more fired up, and I'd encourage myself to be unrelenting. I'd ask myself, 'With events all around you like this, are you going to fall back?' And the confident answer I'd get would be, 'What is there to fall back? Who is this if not me? I've always been this sort of person from the very beginning. Whatever I do, I have to take it seriously. Once I decide to do something, I have to be earnest with it. I don't know how to fool around. I won't fall back unless I die, which is something beyond my control. I won't let anyone put food in my bowl under any circumstances.' Listen to that—'under any circumstances.' That was how I felt at the time.

So the changes in my fellow meditators were like a sermon for me to listen to and take to heart. I haven't forgotten it, even to this day. As soon as I returned from my alms round, I'd quickly take whatever I was going to eat, put my bowl in order, and then quickly prepare whatever I had that I'd put in Ven. Ācariya Mun's bowl—this or that serving that I had noticed seemed to go well with his health, as far as I knew and understood. I'd set aside whatever should be set aside and prepare whatever should go into his bowl. Then I'd return to my seat, my eyes watchful and my ears ready to hear whatever he might say before we'd start eating.

As for my own bowl, when I had put it in order, I'd put it out of the way

behind my seat, right against the wall next to a post. I'd put the lid on and cover it with a cloth to make doubly sure that no one would mess with it and put any food in it. At that time I wouldn't allow anyone to put food in my bowl at all. I made that clear in no uncertain terms. But when Ven. Ācariya Mun put food in my bowl, he'd have his way of doing it. After I had prepared the food I would give to him and had returned to my place; after we had given our blessings and during the period of silence when we were contemplating our food—that's when he'd do it: right when we were about to eat. I have no idea where he had arranged the food to put in my bowl—but he wouldn't do it repeatedly. He knew and he sympathized with me. On the occasions when he'd put food in my bowl, he'd say, 'Mahā, please let me put food in your bowl. These lay people came late....'—and his hand was already in my bowl—right when I had placed my bowl in front of me and was contemplating my food. I didn't know what to do, because of my respect for him. So I had to let him do it in his kindness—but I wouldn't let anyone else do it. He'd do it only once in a long while. In one Rains Retreat, he'd do it only three or four times at most. He wouldn't do it repeatedly, because he was every astute. The word *majjhima*—just right: You'd have to hand it to him, without being able to find anything to fault.

So ever since then I've stuck to my practice all along, up to the present. As for the monks and novices who couldn't get it together, they all ended up in failure, which has made me think—made me think without ceasing—about my fellow meditators: 'What is it with their hearts that they don't have any firm principles, that they keep failing like this? What mainstay can they have for the future when the present is already a failure?' Events like this have kept me thinking in this way without ceasing, all the way up to the meditators who are living with me at present.

For this reason, the ascetic observances are very important principles in the practice. Eating from the bowl: There are many people, monks among them, who don't see the value of eating from the bowl. In addition to not seeing the value of this ascetic practice, they may see it as unbecoming or inappropriate, both in the monastery and in society at large, in that all sorts

of food—meat dishes, desserts, etc.—get mixed together in the one bowl. They may even think that it's ugly or messy—which is an opinion of the defilements trying to efface the truth of the Dhamma. There are few who see the value of any of the thirteen ascetic practices, even though all thirteen are tools for us monks to wash away defilement. It's well known that the defilements and the Dhamma have always worked at cross-purposes from time immemorial. Those who give their hearts and lives in homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha will practice in line with what the Buddha taught. Those who give their hearts and lives in homage to the cycle of defilement will practice in line with the opinions of defilement. So to whom are we going to pay homage now? Hurry up and decide. Don't delay. Otherwise the defilements will pull you up to the chopping block—don't say I didn't warn you. The Dhamma has already been taught, so hurry up and start walking. Don't waste your time being afraid that it's out of date, or you won't be able to make a step.

*Paṇsukūla-cīvaram*—the practice of wearing robes made from cast-off cloth: This is to counteract our feeling for price, ostentation, pride, and excess—the type of beauty that promotes defilement and steps all over the Dhamma—so that these things don't encumber the hearts of meditators whose duty is to eliminate the defilements in order to promote the Dhamma and nourish the heart to be gracious and fine. The items of consumption we collect from what is thrown away are good for killing the defilements of greed, ostentation, and excess, love for beauty and haughtiness. Sages have thus praised and followed this practice all along up to the present. We can see their footprints in using this method to kill defilement as a treat for our hearts and eyes so that we won't die in vain in having followed the homeless life.

*The practice of going for alms:* This is so that we'll perform our duties in line with the Buddha's instructions—*piṇḍiyālopa-bhojanam nissāya pabbajjā*, 'The life gone forth is supported by means of almsfood'—instructions we received on the day of our ordination. Don't be lazy. Don't forget yourself because of whatever other gifts of food you may receive. Whoever may

present them, see them as extraneous. They're not more necessary than the food we get by going for alms with the strength of our own legs—which is our duty as monks who do their work properly. This is the really appropriate way to gain food in line with the *piṇḍiyālopa-bhojanam* in the instructions we receive during our ordination. Listen! It's fitting, appropriate, which is why the Buddha taught us to go for alms, something of first-place importance in our pure work as monks.

The Buddha went for alms throughout his career. The few times he didn't were when he was staying in a place where it wasn't appropriate—as when he was living in the Parileyya Forest, and the elephants looked after him because there were no people around. So there were only a few times when the Buddha made exceptions to this practice. *Pubbaṅhe piṇḍapātañca*—in the five duties of the Buddha—'In the morning he would go for alms for the sake of the beings of the world.' Listen to that!

*Sāyaṅhe dhamma-desanam*: At four in the afternoon he would give instructions to his lay following: kings, generals, financiers, landowners, merchants, and ordinary people in general.

*Padoṣe bhikkhu-ovādam*: After dark he would exhort the monks. This is the second of his duties as a Buddha.

*Aḍḍharatte deva-paṅhānam*: After midnight he would answer the questions posed by the various levels of the heavenly beings—from the lowest up to the highest—and give them instructions. This is the third of his duties.

*Bhabbābhabbe vilokanam*: In the last watch of the night he would survey the beings of the world, using his superior intuition to see what beings might be caught in the net of his knowledge whom he should go to teach first—whoever might be prepared to receive the teaching and whose lives might be in danger, so that he shouldn't wait long before going to teach them. This is the fourth duty.

*Pubbaṅhe piṇḍapātañca*: The following morning he would then go out for alms on a regular basis. These are the five duties of the Buddha that he

normally wouldn't abandon. He'd abandon them only on special occasions. For example, going for alms: When he was staying in the Parileyya Forest, he couldn't go for alms, so he put that duty aside. But otherwise he viewed going for alms as a necessary duty, which is why we have to teach monks to view going for alms as a right activity, as extremely appropriate work. For monks, there is no work in searching for their livelihood more appropriate than going for alms. No matter who might have the faith to bring gifts of food, no matter how much, we should view it as extraneous gains, a luxury, and not as more necessary than the food gained by going for alms. This is so that we don't forget ourselves and become entangled in that sort of thing.

The Buddha teaches monks not to forget themselves, not to be lazy, because the defilement of laziness is important, and to forget ourselves is no mean vice—for we tend to become haughty when there are many people respecting us, and especially when they are people of high status. When we have a large following, we tend to throw out our chest and put on airs. Even though we don't have stripes, it's as if we paint them on to be a royal tiger showing off his rank. Since when were they ever a small matter, the defilements of monks? This is why the Buddha taught us to stamp out these ugly defilements in the society of Buddhists and monks by not forgetting ourselves. However many people come to respect us, that's their business. Our business is not to forget our duties. Don't forget that monks' business is monks' business. *To forget yourself is none of your business as a monk.* Even lay people who are mindful don't forget themselves. They're always even in the way they place themselves in relation to others. We're monks—meditating monks at that—which is even more of a delicate matter. It's our business to be mindful of ourselves and to use our discernment to scrutinize events that come to involve us at all times, not to be careless and forgetful in any circumstances. This is how we show our colors as monks who see danger in what is dangerous.

We are members of the Sakyan lineage, the lineage of the Buddha, who was sharper and more intelligent than anyone else in the three levels of the cosmos. For what reason, should we make fools of ourselves over the baits

of the world, which fill the earth and aren't anywhere nearly as difficult to find as the Dhamma? To forget ourselves, to swell up with pride because of extraneous gains or the respect of people at large: Is this our proper honor and pride as sons of the Sakyan? It's simply because we see the superlative Dhamma as something lower than these things that we monks don't think or come to our senses enough to fear their danger in the footsteps of our Teacher.

*Sakkāro purisaṃ hanti*—'Homage kills a man.' Fish die because they are tempted by bait. If we monks don't die because of things like this, what does make us die? Consider this carefully. Did the Buddha give this teaching to stupid fish or to those of us monks who are moving toward the hook at the moment? Be aware of the fact that the outside is bait, but inside the bait is the hook. If you don't want to meet with disaster, be careful not to bite the hook.

*Eating from the bowl:* This is a very important activity, but we don't see its importance. Ordinarily, we who have ordained in the religion have no vessel for our food more appropriate than our bowl. Even monogrammed plates and gold platters aren't more appropriate than the bowl. Only the bowl is appropriate for monks when they eat. Nothing else is better or more fitting. We each have only one bowl and put everything in there together. The Buddha has already set us a solid example.

Or is it that when food gets mixed together like that, it'll spoil our digestion—as most people say, and we've already heard many times. If that's the case, then when it all gets mixed in the stomach, won't it spoil our digestion? How many stomachs do we have in our belly? How many vessels are in there for us to put our separate sorts of food in? This one for desserts, this one for meat dishes, this one for spicy curry, this one for hot curry: Are there any? Are there different vessels for putting our separate sorts of food in, to keep our digestion from spoiling? We simply see that when food is mixed in the bowl, it'll spoil our digestion, but not when it's mixed in the stomach. This view—fearing that our digestion will be spoiled—is for the sake of promoting our tongues and stomachs, not for promoting the mind

and the Dhamma through our various practices.

If there is anything toxic in the food—whether or not it’s mixed in the bowl—then when it’s eaten, it can spoil our digestion, with no relation to whether or not it’s mixed together, because the toxicity lies with the things that are toxic, and not with the mixing together. When it’s eaten, it’s toxic. But if the food isn’t toxic, then when it’s mixed it isn’t toxic, so where will it get any toxicity? The food is beneficial, without any harm or toxicity mixed in. When it’s placed together in the bowl, it’s still food. When it’s eaten and goes to the stomach, it’s a benefit to the body.

So we as monks and meditators should be observant of the differences between Dhamma and not-Dhamma, which are always effacing each other. For example: Eating food from the bowl spoils your digestion. Eating outside of the bowl improves your digestion and fattens the defilements—but the Dhamma grovels and can’t get up because not-Dhamma has kept stomping on it in this way without mercy from every side all along.

Actually, when food is mixed in the bowl, it’s an excellent sermon. Before eating, we contemplate. While eating, we contemplate the incongruity of food and we’re bound to get unusual tactics for training the mind from the food that is mixed together—because we don’t eat for enjoyment, for beautification, for pride, or for recklessness. We eat enough to keep the body going, to practice the holy life so as to take the defilements and the mental effluents—poisons that are buried deep, cluttering the heart—and wash them away by contemplating them aptly, using these ascetic practices as our tools.

*Refusing food that is brought afterwards:* This too is to prevent us from being greedy and forgetting ourselves. Even when there’s a lot of food—more than enough—greed, you know, has no land of enough. That’s good. This is good. The more food there is, the wider our mouth, the longer our tongue, the bigger our stomach. These are always overtaking the Dhamma without let-up. This is sweet. That’s aromatic. This is rich—everything keeps on being good. There’s no brake on our wheels—no mindfulness—at all. Actually, the word ‘good’ here is a title conferred by defilement to erase

our contentment with little, our fewness of wants as meditators, without our realizing it. This is why we tend to be carried away by the lullaby of the defilements' word 'good.'

As for whether the Dhamma is good or not, that's another matter entirely. If the food is sweet, we know. If it's aromatic, we know. If the mind is attached to the flavor, we have to try to know. To be careful. To thwart the defilement that wants to get a lot and eat a lot. The Dhamma has us take just enough, or just a little, in keeping with the Dhamma; to eat just enough for the body, or just a little, without being greedy for food or other items of consumption. We eat just enough to keep going. We aren't stuffed and lethargic, aiming more at our beds than at the persistent effort to abandon defilement.

We monks, when we eat a lot and have a lot of extraneous gains, get fat and strong, but the mind forgets itself and doesn't feel like meditating. This is good for nothing at all. We simply have food fattening the body, without any Dhamma to fatten the mind. The mind that used to have Dhamma to some extent gets thinner and more emaciated day by day. If it's never had any Dhamma—such as the Dhamma of concentration—the situation is even worse. It has no goals at all. The ascetic practices thus have to put a brake on our greed for food so that the mind can have a chance to follow the Dhamma. The defilements won't have to be fattened, the body will be light, the mind will be still and light while making its effort—more easily stilled than when the belly is stuffed tight with food. This is something really embarrassing in meditating monks: the way we take our stomachs, instead of the Dhamma, to show off to the world.

*Living in the forest:* How does it differ from living in villages? It has to differ, which is why the Buddha taught us to live there. And living in an ordinary forest *vs.* living in a lonely forest: How does this feel to the person living there? For a person aiming at the Dhamma, there's a big difference between living in a forest and living in a lonely forest, including the effort required to make the mind quiet. In a lonely forest, the mind becomes still easily because we aren't complacent. We're watchful over ourselves.

Wherever we're mindful and alert, that's the effort of practice. *Defilement is afraid of people who are mindful and alert*, who are always watchful over themselves. It's not afraid of complacent people. The Buddha thus opened the way, using the ascetic practices, for us to take victory over defilement. This is the way that will stamp out defilement. It's not the case that he opened the way through the ascetic practices for defilement to stomp all over the heart.

All the ascetic practices, for those who follow them, are ways of subduing defilement. For example, *living under the shade of a tree*, in appropriate forests and mountains: The Buddha and his Noble Disciples all came into being in purity from these things, so we as meditators should reflect on this. We shouldn't forget ourselves. However many material gains we may receive, we shouldn't forget ourselves because of them, for that's not the way of those who follow in the footsteps of the Buddha and his Noble Disciples.

No matter how many people come to respect us, that's their business. We in practicing the Dhamma should beware of that sort of thing, because it's a concern and a distraction, an inconvenience in the practice. We shouldn't get involved in anything but the contact between the heart and the Dhamma at all times. That's what's appropriate for us. If the mind becomes a world of rebirth, it'll outstrip the worldliness of the world to the point where it has no limits or bounds. The more people come to respect us—and our defilements as monks and human beings are always ready to welcome this—the more pride we feel, the more we forget ourselves. We swell up more than a river overflowing its banks, because this is a matter of defilement, not of the Dhamma. Matters of the Dhamma have to be even. They require us to be mindful at all times and not to forget ourselves. This is the path followed by those who have practiced to lift themselves beyond suffering and stress. Those of us who want to gain release like them have to practice like them—or like students who have teachers. We shouldn't practice haphazardly, claiming to be smart and not listening to anyone. That's the path of practice taking us up on the chopping block with the

onions and garlic, not the path taking us to the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*.

These are things I have felt ever since I was a young monk, and so I've been able to hold to them as good lessons all along. There were times when I saw people coming to show respect to my teachers, and it gave rise to a strange sort of feeling in my heart—the feeling that I'd like to have them respect me in the same way—but at the same time I knew that the mind was base and was giving rise to an obscene desire, so I didn't encourage it. I kept blocking it and was always conscious of my own fault in feeling that way.

When I really began to practice, I knew even more clearly that that was a wrong notion, that to think in that way wasn't right at all. It was like the toad trying to compare himself to the ox. My teacher's status was that of a teacher. My status was that of a toad lurking underground. How could I try to compare myself with him if I didn't want to burst like the toad in Aesop's fable? That fable is a very good lesson for those who practice properly for the sake of release.

*The practice of visiting the cemetery:* Why visit the cemetery? We people have to see evidence with our own eyes if we're going to come to our senses. Visiting cemeteries is for the sake of seeing human death. Cemeteries in the past weren't like they are today. Unburied bodies were scattered all over the place—old bodies and new, scattered around like logs. When you saw them, you'd see clear evidence with your own eyes.

The Buddha gave instructions on how to visit a cemetery. Go from the upwind side, he said, not from the downwind side. Don't begin by looking at new corpse. Look at the old ones first. Keep contemplating the theme of your meditation and gradually move on until you know that the mind has enough mindfulness and discernment to contemplate a new corpse. Only then should you move on to a new corpse—because a new corpse still has regular features. If the person who just died had beautiful features, it might cause desire to flare up, and you'd end up with an out-of-the-ordinary meditation theme, which is why you have to be careful.

The Buddha taught stage by stage, to visit the cemetery at intervals or in

steps, and to contemplate it at intervals in keeping with your capabilities. He wouldn't have you go storming right in, for that wouldn't be fitting. He taught all the steps. Don't be in a hurry to contemplate a corpse that hasn't fallen apart or been bitten, a corpse that is still new and hasn't swollen or grown foul. Don't be in a hurry to approach such a corpse. And be especially careful with a corpse of the opposite sex—that's what he said—until the mind is capable enough in its contemplation. Then you can contemplate anything.

Once we've contemplated death outside until we gain clear evidence, we then turn inward to contemplate the death in our own body until we catch on to the principle within the mind. Then the external cemetery gradually becomes unnecessary, because we've caught on to the principle within ourselves and don't need to rely on anything outside. We contemplate our body to see it as a cemetery just like the external cemetery, both while it's alive and after it dies. We can compare each aspect with the outside, and the mind gradually runs out of problems of its own accord.

*The practice of not lying down:* This is simply a way of training ourselves to make a great effort. It doesn't mean that we take not-lying-down as a constant practice. We may resolve, for example, not to lie down tonight as our ascetic practice. This is a practice to be observed on occasion—or you might resolve not to lie down for two or three nights running, depending on the resolution you make.

*The practice of living in whatever dwelling is assigned to one:* This is another ascetic practice. They're all ways of getting monks to subdue the defilement of forgetting oneself.

A monk who observes the ascetic practices well, who is solid in his observance of them, is one who is solid in his practice, truly intent on the Dhamma, truly intent on subduing defilement. He's not a person ordained to do nothing or who forgets himself. All thirteen ascetic practices are tools for subduing the defilements of those who follow them. There's nothing about them that anyone can criticize—except for Devadatta and his gang.

A monk who doesn't observe any of these practices is an empty monk

who forgets himself, who has nothing but the outside status of a monk. He wraps himself in a yellow robe, calls himself venerable—and becomes haughty as a result. Even more so when he's given ecclesiastical rank: If the heart is taken with that sort of thing, it'll have to get excited over its shadow, without any need for backup music to get it going. The mind gets itself going through the power of the clay on its head, thinking that it has a crest. Since when has this defilement ever been willing to yield to anyone?

People of this sort forget all the affairs of monks and become part of the world—going even further than the world. Rank is given for the sake of encouraging good practice and conduct, but if the mind becomes haughty, rank becomes a way of destroying oneself, killing oneself with various assumptions. The King bestows ranks and names, this and that, and we assume them to be a crest. Actually, they're just a bit of clay stuck on our head, not a natural crest. If you want a natural crest, then follow the practice well. What could be finer than to be 'venerable' in line with the principles of nature? The word 'venerable' means excellent, so why be enthralled with dolls and clay?

To be venerable doesn't mean that just our name is excellent. *We have to be excellent in our practice and conduct*, in line with such principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya as the ascetic practices. If we're solid in the ascetic practices, we'll gradually become excellent people in line with the principles of our practice and ultimately in line with the principles of nature—excellent not just in name, but through the nature of a mind made spotless and pure. A name can be established any old day. You can even build it up to the sky if you want. They establish names just to flatter one another as a matter of custom. This is an affair of the world. They keep conferring titles on one another. Those who confer the titles have good intentions, so we have to repay those good intentions by setting our hearts on the practice in line with the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya, and on observing our duties as monks to the full. This is in keeping with their purpose in conferring titles so as to encourage monks to be good.

At any rate, don't take the conferring of titles.... Don't take the title and

use it to destroy yourself with pride and conceit. The highest perfection in line with natural principles, with no need to confer titles, is to practice well. Observe the precepts well. Don't violate or overstep them. Make the mind still and calm with meditation. Whichever theme you focus on, be earnest and mindful with it. When you investigate, investigate right on down so as to give rise to astuteness. Analyze the properties (*dhātu*), the *khandhas*, and the sense media (*āyatana*) so as to see them as they are in line with their reality, as I've already explained many times.

What are the properties? The four physical properties: earth, water, wind, and fire. These are the primal properties, the things that exist originally and get combined until a mind comes in and lays claim to ownership, so that they're called a living being or an individual, even though the various parts are just physical properties in line with their natural principles. No matter who confers titles on them as being a living being or an individual or whatever, they don't turn into that. They remain physical properties as they originally were. We should come to know this with our own discernment through investigating.

The sense media: There are internal sense media and external ones. The internal ones are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The external ones are sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas that make contact with the internal sense media, giving rise to consciousness and then to all sorts of assumptions, most of which go off in the wrong directions. We should analyze these things so as to see them well. This is called *vipassanā*, which means seeing clearly—knowing clearly and seeing truly, not knowing in counterfeit or illusory ways.

So we should perform our duties correctly and to the full. Our heart is always hoping to depend on us, because it can't get by on its own. It's been oppressed and coerced by greed, anger, and delusion all along, which is why it's always calling for our help. So what can we use to help this heart that is always oppressed and coerced so as to release it from danger, if we don't use our practice of concentration, discernment, conviction, and persistence as a means of advancing and uprooting so as to help it escape from the

danger of the things that coerce it.

At present we've come to strip off the danger in the heart. We must try every way we can to remove it. *The main principle in the practice is to have the solidity—the heart—of a warrior, ready to die in the battle of washing the world out of the heart.* If we don't gain victory, we're prepared to die, offering our life in homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Don't retreat in defeat, or you'll lose face, and the defilements will taunt you for a long time to come. You won't be able to stand your feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment in the face of the cycle of defilement. Whichever world you go to, there will be nothing but defilements trailing you and taunting you: 'What are you looking for, being born and bearing this mass of suffering, you good-for-nothing person, you? Whenever we fight, you lose miserably every time. You've never had the word "victory" at all.' Listen to that, fighters for the sake of completing the holy life! Do the taunts of the defilements sting? I myself would be stung to the quick. Even if I died, I wouldn't forget. So how do we feel? Are we spurred on to fight with them by giving our lives?

Our Buddha was a noble warrior to the last inch. His every movement was bravery in the fight with defilement, without retreat, to the point where the defilements were annihilated and he became the Teacher of the world to whom we pay homage up to the present. The footprints of his practice are still fresh in every word, every phrase of the well-taught Dhamma, which hasn't been corrupted or effaced. So hold to him as a principle in the heart, a principle in the practice, until you have no breath left to breathe. Don't let him go.

The land of victory, when all the defilements fall back in defeat: You don't have to ask about it. You'll know it on your own through the Dhamma immediately apparent to every person who practices to that point. The Buddha didn't lay any exclusive claims on it, but bestowed it as the wealth of every person who practices in dignity in the midst of this world of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. When the *khandhas* no longer carry on, we will attain full *anupādisesa-nibbāna* with nothing more to worry about.

The Dhamma is something secure and complete. On the side of its causes, it's a Dhamma right for remedying and removing defilement of every sort. There's no defilement that lies above this Dhamma at all. The Buddha taught it rightly in every way, in every facet, for remedying defilement of every sort. Nothing excels this Dhamma—in particular, the Dhamma of the middle way, which is summarized as virtue, concentration, and discernment. This is the Dhamma of causes, the methods with which we should train ourselves and which the Buddha taught us in full. As for the Dhamma of results, it comes in stages. The mind is solid and doesn't stray or lean in line with its preoccupations. It has stillness and calm: This is the mind centered in concentration. The mind is courageous and capable, astute and aware all-around in terms of the things that become involved with it both within and without: This is the mind with discernment. And when it's even more astute and refined than that, to the point of being astute all-around and attaining release, then the entire mind is Dhamma. In other words, the mind is the Dhamma, the Dhamma is the mind—oneness—without any adversaries paired with it as before.

My own impression—and whether I'm right or wrong, please decide for yourselves—but I'm certain that the Dhamma of the doctrine (*sāsana-dhamma*), the teaching of the Buddha, refers for the most part to causes. The Buddha explained the causes, the practices to follow so as to remedy and remove defilement or to develop the various forms of goodness. The results are happiness. The teachings are simply directions showing the way.

As for the genuine Dhamma appearing from the practice, whether or not we give it names, it's a Dhamma in the principles of nature. It's Dhamma that we can't easily reach to touch. This is the Dhamma that's said to exist with the world at all times. As for the Dhamma of the doctrine taught by the Buddhas, this can disappear from time to time, as has happened with each of the long line of Buddhas who have gained Awakening. This in itself shows the inconstancy of the Dhamma of the doctrine for us to see clearly—unlike the Dhamma in the principles of nature, which has existed from the very beginning and has no involvement with inconstancy, stress, or not-

self in any way that would give rise to that Dhamma or make it end.

The tactics given by each of the Buddhas to the world are called the Dhamma of the doctrine. *These aren't the genuine Dhamma.* They're tactics—different off-shoots—actions and modes displayed by the genuine Dhamma, means for letting go and striving, teaching us to let go, teaching us to strive using various methods, saying that the results will be like this or that.

As for the genuine Dhamma of results in the principles of nature, that's something to be known exclusively in the heart of the person who practices. This Dhamma can't really be described correctly in line with its truth. We can only talk around it. And particularly with release: This can't be correctly described at all, because it's beyond all conventions and speculations. It can't be described. Even though we may know it with our full heart, we can't describe it. Like describing the flavor and fullness that come from eating: Even though eating is something in the realm of conventional reality that can be described, and though we all have savored the flavor and eaten our fill, still we can't describe these things at all in line with their truth.

*The Dhamma that can't be described: That's the genuine Dhamma.* It doesn't have the word 'vanishes' or 'disappears'—simply that the world can't reach in to know it and touch it. As for annihilating this Dhamma, it can't be annihilated. When we practice in line with the tactics given by each of the Buddhas, we can touch it and become aware of it. The heart becomes an awareness of the Dhamma, a right and fitting vessel for the Dhamma—and there is no vessel more appropriate for receiving each level of the Dhamma than the heart. When it enters into the Dhamma in full measure, the heart becomes one with the Dhamma. The heart is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the heart. Oneness. There is nothing but oneness, not becoming two with anything else.

This Dhamma of oneness: Our ability to reach and to know it depends on our individual practice. It doesn't depend on the time or place or on anyone else. The important point is simply that our practice be right and

appropriate. It will foster the mind in making contact with the Dhamma step by step to the highest step. So we should be intent and make determination the basis for our practice.

Don't forget the phrase, *Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*—I go to the Buddha for refuge—as I have already explained it to you. *Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*—I go to the Dhamma for refuge. This I have also explained. *Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*—I go to the Saṅgha for refuge. Don't forget the ways in which the Noble Disciples practiced. Virtually all of them went through hardships to the brink of death before becoming our *Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. It's not the case that they were spoon-fed, while we practice with hardship and difficulties to the brink of death. That's not the case at all. They went through difficulties just like ours—or far greater than ours—before becoming our *Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. They came from all levels of society, some from royal families and noble families leading a very delicate life. They had the ranks of kings, courtiers, and financiers, all the way down to ordinary farmers and slaves.

Coming from different classes of society—and some of them having lived in comfort in their homes—when they went forth to practice, they had to train and fit their thoughts, words, and deeds into a single mould, the mould of the sons of the Sakyan. So why wouldn't they have had trouble? Why wouldn't they have had difficulties? The way they ate in their homes was one thing; when they went forth to become monks, they had to ask others for alms. Instead of getting to eat this, they got that. Instead of getting hot food, they got cold food. Instead of getting to eat a lot, they got just a little, not in keeping with their wants. So how wasn't this difficult? It had to be difficult. But after they had finished eating, the important thing was training the mind to subdue defilement. Defilement has been the adversary, the foremost opponent of the Dhamma within the heart all along. There is no adversary stronger, smarter, or trickier than the defilements that have held power over the hearts of living beings for so long.

For this reason, we have to produce enough mindfulness, discernment,

conviction, and persistence to subdue defilement. Otherwise we'll be deficient in the fight. To be deficient in the fight is no good at all. It's sure to make us deficient in the results we'll obtain. So the production of mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence to be appropriate for subduing defilement of every sort, step by step, is the path of victory for the meditator who is to gain complete results, who will one day be free and independent for sure.

Virtually all of the Noble Disciples practiced in this way until reaching release. They gained release from suffering through struggle before becoming our *saraṇam gacchāmi*. So don't forget. Our refuges—*Saṅgha saraṇam gacchāmi*—weren't spoon-fed people. They were people who struggled to the brink of death just like us. Think of them and hold to them as examples. Don't take the diddly-shit affairs of the world, which have no value or standards, as the principles in your heart, or you'll become irresolute and good for nothing, unable to find any goodness, any release from stress, any happiness or prosperity, any standards at all to your dying day. When this is the case, fullness and satisfaction in your work and in the results of your work won't exist in your heart. So be intent on practicing.

The Dhamma of the Buddha is always shining new. Don't forget that it's always shining new. *Majjhima paṭipadā*—the middle way—is a shining-new Dhamma, not tarnished, shabby, or worn out like objects we've used for a long time. *Majjhima* means right in the middle—the Dhamma that has been appropriate for curing defilements of every sort all along. Ultimately it becomes *majjhima* in the principles of nature, because it has cured defilement and brought release within the mind. The mind becomes a *majjhima* mind, always even within itself.

So don't take anyone as your model more than the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. By and large, the mind tends to take lowly things as its model, which is why we have to say, 'Don't take anyone as your model other than the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.' The meditation masters who have practiced rightly, appropriately, and well as a good example for us who aim at studying with them: They too derived their model from the Buddha,

Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

If we get weak or discouraged, we should reflect on the cemeteries of birth and death that will burn us forever: Is there anything good about them? The struggle involved in the effort of the practice, even though it involves hardship, is a means of cutting back on our becoming and birth. More than that, it completely eliminates becoming and birth, which are a massive heap of stress, from the heart, so that we can freely pass by and gain release. There are none of the various sorts of defilement—even the most subtle—infiltrating or coercing such a heart. This is what it means to be free in every way, above the world of rebirth—which is a conventional reality—through the power of our persistent endeavor. For this reason, we should take persistence, endeavor, and effort as our basis for victory, or as our basis for the practice. We are then sure one day of attaining release from suffering and stress. No one has the power to coerce us or decide our score. We are the ones who'll decide our score for ourselves.

Very well then. That's all I'll discuss for now.

# *The Four Frames of Reference*

*August 25, 1962*

The way of practice that follows the aims of the Buddha and the true Dhamma is to be truly intent on acting rightly. Every sort of duty that is ours to do should be done intently. When doing a task of any sort, even a small one, if we lack intentness, it won't get finished in a presentable way at all, because intentness—which is a matter of mindfulness and principles in the heart that can bring a task to completion—is lacking in ourselves and in our work. To have mindfulness and principles of the heart in ourselves and in our work is, in and of itself, to be making the effort of the practice, regardless of whether the work is internal or external. If a person lacks intentness as a means of keeping his work in focus, then even if he is a craftsman capable of making things solid and beautiful, *his lack of intentness will reduce the quality and beauty of his work*. For this reason, intentness and concentration are important factors that shouldn't be overlooked by those who aim at full results in their work.

We have gone forth from the household life. We're meditators. We should display intentness in our every duty and be deliberate in our every task. Even when we sweep the monastery compound, clean our quarters and the meeting hall, set out sitting mats and drinking water, in all our movements, comings and going, even when looking right and glancing left, *we should be mindful at every moment*. This is what it means to be making the effort of the practice. In developing the habit of mindfulness, we have to use our work as our training ground. Every external task of every sort is a duty. Walking meditation and sitting meditation are duties. If we're mindful in doing our duties, it means that our effort in the practice hasn't lapsed. To train ourselves in the habits of those who are intent on the higher levels of Dhamma, we must begin—with urgency—by training ourselves to be

mindful in every task of every sort from the very beginning. For the sake of the certainty and stability of your future, develop mindfulness as a habit from this moment onward until you have it constantly present within you, every moment you act and every moment you rest.

When the time comes to make the mind still, mindfulness will come to stick close by the heart and be established as soon as you make the effort, just as you want it to. At the same time, your mindfulness will have enough strength to force the mind into stillness at will. For the most part, when people are unable to make their minds still as they like, it's because mindfulness, which is the primary factor, isn't strong enough, and so the mind easily finds the opening to slip out after other preoccupations—like an inquisitive child who has no one to watch over him and who can thus get into danger any time at all. The mind that's always carried away, without any mindfulness to look after it, is thus always getting disturbed to the point where it can never find any stillness and peace. The guardians of the mind are mindfulness and discernment, which continually watch over it all the time it is thinking about various issues, and which continually try to reason with the mind to free it from the issues that come to involve it. When the mind is constantly hearing the logic of its discernment, it will be unable to disobey its discernment by thinking about and becoming attached to any issues any longer.

To train mindfulness and discernment to become progressively stronger and not to deteriorate, please train them in the method already mentioned. Don't let yourself be careless in any useful activity of any sort, no matter how small. Otherwise the carelessness that's already the lord of the heart will become a chronic disease taking deep root in the heart, ruining every aspect of your practice. Try to train yourself in the habit of being dependable and intent in your proper activities, within and without, at all times. Don't let carelessness or negligence incubate in your character at all, because people who have trained themselves in the habit of being true to their every duty are sure to be able to succeed in every sort of activity, whether inner or outer, without any obstacle to thwart them. Even when they train their hearts, which is the important job within, they are sure to

succeed with circumspection in such a way that they will find nothing with which they can fault themselves—*because outer activities and inner activities both point to the same heart in charge of them*. If the heart is habitually careless, then when it takes charge of any inner task, it's bound to ruin the task, without leaving even a scrap for itself to take as its refuge.

So for a bright future in the tasks that form your livelihood and source of happiness, you should train yourself in the habit of being dependable and true in your duties. Perform each task to the utmost of your ability. Then when you turn inward to perform your inner work for the sake of stillness or for the sake of discernment and discovery, you will be able to perform both sorts of work with precision and circumspection because of the habits you have developed in training yourself to be true and circumspect all along. To follow the practice from the beginning to the highest level depends mainly on your basic habits. The 'beginning' of the practice and the 'end' both refer to the one heart whose condition of awareness will develop when it's modified by the Dhamma, both in terms of causes—the striving of the practice—and in terms of the results, or happiness, just as a child gradually develops from infancy to adulthood when nourished by food and all sorts of other factors. The beginning of the practice thus refers to the training of the mind in the beginning stages so as to change its habits and sensibilities, making them reasonable and right, until it is knowledgeable and can maintain itself without any deviations from the reasonability and rightness appropriate to it. But when we come right down to it, the beginning and end of the practice are like a piece of fruit: We can't say exactly where it begins and where it ends. When we look at it, it's simply a piece of fruit.

The same sort of thing holds true with the mind. We talk about the beginning or the end of the practice in the sense that the mind has its various preoccupations, coarse and refined, mixed in with it. In modifying them, we have to keep coming up with new techniques, changing those preoccupations from their original state to more and more refined levels that should be called, where suitable, the beginning or the end of the path. Those of you listening should make yourselves reach this sort of

understanding of the defilements and evil qualities in the heart that are given such a variety of names that they can go beyond the bounds of what the suppositions of a single mind can keep track of and resolve. Otherwise you won't have any techniques for curing yourselves of the condition just mentioned.

Let me stress once more the principle that guarantees sure results: *Train yourself in the habit of being solid and true in your work and duties at all times.* Don't be unsteady, uncertain, or undependable. If you say you'll go, go. If you say you'll stay, stay. If you say you'll do something, do it. Once you've settled on a time or a task, keep to it. Be the sort of person who writes with his hand and erases with his hand. Don't be the sort who writes with his hand and erases with his foot. In other words, once we've made a vow, no one else can come in and destroy that vow, and yet we ourselves are the ones who destroy it: This is what is meant by writing with the hand and erasing with the foot, which is something very unseemly. We have to be true to our plans and always decisive. Once we've determined that a particular task is worthwhile and right, we should give our life to that task and to our determination. This way we'll become dependable and self-reliant. The virtues we are maintaining will become dependable virtues and won't turn into virtues floating in the wind. Our practice of concentration will become dependable concentration on every level and won't turn into concentration floating in the wind, i.e., concentration only in name but without the actuality of concentration in the heart. And when we develop each level of discernment, it will be dependable discernment, in keeping with the truthfulness of our character, and won't turn into discernment floating in the wind, i.e., discernment only in name but without any ingenuity in freeing ourselves. What I've said so far is so that you will see the drawbacks of being undependable and desultory, without any inner truthfulness, and so that if you hope for genuine progress in terms of the world and the Dhamma, you'll look for a way to give these things a wide berth.

Now I'd like to say more about mindfulness and discernment, the factors

that can make your character more stable and circumspect. You should always be aware that discernment isn't something that you can cook up like food. It comes from considering things carefully. A person without discernment is unable to complete his tasks with any sort of finesse and unable to protect his valuables—in the sense of the world or of the Dhamma—from danger. For this reason, the important factors in maintaining and practicing the teachings of the religion are mindfulness and discernment. Whenever an event, whether good or bad, makes contact with the mind, *mindfulness and discernment should take it up immediately*. This way you can be alert to good and bad events in time and can prevent the heart from straying after things that will harm it.

For the most part, whenever an issue arises, whether it's sudden or not, the heart can be swayed or harmed in line with that issue because it lacks the mindfulness and discernment to observe and inspect things carefully beforehand. It then sees everything as worth pursuing, and so you let the mind follow along with things without your being aware of it. By the time you realize what has happened, time has been wasted, and it's too late to put a stop to the mind, so you let things follow their own course until they all turn to ashes, without any way of being remedied. *Don't think that this comes from anything other than a lack of the mindfulness and discernment that can lead out to freedom*. If not for this, who would be willing to sacrifice his or her own worth—with a value above that of anything else in the world—for the sake of this sort of failure? Yet it's unavoidable and we have to give in—all of us—for when the chips are down, it's normal that mindfulness will lapse, and we won't be able to latch onto anything in time. We'll then let things follow their own course in line with the force of events too strong for the mind to withstand.

Thus it is only right that we should prepare ourselves from this moment onward to be ready for the events that lie in wait around us, within and without, and are ready to strike at any time or place. Even though it's still morning (even though you're still alive), don't let yourself delay. To be prepared is to strive to have a firm basis, both within and without, for your

living and dying. Whether you live here or there, whether death will happen here or there, whether you live in this world or the next, or whether you're coming to this world or going to the next, you should prepare yourself, beginning now, in the immediate present. Otherwise, when life is up, you won't be able to prepare anything in time. I've never seen any Teacher's Dhamma that says to prepare yourself tomorrow or next month or next year or in the next life, which would simply encourage people to be complacent. I've seen the Dhamma say only that you should make yourself a refuge both within and without *right now while you're alive*. Even though days, nights, months, and years, this world and the next, are always present in the cosmos, they're not for worthless people who are born and die in vain without doing anything of any benefit to the world or the Dhamma at all.

In particular, now that we are monks and meditators—which is a peaceful way of life, a way of life that the world trusts and respects, a way of life that more than any other in the world gives us the opportunity to do good for ourselves and others—we should be fully prepared in our affairs as monks and shouldn't let ourselves be lacking. For our behavior as monks to be gracious in a way pleasing and inspiring to others, we must use mindfulness and discernment as our guardians, looking after our every movement. A person with mindfulness and discernment looking after his behavior is gracious within and without, and maintains that graciousness in a way that never loses its appeal at any time. When we use mindfulness and discernment to straighten out things within us—namely, the mind and its mess of preoccupations—the mind immediately becomes clean, clear, and a thing of value.

Remember the Dhamma you have studied and heard, and bring it inward to blend with your practice and to support it. Keep your mindfulness and discernment right with the heart and with your every movement. *Wherever the eye looks or the ear listens, mindfulness and discernment should follow them there*. Whatever the tongue, nose, and body come into contact with—no matter how good or bad, coarse or refined—mindfulness and discernment should keep track of those things and pry intelligently into their causes

every time there's a contact. Even when ideas occur in the mind itself, mindfulness and discernment must keep track and investigate them without break—because those who have gained release from the world of entanglements in the heart have all acted in this way. They have never acted like logs thrown away on the ground where children can climb up to urinate and defecate on them day and night.

If anyone acts like a log, defilements and cravings from the various directions—namely, from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations—will come in through the openings of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body to urinate and defecate on the heart that is making itself into a log because it doesn't have any intelligence or circumspection with regard to its inner and outer preoccupations. It simply lets cravings and defilements urinate and defecate on it day and night. This isn't at all fitting for those who aim at freedom from the cycle—i.e., who aim at *nibbāna*—because the *nibbāna* of the Buddha and his disciples is not a lazy *nibbāna* or a log's *nibbāna*. Those who want the Buddha's *nibbāna* in their hearts must try to conform to the tracks left by the practice of the Buddha and his disciples. In other words, they must make an effort to develop mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence to keep abreast of the events occurring within and without at all times. Don't act like a log, simply going through the motions of walking, sitting, meditating, sitting like a stump in the middle of a field without any sense of circumspection in the heart. This sort of going through the motions isn't any different from the way people in general normally act.

To be a disciple of the Tathāgata, whose fame has spread throughout the three levels of the cosmos, you should try to revive the mindfulness and discernment lying dormant in the heart so that they can support your efforts in extracting all the various defilements and cravings coming from the heart that at the moment is like a log. Greed, anger, delusion, laziness, discontent, jealousy, possessiveness: All of these things are excrement piled on the heart. Once mindfulness and discernment have been trained as we have mentioned, they will become stronger day by day, more and more

accustomed to working, in the same way that we get accustomed to other forms of work. When we bring them to bear on the effort of the practice within the heart, they will be able to understand the affairs of the heart in due time, without taking long.

In order to be principled and methodical in your training, keep your awareness *constantly with the body*. Keep mindfulness focused there and use discernment to investigate within the sphere of the body. To do this is to follow the principles of the frames of reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*) and the Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*), which form the path of all the Noble Ones.

There are four frames of reference: the body, feelings, the mind, and phenomena. ‘The body’ refers to every part of the body. This is termed *kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*. ‘Feelings’ refers to pleasure, pain, and indifference. This is termed *vedanānupassana satipaṭṭhāna*. ‘The mind’ refers to the mental states that are fashioned by the mind and color it. This is termed *cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*. ‘Phenomena’ refers to anything, material or mental, that is the object or focal point of the mind’s investigation. This is termed *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*.

In investigating the four frames of reference, be sure to come to a right understanding from the outset that body, feelings, mind, and phenomena as frames of reference *are a class separate from the mind that possesses them as frames of reference*. Otherwise you’ll get discouraged or upset when they exhibit change as part of their normal nature or as a result of the investigation, which is something that may happen in the course of the practice. In other words, these four factors normally undergo change that can give rise to pleasure or displeasure. When we are investigating them, they continue to undergo change, which can make the meditator pleased or displeased or sometimes even discouraged and fed up with the investigation. I mention this so that you’ll be forewarned when it happens and will make yourself understand with circumspection that the mind in charge of the frames of reference hasn’t changed along with its frame of reference in any way. Once you have come to a right understanding, you can become confident in your investigation of the frames of reference. No

matter which frame of reference—body, feelings, mind, or phenomena—exhibits change or disappears, the heart—a phenomenon that doesn't change or die—will be able to investigate to the full extent of its strength and come to a clear comprehension of these four factors step by step without being affected by the pleasures and pains in the body and mind, which are the conditions exhibited by the frames of reference.

In investigating the body, you can deal either with the internal body or with external bodies, depending on the situation and what comes easiest to the heart. 'The internal body' refers to every part of your own body. 'External bodies' refers to the bodies of other people and animals. 'The body within the body' refers to any one part of the body. All of these things will show themselves to be disgusting and dismaying to the person who uses discernment to investigate them and know them *as they actually are*. Inside and out, both the internal body and external bodies, all share in the same characteristics. They always have to be washed and cleaned—and thus the care of the body is a constant duty for everyone in the world. The things that are used to care for the body, to keep it alive and presentable, are thus the best-selling merchandise all over the world. The investigation of the body so as to see clearly with discernment into its origins, needs, and behavior, is thus a means of cutting off a well-spring of worries and stress in the heart—because even a huge mountain of solid rock reaching to the clouds would never weigh on the heart causing it any stress, but the *khandhas*—such as the physical *khandha*, or body—oppress and weigh on the heart at all times to the point where we can find no chance to put them down. The affairs of stress that are related to the *khandhas* thus converge on the heart responsible for them. For this reason, the mind in charge of the *khandhas* should gain an all-around understanding of the *khandhas*, both in their good and their bad aspects, so as to manage them smoothly and comfortably, and not always be abused by them.

Normally, the *khandhas* take advantage of us all day long. *Every move we make is for their sake*. If the mind can find a way out by becoming wise to its *khandhas* —even while it is still responsible for them—it can then be in a

position to contend with them and won't have to take on all their stresses and pains. At the same time, the stresses and pains in the *khandhas* won't set up shop to sell us all their suffering. Thus those who investigate the *khandhas* so as to see their benefits and drawbacks with discernment aren't destined to take on pain and nothing but pain from the *khandhas*. They are sure to find a way to reduce and relieve the tensions and strains in their hearts.

In investigating the body, you have to investigate it repeatedly, time and again—as required for your understanding, and not as determined by your laziness—until you really see clearly that *the body is nothing but a body*, and is in no way a being, a person, one's self, or another. This is called the contemplation of the body as a frame of reference.

As for feelings, the mind, and phenomena, you should realize that they are all present in this same body, but their characteristics are somewhat different, which is why they are given different names. Make sure that you understand this point well. Otherwise the four frames of reference and the four Noble Truths will turn into a cause of stress—a source of worries and doubts—while you are practicing, because of your confusion about where these phenomena begin and end.

As for feelings, there are three: pleasure, pain, and indifference—neither pleasure nor pain. Feelings coming from the body and those coming from the mind have these same three sorts. To investigate them, you should ferret them out and examine them in line with their characteristics, *but don't take the body to be a feeling*. Let the body be the body. Let the feeling be a feeling—in the same way as seeing a tiger as a tiger, and an elephant as an elephant. Don't take the tiger to be an elephant, or else your evidence won't be in line with the truth, and the issue will spread until it can never be resolved. In other words, ferret out and investigate the feeling displaying itself in the present moment so as to see how it arises, how it takes a stance, and how it disbands. The bases for the arising of all three kinds of feeling are the body and mind, but the feelings themselves aren't the body, nor are they the mind. They keep on being feelings both in their arising and in their

disbanding. Don't understand them as being anything else *or you'll be understanding them wrongly*. The cause of stress will arise in that moment, and you won't be able to find any way to remedy or escape from it. Your investigation, instead of leading to the discernment that will release you from stress and its cause, will turn into a factory producing stress and its cause at that moment without your realizing it.

The way feelings behave is to arise, take a stance, and disband. That's all there is to them every time. And there's no 'being,' 'person,' 'our self,' or another to them at all. As soon as we invest them with the ideas of 'being' or 'person,' they will appear in terms of beings and persons, which are the powers giving rise to the cause of stress in that moment, and we'll immediately be intensifying stress. Meditators should thus use their discernment to be circumspect in dealing with feelings. If you don't take feelings to be yourself while you are investigating them, all three sorts of feelings will appear clearly as they truly are in line with the principles of the frames of reference and the Noble Truths. No matter how these feelings may change for good or bad, it will be a means of fostering the discernment of the person investigating them each moment they exhibit movement and change. The notions of 'being,' 'person,' 'our self,' or 'another' won't have an opening by which to slip into these three sorts of feelings at all. There will be just what appears there: *feelings as nothing but feelings*. No sense of sorrow, discontent, discouragement, infatuation, or pride will be able to arise in any way while these three sorts of feelings are displaying their behavior, because we have come to a proper understanding of them—and all the time that we as meditators have a proper understanding of feelings while they are arising, we are said to have the contemplation of feelings as a frame of reference in the heart.

The mind as a frame of reference is not a level of mind different or apart from the other three frames of reference, which is why it is termed a frame of reference just like the body, feelings, and phenomena. If we were to make a comparison with timber, *the mind on this level is like an entire tree, complete with branches, bark, softwood, roots, and rootlets*, which is different from the

timber put to use to the point where it has become a house. *To contemplate the mind as a frame of reference is thus like taking a tree and cutting it up into timber as you want.* To investigate the mind on this level, we should focus on the thought-fabrications of the mind as the target or topic of our investigation, because these are the important factors that will enable us to know the defilement or radiance of the mind. If we don't know them, then even if the mind suffers defilement and stress all day long, we won't have any way of knowing. If we want to know the mind, we must first understand the thought-fabrications that condition the mind in the same way that seasonings give various flavors to food. The fact that the mind displays such an infinite variety of forms, becoming so changed from its original state as to bewilder itself, not knowing the reason and how to cure it, giving in to events with no sense of good or evil, right or wrong, *is all because of the thought-fabrications that condition it.*

For this reason, the mind as a frame of reference is a mind entangled with its preoccupations and conditioned by its thought-fabrications. The investigation of thought-fabrications is thus related to the mind, because they are things interrelated by their very nature. If we understand thought-fabrications, we will begin to understand the mind, and if we understand the mind, we will understand more about thought-fabrications—starting with thought-fabrications from the blatant to the intermediate and subtle levels, and the mind from the blatant to the intermediate and subtle levels. These levels of thought-fabrications and the mind come from the fact that the mind can become involved with blatant, intermediate, or subtle preoccupations. People contemplating the mind as a frame of reference should thus make themselves understand from the very outset that *the mind and its conditions, or thought-fabrications, are two different sorts of things.* They aren't one and the same. Otherwise the mind and its thought-fabrications will become entangled and this will complicate the investigation as I have already explained.

The point to focus on is the arising and involvement of thought-fabrications—what preoccupations they touch on—as well as their

disbanding together with the disbanding of their preoccupations. Try to observe and keep track of the movements of these thought-fabrications that come out from the mind to focus on preoccupations of the past or future, both blatant and subtle. Always be aware that thought-fabrications and preoccupations of every sort that are interrelated *must arise and disband together*. They can't be made to behave otherwise. Thus the notions of 'being,' 'person,' 'self,' or 'other' shouldn't be brought in to refer to the mind, because they will immediately turn into a cause of stress. Try to observe until you see this in the course of the investigation, and you will see, as the Buddha taught, that the mind is simply a mind and nothing else—not a being, a person, self, other, or whatever. When we contemplate the mind in this way, the heart will not be upset or infatuated with the fashionings and conditions, the pleasures and pains of the mind. This is what it means to have the mind as a frame of reference.

'Phenomena' (*dhamma*) as a frame of reference covers anything that serves as a focal point of the heart. On the refined level, it refers to the heart itself. External phenomena are of many kinds. Internal phenomena include every part of the body, all three kinds of feelings, and the mind on the level of a frame of reference. All of this is included in the contemplation of phenomena as a frame of reference. *The contemplation of the body, feelings, and mind together—all four frames of reference at once—is, from the standpoint of forest Dhamma, [1] the contemplation of phenomena as a frame of reference.* If this is in any way wrong, due to my lack of skill in understanding and explaining the matter, I ask forgiveness of all my listeners and readers, because I always feel at a loss every time I mention the topic of forest Dhamma in any of my talks or writings. For this reason, I ask that my readers, when reading about forest Dhamma, try to cultivate a fairly open mind toward every passage so that they won't get upset while they are reading.

When, in the course of the investigation, the four frames of reference are brought together in the contemplation of phenomena so that they become a single level of Dhamma, this is a point in the practice more amazing and

unexpected than anything that has gone before. This is because in the beginning steps of the investigation the body is like a piece of wood in the raw state. Feelings are in a raw state. The mind is in a raw state. Even phenomena are in a raw state, *because the investigation itself is like a piece of wood in the raw state*, so that the things investigated are all in the same state. But when we plane and polish things with the effort of the practice, everything in the area of the practice gradually changes its condition.

What I have mentioned here concerning the contemplation of phenomena as a frame of reference is a fairly refined level of Dhamma, so we can't help but be grateful for the groundwork laid during the raw state of the investigation on the beginning levels. When we investigate phenomena in the final stages, it feels very different from the beginning stages, even though they are the same four frames of reference. When we reach the final stages, it appears to the mind that all four frames of reference—body, feelings, mind, and phenomena—connect so that they all come under contemplation of phenomena as a frame of reference. They converge completely so that there is no sense that this is the body, that's a feeling, this is the mind, that's a phenomenon. They all seem to come together on a single level of Dhamma.

In dealing with the body, feelings, and mind, I've given a fairly adequate explanation of the methods of investigation for remedying and freeing the mind, but now that we come to the topic of phenomena, the discussion seems to have dealt entirely with my own experiences. Nevertheless, I hope that you will approach it with the attitude I've just mentioned and put it into practice in a way suited to your own temperament. The results are sure to come out directly in line with what I've explained to you.

To summarize the four frames of reference: There is the body, which covers the internal body, external bodies, and the body within the body. There are feelings—internal feelings, external feelings, and feelings within feelings. (The issue of feelings is fairly complex, so I'd like to insert a few opinions here: Internal feelings are feelings or moods in the mind. External feelings are feelings in the body.) There is the mind—the inner mind, the

outer mind, and the mind within the mind. ‘The inner mind’ refers to mental states that deal with preoccupations exclusively within the mind. ‘The outer mind’ refers to mental states involved with external preoccupations. ‘The mind within the mind’ refers to any single mental current out of the many mental currents that come out of the heart. And then there are phenomena—inner phenomena, outer phenomena, and phenomena within phenomena. ‘Inner phenomena’ are the refined states or preoccupations that are objects or focal points of the mind, and also the mind itself, which is the converging point of all mental objects. ‘Outer phenomena’ refers to every kind of external condition capable of being an object of the mind. ‘Phenomena within phenomena’ refers to any single condition out of the many conditions that are the focal points of the mind.

Thus the terms ‘body within the body’, ‘feelings within feelings’, ‘the mind within the mind’, and ‘phenomena within phenomena’ refer to any single part or instance of these things. For example, any one hair out of the many hairs on the head, any one tooth out of the many teeth we have: These are termed the body within the body. A person investigating any one part of the body in general is said to be contemplating the body within the body. The same holds true for feelings, mind, and phenomena, but I won’t go into detail on this point for fear that we won’t have enough time. Let’s save it for a later date.

*The four frames of reference, from the point of view of forest Dhamma, are present in full measure in our own bodies and minds.* This doesn’t mean, though, that their external aspects are irrelevant. This is a point you will see clearly when you work at the frames of reference until you can connect them entirely on the level of contemplation of phenomena. The mind won’t feel compelled to search for anything external to help in its practice. Simply investigating exclusively in the area of the body and mind, using the four frames of reference complete in the body and mind, will be enough to cure it of its problems.

On the beginning level, though, everything internal and external is relevant. But as you reach the stage of letting go step by step, those various

conditions will lose their relevance. Even the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, which are the necessary terms of the frames of reference, *have to be let go*. They shouldn't be held to or borne as a burden on the heart. They must all be let go when your investigation fully reaches the point of *dhamma anattā*: Phenomena are not-self. Then later you can turn around to contemplate and connect them again as a pastime for the mind in the present, once the mind has gone beyond and yet is still in charge of the *khandhas*.

Meditators, if they are firm and unflinching in the practice of the frames of reference, are sure to see a variety of extraordinary and amazing things arising at intervals in their minds. When the time comes to reap the results on the level of Dhamma corresponding to the causes that have been properly developed, the results will have to appear stage by stage as the attainment of stream entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship. There is no need to doubt this.

So know that whether we contemplate the four frames of reference or the four Noble Truths, they are one and the same path for the sake of release from suffering and stress. Even though there may be some differences, they differ only in name. In terms of their basic principles, they are one and the same. Those who work at the four frames of reference and those who work at the four Noble Truths are performing the same branch of work, because stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the path to its disbanding are the same level of truth as the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena—in the same way as when different people do different jobs in a single factory, the profits from their labor all go to the same factory.

To summarize the final results that come from working at the frames of reference and the Noble Truths step by step: In the beginning the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena are in a raw state. Stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the path to its disbanding are in a raw state, because the practice is in a raw state of planing and polishing back and forth without any feel for the heaviness or lightness, depth or shallowness, breadth or narrowness of the Dhamma, and without any sense of right or wrong, good

or bad in the practice, because it's something we have never done before. No one, from our great-grandparents down to our parents and other relatives, has ever told us that the frames of reference and Noble Truths are like this or that, that they should be put into practice this or that way so as to give results of this or that sort—for they themselves had no way of knowing. What's worse, they have taken these excellent frames of reference and Noble Truths and thrown them away underground, underwater and into the fire time and again. We are simply their children, grandchildren, and great-grand-children: How can we boast that we're wise and all-knowing in these matters? We simply have to admit our own ignorance. Even though it's true that the frames of reference and Noble Truths have been excellent Dhamma from the very beginning, when they reach us they have to start as Dhamma in the raw state, because we ourselves are people in the raw state. Even our practice is practice in the raw state. But as we practice persistently, without retreating, and as our understanding into the Dhamma and the practice gradually appears bit by bit, day by day, and slowly begins to take shape, our conviction in the teachings of the Buddha grows continually stronger and more deeply rooted. The things that used to be mysterious gradually come to be revealed for what they truly are.

For example, the four frames of reference and four Noble Truths, even though they were always right with us, used to be as if buried out of sight, without our being aware of them. We listened to monks giving sermons and imagined things to be far away, beyond the range of our ears and eyes. We never thought at all to refer these teachings inwardly to ourselves, the converging points of the Dhamma. When the monks finished their sermons, the results could be summarized as this: 'We don't have the capability of reaching the Dhamma that has been taught, because it's infinitely deep and exceedingly subtle. The Dhamma explained and we the listeners lie on opposite sides of the world.' The thought never occurred to us that all of us—teachers and listeners alike—are in the same world of the frames of reference and the four Noble Truths, and that the matters explained were entirely our own affairs without the slightest deviation. These sorts of misunderstandings can happen to all of us.

But when the truth—such as the frames of reference—starts revealing itself in the course of our practice, these teachings turn step by step into a map for the mind. We see the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena as if they were a piece of paper covered with symbols and signs showing us the way to proceed so as to gain release from suffering and stress. The frames of reference and Noble Truths, within and without, become symbols and signs showing the way for the mind to proceed on all sides, as if they were saying, ‘Hurry up and follow these arrows showing the way to safety. The enemy is in a frenzy searching for you right nearby and is waiting in ambush for you everywhere. *Don’t be lulled into thinking that any of these places are safe.* Only if you hurry through this jungle will you reach safety.’ Our persistence in the practice then grows stronger, together with the mindfulness and discernment we have been training by using the frames of reference and Noble Truths as our whetstone and path. The body, feelings, mind, and phenomena that we used to investigate erratically and unevenly now become Dhamma on a common level and can all be investigated so as to be brought together and subsumed under the level of contemplation of pure phenomena.

When the mind takes the contemplation of phenomena as its frame of reference until it is skilled and thoroughly sure of itself, the contemplation of phenomena (*dhamma*) turns to deal exclusively with the affairs of the mind. At this stage you could say that the Dhamma becomes the mind, or the mind becomes Dhamma. Once the mind has entered purely into the contemplation of phenomena, then external conditions—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas, together with the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and ideation, which used to be like a solid mountain of rock, obstructing the mind so that it could find no way out—fade away and vanish from the imagination. The body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness that were like clouds obscuring the heart are now dispersed bit by bit from their shapes—the suppositions of conventional reality—by the winds of mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence, until they fade away to the point where almost

nothing is left. What *is* left is simply a vapor arising from the heart: This is a level of phenomena that hasn't yet been destroyed but can't display itself openly because strong mindfulness and discernment have it surrounded and are constantly probing after it to destroy it at all times. Finally this level of phenomena—the mind of unawareness (*avijjā*)—is utterly destroyed by mindfulness and discernment, using the truth of *dhamma anattā*—phenomena are not-self—and the teaching that all phenomena are unworthy of attachment. The notions of being, person, self, or others, when they no longer have any conventional suppositions in which to find shelter, must now float away of their own accord.

The moment that mindfulness and discernment have completed their duties toward the frames of reference, a nature that is extraordinary and amazing appears in all its fullness. All problems are resolved without any chance of continuation, because cause and effect between the *khandhas* and the mind have come to a full and lasting truce. Even though they still live together, they no longer quarrel the way they used to. Each is free in line with its truth. The word *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*—knowledge and vision of things as they are—in the understanding of forest Dhamma means *living with no mistrust between the khandhas and mind, the world and the Dhamma, the inside and the out*. The heart and all things everywhere are no longer enemies as they used to be, and the heart can now put all things to their proper uses.

I ask that all of you as monks and meditators listen to this so that it goes straight to the heart, and make an effort until your practice goes straight to the heart as well. All of this dhamma will appear as a treasure of infinite worth in the hearts of those who are intent, and nothing will ever be able to separate them from it. The effort made for an honorable victory like that of the Buddha—a victory unmatched by anything else in the world—is the effort to take victory over oneself, as the Pāli says,

*attā have jitaṃ seyyo:*

It is better to take victory over oneself.

This seems to be enough explanation for the time being, so now, at the

end of this talk, I ask that the power of the Triple Gem safeguard and protect each and every one of you so that you meet with ease in body and mind, and so that you progress in virtue, concentration, and discernment until you can overcome all obstacles to the realm of security and peace that is *nibbāna*.

#### Note

- I. The Dhamma learned from practice, and not from the study of books.

# *The Work of a Contemplative*

*October 31, 1978*

Here in this monastery we practice not in line with people's wishes and opinions, but in line for the most part with the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya, the principles of the religion. We do this for the sake of the public at large who rely on the religion as a guiding principle in what is good and right, and who rely on the good and right behavior of monks and novices, the religious leaders for Buddhists at large.

For this reason, I'm not interested in treating anyone out of a sense of deference over and above the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya that are the basis of the religion. If our minds start to bend under the influence of the views and opinions of any one person or of the majority—who have no limits or standards—then monasteries and the religion will come to have no limits or standards. Monasteries that bend under the influence of the world, without any sense of reason as an underlying support, will have no order or standards, and will become monasteries without any of the substance of the religion remaining in them at all. Those who look for things of value to revere and respect—in other words, intelligent people—won't be able to find anything good of any substance that will have a hold on their hearts, because there will be nothing but worthless and counterfeit things filling the monasteries, filling the monks, the novices, the nuns, filling everything everywhere. In homes as well as in monasteries, in the area of the world as well as the Dhamma, everything will get mixed into being one with what is counterfeit and lacking in any value or worth.

For this reason, we have to keep things in their separate places. The religion and the world, even though they may dwell together, are not the same thing. A monastery—whether it's located in a village, outside of a village, or in a forest—is not the same as a village. The people who come to

stay there are not the same as ordinary people. The monastery has to be a monastery. The monks have to be monks with their own independent Dhamma and Vinaya that don't come under or depend on any particular individual. This is an important principle that can have a hold on the hearts of intelligent people who are searching for principles of truth to revere and respect or to be their inspiration. I view things from this angle more than from any other. Even the Buddha, our Teacher, viewed things from this angle as well, as we can see from the time he was talking with Ven. Nāgita.

When a crowd of people shouting and making a big racket came to see the Buddha, he said, 'Nāgita, who is that coming our way, making a commotion like fish-mongers squabbling over fish? We don't aspire to this sort of thing, which is a destruction of the religion. The religion is something to guard and preserve so that the world will find peace and calm—like clear, clean water well-guarded and preserved so that people in general can use it to drink and bathe at their convenience. The religion is like clear, clean water in this way, which is why we don't want anyone to disturb it, to make it muddy and turbid.' This is what the Buddha said to Ven. Nāgita. He then told Ven. Nāgita to send the crowd back, telling them that their manner and the time of day—it was night—were not appropriate for visiting monks who live in quiet and solitude. Polite manners are things that intelligent people choose to use, and there are plenty of other times to come. This is a time when the monks want quiet, so they shouldn't be disturbed in a way that wastes their time and causes them difficulties without serving any kind of purpose at all.

This is an example set by our Teacher. He wasn't the sort of person to mingle and associate with lay people at all times without any reasonable limits or rules, the way things currently are—as if the religion were a distillery, and we monks and novices were distributing liquor so that the public could be drunk without ever sobering up for a day. Actually, the religion is medicine for curing drunkenness. Monks and novices are supposed to be doctors for curing their own drunkenness and that of the world. They're not supposed to sell liquor and intoxicants to the point where they have no sense of shame.

Whenever people set foot in the monastery, we say that they come in good faith—and so we make allowances and compromises until we forget ourselves, forget the Dhamma and Vinaya, and forget the good standards of monasteries and monks to the point where we destroy ourselves, the monastery, and the religion bit by bit, day by day, and everything turns into mud. Home-dwellers and monastery-dwellers can't find any principles to hold to. Monks are full of excrement—i.e., the worthless things in the monasteries and in the monks and novices themselves.

For this reason, each of us who has ordained in the religion should reflect a great deal on these matters. *Don't see anything as having greater value than the Dhamma and Vinaya*, which are the major principles for uniting the hearts of Buddhists in confidence, conviction, and peace. If the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya are lacking or deficient, the benefits received by Buddhists will have to be deficient in turn, until there is nothing to which their hearts can hold. Even though the teachings of the religion fill the texts, and copies of the Canon fill every monastery, still the important essence that should be put into practice so that people can be inspired to take this essence into their hearts and put it into practice themselves for the sake of what is beneficial and auspicious, doesn't exist—even though the religion still exists. This is something we can clearly see at present.

*The important factors that can make the religion prosper* and can serve as witnesses to the people who become involved with it for the sake of all things meritorious and auspicious *are the monks and novices*. If the monks and novices are intent on behaving in line with the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya as taught by the Buddha, they are the ones who will preserve the good pattern of the religion and of the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* without a doubt. People will be able to take them as their standard—because there are still plenty of intelligent people left in the world. As for stupid people, even though they may overflow the world, they have no sure standards. If they feel pleased, they praise you. That praise simply comes out of their stupidity and serves no purpose. If they feel displeased, they criticize you. That criticism serves no purpose, either for them or for you. If

intelligent people praise you, though, that can be taken to heart and benefits both parties, them as well as you. If they praise the Saṅgha, they praise it in line with the principles of the truth and of their intelligence. At the same time, those members of the Saṅgha who hold to reason can make themselves a field of merit for them as well, so that they too can benefit. Even if they criticize us, they have their reasons that should be taken as food for thought. Thus we who practice should make ourselves well aware of this point.

Wherever you go, don't forget that you are a practitioner of the religion, a representative of our Teacher in following the religion and proclaiming it through your practice. This doesn't mean that you have to teach the public to understand the Dhamma. Even the practices you follow rightly are a visible example that can make them feel conviction in the religion from what they see. Even more so when you can explain the Dhamma correctly in line with the principles of the practice following the teachings of the Buddha: This is all the more the right and proper proclamation of the religion for good people to hold to in their hearts. The religion will come to flourish more and more in the hearts of Buddhists.

Wherever you go, wherever you stay, don't forget the basic principles—virtue, concentration, and discernment—which are the basic principles of our work as contemplative. These are the essential principles of each monk's work. This is where we become 'sons of the Sakyan (*sakya-putta*), of the victorious Buddha,' disciples of the Tathāgata, and not when we simply shave our heads and don the yellow robe. That's something anyone can do and isn't important. What's important is behaving in line with our duties.

Virtue. We should be careful to maintain our precepts so that they aren't broken or stained. We should be careful, using mindfulness and discernment in our every activity. *Whatever else may get broken, don't let your precepts get broken*, for they are the invaluable treasure of your status as a monk, something on which you can truly stake your life.

Concentration. If it hasn't yet arisen, try to train the heart and bring it under control, coming down hard on its unruliness caused by the power of

defilement, so that you can have it in hand in your efforts with the practice. Use mindfulness and discernment to block its recklessness so that it can settle down in peace and quiet. This is our *samādhi* treasure as monks.

Discernment is intelligence and ingenuity. Discernment is of use in all places at all times. Both in your internal and in your external activities, always make use of your discernment. Especially in your internal activities, when you're investigating the various kinds of defilements and mental effluents, discernment becomes especially important. Discernment and mindfulness shouldn't be separated. They have to perform their duties together. Mindfulness is what keeps watch over the work discernment is doing. Whenever mindfulness lapses, that work won't accomplish its full aims. For this reason, mindfulness is a necessary quality that must always be kept fastened on your work.

These things are our work as contemplatives. Remember them and always take them to heart. Don't be apathetic, or you'll become a shameless monk, callous to the fact that the world is bowing down to you at all times.

Now that the Rains Retreat is over, we'll each go our separate ways in line with duty and necessity and the laws of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. These are things we can't prevent, because they are big matters, the way of nature. Even I myself: I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to stay with you all, because I lie under the law of inconstancy, too. So while we are still living together, I want you to be intent on training yourselves with your full hearts, in keeping with the fact that you've come to study, to train yourselves, and to practice.

The word 'discernment,' which I mentioned a moment ago, means to investigate and unravel the various factors that become involved with us within and without. (And here I have to ask forgiveness of the men and women interested in the Dhamma who fall under the condition I'm about to discuss. Please reflect on it in all fairness.) The body: Usually it's the body of the opposite sex. As the Dhamma says, *there is no sight that's a greater enemy to the state of a contemplative than the sight of the opposite sex*. The same holds true for the voice, the smell, the taste, and the touch of the opposite

sex. These are the foremost dangers that face contemplatives, so we have to show greater care and restraint toward these things than toward anything else. Mindfulness and discernment have to unravel these important points more than they have to deal with any other work.

The body. We should analyze it with our discernment so as to see it clearly. The words ‘the body of a woman’ or ‘the body of a man’ are simply names given in line with convention. Actually, it’s not a woman or a man. It’s simply an ordinary body just like ours, covered all over with skin. If we look inside, there’s flesh, tendons, and bones. It, like us, is all full of filthy and repulsive things. There’s no part that’s basically any different from our own body. There’s simply the label in our mind that says ‘woman’ or ‘man.’ This word ‘woman’ or ‘man’ is engraved deeply within the heart by the heart’s own suppositions, even though it’s not a truth, and is simply a supposition.

The same with the voice: It’s just an ordinary sound, and yet we label it the voice of the opposite sex and so it stabs deep into the heart—especially for those of us who are ordained—and goes clear through, to the point where we forget ourselves. The heart gets cut at the stem, even though we continue to live. The stem of the heart is torn, rotten, and putrid, and yet we don’t die. Instead, we listen with pleasure to the song of our heart’s being cut at the stem, without ever wearying of it or having enough.

The smell: It’s an ordinary smell, just like ours, because it’s the smell of a person. Even if we bring perfumes and scents from the realms of the devas and Brahmās to rub down that body, the smell is the smell of those things, not the smell of a woman or man, not the least little bit. So analyze this and make careful distinctions.

The taste is simply the touch. The touch of that body is no different from one part of our own body touching another part. Each of the parts is just earth, water, wind, and fire, just like ours. We can’t see that there’s any difference. So we have to investigate clearly like this and then make comparisons, comparing the sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch of the woman or man with our own sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. There’s

no difference in terms of the principles of nature and of the truth, aside from the mind's conferring titles in line with its thoughts.

For this reason, we must use discernment to unravel things. Don't let suppositions of any kind that will be your enemies infiltrate or destroy your heart. Shake them off using discernment, which is a truth, coming down to the truth that these things are just sights, just sounds, just smells, just tastes, just tactile sensations, all of which pass by and disappear like other things. This is without a doubt the right way to contemplate that can gradually uproot our attachments and misconceptions concerning these matters.

Whatever object you may investigate in the world, it's full of inconstancy, stress, and lack-of-self. There's nothing lasting to be found. All things depend on one thing or another, and then fall apart. Whatever the object: *If it exists in the world, it has to fall apart.* If it doesn't fall apart, we will. If it doesn't break up, we'll break up. If it doesn't leave, we'll leave—because this world is full of leaving and separation through the principles of nature. So investigate in this way with discernment to see clearly before these things leave us or we leave them, and then let them go in line with their truth. When we can do this, the mind will be at its ease. Here we've been talking about discernment on the level of investigating sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Whether within or without, on the blatant or the subtle level, this is how all of these things are investigated.

Concentration I've already explained to some extent. Concentration refers to the stability and solidity of the heart, beginning with its small moments of stillness and peace, all the way up to the refined and stable levels of stillness and peace. If the mind isn't trained, isn't improved, isn't forced with various tactics backed up by mindfulness, discernment, conviction, and persistence, it won't be able to attain peace till its dying day. It will die in vain. It will die restless and confused, straying off to 108 different preoccupations. It won't have any mindfulness or alertness. It will die without any principles or standards to hold to. It will die just as a kite whose string is cut when it's up in the air floats wherever the wind blows.

Even while it's still living, it lives without any principles or standards, because of its absent-mindedness and heedlessness, its lack of any sense of reason for it to follow. It lives simply drifting. *If we live simply drifting, without any good principles to hold to, then when we go, we'll have to go simply drifting.* What purpose will it serve? What goodness and certainty can we have for our destination? So as long as we're alive and aware as we currently are, we should build certainty for ourselves in our hearts by being strong and unflinching in matters that are of solid worth. Then we can be certain of ourselves both as we live and when we die. We won't be upset or affected by life or death, by being separated from other beings or our own bodies—something we all have to meet with, because these are things lying within us all.

It's not the case that discernment arises automatically on the heels of concentration when the mind has been centered. It has to be exercised and trained to think, explore, and investigate. Only then will discernment arise, with concentration as its support. *Concentration on its own can't turn into discernment.* It has to remain as concentration. If we don't use discernment to investigate, concentration simply makes the mind refreshed and calm, content with its preoccupation in tranquility, not hungering to think here or there, not confused or straying—because once the mind is still, it's calm and refreshed with the Dhamma in line with the level of its stillness. We then take the mind that has been refreshed by tranquility and use it with discernment to investigate and unravel various things, none of which in this world lie over and beyond inconstancy, stress, and not-self. All things are filled with these same conditions, so use discernment to contemplate—from whatever angle most suits your temperament—by investigating these things with interest, with the desire really to know and see them as they truly are. Don't simply investigate without any intention or mindfulness in control.

In particular, the theme of unattractiveness: This is a good, a very good cure for the mind obsessed with lust and passion. However strong the lust, that's how strongly you should investigate unattractiveness until you can

see your own body and that of others throughout the world as a cemetery of fresh corpses. Lust won't have a chance to flare up when discernment has penetrated to the knowledge that the body is filled with repulsiveness. Who would feel lust for repulsiveness? Who would feel lust for things with no beauty? For things that are disgusting? This is one form of the medicine of unattractiveness, one of the prime medicines for curing the disease of lust and craving. Once you've made a really full investigation, make the mind grow still in a restricted range. Once the mind has investigated unattractiveness many, many times, to the point where it becomes proficient, adept at contemplating external bodies as well as the internal body, able to visualize things in whatever way you want, *then the mind will converge to the level of unattractiveness within itself* and see the harm of the pictures of unattractiveness it paints as being one form of illusion. It will then let go of both sides: both the side of unattractiveness and the side of attractiveness.

Both attractiveness and unattractiveness are labels coupled with the affairs of lust. Once we have investigated and fully understood both sides, the word 'attractive' will dissolve and no longer have meaning. The word 'unattractive' will dissolve and no longer have meaning. That which gives the meaning of 'attractive' and 'unattractive' is the mind or, in other words, *saññā*. We are now wise to *saññā* as being what labels things. We see the harm of this labeling, and so it will no longer be able to go out interpreting in such a way as to make the mind grasp and be attached again. When this is the case, the mind lets go of both attractiveness and unattractiveness—or of beauty and ugliness—by seeing that they are simply dolls for training the mind and discernment as long as the mind is still attached to them, and the discernment for investigating to uproot them is not yet proficient enough.

When the mind is proficient and realizes the causes and effects of both sides—both attractiveness and unattractiveness—it can at the same time turn around to know its own labeling that goes out to dress this thing up as attractive and that as unattractive. When it knows this labeling clearly, the labeling disbands. The mind can see its harm, in that this labeling is the

culprit. The unattractive object isn't the culprit. The attractive object isn't the culprit. Instead, *the labeling that says 'attractive' and 'unattractive' is the culprit* deceiving us and making us become attached. This is where things start coming inward. Our investigation comes inward like this and lets go, step by step.

When the mind has reached this stage, then whether we focus on attractiveness or unattractiveness, it will appear in the mind, without our having to create an external image to exercise with, just as when we travel and have passed progressively along a road. The image appears in the mind. The moment it appears there, we immediately know that *saññā* can label only as far as this and can't go labeling outside. Even though the image appears in mind, we know clearly that the phenomenon that appears there as attractive or unattractive comes from *saññā* in the same way. We know the image that appears in the mind as well as the *saññā* labeling it, also as an image in the mind. Finally, the images in the mind vanish. The *saññā*—the labels, the interpretations—disband. We know that the labels that used to fool us into seeing things as attractive and unattractive and all sorts of other ways without limit—that used to fool us into falling for both of these sides—have disbanded. There is nothing further to deceive the heart. This is how unattractiveness is investigated in line with the principles of the practice—but you won't find this anywhere in the texts. You'll find it only if you search for the truth in the principles of nature that exist with the body and mind—the location of the four Noble Truths and the four frames of reference—coming down finally to the text of the heart. That's where you'll find the things I've explained here.

This is the body. We can know clearly that every part of the body is simply a physical phenomenon. And what is there in these physical phenomena? All the parts—hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, intestines, stomach, gorge, feces—are just physical phenomena, things separate from the mind. If we consider them as unattractive, they've been unattractive all along, even before we considered

them. And who is it that gives them meaning, saying that this is attractive or that is unattractive? When did these things ever give themselves meanings? When did they ever say they were attractive or unattractive? They don't label or say anything at all. Whatever their truth is, that's how it's always been in line with its nature from the very beginning—and they don't know their meaning. What knows their meaning is *saññā*. The one that falls for their meaning is also *saññā*, which comes out of this deluded mind. Once we are wise to this labeling, all these things disappear. Each has its separate reality. This is what it means to be wise to these things.

Feelings (*vedanā*) are the feelings of pleasure, pain, and indifference that arise from the body. The body is a phenomenon that has existed since before these feelings arose. Pains arise, remain, and then vanish. The body is the body. The pain is a pain. Each is a separate reality. Investigate and analyze them so as to see them for what they are—just a feeling, just a body—without regarding them as a being, a person, us or anyone else, ours or anyone else's. The feeling isn't us, ours, or anyone else's. It's simply something that appears for a moment and disappears for a while, in line with its nature. That's what the truth is.

*Saññā* means labeling. Whatever it labels—things near, far, past, present, or future—whatever it labels, it vanishes immediately. It keeps vanishing—arising and vanishing, arising and vanishing—so how can we regard it as a self, a being, a person? Here we're referring to discernment on the refined level, penetrating down in line with the truth that is clear to our heart without our having to ask anyone else.

*Saṅkhāra* means thought-fabrication: forming good thoughts, bad thoughts, neutral thoughts. Whatever it forms is simply a matter of arising and vanishing, arising and vanishing. We can't get any sense out of these thought-fabrications at all if *saññās* don't take up where they leave off and turn them into issues. As for *saññās*, we already know them clearly, so what is there to form thoughts, pick up where they leave off and grasp at them, turning them into long issues? All there is, is just the arising and vanishing in the mind. This is thought-fabrication. It's one reality, which the Buddha

calls the *saṅkhāra khandha*. *Khandha* means heap or aggregate. *Rūpa khandha* means the physical heap. *Vedanā khandha* means the heap of feelings. *Saññā khandha* means the heap of labels, the aggregate of labels. *Saṅkhāra khandha* means the heap of thought-fabrications, the aggregate of thought-fabrications.

*Viññāṇa khandha* means the aggregate or heap of consciousness, that which takes note the moment external things make contact, as when visual images make contact with the eye and consciousness occurs. As soon as the object passes, this consciousness vanishes. No matter what thing it takes note of, it's always ready to vanish with that thing. What sense or substance can we get out of these five *khandhas*? How can we assume them to be us or ours?

This is what the issues of the five *khandhas* are like. They've occurred this way, appeared this way, arisen and vanished this way one after another continually from the day of our birth to the present moment. We can't find any meaning or substance in them at all, unless the mind labels and interprets them, grasping onto them as being itself or belonging to itself and then carrying their weight—which is heavier than an entire mountain—within itself, without any reward. Its only reward is suffering and stress, because its own delusion has caused these things to reward it.

When the mind has investigated and seen these things clearly with sharp discernment, then the body is true in its body way, in line with the principles of nature that are made clear with discernment. Feelings of pain, pleasure, and indifference in the body are known clearly in line with their truth. Feelings in the mind—the pleasure, pain, and indifference arising in the mind—are the factor the mind continues to be interested in investigating. Even though we may not yet be abreast of these things, they have to be alerting the mind to investigate them at all times, because on this level we aren't yet able to keep abreast of feelings in the mind—in other words, the pleasure, pain, and indifference exclusively in the mind that aren't related to feelings in the body.

Consciousness is simply a separate reality. We see this clearly as it truly

is. The mind has no more doubts that would cause it to latch onto these things as its self, because each is a separate reality. Even though they dwell together, they're like a piece of fruit or an egg placed in a bowl. The bowl has to be a bowl. The egg placed there is an egg. They aren't one and the same. The mind is the mind, which lies in the bowl of the body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness, but it's not the body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, or consciousness. It's simply the mind, pure and simple, inside there. When we clearly make the distinction between the mind and the *khandhas*, that's how it is.

Now that the mind clearly understands the body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness, with nothing more to doubt, all that remains is the fidgeting and rippling exclusively within the mind. This rippling is a subtle form of *saṅkhāra* that ripples within the mind, a subtle form of pleasure, a subtle form of stress, a subtle form of *saññā* appearing in the mind. That's all there is. The mind will investigate and analyze these things at all times with automatic mindfulness and discernment.

The mind on this level is very refined. It has let go of all things. The five *khandhas* no longer remain, but it hasn't yet let go of itself: its awareness. This awareness, though, is still coated with unawareness.

This is called unawareness converging. It converges in the mind and can't find any way out. The paths of unawareness are out the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, leading to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Once mindfulness and discernment have been able to cut these paths step by step, unawareness has no way out. It doesn't have any following, so it just goes 'blip...blip...blip...' within itself, taking just the mind as the support onto which it latches because it can't find any way out. It displays itself as a subtle feeling of pleasure, a subtle feeling of stress, a radiance that's extremely amazing as long as discernment isn't yet all-around and can't yet destroy it. The mind keeps contemplating right there.

*No matter how radiant or magnificent it may be, any conventional reality—no matter how refined—has to display a symptom of one sort or another that will arouse the mind's suspicions enough to make it look for a way to remedy*

the situation. Thus the pleasure and stress that are refined phenomena appearing exclusively within the mind, together with the brightness and marvelousness, have unawareness as their ringleader; but because we have never encountered them before, we're deluded into holding onto them when we first investigate into this point, and are lulled sound asleep by unawareness so that we grasp onto the radiance—to the pleasure, to the marvelousness, or to the magnificence arising from the unawareness embedded in the mind—as being our self. And so we assume the mind complete with unawareness to be our self, without our realizing what we are doing.

But not for long—because of the power of super-mindfulness and super-discernment, qualities that by now are uncomplacent. They keep scrutinizing, investigating, and analyzing back and forth in line with their nature on this level. The time will have to come when they know for sure by noticing the subtle pleasure that behaves just slightly in an irregular manner. Even though stress displays itself just barely, in line with this level of the mind, it's enough to make us suspicious: 'Eh—why does the mind have symptoms like this? It's not constant.' The magnificence displaying itself in the mind, the marvelousness displaying itself in the mind, display irregularities just barely, but enough for mindfulness and discernment to catch sight of them.

Once they catch sight of these things, they get suspicious and take them as the point to be investigated at that moment. So now the mind—this sort of awareness—becomes the target of their investigation. They focus down on this point to find out, 'What is this? We've investigated everything of every sort to the point where we've been able to uproot it all, stage by stage, but this knowing nature, so bright, so amazing: What exactly is it?'

Mindfulness and discernment keep focusing on down and investigating. This point thus becomes the target of a full-scale investigation, the battlefield of automatic mindfulness and discernment at that moment. Before long, they are able to destroy the mind of unawareness that is so superlative, so amazing and magnificent from the viewpoint of

unawareness, smashing and scattering it completely so that nothing, not even an atom, is left remaining in the heart.

When the nature on which we ignorantly conferred such titles as superlative and amazing is dissolved away, something on which we don't have to confer the titles of superlative or not-superlative appears in full measure. *That nature is purity.* And this purity: When we compare it with the mind of unawareness that we once held to be superlative and supreme, the mind of unawareness is like a pile of cow dung, while the nature that had been concealed by unawareness, once it is revealed, is like pure gold. Pure gold and squishy cow dung: Which has greater value? Even a baby sucking his thumb can answer, so we needn't waste our time and expose our stupidity by making comparisons.

This is the investigation of the mind. This level, when we have reached it, is where things are severed completely from becoming and birth in the mind, severed completely from all unawareness and craving. '*Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*'—'With unawareness as condition, there occur fabrications'—is completely severed and becomes '*avijjāya tv'eva asesā-virāga-nirodhā saṅkhāra-nirodho, saṅkhāra-nirodhā viññāṇa-nirodho...*'—'Simply with the disbanding of unawareness, with no remaining passion, thought-fabrications disband. With the disbanding of thought-fabrications, consciousness disbands....' all the way to 'this is the disbanding of this entire mass of stress.'

When unawareness has disbanded, the fabrications that are the cause of stress disband and keep disbanding, just as the Buddha said, while the fabrications that continue as part of the *khandhas* become fabrications pure and simple, and aren't a cause of stress. The consciousness that appears in the heart is consciousness pure and simple, and not consciousness as a cause of stress. '*Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ, nāma-rūpa-paccayā salāyatanaṃ, salāyatana-paccayā phasso*'—whatever is a physical or mental phenomenon, a sense medium, or a sensory contact is simply its own simple nature. It can't provoke the mind that has finished its task to the point of '*evam-etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti*'—'This is the

disbanding of this entire mass of stress.’ The words, ‘*evam-etassa kevalassa*’—‘all things mentioned here’—have absolutely disbanded. This is called disbanding in full measure.

When we disband defilement, craving, and unawareness, when we disband the world of rebirth, where do we disband it if not in the mind, which is the essence of the world of rebirth, the essence of unawareness, the essence of birth, ageing, illness, and death. The seeds of birth, ageing, illness, and death—namely, passion and craving, with unawareness as their ringleader—lie only here in the mind. When they are completely scattered from the mind, there is simply ‘*nirodho hoti*’—‘This is the disbanding....’

This, then, is the work of the practice in line with the principles of the Buddha’s teachings. From the time of the Buddha down to the present, these principles have remained constant. There are no deficiencies or excesses in the principles of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha that would make it unable to keep up with the tricks and deceits of the various forms of defilement. This is why it’s called the middle way: the Dhamma always appropriate for curing every sort of defilement to the point where defilement no longer remains.

This is how you should understand the power of the middle way. Hold to this path in your practice, because release from suffering and stress is something with a value transcending all three levels of becoming. *And what do we see in any of the three levels of existence that is more fantastic than the release of the heart from all suffering and stress?* When we see this clearly with our reason, our efforts in the practice will be able to advance. We’ll be ready to die in the battle. If it means death, then go ahead and die—die in the battle for victory over the defilements that have smothered the heart for so long. There is no teaching, no tool at all that can attack the defilements and strike them down like the middle way taught by the Lord Buddha.

For this reason, we can be secure and confident in the words, ‘*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*’—‘I go for refuge in the Buddha’—in that he practiced so that both the causes and the results—everything of every sort—were perfect and complete, before taking the Dhamma to teach the world.

*‘Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo’*—‘The Dhamma of the Blessed One is well taught.’ He taught it well in every facet from having comprehended and seen the truth of every thing of every sort. *‘Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi’*—‘I go for refuge in the Saṅgha.’ The Noble Disciples who practiced in line with the principles of the Buddha’s Dhamma—without slacking or weakening, enabling themselves to expel defilement from their hearts, making their hearts superlative and becoming our refuge—did so without going outside the principles of this middle way. So I ask that you listen to this and take it to heart. Don’t set your heart on the deceitful and counterfeit issues filling the world of rebirth. Set your heart on the truth of the Dhamma, the truth of the practice. You will see the truth continually appearing in your heart in the midst of all the counterfeit things in the heart and throughout the world. Don’t harbor any doubts, for that would be to linger over the defilements that know no end.

*In practicing the Dhamma, aim at the qualities of the heart—virtue, concentration, and discernment—more than at material things. As for material things, if we have just enough to get by, that’s plenty enough. Wherever you go... We are born from human beings. We monks come from people. People have homes; we monks need places to stay—enough to provide ordinary shelter—but they should be just enough to get by. Don’t make them fancy. Don’t go competing with the world outside. That would simply foster your own defilements and make you known throughout the world in a way that the defilements would ridicule. Make yourself known instead for your virtue, concentration, and discernment, your conviction and persistence. Make yourself known for having striven to cure yourself or extricate yourself, to gain release from defilement and the mass of stress in the cycle of rebirth. This is what it means genuinely and directly to enhance your stature. Don’t abandon your efforts. Make it to the other shore of this turning, churning cycle in this lifetime—which is much surer than any other lifetime, any other time or place.*

And don’t forget, wherever you go: Don’t get involved in construction work. Everywhere we go these days, there’s construction work and monks

involved in it. It's enough to make you sick. As soon as they meet each other: 'How's it going with your meeting hall?' 'How's it going with your school? Are you finished yet? How much has it cost?' Whenever there's a project, whatever the project, they go harassing lay people, gathering up funds, so that the lay people have to spend money and get embroiled too, without any respite. Let the lay people have enough money so that they can stash some of it away. They practically kill themselves just to scrape together a little cash, but instead of being able to use it to provide for their stomachs, for their families, their children, and other essentials, and for making merit at their leisure, they end up having to hand it all over to help the monks who harass them by fund-raising to the point where they're left empty-handed. This is the religion of harassing the world, which the Buddha never practiced and never taught us to practice. So I want you all to understand this. The Buddha never acted this way. This is the religion of material objects, the religion of money, not the religion of Dhamma following the example of the Buddha.

Look around us: Monks' dwellings as large as Doi Inthanon.<sup>[1]</sup> How many stories do they have? They stretch up to the sky. How luxurious are they? How much do they make you sick to your heart? Even my own dwelling, I can't help feeling embarrassed by it, even though I stay there against my will and have to put up with the embarrassment. They sent the money to build it without letting me know in advance. I'm ashamed of the fact that while I have asked for alms all my life, my dwelling...even a palace in heaven is no match for it, while the people who give alms live in shacks no bigger than your fist. What's appropriate, what's fitting for monks who are habitually conscious of danger, is to live wherever you can squeeze yourself in to sit and lie down. But as for your effort in the practice, I ask that you be solid and stable, diligent and persevering.

Don't waste your time by letting any job become an obstacle, because exterior work, for the most part, is work that destroys your work at mental development for the sake of killing and destroying defilement. This is the major task in body and mind for monks who aim at release and feel no

desire to come back to be reborn and die, to carry the mass of major and minor sufferings in levels of becoming and birth any more. There's no danger greater than the danger of defilement smothering the heart, able to force and coerce the heart into suffering everything to which the Dhamma doesn't aspire. There's no suffering greater than the suffering of a person oppressed by defilement. If we don't fight with defilement while we're ordained, will we be able to fight with it after we die? The vagaries of life and the body are things we can put up with, but don't put up with the oppression of defilement any longer, for that wouldn't be at all fitting for monks who are disciples of the Tathāgata.

Whether things may be just enough to get by, or however much they may be lacking, be sure to look to the Tathāgata as your refuge at all times. Don't let things that are unnecessary for monks become luxurious beyond all reason—such as building things to the point of competing with the world outside and being crazy for hollow rank and fame, without being interested in building the Dhamma to revive the heart from its stupor. The people of the world live in flimsy little shacks that are ready to collapse at a sneeze. Whatever they get, they deny their own stomachs and their families so that they can make merit and give donations to monks. But monks live in many-storied mansions—fancier and more luxurious than those of heavenly beings—as if they had never lived in tiny shacks with their parents before becoming ordained. And who knows what they have decorating their mansions in competition with the world outside? It makes you more embarrassed than a young bride when her mother-in-law sneezes and passes wind so loud she practically faints.

We forget that our heads are shaved: Why don't we ever think about what that means? Aren't we becoming too shameless? This isn't in line with the principles of the religion that teach those who are ordained to cure their defilements by seeing the dangers in worldly comforts. These sorts of things clutter up the religion and the hearts of us monks, so I ask that you not think of getting involved in them. Be conscious always of the fact that they aren't the principles of the Dhamma for curing defilement in a way the heart can see clearly. Instead, they're means for making monks forget

themselves and become involved in the business of defilement, which is none of their business as monks at all.

The primary principle of the Dhamma for monks is *'rukhamūla-senāsanam nissāya pabbajjā, tattha te yāva-jīvam ussāho karaṇīyo'*—'Once you have ordained in the religion of the Buddha, you are to live under the shade of trees, in forests and mountains, in caves, under overhanging cliffs, in the open, by haystacks, which are all places suitable for killing defilement, for wiping out the defilements in your hearts. Try to act in this way all of your life.' Everything else—such as the things termed 'extraneous gains' (*atireka-lābho*)—are unnecessary comforts.

The work the Buddha would have us do is the contemplation of *kesā, lomā, nakhā, dantā, taco; taco, dantā, nakhā, lomā, kesā*: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin; skin, teeth, nails, hair of the body, hair of the head, and from there on to the 32 parts of the body—beginning with hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, intestines, stomach, gorge, and feces—which exist in each of us. 'Try to unravel these things with your discernment so as to see them as they truly are. When you have completed this work with the full mindfulness and discernment of heroes, then release from suffering—that tremendous treasure—will be yours.' Listen to that! Isn't it far removed from the way we like to take our pleasure with the scraps and leftovers that the Buddha taught us to relinquish in every word, every phrase, every book of the Dhamma?

We ourselves are the adversaries of the teachings of the religion. We luxuriate in everything the Dhamma criticizes. Lay people are no match for us. Whenever they get anything good, they use it to make merit and give to monks. Whatever they eat and use is just so as to get by. All they ask for is good things to give to monks, in line with their nature as merit-seekers, while we monks have become luxury-seekers. Our dwellings are fine, the things we use are fine, and on top of that some of us have radios, TV sets, cars... If you compare this with the basic rules of the Dhamma and Vinaya, it makes you more heartsick than you can say. How is it that we have the

stomach to kill the Buddha red-handed this way with our shameless and unthinking ostentation as monks? It really makes you embarrassed.

So I ask that each of you reflect a great deal on these matters. If you've ordained really for the sake of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha—and not for the sake of being adversaries of the Buddha's teachings—I ask that you reflect on the Dhamma and the path followed by the Buddha more than on any other matter. *No time excels the time of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha* that they have set as an example for us to follow. This is a very important principle. I ask that you all follow the principles of the time of the Buddha. The results, which are refreshing and satisfying, are sure to appear in line with the principles of the well-taught Dhamma, the Dhamma that leads out from suffering. There's no way to doubt this.

These things I've practiced to a fair extent myself. I used to be a junior monk too, you know. When I went to study and train with my teachers—and especially Ven. Ācariya Mun—I really listened. I listened to him speak. He would speak half in earnest, half in jest, in the ordinary way of teachers talking with their students, but I would never listen in jest. I always listened in earnest and took things to heart. I had the greatest imaginable love and fear and respect for him. I'd hold to every facet of what he'd say that I could put into practice. What I've been able to teach my students is due to the power of what he taught me. For this reason, even though in this monastery we may conduct ourselves somewhat differently from other monasteries in general, I'm confident in line with the principles of reason and of the Dhamma and Vinaya so that I'm not worried about the matter. I don't think that what we do is wrong, because I have the example of the Buddha's teaching and of my teachers—everything of every sort that follows the original patterns—which is why I've led my fellow meditators to practice this way all along. Whether this is right or wrong, we have to decide in line with the principles of reason. Deference to people is an affair of the world, an affair of individuals, and not an affair of the Dhamma and Vinaya, which are fixed principles for the practice. Speaking in line with the Dhamma for the sake of understanding and right practice: That's the genuine Dhamma.

For this reason, an unwillingness to speak the truth for fear of stepping on someone's toes is not a trait for those who aim at the Dhamma together.

This seems enough for now, so I'll ask to stop here.

Note

1. The tallest mountain in Thailand.

# *The Fangs of Unawareness*

*An excerpt from a talk given July 16, 1982*

...This state of mind with its unawareness is a magnificent mind, bold and daring—not only radiant, but also bold and daring as well, and reckless because of its daring, in thinking that it's smart. It's not reckless in the ordinary way. It's reckless in line with its nature as a state of mind of this sort. This is called the nine forms of *māna*, or conceit. The nine forms of conceit lie right here. The Buddha explains this in the five higher fetters (*sanyojana*): passion for form, passion for formlessness, conceit, restlessness, and unawareness. Conceit means to assume—to assume that the state of mind blended into one with unawareness is one's self, that it's 'me' or 'mine', and then taking it to make comparisons: 'How is it with those people or these people? Are their minds on a par with mine? Higher than mine? Lower than mine?' This is why there are nine forms of conceit. In other words, three times three is nine. For example, our mind is lower than theirs, and we assume it to be lower than theirs, higher than theirs, or on a par. Our mind is on a par with theirs, and we assume it to be lower than theirs, higher than theirs, or on a par. Our mind is higher than theirs, and we assume it to be lower than theirs, higher than theirs, or on a par.

The refined level of defilement takes this state of mind out to make the comparison—because it's in the phase where it has fangs. Its fangs are growing sharp. The fangs of unawareness: They're called conceit, or self-assumption. Once this state is dissolved, what is there to assume? What is there to be radiant? To be defiled? To be bold and daring? To be afraid? There isn't anything, once that nature dissolves through the power of investigation.

These things, you know, are phenomena that create problems in line with their level. Their level is subtle, so they manage to create subtle

problems. Blatant defilements create blatant problems. Subtle defilements create subtle problems. When the defilements are gone, there's nothing to create any problems. There are no more problems in any way, no more conditions for conventional reality to make further connections. All that remains is absolute purity, which is why there are no more problems.

Absolute purity is a condition for what? What problems does it create? The Buddha says that we run out of problems. This is where they run out. However many levels of becoming and birth there may be in the mind, it has known them step by step until it reaches the converging point, leaving just the seeds of these things that get planted here and there as birth. So we burn them up with *tapas*, the fire of our effort, until they are completely eradicated. So now are there any levels of becoming and birth to make further connections? *Whom do we have to ask?* Even if the Buddha were sitting right in front of us, we wouldn't ask him, because the truth is the same for us as it is for him. There's nothing different enough for us to ask. This is why the Dhamma is said to be *sandiṭṭhiko*:

We know it and see it ourselves. *Paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*: Those who know it, know it for themselves alone. This means that only those who know it from the practice can know it. It can't be made available to anyone else.

This is what the Buddha calls *vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ*: It's the end of the job. The earth-shattering job is done—earth-shattering because becoming and birth build themselves up with earth, water, wind, and fire; or because any level of becoming and birth is a matter of convention, which is now overturned. This is why we say it's earth-shattering. So what is there to move in and take up residence in the mind?

Now we can watch defilement. Once we have completely killed defilement in this mind, then how can defilement be kept hidden from us when it displays itself in anyone else's mind or actions? This mind can't help but know it every time. As they say, defilement ordinarily rules us completely without our knowing it, but how can the Buddha and the arahants have any trouble seeing? They see in the flash of an eye and

they're already disgusted. *Those who know, know to the point where they're disgusted:* What do you say to that? As for us, we're the blind living with the blind. We don't know our own affairs or those of anyone else. Neither side knows, but each side thinks that it knows, assumes that it knows, assumes that it's right—and so both sides argue and bite each other like dogs because their inner eyes don't see. They don't have the eye of discernment like the Buddha and the Noble Disciples. This is the way it is with defilement: It has to assume itself and exalt itself. The more vile it is, the more it assumes itself to be good. This is the way defilement is. It has never submitted to the truth of the Dhamma from time immemorial.

For this reason, we practice to stamp out these things. Don't let them linger in the heart. Stamp them out till they're completely scattered and smashed, and then you can be at your ease: the mind completely open and yet a reservoir for the quality of purity, without an inkling of convention passing in. If we were to make a comparison with conventional reality, it's an outer space mind, but that's just a manner of speaking.

# *The Outer Space of the Mind*

*August 24, 1982*

People who practice in earnestness, trying to develop and improve the qualities in their hearts step by step, beginning with virtue, the stages of concentration, and the levels of discernment, are—to make a comparison—like the people who build a rocket or a satellite to travel in outer space. They have to put their vehicle into good shape. Otherwise it won't get off the ground—because the things that can act as obstacles to their vehicle are many. The object that's going to travel in space has to be developed in order to be completely suited to its environment in every way. Before they can get it safely past its obstacles, they need to have made ample calculations. Even then, there are times when mishaps occur. But once the vehicle has been thoroughly developed, it can travel easily in outer space without any mishaps of any sort. This is an analogy for the minds of those who practice, who have developed their inner qualities and put them in to shape.

The heart is what will step out beyond the realm of conventional realities that exert a gravitational pull on it, into the outer space beyond convention: to *vimutti*, or release. The things that act as obstacles, preventing it from stepping out, are the various kinds of defilement.

For this reason, we have to make a very great effort. The defilements have various levels of crudeness and subtlety, so in developing the heart so as to pass through the crudeness and subtlety of the various levels of conventional reality—and of the defilements in particular—we must try to make it just right. We must use whatever qualities are needed to get the mind past the crudeness of conventional realities or defilement, stage by stage, by means of our practice, by means of our efforts to improve and develop it. Our persistence has to be strong. Our efforts, our endeavors in

all ways have to be strong. Mindfulness and discernment are the important factors that will take the heart beyond the various obstacles thwarting it step by step. All of the techniques and strategies taught by the Buddha in the area of meditation are means for developing the heart so that it will be suited to transcending the realm of conventional reality and reaching outer space: *nibbāna*.

What is it like, the outer space of the Dhamma? They no longer doubt about whether the outer space of the world exists or not. The things that lie within conventional reality are known to exist. Outer space beyond our atmosphere is another level of conventional reality. Outer space: What is it like? Does it exist? How does our world in the atmosphere differ from the things outside the world of our atmosphere called outer space? Both of these levels exist.

The mind that lies in the realm of conventional reality—surrounded and controlled—is like the various objects in the world trapped by the pull of gravity at all times. The mind is trapped by the pull of defilement in just the same way. It can't escape, which is why it must develop its strength to escape from the world of this gravitational pull. This gravitational pull is something the Buddha has already explained. In brief, there is craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving for no becoming. The details—the branches and offshoots—are more than can be numbered. They fill this world of conventional realities. They are all factors that make the mind attached and entangled—loving, hating, and resenting different things, different beings, different people. All these factors can be adversaries to the heart and come from the preoccupations of the heart itself that labels things and misinterprets them.

For this reason, the principles of the Dhamma that the Buddha taught in the area of meditation for developing and modifying the heart are very appropriate for helping us as meditators to escape from all the things in our hearts that exert a pull on us or weigh us down. These things are hard to remove, hard to remedy, hard to sever, which is why we need a Teacher to guide us. If we had no Teacher, the living beings in the three realms of the

cosmos—no matter how many thousands or millions of forms and levels there are—would all be as if deaf and blind. Not one of them would be able to escape from this darkness and blindness.

This is why we should have a heartfelt sense of the awesomeness of the arising of a Buddha, who leads living beings to escape from this gravitational pull, from this oppressiveness, safely and in large numbers—to the point where no one else can compare—beginning with each Buddha’s foremost disciples and on to the end of his dispensation, when his teachings no longer exist in the hearts of living beings, which is the final point in his work of ferrying living beings from all sorts of blindness, darkness, suffering, and stress.

Our present Buddha performed these duties with the full mindfulness and discernment of his great mercy and compassion, beginning with the day of his Awakening. It’s as if he took a large ship and cast anchor in the middle of the ocean in order to gather the living beings of various kinds and strengths adrift in the water on the verge of death and bring them on board stage by stage. Those who take an interest in the Dhamma are like beings who struggle to get on board the Buddha’s ship that has cast anchor in the middle of the sea. They keep climbing on board, climbing on board, until the day when the beings of the world have no more belief in the teachings of the religion. That’s when the ship will no longer have any function. Those who are still left in the sea will have to stay there adrift, with no more way of escape. They are the ones who are to become food for the fishes and turtles.

Those who have come on board, though, are the various stages of those who have been able to escape, as mentioned in the four types of individuals, beginning with the *ugghatitaññū*, *vipacitaññū*, and *neyya*. These are the ones who have come on board. How high or low they are able to go depends on their individual capabilities. There are those who escape completely—those free of defilement; there are those on the verge of escape—the non-returners (*anāgāmi*); those in the middle—the once-returners (*sakidāgāmi*); and then the stream-winners (*sotapanna*); and finally ordinary good people.

Here we're referring to the Buddha's ship in its general sense. He uses it to salvage living beings, beginning from the day of his Awakening until the point when the teachings of the religion have no more meaning in the world's sensibilities. That's the final point. Those who remain are the diseased who can find no medicine or physician to treat their illnesses and are simply awaiting their day to die.

So now we are swimming and struggling toward the Buddha's large ship by making the effort of the practice. In particular, now that we have ordained in the Buddha's religion and have developed a feel for his teaching, this makes us even more moved, even more convinced of all the truths that he taught rightly about good and evil, right and wrong, hell, heaven, the Brahmā worlds, and *nibbāna*, all of which are realities that actually exist.

We have followed the principles of the Buddha's Dhamma, and in particular the practice of meditation. Try to build up your strength and ability without flagging, so as to resist and remove all the things that coerce or exert a gravitational pull on the heart. Don't let yourself become accustomed to their pull. *They pull you to disaster*, not to anything else. They're not forces that will pull you to what is auspicious. They'll pull you to what's inauspicious, step by step, depending on how much you believe, give in, and are overcome by their pull. Suffering will then appear in proportion to how much you unconsciously agree, give in, and are overcome by their pull. Even though there are the teachings of the religion to pull you back, the mind tends to take the lower path more than the path of the religion, which is why it is set adrift. But we're not the type to be set adrift. We're the type who are swimming to release using the full power of our intelligence and abilities.

Wherever you are, whatever you do, always be on the alert with mindfulness. Don't regard the effort of the practice as tiring, as something wearisome, difficult to do, difficult to get right, difficult to contend with. Struggle and effort: These are the path for those who are to gain release from all stress and danger, not the path of those headed downward to the

depths of hell, blind and in the dark by day and by night, their minds consumed by all things lowly and vile.

The Noble Ones in the time of the Buddha practiced in earnest. With the words, ‘I go to the Buddha for refuge,’ or ‘I go to the Saṅgha for refuge,’ we should reflect on their Dhamma, investigating and unraveling it so as to see the profundity and subtlety of their practice. At the same time, we should take their realizations into our hearts as good examples to follow, so that we can conduct ourselves in the footsteps of their practices and realizations.

‘I go to the Buddha for refuge.’ We all know how difficult it was for him to become the Buddha. We should engrave it in our hearts. Our Teacher was the first pioneer in our age to the good destination for the sake of all living beings. Things were never made easy for him. From the day of his renunciation to the day of his Awakening, it was as if he were in hell—there’s no need to compare it to being in prison—because he had been very delicately brought up in his royal home. When he renounced the household life, he faced great difficulties in terms of the four necessities. In addition, there were many, many defilements in his heart related to his treasury and to the nation filled with his royal subjects. It weighed heavily on his heart at all times that he had to leave these things behind. He found no comfort or peace at all, except when he was sound asleep.

As for us, we don’t have a following, don’t have subjects, have never been kings. We became ordained far more easily than the Buddha. And when we make the effort of the practice, we have his teachings, correct in their every aspect, as our guide. Our practice isn’t really difficult like that of the Buddha, who had to struggle on his own with no one to guide him. On this point, we’re very different. We have a much lighter burden in the effort of the practice than the Buddha, who was of royal birth.

Food, wherever we go, is full to overflowing, thanks to the faith of those who are already convinced of the Buddha’s teachings and are not lacking in interest and faith for those who practice rightly. For this reason, monks—wherever they go—are not lacking in the four necessities of life, which is very different from the case of the Buddha.

All of the Noble Disciples who followed in the Buddha's footsteps were second to him in terms of the difficulties they faced. They had a much easier time as regards the four necessities of life, because people by and large had already begun to have faith and conviction in the teachings. But even so, the disciples didn't take pleasure in the four necessities more than in the Dhamma, in making the single-minded effort to gain release from suffering and stress. This is something very pleasing, something very worthy to be taken as an example. They gave their hearts, their lives—every part of themselves—in homage to the Buddha and Dhamma, to the point where they all became homage to the Saṅgha within themselves. In doing so, they all encountered difficulties, every one of them.

Because the Dhamma is something superior and superlative, whoever meets it has to develop and prosper through its power day by day, step by step, to a state of superlative excellence. As for the defilements, there is no type of defilement that can take anyone to peace, security, or excellence of any kind.

The defilements know this. They know that the Dhamma far excels them, so they disguise themselves thoroughly to keep us from knowing their tricks and deceptions. In everything we do, they have to lie behind the scenes, showing only their tactics and strategies, which are nothing but means of fooling living beings into falling for them and staying attached to them. This is very ingenious on their part.

For this reason, those who make the effort of the practice are constantly bending under their gravitational pull. Whether we are doing sitting meditation, walking meditation—whatever our posture—we keep bending and leaning under their pull. They pull us toward laziness and lethargy. They pull us toward discouragement and weakness. They pull us into believing that our mindfulness and discernment are too meager for the teachings of the religion. They pull us into believing that our capacities are too meager to deserve the Dhamma, to deserve the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*, or to deserve the Buddha's teachings. All of these things are the tactics of the pull of defilement to draw us solely into failure, away from the

Dhamma. If we don't practice the Dhamma so as to get above these things, we won't have any sense at all that they are all deceptions of defilement. When we have practiced so as to get beyond them step by step, though, they won't be able to remain hidden. No matter how sharp and ingenious the various kinds of defilement may be, they don't lie beyond the power of mindfulness and discernment. This is why the Buddha saw causes and effects, benefits and harm, in a way that went straight to his heart, because of his intelligence that transcended defilement.

For this reason, when he taught the Dhamma to the world, he did so with full compassion so that living beings could truly escape from danger, from the depths of the world so full of suffering. He wanted the beings of the world to see the marvelousness, the awesomeness of the Dhamma that had had such an impact within his heart, so that they too would actually see as he did. This is why his proclamation of the Dhamma was done in full measure, for it was based on his benevolence. He didn't proclaim it with empty pronouncements or as empty ceremony. That sort of thing didn't exist in the Buddha. Instead, he was truly filled with benevolence for the living beings of the world.

His activities as Buddha—the five duties of the Buddha we are always hearing about—he never abandoned, except for the few times he occasionally set them aside in line with events. But even though he set them aside, *it wasn't because he had set his benevolence aside*. He set them aside in keeping with events and circumstances. For example, when he spent the rains alone in the Parileyya Forest, he had no following, and none of the monks entered the forest to receive instruction from him, which meant that this activity was set aside. Other than that, though, he performed his duties to the full because of his benevolence, with nothing lacking in any way.

This is a matter of his having seen things clearly in his heart: the harm of all things dangerous, and the benefits of all things beneficial. The Buddha had touched and known them in every way, which is why he had nothing to doubt. His teaching of the Dhamma regarding harms and benefits was thus done in full measure. He analyzed harm into all its branches. He analyzed

benefits into all their branches and completely revealed the differing degrees of benefits they gave. The beings of the world who had lived drearily with suffering and stress for untold eons and were capable of learning of the excellence of the Dhamma from the Buddha: How could they remain complacent? Once they had heard the teachings of the religion truly resonating in their very own ears and hearts—because of the truth, the honesty, the genuine compassion of the Buddha—they had to wake up. The beings of the world had to wake up. They had to accept the truth.

That truth is of two kinds. The truth on the side of harm is one kind of truth: It really is stressful, and the origin of stress really creates stress to burn the hearts of living beings. As for the path, it really creates ease and happiness for living beings. Those who listened to these truths, listened with all their hearts. This being the case, the strength of will they developed, their conviction, and their clear vision of both harm and benefits all gathered to become a strength permeating the one heart of each person. So why shouldn't these things reveal their full strength and manifest themselves as persistence, effort, earnestness, and determination in every activity for the sake of gaining release from all dangers and adversity by means of the Dhamma?

This is why the disciples who heard the Dhamma from the Buddha, from the mouth of the foremost Teacher, felt inspired and convinced. Many of them even came to see the Dhamma and gain release from suffering and stress, step by step to the point of absolute release, right there in the Buddha's presence. As we've seen the texts say: When the Buddha was explaining the Dhamma for the sake of those who could be taught, his followers—such as the monks—attained the Dhamma to ultimate release, *nibbāna*, in no small numbers. *This is what happens when truth meets with truth.* They fit together easily with no difficulty at all. Those who listened did so by really seeing the benefits and harm, really convinced by the reasons of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, which is why they gained clear results right then and there.

The Dhamma—both the harm and benefits that the Buddha explained in

his day and age, and that existed in the hearts of his listeners in that day and age: In what way is it different from the truths existing in our hearts at present? They're all the same nature of truth, the same Noble Truths. They don't lie beyond the four Noble Truths, either in the Buddha's time or in the present.

The Buddha's instructions were the truth of the path, teaching people to have virtue, concentration, and discernment so that they could truly understand the affairs of stress straight to the heart and remove the cause of stress, which is a thorn or a spear stabbing the heart of living beings, creating suffering and stress that go straight to the heart as well. The truth of stress exists in our bodies and minds. The truth of the origin of stress reveals itself blatantly in our hearts in our every activity. What can reveal itself only intermittently, or not at all, is the path—even though we are listening to it right now.

What is the path? Mindfulness and discernment. *Right View* and *Right Resolve*: These things refer to the levels of discernment. If we add *Right Mindfulness*, then when we have these three qualities nourishing the heart, *Right Concentration* will arise because of our right activities. *Right Activity*, for those who are to extricate themselves from stress, refers primarily to the work of removing defilement—for example, the work of sitting and walking meditation, the work of guarding the heart with mindfulness, using mindfulness and discernment continually to investigate and contemplate the different kinds of good and bad things making contact with us at all times. This is called building the path within the heart.

When we bring the path out to contend with our adversary—the origin of stress—what facet is the adversary displaying? The facet of love? What does it love? What exactly is the object it loves? Here we focus mindfulness and discernment in on unraveling the object that's loved. *What is the object in actuality?* Unravel it so as to see it through and through, being really intent in line with the principles of mindfulness and discernment. Reflect back and forth, again and again, so as to see it clearly. The object that's loved or lovable will fade away of its own accord because of our

discernment. Mindfulness and discernment wash away all the artifice, all that is counterfeit in that so-called love step by step until it is all gone. This is the discernment we build up in the heart to wash away all the artifices, all the filth with which the defilements plaster things inside and out.

Outside, they plaster these things on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Inside, they plaster them on labels—*saññā*—that go out our eyes.... They plaster things beginning with our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, stage by stage. There's nothing but the plaster of defilement. When we meet with these things, seeing them or hearing them, *saññā*—labels and interpretations—and *saṅkhāra*—thought-fabrications—appear in the mind. These continue plastering layer on layer.

For this reason, we must use discernment to investigate. Whatever is plastered outside, wash that plastering away. Then turn around to wash away the plastering inside. When we have seen these things clearly with discernment, how can discernment help but turn to find the important culprit, the deceiver inside? It *has* to turn inside. In using mindfulness and discernment, this is how we must use them. When we investigate, this is how we investigate—and we do it earnestly. This is Right Activity in the area of the practice.

*Right Speech:* As I've said before, we speak in line with the ten topics of effacement (*sallekha-dhamma*). We don't bring matters of the world, politics, commerce, matters of women and men, matters of defilement and craving to converse among ourselves so as to become distracted and conceited, piling on more defilement and stress, in line with the things we discuss. With the topics of effacement—that's what the Buddha called them—we speak of things that will strengthen our will to make persistent effort, making us convinced and inspired with the Dhamma. At the same time, these topics are warnings against heedlessness and means of washing away the various kinds of defilement when we hear them from one another. This is Right Speech in the area of the practice.

*Right Livelihood:* Feed your heart with Dhamma. Don't bring in poison—greed, anger, delusion, or lust—to feed the heart, for these things will be

toxic, burning the heart and making it far more troubled than any poisonous substances could. Try to guard your heart well with mindfulness and discernment. The savor of the Dhamma, beginning with concentration as its basis, will appear as peace and calm within the heart in proportion to the levels of concentration. Then use discernment to unravel the various things that the mind labels and interprets, so as to see them clearly step by step. This is called Right Livelihood—guarding the heart rightly, feeding it correctly with the nourishment of the Dhamma, and not with the various kinds of defilement, craving, and mental effluents that are like poisons burning the heart. Reduce matters to these terms, meditators. This is called Right Livelihood in the practice of meditation.

*Right Effort*, as I've said before, means persistence in abandoning all forms of evil. This covers everything we've said so far. The Buddha defines this as persistence in four areas, or of four sorts,<sup>[1]</sup> but since I've already explained this many times, I'll pass over it here.

*Right Mindfulness*: What does the Buddha have us keep in mind? All the things that will remove defilement. For example, he has us keep the four frames of reference in mind: being mindful as we investigate the body; being mindful as we investigate feelings; being mindful as we investigate the mind; being mindful as we investigate phenomena that involve the mind, arise in the mind, arise and then vanish, vanish and then arise, matters of past and future appearing in the present all the time. We keep investigating in this way. If we investigate so as to make the mind progress in tranquility meditation, Right Mindfulness means using mindfulness to supervise our mental repetition. From there it turns into *Right Concentration* within the heart. This is called building the Dhamma, building tools for clearing our way, loosening the things that bind and constrict the heart so that we can make easy progress, so that we aren't obstructed and blocked by the force of the things I have mentioned.

Only the religion, or only the Dhamma, can remove and scatter all the things that have bound us for countless eons, clearing them away so that we can make easy progress. When the mind is centered in concentration, then

confusion and turmoil are far away. The mind is still and dwells in comfort and ease. When the mind develops discernment from investigating and contemplating the things that obstruct it, it makes easy progress. The sharper its discernment, the wider the path it can clear for itself. Its going is smooth. Easy. It advances by seeing and knowing the truth, without being deluded or deceiving itself. Genuine discernment doesn't deceive itself, but instead makes smooth progress. It unravels all the things that obstruct it—our various attachments and misconstruings—so as to see them thoroughly, as if it were slashing away the obstacles in its path so that it can progress step by step as I've already explained to you.

The most important basis for its investigation is the body. Bodies outside or the body inside, investigate them carefully and thoroughly, for they're all Noble Truths. They're all the path, both inside and out. Investigate and unravel them so as to see them clearly—and while you're investigating them, don't concern yourself with any other work more than with the work of investigation. Use discernment to investigate in order really to know, really to see these things *as they are*, and uproot the counterfeit labels and assumptions that say that they're pretty and beautiful, lovely and attractive. Investigate so as to penetrate to the truth that *there is nothing at all beautiful or attractive about them*. They're thoroughly filthy and repulsive: your body and the bodies of others, all without exception. They're all filled with filthy and repulsive things. If you look in line with the principles of the truth, that's how they are. Discernment investigates, peering inward so as to see clear through—from the skin outside on into the inside, which is putrid with all kinds of filth—for the sake of seeing clearly exactly what is pretty, what is beautiful, what is lovely and attractive. There's nothing of the sort in any body. There are only the lying defilements that have planted these notions there.

When we have really investigated on in, we see that these notions are all false. The genuine truth is that these bodies aren't pretty or beautiful. They're nothing but repulsive. When they fall apart, what are they? When they fall apart, earth is earth—because earth is what it already was when it

was still in the body. The properties of water, wind, and fire were already water, wind, and fire when they were in the body. When the body falls apart, where do these things ever become gods and Brahmās, heaven and *nibbāna*? They have to be earth, water, wind, and fire in line with their nature. This is how discernment investigates and analyzes so as to see clearly. This is how we use clear-seeing discernment to clear away the things obstructing and distorting our vision. Now there's no more such thing as being constricted or blocked. Our discernment, if we use it, has to be discernment all the day long.

Wherever discernment penetrates, it sees clearly, clears away its doubts, and lets go, step by step, *until it lets go once and for all from having known thoroughly*. Once it has investigated blatant things so as to know them clearly, where will the mind then go? Once it has investigated blatant things and known them clearly, it's as if it has completely uprooted the blatant defilements that have planted thorns in different objects, such as our own body. So now where will the defilements go? Will they fly away? They can only shrink inward to find a hiding place when they are chased inside and attacked by mindfulness and discernment.

Feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness: These are simply individual conditions by their nature, but they are under the control of defilement. Defilement is the basis from which they spring, so it has to regard itself as being in charge. It uses labels to make them defilement. It forms thought-fabrications so as to make them defilement. It cognizes and takes note so as to make these things defilement. However many feelings arise, it makes them all defilement. Defilement can't make things into Dhamma. It has to be defilement all the day long. This is how it builds itself in its various branches.

So. Investigate on in. Slash on in. Feelings of pleasure and pain: They exist both in the body and in the mind. Feeling isn't defilement. If we look in line with the principles of nature, *it's simply a reality*. The assumption that 'I'm pained' or 'I'm pleased'—delusion with pain, delusion with pleasure, delusion with feelings of indifference in the body and mind: *These* things are

defilement. The assumptions and delusions are defilement. When we really investigate inward, the various feelings aren't defilement; these four mental phenomena aren't defilement.

Once we've spotted our assumptions and constrictings, they retreat inward. The feelings that still exist in the body and mind, even though they aren't yet thoroughly understood, are still greatly lightened. We begin to gain an inkling of their ways, step by step. We're not deluded to the point of complete blindness as we were before we investigated. Whichever aspects of feeling are blatant and associated with the body, we know clearly. We can let go of bodily feelings. We can understand them. As for feelings remaining in the mind, for the most part they're refined feelings of pleasure. We know and let go of them in the same way when the path gains power. These feelings of pleasure are like fish in a trap: No matter what, there's no way they can escape getting cooked. They can't swim down into large ponds and lakes as they used to. They can only sit waiting for their dying day. The same holds true for the refined feeling of pleasure—which is a conventional reality—within the heart. It can only wait for the day it will be disbanded as a convention when the ultimate ease, which is not a convention, comes to rule the heart through the complete penetration of mindfulness and discernment. So investigate on in until you understand, reaching the point of letting go with no more concerns.

What is *saññā* labeling? Labeling this, labeling that, making assumptions about this and that: These are all affairs of defilement using *saññā*. When consciousness (*viññāṇa*) takes note, it too is turned into defilement. So we investigate these things, using discernment in the same way as when we investigate feelings. We then understand. When we understand, these things become simply consciousness taking note, simply *saññā* labeling, without labeling so as to be defilement, without taking note so as to be defilement. Defilement then retreats further and further inward.

Ultimately, these five issues—namely, the physical *khandha*, our body; the *vedanā khandha*, feelings in the body (as for feelings in the mind, let's save those for the moment); the *saññā khandha*, the *saṅkhāra khandha*, and

the *viññāṇa khandha*— are all clearly known in the heart, with no more doubts. The defilements gather inward, converge inward. They can't go out roaming, because they'll get slashed to bits by mindfulness and discernment. So they have to withdraw inward to find a hiding place. This, in actuality, is what the investigation is like, and not otherwise.

In our investigation as meditators, when discernment reaches any particular level, we'll know for ourselves, step by step. Both defilement and discernment: We'll know both sides at the same time. When discernment is very strong, defilement grows weaker. Mindfulness and discernment become even more courageous and unflinching. The words laziness and lethargy, which are affairs of defilement, disappear. We keep moving in with persistence day and night. This is the way it is when the path gains strength. As meditators you should take note of this and practice so as to know it and see it, so as to make it your own treasure arising in your heart. Your doubts will then be ended in every way.

We now take this atomic mindfulness and discernment and shoot it into the central point of conventional reality, the point that causes living beings to founder in the wheel of the cycle (*vaṭṭa*) so that they can't find their way out, don't know the way out, don't know the ways of birth, don't know who has been born as what, where they have died, what burdens of suffering and stress they have carried. Mindfulness and discernment go crashing down into that point until it is scattered to pieces. And so now how can we not know what it is that has caused us to take birth and die? There is only defilement that is the important seed causing us to take birth and die, causing us to suffer pain and stress. The true Dhamma hasn't caused us to suffer. It has brought us nothing but pleasure and ease in line with its levels, in line with the levels of what is noble and good. The things that give rise to major and minor sufferings are all affairs of defilement. We can see this clearly. We can know this clearly. Especially when defilement has been completely scattered from the heart, it's as if the earth and sky collapse. How can this not send a tremor through the three levels of the cosmos?— because this thing is what has wandered throughout the three levels of the

cosmos. When it has been made to collapse within the heart, what is the heart like now? How does the outer space of the Dhamma differ from the outer space of the world? Now we know clearly. The outer space of this purified mind: Is it annihilation? The outer space of the world isn't annihilation. If it were annihilation, they wouldn't call it outer space. It's a nature that exists in line with the principles of its nature as outer space.

The outer space of the mind released from all forms of gravitational pull, i.e., conventional reality: What is it like? Even though we've never known it before, when we come to know it, we won't have any doubts. Even though we've never seen it before, when we come to see it, we won't have any doubts. Even though we've never experienced it before, when we come to experience it, we won't have any doubts. We won't have to search for witnesses to confirm it, the way we do with conventions in general. It's *sandiṭṭhiko*—immediately apparent—and only this fits perfectly with our heart and that outer space mind.

This is what we referred to at the beginning when we talked about the outer space of the world and the outer space of the mind. The outer space of the mind—the mind of *nibbāna*—is like that. Just where is it annihilated? Who experiences the outer space of the mind? *If it were annihilation, who could experience it?* As for where it will or won't be reborn, we already know that there's no way for it to be reborn. We know this clearly. We've removed every defilement or conventional reality that would lead to rebirth. Conventional reality is the same thing as defilement. All things—no matter how subtle—that have been dangers to the heart for such a long time have been completely destroyed. All that remains is the pure outer space of the mind: the mind that is pure. You can call it outer space, you can call it anything at all, because the world has its conventions, so we have to make differentiations to use in line with the conventions of the world so as not to conflict.

When we reach the level of the outer space mind, how does it feel for the mind to have been coerced, oppressed, and subject to the pull of all things base and vile, full of stress and great sufferings for eons and eons? We don't

have to reflect on how many lifetimes it's been. We can take the principle of the present as our evidence. Now the mind is released. We've seen how much suffering there has been and now we've abandoned it once and for all. We've absolutely destroyed its seeds, beginning with '*avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*'—'With unawareness as condition there occur fabrications.' All that remains is '*avijjāya tv'eva asesā-virāga-nirodhā saṅkhāra-nirodho*'—'Simply with the disbanding of unawareness, with no remaining passion, fabrications disband.' That's the outer space of the mind.

The mind released from all gravitational forces: Even though it's still alive and directing the *khandhas*, there's nothing to bar its thoughts, its vision, its knowledge. There's nothing to obstruct it, nothing to make it worried or relieved, nothing to make it brave, nothing to make it afraid. It is simply its own nature by itself, always independent in that way.

For this reason, knowledge of all truths has to be completely open to this unobstructed and unoppressed mind. It can know and see. If we speak of matters related to the body and *khandhas*, we can speak in every way without faltering, because there's nothing to hinder us. Only the defilements are what kept us from seeing what we saw and from describing the things we should have been able to describe, because we didn't know, we didn't see. What we knew was bits and pieces. We didn't know the full truth of these various things. When this was the case, how could we know clearly? How could we speak clearly? *All we knew was bits and pieces, so when we spoke, it had to be bits and pieces as well.*

But once we've shed these things, everything is wide open. The mind is free, vast, and empty, without limits, without bounds. There's nothing to enclose or obscure it. When we know, we really know the truth. When we see, we really see the truth. When we speak, we can speak the truth. You can call the mind brave or not-brave as you like, because we speak in line with what we experience, what we know and see, so why can't we speak? We can know, we can see, so why can't we speak?—for these things exist as they have from the beginning. When the Buddha proclaimed the Dhamma to the world, he took the things that existed and that he saw in line with

what he had known—everything of every sort—and proclaimed them to the world. Think of how broad it was, the knowledge of the Buddha, how subtle and profound—because nothing was concealed or mysterious to him. Everything was completely opened to him. This is why he’s called *lokavidū*—one who knows the world clearly—through the vastness of his mind that had nothing to enclose or conceal it at all.

*Āloko udapādi*: ‘Brightness arose.’ His mind was bright toward the truth both by day and by night. This is how the Buddha knew. The Noble Disciples all knew in the same way, except that his range and theirs differed in breadth. But as for knowing the truth, it was the same for them all.

Here we’ve described both the benefits and the harm of the things involved with the mind—in other words, both the Dhamma and the defilements—for you as meditators to listen to and contemplate in earnestness.

So. Let’s try to develop our minds so as to shoot out beyond this world of conventional realities to see what it’s like. Then we won’t have to ask where the Buddha is, how many Buddhas there have been, whether the Noble Disciples really exist or how many they are—*because the one truth that we know and see clearly in our hearts resonates to all the Buddhas, all the Noble Disciples, and all the Dhamma that exists.* We won’t have any doubts, because the nature that knows and exists within us contains them all: all the Buddhas, the community of Noble Disciples, and all the Dhamma that exists. It’s a nature just right in its every aspect, with nothing for us to doubt.

This is the place—if we speak in terms of place—where we run out of doubts about everything of every sort. We oversee the *khandhas*, which are simply conventions of the world, just as all the Noble Disciples do while they are still living. As for the mind, it has gained release and remains released in that way. As we have said, even though it remains in the midst of the world of conventions, this nature is its own nature, and those other things are their own affairs. Each is a separate reality that doesn’t mingle, join, or have an effect on the others. When we say release from the world,

this is what we mean.

All of the Dhammas I have mentioned here: When do they exist? And when don't they exist? The Dhamma exists at all times and in all places. It's *akāliko*, timeless. So I ask that you penetrate into the Dhamma of these four Noble Truths. You'll be right on target with the results of the Buddha and the Noble Disciples; and there's no doubt but that you'll be right on target with the results of the Buddha's and the Noble Disciples' work. Their workplace is in these four Noble Truths, and the results that come from the work are the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*. They arise right here. They're located right here. When we have practiced and reached them fully and completely, there will be nothing for us to question.

This is why there won't be any reason to doubt the time of the Buddha as compared to our own time, as to whether the Dhamma of the Buddha was different because the defilements are now different from what they were then. *The defilements then and now are all of the same sort. The Dhamma is all of the same sort.* If we cure defilement in the same way, we're bound to gain release in the same way. There is no other way to gain release, no matter what the day and age. There is only this one way: following the way of the path, beginning with virtue, concentration, and discernment, to eliminate defilement, the cause of stress—in particular, craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving for no becoming—completely from the heart.

As for *nirodha*, the cessation of stress: When defilement is disbanded, from where will any more suffering or stress arise? When defilement and stress are disbanded for good, that's the outer space of the mind. As for the Noble Truths, they're activities, or our workplace. The result that comes from these four Noble Truths is something else entirely. As I've always been telling you: What is it that knows that stress and the cause of stress disband? When the path has performed its duties to the full and has completely wiped out the cause of stress, then *nirodha*—the cessation of stress—appears in full measure, after which it disbands as well, because it too is a conventional reality. As for the one who knows that the cause of

stress has disbanded by being eradicated through the path so as to give rise to the cessation of stress: *The one who knows this is the pure one*—the outer space of the mind—and that’s the end of the matter.

So investigate carefully. Listen carefully when you listen to the Dhamma while putting it to use. When we work, we can’t let go of our tools. For instance, if we’re working with an ax, the ax has to be at hand. If we’re working with a knife, the knife has to be at hand. If we’re working with a chisel, the chisel has to be at hand. But when we’ve finished our work, we let go of our chisel, we let go of our various tools. So here the virtue, concentration, and discernment that are called the path are our tools in the work of eliminating defilement. We have to keep them right at hand while we are working. When we have eliminated defilement until it’s completely defeated and nothing is left, these tools are phenomena that let go of themselves of their own accord, without our having to force them.

As I’ve always been saying, the teachings on inconstancy, stress, and not-self are our path. We can’t let go of them. We have to investigate things with mindfulness and discernment so as to see them clearly in line with the principles of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Once we’re ready and we’ve run the full course, we let go of these principles in line with the truth. We don’t call anything not-self. Each thing is a separate reality, with no quarreling. This is the Dhamma: It has many stages, many levels, so those who listen have to make distinctions, because in this talk I’ve discussed many stages on many levels, back and forth, so as to make things plain for those listening.

To summarize: The marketplace of the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* is located in the Noble Truths. It isn’t located anywhere else. So, whatever else, make sure that you attain them. Accelerate your efforts to the full extent of your ability. Use all the mindfulness and discernment you have to contemplate and investigate things in order to see them clearly. See what it’s like to set them spinning as a wheel of Dhamma, which the Buddha has described as super-mindfulness and super-discernment. When we start out practicing, how can they immediately become super-mindfulness and

super-discernment? When children are born, they don't immediately become adults. They have to be nourished and guarded and cared for. Think of how much it takes, how much it costs, for each child to become an adult as we all have. Mindfulness and discernment need to be nourished and guarded in just the same way. When we nourish and guard them unceasingly, unflinchingly, they grow bold and capable until they become super-mindfulness and super-discernment. Then they attack the defilements—no matter what the sort—until the defilements are slashed to pieces with nothing left, so that we attain purity—release and *nibbāna*—within our own heart, which will then have the highest value. Whether or not anyone else confers titles on it, we ourselves don't confer titles. We've reached sufficiency, so what is there to gain by conferring titles? All that's left is the gentleness and tenderness of purity, blended into one with benevolence. The entire mind is filled with benevolence.

The Buddha taught the beings of the world through his benevolence. His mind was completely gentle toward every living being in the three levels of the cosmos. He didn't exalt or demean any of them at all. '*Sabbe sattā*'—'May all living beings who are fellows in suffering, birth, ageing, illness, and death'— '*averā hontu*'—'be free from enmity'... all the way to '*sukhī attānam pariharantu*'—'may they look after themselves with ease.'<sup>[2]</sup> That was his benevolence. He gave equality to all living beings. He didn't lean, because his mind didn't have anything to lean. It didn't have any defilements infiltrating it that could make it lean. The things leaning this way and that are all affairs of defilement. When there's pure Dhamma, the mind keeps its balance with pure fairness, so there's no leaning. It's a principle of nature that stays as it is.

So I ask that you all take this and earnestly put it into practice. Gain release so as to see it clearly in your heart. How do they compare: this heart as it's currently coerced and oppressed, and the heart when it has attained release from coercion and oppression. How do they differ in value? Come to see this clearly in your own heart. You won't see it anywhere else. *Sandiṭṭhiko*: It's immediately apparent within the person who practices.

So then. This seems to be enough explanation for now.

#### Note

1. Making the effort (1) to prevent evil from arising, (2) to abandon evil that has arisen, (3) to give rise to the good, and (4) to maintain and perfect the good that has arisen.

2. The full passage: *Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu, averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu:*

May all living beings be happy, free from enmity, free from affliction, free from anxiety. May they look after themselves with ease.

# *To Be an Inner Millionaire*

*September 10, 1962*

The search for inner wealth is much the same as the search for outer wealth. In searching for outer wealth, intelligent people have no problems: They can find it easily. But stupid people have lots of difficulties. Look around and you'll see that poor people are many, while rich people are few. This shows that stupid people are many, while intelligent people are few, which is why there are more poor people than rich people.

In the search for inner wealth—virtue and goodness—the same holds true: It depends more on ingenuity than on any other factor. If we're stupid, then even if we sit right at the hem of the Buddha's robe or the robe of one of his Noble Disciples, the only result we'll get will be our own stupidity. To gain ingenuity or virtue from the Buddha or his Noble Disciples is very difficult for a stupid person, because inner wealth depends on ingenuity and intelligence. If we have no ingenuity, we won't be able to find any inner wealth to provide happiness and ease for the heart.

External wealth is something we're all familiar with. Money, material goods, living things, and things without life: All of these things are counted as wealth. They are said to belong to whoever has rights over them. The same holds true with the virtue and goodness we call merit. If unintelligent people search for merit and try to develop virtue and goodness like the people around them, the results will depend on their ingenuity and stupidity. If they have little ingenuity, they'll gain little merit.

As for those of us who have ordained in the Buddha's religion, our aim is to develop ourselves so as to gain release from suffering and stress, just like a person who aims single-mindedly at being a millionaire.

People in the world have basically three sorts of attitudes. The first sort: Some people are born in the midst of poverty and deprivation because their

parents are ignorant, with no wealth at their disposal. They make their living by begging. When they wake up in the morning, they go begging from house to house, street to street, sometimes getting enough to eat, sometimes not. Their children fall into the same '*kamma* current'. That's the kind of potential they've developed, so they have to be born to impoverished parents of that sort. They just don't have it in them to think of being millionaires like those in the world of the wealthy. The parents to whom they are born act as a mould, so they are lazy and ignorant like their parents. They live in suffering with their parents and go out begging with them, sometimes eating their fill, sometimes not.

But this is still better than other sorts of people. Some parents are not only poor, but also earn their living by thievery and robbery. Whatever they get to feed their children, they tell their children what it is and where it came from. The children get this sort of education from their parents and grow up nourished by impure things—things gained through dishonesty, thievery, and robbery—so when they grow up, they don't have to think of looking for work or for any education at the age when they should be looking for learning, because they've already received their education from their parents: education in stealing, cheating, thievery and robbery, laziness and crookedness. This is because their parents have acted as blackboards covered with writing: their actions and the manners of their every movement. Every child born to them receives training in how to act, to speak, and to think. Everything is thus an education from the parents, because the writing and teachings are all there on the blackboard of the parents. Laziness, dishonesty, deceit, thievery: Every branch of evil is there in the writing on the blackboard. The children learn to read, to draw, to write, all from their parents, and fill themselves with the sort of knowledge that has the world up in flames. As they begin to grow up, they take over their parents' duties by pilfering this and that, until they gradually become hoodlums, creating trouble for society at large. This is one of the major fires burning away at society without stop. The reasons that people can be so destructive on a large scale like this can come either from their parents, from their own innate character, or from associating with evil, dishonest

people. This is the sort of attitude found in people of one sort.

The second sort of people have the attitude that even though they won't be millionaires, they will still have enough to eat and to use like people in general, and that they will be good citizens like the rest of society so that they can maintain a decent reputation. People of this sort are relatively hard-working and rarely lazy. They have enough possessions to get by on a level with the general run of good citizens. When they have children, the children take their parents as examples, as writing on the blackboard from which they learn their work, their behavior, and all their manners. Once they gain this knowledge from their parents, they put it to use and become good citizens themselves, with enough wealth to get by without hardships, able to keep up with the world so that they don't lose face or cause their families any shame. They can relate to the rest of society with confidence and without being a disgrace to their relatives or to society in general. They behave in line with their ideals until they become good citizens with enough wealth to keep themselves out of poverty. These are the attitudes of the second sort of people.

The third sort of people have attitudes that differ from those of the first two sorts in that they're determined, no matter what, to possess more wealth than anyone else in the world. They are headed in this direction from the very beginning because they have earned the opportunity to be born in families rich in virtue and material wealth. They learn ingenuity and industriousness from their parents, because their parents work hard at commerce and devote themselves fully to all their business activities. Whatever the parents do, the children will have to see. Whatever the parents say with regard to their work inside or outside the home, near or far, the children—who are students by nature—will have to listen and take it to heart, because the children are not only students, but also their parents' closest and most trusted helpers. The parents can't overlook them. Eventually they become the supervisors of the parents' workers inside and outside the home and in all the businesses set up by their parents. In all of the activities for which the parents are responsible, the children will have to be students and workers, at the same time keeping an eye and an ear out to

observe and contemplate what is going on around them. All activities, whether in the area of the world, such as commerce, or in the area of the Dhamma—such as maintaining the precepts, chanting, and meditating—are things the children will have to study and pick up from their parents.

Thus parents shouldn't be complacent in their good and bad activities, acting as they like and thinking that the children won't be able to pick things up from them. This sort of attitude is not at all fitting, because the way people treat and mistreat the religion and the nation's institutions comes from what they learn as children. Don't think that it comes from anywhere else, for no one has ever put old people in school.

We should thus realize that children begin learning the principles of nature step by step from the day they are born until their parents send them for formal schooling. The principles of nature are everywhere, so that anyone who is interested—child or adult—can study them at any time, unlike formal studies and book learning, which come into being at some times and change or disappear at others.

For this reason, parents are the most influential mould for their children in the way they look after them, give them love and affection, and provide their education, both in the principles of nature and in the basic subjects that the children should pick up from them. This is because all children come ready to learn from the adults and the other children around them. Whether they will be good children or bad depends on the knowledge they pick up from around them. When this is stored up in their hearts, it will exert pressure on their behavior, making it good or bad, as we see all around us. This comes mainly from what they learn of the principles of nature, which are rarely taught in school, but which people pick up more quickly than anything that school teachers teach.

Thus parents and teachers should give special attention to every child for whom they are responsible. Even when parents put their children to work, helping with the buying and selling at home, the children are learning the livelihood of buying and selling from their parents—picking up, along the way, their parents' strong and weak points. We can see this from the

way children pick up the parents' religion. However good or bad, right or wrong the religion may be—even if it's worshipping spirits—the children are bound to pick up their parents' beliefs and practices. If the parents cherish moral virtue, the children will follow their example, cherishing moral virtue and following the practices of their parents.

This third sort of person is thus very industrious and hard-working, and so reaps better and more outstanding results than the other two sorts.

When we classify people in this way, we can see that people of the first sort are the laziest and most ignorant. At the same time, they make themselves disreputable and objects of the scorn of good people in general. People of the second sort are fairly hard-working and fairly well-off, while those of the third sort are determined to be wealthier than the rest of the world and at the same time are very hard-working because, since they have set their sights high, they can't just sit around doing nothing. They are very persevering and very persistent in their work, going all out to find ways to earn wealth, devoting themselves to their efforts and to being ingenious, circumspect, and uncomplacent in all their activities. People of this sort, even if they don't become millionaires, are important and deserve to be set up as good examples for the people of the nation at large.

We monks fall into the same three sorts. The first sort includes those who are ordained only in name, only as a ceremony, who don't aim for the Dhamma, for reasonability, or for what's good or right. They aim simply at living an easy life because they don't have to work hard like lay people. Once ordained, they become very lazy and very well-known for quarreling with their fellow monks. Instead of gaining merit from being ordained, as most people might think, they end up filling themselves and those around them with suffering and evil.

The second sort of monk aims at what is reasonable. If he can manage to gain release from suffering, that's what he wants. He believes that there is merit and so he wants it. He believes that there is evil, so he wants really to understand good and evil. He is fairly hard-working and intelligent. He follows the teachings of the Dhamma and Vinaya well and so doesn't offend

his fellow monks. He is interested in studying and diligently practicing the threefold training of virtue, concentration, and discernment. He takes instruction easily, has faith in the principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya, is intent on his duties, and believes in what is reasonable.

The third sort of monk becomes ordained out of a true sense of faith and conviction. Even if he may not have had much of an education from any teachers in the beginning, once he has become ordained and gains instruction from his teachers or from the texts that give a variety of reasons showing how to act so as to head toward evil and how to strive so as to head toward the good, he immediately takes it as a lesson for training himself. The more he studies from his teachers, the stronger his faith and conviction grow, to the point where he develops a firm, single-minded determination to gain release from suffering and stress. Whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, he doesn't flag in his determination. He is always firmly intent on gaining release from suffering and stress. He's very persistent and hard-working. Whatever he does, he does with his full heart, aiming at reason, aiming at the Dhamma.

This third sort of monk is the uncomplacent sort. He observes the precepts for the sake of real purity and observes them with great care. He is uncomplacent both in training his mind in concentration and in giving rise to discernment. He is intent on training the basic mindfulness and discernment he already has as an ordinary run-of-the-mill person, so that they become more and more capable, step by step, making them the sort of mindfulness and discernment that can keep abreast of his every action until they become super-mindfulness and super-discernment, capable of shedding all defilements and mental effluents from the heart. He thus becomes one of the amazing people of the religion, earning the homage and respect of people at large.

In the area of the world there are three sorts of people, and in the area of the Dhamma there are three sorts of monks. Which of the three are we going to choose to be? When we come right down to it, *each of these three types refers to each of us*, because we can make ourselves into any of them,

making them appear within us—because these three types are simply for the purpose of comparison. When we refer them to ourselves, we can be any of the three. We can be the type who makes himself vile and lazy, with no interest in the practice of the Dhamma, with no value at all; or we can make ourselves into the second or third sort. It all depends on how our likes and desires will affect our attitudes in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Whichever type we want to be, we should adapt our thoughts, words, and deeds to fit the type. The affairs of that sort of person will then become our own affairs, because none of these sorts lies beyond us. We can change our behavior to fit in with any of the three. If we are going to be the third sort of person, then no matter what, we are sure to release ourselves from suffering and stress someday in the future or in this very lifetime.

So be uncomplacent in all your activities, mindful of your efforts and actions, and discerning with regard to your affairs at all times. Don't let the activities of your thoughts, words, and deeds go straying down the wrong path. Try to train your mindfulness and discernment to stay involved with your activities at all times. To safeguard these sorts of things isn't as difficult as safeguarding external wealth, because inner wealth stays with us, which makes it possible to safeguard it.

As a monk, you have only one duty. When sitting, be aware that you're sitting. Whatever issue you think about, know that you're thinking. Don't assume that any issue comes from anywhere other than from a lapse of mindfulness in your own heart, which makes wrong issues—from minor ones to major ones—start spreading to your own detriment. All of this comes from your own lack of watchfulness and restraint. It doesn't come from anything else. If you want to gain release from suffering and stress in this lifetime, then see the dangers of your own errors, your complacency, and your lack of mindfulness. See them as your enemies. If, in your eyes, the currents of the mind that spin to give rise to the cravings and mental effluents termed the origin of stress are something good, then you're sure to go under. Be quick to shed these things immediately. Don't let them lie fermenting in your heart.

Those who see danger in the round of rebirth must see the danger as lying in the accumulation of defilement. Your duties in the practice are like the fence and walls of a house that protect you stage by stage from danger. In performing your duties that constitute the effort of the practice, you have to keep your mindfulness with those duties and not let it lapse. Nourish your mindfulness and discernment so that they are always circumspect in all your affairs. Don't let them flow away on the habitual urges of the heart. You can then be sure that the affairs of the mind will not in any way lie beyond the power of your effort and control.

So I ask that each of you be mindful—and don't let your mindfulness conjecture ahead or behind with thoughts of the past or future. Always keep it aware of your activities, and you will be able to go beyond this mass of suffering and stress. Even if your mind hasn't yet attained stillness, it will begin to be still through the power of mindfulness. There is no need to doubt this, for the mind can't lie beyond the power of mindfulness and discernment coupled with persistent effort.

Of the famous meditation masters of our present era, Ven. Ācariya Mun is the one I admire and respect the most. In my opinion, he is the most outstanding teacher of our day and age. Living and studying with him, I never saw him act in any way at odds with the Dhamma and Vinaya. His behavior was in such harmony with the Dhamma and Vinaya that it was never a cause for doubt among those who studied with him. From my experience in living with him, I'd say that he was right in line with the path of those who practice rightly, straightly, methodically, and nobly. He never strayed from this path at all.

When he would tell us about the beginning stages of his practice, he'd talk about how he had tried to develop mindfulness. He liked to live alone. If others were living with him, they would get in the way of his meditation. If he could get away on his own, he'd find that mindfulness and discernment were coupled with his efforts at all times. He would stay with his efforts both day and night. It was as if his hand was never free from its work. Mindfulness converged with his mind so that they were never willing

to leave their endeavors.

He had resolved never to return to this world of continual death and rebirth. No matter what, he would have to gain release from suffering and stress in this lifetime and never ask to be reborn again. Even being born into this present lifetime had him disgusted enough, but when he also saw the birth, ageing, illness, and death of human beings and living beings in general, day and night, together with the blatant sufferings caused by the oppression and cruelties of the strong over the weak, it made him feel even greater dismay, which is why he asked not to be reborn ever again. The way he asked not to be reborn was to take the effort of the practice as the witness within his heart. *Wherever he lived, he asked to live with the effort of the practice.* He didn't want anything else that would delay his release from suffering. This is what he would tell us when the opportunity arose.

Whatever knowledge or understanding he had gained in the various places he had lived, he wouldn't keep from us. When he lived there, his mind was like that; when he lived here, his mind was like this. He even told us about the time his mind realized the land of its hopes.

The way each person's mind progresses is purely an individual matter. It's not something we can imitate from one another. Even the various realizations we have and the means of expression we use in teaching ourselves, our fellow meditators, and people in general, have to be a matter of our own individual wealth, in line with our habits and capabilities, just as a millionaire with lots of wealth uses his own millionaire's wealth, while a poor person with little wealth makes use of *his* own wealth. Each person, no matter how rich or poor, makes use of the wealth he or she has been able to accumulate.

In the area of habits and capabilities, how much we may possess depends entirely on ourselves. These aren't things we can borrow from one another. We have to depend on the capabilities we develop from within. This is why our habits, manners, and conversation, our knowledge and intelligence, our shallowness and depth differ from person to person in line with our capabilities. Even though I studied with Ven. Ācariya Mun for a

long time, *I can't guarantee that I could take his Dhamma as my own and teach it to others.* All I can say is that I depend on however much my own knowledge and capabilities may be, in line with my own strengths, which is just right for me and doesn't overstep the bounds of what is fitting for me.

As for Ven. Ācariya Mun, he was very astute at teaching. For example, *he wouldn't talk about the major points. He'd talk only about how to get there.* As soon as he'd get to the major points, he'd detour around them and reappear further on ahead. This is the way it would be every time. He was never willing to open up about the major points. At first I didn't understand what his intentions were in acting this way, and it was only later that I understood. Whether I'm right or wrong, I have to ask your forgiveness, for he was very astute, in keeping with the fact that he had taught so many students.

There were two reasons why he wouldn't open up about the major points. One is that those who weren't really intent on the Dhamma would take his teachings as a shield, claiming them to be their own as a way of advertising themselves and making a living. The other reason is that the Dhamma that was a principle of nature he had known and might describe *was not something that could be conjectured about in advance.* Once those who were strongly intent on the Dhamma reached those points in their investigation, if they had heard him describe those points beforehand, would be sure to have subtle assumptions or presuppositions infiltrating their minds at that moment, and so they would assume that they understood that level of Dhamma *when actually those assumptions would be a cause for self-delusion without their even realizing it.*

As far as these two considerations are concerned, I must admit that I'm very foolish because of my good intentions toward those who come intent on studying with me. I'm not the least bit secretive. I've revealed everything all along, without holding anything back, not even the things that should be held back. I've been open to the full extent of my ability, which has turned into a kind of foolishness without my being aware of it. This has caused those who are really intent on studying with me to misunderstand, latching

onto these things as assumptions that turn into their enemies, concealing the true Dhamma, all because I may lack some circumspection with regard to this second consideration.

Ven. Ācariya Mun was very astute both in external and in internal matters. On the external level, he wouldn't be willing to disclose things too readily. Sometimes, after listening to him, you'd have to take two or three days to figure out what he meant. This, at least, was the way things were for me. Whether or not this was the way they were for my fellow students, I never had the chance to find out. But as for me, I'd use all my strength to ponder anything he might say that seemed to suggest an approach to the practice, and sometimes after three days of pondering the riddle of his words I still couldn't make heads or tails of it. I'd have to go and tell him, 'What you said the other day: I've been pondering it for three days and still can't understand what you meant. I don't know where to grab hold of it so that I can put it to use, or how much meaning your words had.'

He'd smile a bit and say, 'Oh? So there's someone actually pondering what I say?'

So I'd answer, 'I'm pondering, but pondering out of stupidity, not with any intelligence.'

He'd then respond a little by saying, 'We all have to start out by being stupid. No one has ever brought intelligence or wealth along at birth. Only after we set our mind on learning and pondering things persistently can we become intelligent and astute to the point where we can gain wealth and status, and can have other people depend on us. The same holds true with the Dhamma. No one has ever been a millionaire in the Dhamma or an arahant at birth.'

That's all he would say. He wouldn't disclose what the right way would be to interpret the teaching that had preoccupied me for two or three days running. It was only later that I realized why he wouldn't disclose this. *If he had disclosed it, he would have been encouraging my stupidity.* If we get used simply to having things handed to us ready-made from other people, without producing anything with our own intelligence, then when the time

comes where we're in a tight spot and can't depend on anything ready-made from other people, we're sure to go under if we can't think of a way to help ourselves. This is probably what he was thinking, which is why he wouldn't solve this sort of problem when I'd ask him.

Studying with him wasn't simply a matter of studying teachings about the Dhamma. You had to adapt and accustom yourself to the practices he followed until they were firmly impressed in your own thoughts, words, and deeds. Living with him a long time was the way to observe his habits, practices, virtues, and understanding, bit by bit, day by day, until they were solid within you. There was a lot of safety in living with him. By and large, people who studied with him have received a great deal of trust and respect, because he himself was all Dhamma. Those who lived with him were bound to pick up that Dhamma in line with their abilities. At the same time, staying with him made you accustomed to being watchful and restrained. If you left him, and were intent on the Dhamma, you'd be able to take care of yourself using the various approaches you had gained from him.

When you'd stay with him, it was as if the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna* were right within reach. Everything you did was solid and got results step by step. But when you left him, it wouldn't be that way at all. It would turn into the other side of the world: If the mind didn't yet have a firm basis, that's the way it would usually be. But if the mind had a firm basis—in other words, if it had concentration and discernment looking after it—then you could benefit from living anywhere. If any doubts arose that you couldn't handle yourself, you'd have to go running back to him for advice. Once he'd suggest a solution, the problem would usually disappear in an instant, as if he had cut it away for you. For me, at least, that's the way it would be. Sometimes I would have left him for only five or six days when a problem started bothering me, and I couldn't stand to wait another two or three days. If I couldn't solve this sort of problem the moment it arose, then the next morning I'd have to head right back to him, because some of these problems could be very critical. Once they arose, and I couldn't solve them myself, I'd have to hurry back to him for advice. But other problems aren't

especially critical. Even when they arise, you can wait. Problems of this sort are like diseases. When some diseases arise, there's no need to hurry for a doctor. But with other diseases, if we can't get the doctor to come, we have to go to the doctor ourselves. Otherwise our life will be in danger.

When these critical sorts of problems arise, if we can't handle them ourselves, we have to hurry to find a teacher. *We can't just leave them alone, hoping that they'll go away on their own.* The results that can come from these problems that we don't take to our teachers to solve: At the very least, we can become disoriented, deluded, or unbalanced; at worst, we can go crazy. When they say that a person's meditation 'crashes,' it usually comes from this sort of problem that he or she doesn't know how to solve—isn't willing to solve—and simply lets fester until one of these two sorts of results appear. I myself have had these sorts of problems with my mind, which is why I'm telling you about them so that you can know how to deal with them.

The day Ven. Ācariya Mun died, I was filled with a strong sense of despair from the feeling that I had lost a mainstay for my heart, because at the time there was still a lot of unsettled business in my heart, and it was the sort of knowledge that wasn't willing to submit easily to anyone's approaches if they weren't right on target—the way Ven. Ācariya Mun had been, and that had given results—with the spots where I was stuck and that I was pondering. At the same time, it was a period in which I was accelerating my efforts at full speed. So when Ven. Ācariya Mun died, I couldn't stand staying with my fellow students. My only thought was that I wanted to live alone. So I tried to find a place where I could stay by myself. I was determined that I would stay alone until every sort of problem in my heart had been completely resolved. Only then would I stay with others and accept students as the occasion arose.

After Ven. Ācariya Mun's death, I went to bow down at his feet and then sat there reflecting with dismay for almost two hours, my tears flowing into a pool at his feet. At the same time, I was pondering in my heart the Dhamma and the teachings he had been so kind to give me during the eight

years I had lived with him. Living together for such a long time as this, even a husband and wife or parents and children who love one another deeply are bound to have some problems or resentments from time to time. But between Ven. Ācariya Mun and the students who had come to depend on his sheltering influence for such a long time, there had never been any issues at all. The longer I had stayed with him, the more I had felt an unlimited love and respect for him. And now he had left me and all my well-intentioned fellow students. *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā*: Fabrications—how inconstant they are! His body lay still, looking noble and more precious than my life, which I would have readily given up for his sake out of my love for him. My body was also still as I sat there, but my mind was in agitation from a sense of despair and my loss of his sheltering influence. Both bodies were subject to the same principle of the Dhamma—inconstancy—and followed the teaching that says, ‘*uppajjivā nirujjhanti*’: Having been born, they are bound to die. There’s no other way it could be.

But as for Ven. Ācariya Mun, he had taken a path different from that of conventional reality, in line with the teaching, ‘*tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho*’: In their stilling is ease. He had died in this lifetime, lying still for just this brief span of time so that his students could reflect with resignation on the Dhamma, but from now on he would never be reborn to be a source for his students’ tears again. His mind had now separated from becoming and birth in the same way that a rock split into two pieces can never be truly rejoined.

So I sat there, reflecting with despair. The problems in my heart that I had once unburdened with him: With whom would I unburden them now? There was no longer anyone who could unburden and erase my problems the way he had. I was left to fend for myself. It was as if he had been a doctor who had cured my illnesses countless times and who was the one person with whom I had entrusted my life—and now the doctor who had given me life was gone. I’d have to become a beast of the forest, for I had no more medicine to treat my inner diseases.

While I was sitting there, reminiscing sadly about him with love, respect, and despair, I came to a number of realizations. How had he taught me

while he was still alive? Those were the points I'd have to take as my teachers. What was the point he had stressed repeatedly? *'Don't ever stray from your foundation, namely "what knows" within the heart. Whenever the mind comes to any unusual knowledge or realizations that could become detrimental, if you aren't able to investigate your way past that sort of knowledge, then turn the mind back within itself and, no matter what, no damage will be done.'* That was what he had taught, so I took hold of that point and continued to apply it in my own practice to the full extent of my ability.

To be a senior monk comes from being a junior monk, as we see all around us and will all experience. We all meet with difficulties, whether we're junior or senior. This is the path we all must take. We must follow the path of difficulty that is the path toward progress, both in the area of the world and in the area of the Dhamma. No one has ever become a millionaire by being lazy or by lying around doing nothing. To be a millionaire has to come from being persevering, which in turn has to take the path of difficulty—difficulty for the sake of our proper aims. This is the path wealthy and astute people always follow.

Even in the area of the Dhamma, we should realize that difficulty is the path of sages on every level, beginning with the Buddha himself. The Dhamma affirms this: *Dukkhasanantaram sukham*—people gain ease by following the path of difficulty. As for the path to suffering, *sukhasanantaram dukkham*—people gain difficulties by following the path of ease. Whoever is diligent and doesn't regard difficulty as an obstacle, whoever explores without ceasing the conditions of nature all around him, will become that third sort of person: the sort who doesn't ask to be reborn in this world, the sort who *tesam vūpasamo sukho*—eradicates the seeds for the rebirth of any sort of fabrication, experiencing an ease undisturbed by worldly baits, an ease that is genuinely satisfying.

So. I ask that all of you as meditators keep these three sorts of people in mind and choose for yourselves which of the three is the most outstanding within you right now—because we can all make ourselves outstanding, with no need to fear that it will kill us. The effort to gain release from suffering

and stress in the Lord Buddha's footsteps isn't an executioner waiting to behead the person who strives in the right direction. Be brave in freeing yourself from your bonds and entanglements. The stress and difficulties that come as a shadow of the *khandhas* are things that everyone has to bear as a burden. We can't lie to one another about this. Each person has to suffer from worries and stress because of his or her own *khandhas*. Know that the entire world has to suffer in the same way you do with the *khandhas* you are overseeing right now.

Don't let yourself be content to cycle through birth, ageing, illness, and death. *Be uncomplacent at all times.* You shouldn't have any doubts about birth, because the Buddha has already told us that birth and death are out-and-out suffering. Don't let yourself wonder if they are flowers or sweets or any sort of food you can eat to your satisfaction. Actually, they are nothing but poison. They are things that have deceived us all in our stupidity to be born and to die in heaps in this world of suffering and stress. If we die in a state of humanity, there's some hope for us because of the openings for rebirth we have made for ourselves through the power of our good deeds. But there are not just a few people out there who are foolish and deluded, and who thus have no way of knowing what sorts of openings for rebirth their *kamma* will lead them to.

So for this reason, see the danger in repeated birth and death that can give no guarantees as to the state in which you'll take birth and die. If it's a human state, as we see and are at present, you can breathe easily to some extent, but there's always the fear that you'll slip away to be reborn as a common animal for people to kill or beat until you're all battered and bruised. Now *that's* really something to worry about. If you die, you die; if you survive, you live and breathe in fear and trembling, dreading death with every moment. How many animals are dragged into the slaughter houses every day? This is something we don't have to explain in detail. It's simply one example I mention to remind you of the sufferings of the living beings of the world. And where is there any shelter that can give a sure sense of security to the heart of each person overseeing his or her heap of life?

As meditators we should calculate the profits and losses, the benefits and drawbacks that come from the *khandhas* in each 24 hour period of day and night. The discontent we feel from being constantly worried: Isn't it caused by the *khandhas*? What makes us burdened and worried? We sit, stand, walk, and lie down for the sake of the *khandhas*. We eat for the sake of the *khandhas*. *Our every movement is simply for the sake of the khandhas*. If we don't do these things, the *khandhas* will have to break apart under the stress of suffering. All we can do is relieve things a little bit. When they can no longer take it, the *khandhas* will break apart.

*bhārā have pañcakkhandhā:*

The five *khandhas* are really a heavy burden.

Even though the earth, rocks, and mountains may be heavy, they stay to themselves. They've never weighed us down or oppressed us with difficulties. Only these five *khandhas* have burdened and oppressed us with difficulties with their every movement. Right from the day the *khandhas* begin to form, we have to be troubled with scurrying around for their sake. They wield tremendous power, making the entire world bend under their sway until the day they fall apart. We could say that we are slaves to the *khandhas* from the day we're born to the day we die. In short, what it all comes down to is that the source of all worries, the source of all issues lies in the *khandhas*. They are the supreme commanders, making us see things in line with their wants. This being the case, how can anything wonderful come from them? Even the *khandhas* we will take on as a burden in our next birth will be the same sort of taking-birth-and-dying *khandhas*, lording it over us and making us suffer all over again.

So investigate these things until you can see them clearly with discernment. Of all the countless lifetimes you may have been through over the eons, take this present lifetime before you as your evidence in reviewing them all. Those who aren't complacent will come to know that *khandhas* in the past and *khandhas* that will appear in the future all have the same

characteristics as the *khandhas* that exist with us in the present. All I ask is that you force your mind to stay in the frame of the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhaṇa*), which are present throughout the body and mind at all times. No matter how wild and resistant the mind may be, it can't withstand the strength of mindfulness and discernment backed up by persistent effort.

As long as mindfulness and discernment aren't yet agile, you have to force them; but as soon as they gain enough strength to stand on their own, they'll be like a fire and its light that always appear together. Once mindfulness and discernment have been trained to be authoritative, then wherever you are, you're mindful and discerning. It's not the case that you will always have to force them. They're like a child: When it's first born, it doesn't have the strength and intelligence to care for itself, so its parents have to take on the duty of caring for it in every way until it matures and becomes able to survive on its own. The parents who used to look after it are then no longer burdened with that duty. The same holds true with mindfulness and discernment. They gain strength step by step from being trained without ceasing, without letting them slide. They develop day by day until they become super-mindfulness and super-discernment at the stage where they perform their duties automatically. Then every sort of thing that used to be an enemy of the heart will be slain by super-mindfulness and super-discernment until nothing remains. All that remains is a heart entirely '*buddho*,' '*Dhammo*' will become a marvel at that very same moment through the power of super-mindfulness and super-discernment.

So I ask that all of you as meditators make the effort. See the burden of birth, ageing, illness, and death that lies ahead of you as being at least equal to the burden of birth, ageing, illness, and death present in living beings and fabrications all around you. It may even be more—who knows how much more? For this reason, you should make sure that you gain release from it in this lifetime in a way clear to your own heart. Then wherever you live, *you'll be at your ease*—with no need to bother with any more problems of birth or death anywhere at all—*simply aware of this heart that is pure*.

I ask that you all contemplate this and strive with bravery in the

threefold training of virtue, concentration, and discernment. The goal you set for yourself in that third sort of person will one day be you. There's no need to doubt this.

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

*Evam.*

# *Every Grain of Sand*

*Excerpts from a talk given April 10, 1982*

...When we investigate, we have to investigate over and over, time and time again, many, many times until we understand and are fully sure. The mind will then let go of its own accord. There's no way we can try to force it to let go as long as we haven't investigated enough. It's like eating: If we haven't reached the point where we're full, we're not full. There's no way we can try to make ourselves full with just one or two spoonfuls. We have to keep on eating, and then when we're full we stop of our own accord. We've had enough.

The same holds true with investigating. When we reach the stage where we fully know, we let go of our own accord: all our attachments to the body, feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, consciousness, step by step until we finally penetrate with our discernment into the mind itself—the genuine revolving wheel, the revolving mind—until it is smashed to pieces with nothing left. *That's* the point—that's the point where we end our problems in fighting with defilement. That's where they end—and our desire to go to *nibbāna* ends right there as well.

The desire to go to *nibbāna* is part of the path. It's not a craving. The desire to gain release from suffering and stress is part of the path. It's not a craving. Desire has two sorts: desire in the area of the world and desire in the area of the Dhamma. Desire in the area of the world is craving. Desire in the area of the Dhamma is part of the path. The desire to gain release from suffering, to go to *nibbāna*, strengthens the Dhamma within us. Effort is the path. Persistence is the path. Endurance is the path. Perseverance in every way for the sake of release is the path. Once we have fully come into our own, the desire will disappear—and at that point, who would ask after

*nibbāna?*

Once the revolving wheel, the revolving mind has been smashed once and for all, there is no one among any of those who have smashed that revolving mind from their hearts who wants to go to *nibbāna* or who asks where *nibbāna* lies. The word ‘*nibbāna*’ is simply a name, that’s all. Once we have known and seen, once we have attained the genuine article within ourselves, what is there to question?

This is what it means to develop the mind. We’ve developed it from the basic stages to the ultimate stage of development. So. Now, no matter where we live, we are sufficient unto ourselves. The mind has built a full sufficiency for itself, so it can be at its ease anywhere at all. If the body is ill—aching, feverish, hungry, or thirsty—we are aware of it simply as an affair of the body that lies under the laws of inconstancy, stress, and lack of self. It’s bound to keep shifting and changing in line with its nature at all times—but we’re not deluded by it. The *khandhas* are *khandhas*. The pure mind is a pure mind by its nature, with no need to force it to know or to be deluded. Once it’s fully true from every angle, everything is true. We don’t praise or criticize anything at all, because each thing is its own separate reality—so why is there any reason to clash? If one side is true and the other isn’t, that’s when things clash and fight all the time—because one side is genuine and the other side false. But when each has its own separate reality, there’s no problem.

Contemplate the mind so as to reach this stage, the stage where each thing has its own separate reality. *Yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*: the knowledge and vision of things as they are. The mind knows and sees things as they are, within and without, through and through, and then stays put with purity. If you were to say that it stays put, it stays put with purity. Whatever it thinks, it simply thinks. All the *khandhas* are *khandhas* pure and simple, without a single defilement to order their thinking, labeling, and interpreting any more. There are simply the *khandhas* pure and simple—the *khandhas* without defilements, or in other words, the *khandhas* of an arahant, of one who is free from defilement like the Lord Buddha and all his Noble

Disciples. The body is simply a body. Feelings, labels, thought-fabrications, and consciousness are each simply passing conditions that we use until their time is up. When they no longer have the strength to keep going, we let them go in line with their reality. But as for the utterly true nature of our purity, there is no problem at all...

...Those who have reached full release from conventional realities of every sort, you know, don't assume themselves to be more special or worse than anyone else. For this reason, they don't demean even the tiniest of creatures. They regard them all as friends in suffering, birth, ageing, illness, and death, because the Dhamma is something tender and gentle. Any mind in which it is found is completely gentle and can sympathize with every grain of sand, with living beings of every sort. There's nothing rigid or unyielding about it. Only the defilements are rigid and unyielding. Proud. Conceited. Haughty and vain. Once there's Dhamma, there are none of these things. There's only the unvarying gentleness and tenderness of mercy and benevolence for the world at all times.

## Glossary

**Ācariya:** Teacher; mentor.

**Anāgāmi:** Non-returner. A person who has abandoned the five lower fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *saṅyojana*), and who after death will appear in one of the Brahmā worlds called the Pure Abodes, there to attain nibbāna, never again to return to this world.

**Anattā:** Not-self; ownerless.

**Anicca:** Inconstant; impermanent.

**Anupādisesa-nibbāna:** Nibbāna with no fuel remaining (the analogy is to an extinguished fire whose embers are cold)—the nibbāna of the arahant after his passing away.

**Apāya-mukha:** Way to destitution—extra-marital sexual relations; indulgence in intoxicants; indulgence in gambling; associating with bad people.

**Arahant:** A person who has abandoned all ten of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *saṅyojana*), 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.

**Ariya-sacca:** Noble Truth. The word ‘ariya’ (noble) can also mean ideal or standard, and in this context means ‘objective’ or ‘universal’ truth. There are four: stress, the origin of stress, the disbanding of stress, and the path of practice leading to the disbanding of stress.

**Āsava:** Mental effluent or pollutant—sensuality, 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.

**Bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma:** ‘Wings to Awakening’—seven sets of principles that are conducive to Awakening and that, according to the Buddha, form the heart of his teaching: [1] the four frames of reference (see *satipaṭṭhāna*); [2] four right exertions (*sammappadhāna*)—the effort to prevent evil from arising in the mind, to abandon whatever evil has already arisen, to give rise to the good, and to maintain the good that has arisen; [3] four bases of success (*iddhipāda*)—desire, persistence, intentness, circumspection; [4] five dominant factors (*indriya*)—conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, discernment; [5] five strengths (*bala*)—identical with [4]; [6] seven factors for Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*)—mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, equanimity; and [7] the eightfold path (*magga*)—Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

**Brahmā:** ‘Great One’—an inhabitant of the heavens of form or formlessness.

**Buddho (buddha):** Awake; enlightened.

**Deva:** ‘Shining One’—an inhabitant of the heavens of sensual bliss.

**Devadatta:** A cousin of the Buddha who tried to effect a schism in the Saṅgha and who has since become emblematic for all Buddhists who work knowingly or unknowingly to undermine the religion from within.

**Dhamma (dharma):** Phenomenon; event; the way things are in and of themselves; the basic principles that underlie their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension,

‘Dhamma’ is used also to refer to any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha refers both to his teachings and to the direct experience of nibbāna, the quality to which those teachings point.

**Dhātu:** Property; element; impersonal condition. The four physical properties or elements are earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (motion), and fire (heat). The six properties include the above four plus space and cognizance.

**Dhutaṅga:** Ascetic practices that monks may choose to undertake if and when they see fitting. There are thirteen, and they include, in addition to the practices mentioned in the body of this book, the practice of using only one set of three robes, the practice of not by-passing any donors on one’s alms path, the practice of eating no more than one meal a day, and the practice of living under the open sky.

**Dukkha:** 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 becoming and birth.

**Khandha:** Heap; group; aggregate. Physical and mental components of the sense of self, 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.

**Magga:** Path. Specifically, the path to the disbanding of 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.

**Majjhima:** Middle; appropriate; just right.

**Nibbāna (nirvana):** Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from mental effluents, defilements, and the fetters that bind it to the round of rebirth (see *āsava*, *kilesa*, and *saṅyojana*). As this term is used to refer also to 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.)

**Nirodha:** Cessation; disbanding; stopping.

**Paññā:** Discernment; insight; wisdom; intelligence.

**Phala:** Fruition. Specifically, the fruition of any of the four transcendent paths (see *magga*).

**Rūpa:** Form; body; physical phenomenon; sense datum.

**Sabhāva dhamma:** Condition of nature; any phenomenon, event, property, or quality as experienced directly in and of itself.

**Sakidāgāmi:** Once-returner. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *saṅyojana*), has weakened the fetters of sensual passion and irritation, and who after death is destined to be reborn in this world only once more.

**Sakya-putta:** Son of the Sakyan. An epithet for Buddhist monks, the Buddha having been a native of the Sakyan Republic.

**Sallekha-dhamma:** Topic 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; anything conjured into being by the mind.

**Sampajañña:** Alertness; self-awareness; presence of mind; clear comprehension.

**Sanditṭhiko:** Self-evident; immediately apparent; 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*.

**Saññā:** Label; allusion; perception; act of memory or recognition; interpretation.

**Saṅyojana:** Fetter that binds the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *vaṭṭa*)—self-identification views, uncertainty, grasping at precepts and practices; sensual passion, irritation; passion for form, passion for formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and unawareness.

**Sati:** Mindfulness; self-collectedness; powers of reference and retention.

**Satipaṭṭhāna:** Frame of reference; foundation of mindfulness—body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, viewed in and of themselves as they occur.

**Sotapanna:** Stream winner. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *saṅyojana*) and has thus entered the 'stream' flowing inexorably to *nibbāna*, which ensures that one will be reborn at most only seven more times.

**Taṇhā:** Craving—the cause of stress—which takes three forms: craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for no becoming.

**Tapas:** The purifying 'heat' of meditative practice.

**Tathāgata:** One who has become true. A title for the Buddha.

**Ti-lakkhaṇa:** Three characteristics found in all conditioned phenomena—being inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

**Ugghatitaññū:** Of swift understanding. After the Buddha attained Awakening and was considering whether or not to teach the Dhamma, he perceived that there were four categories of beings: those of swift understanding, who would gain Awakening after a short explanation of the

Dhamma, those who would gain Awakening only after a lengthy explanation (*vipacitaññū*); those who would gain Awakening only after being led through the practice (*neyya*); and those who, instead of gaining Awakening, would at best gain only a verbal understanding of the Dhamma (*padaparama*).

**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.

**Vatṭa:** The cycle of death and rebirth. This refers both to the death and rebirth of living beings and to the death and rebirth of defilement in the mind.

**Vedanā:** Feeling—pleasure (ease), pain (stress), or neither pleasure nor pain.

**Vinaya:** The disciplinary rules of the monastic order. The Buddha's own name for the religion he founded was 'this dhamma-vinaya'—this doctrine and discipline.

**Viññāṇa:** Consciousness; sensory cognizance.

**Vipassanā:** Clear intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them as they are in terms of the three characteristics and the four Noble Truths (see *ti-lakkhaṇa* and *ariya-sacca*).

\* \* \*

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*

# Table of Contents

Titlepage	2
Copyright	3
Quote	4
Introduction	5
From Ignorance to Emptiness	6
The Tracks of the Ox	19
The Path of Strength	22
The Savor of the Dhamma	39
The Middleness of the Middle Way	58
The Simile of the Horse	67
Principles in the Practice, Principles in the Heart	69
The Four Frames of Reference	92
The Work of a Contemplative	112
The Fangs of Unawareness	134
The Outer Space of the Mind	137
To Be an Inner Millionaire	159
Every Grain of Sand	178
Glossary	181