

*A  
Heart  
Released*



PHRA

AJAAN MUN

# A Heart Released

*The Teachings of Phra Ajaan Mun  
Bhūridatta Thera*

Translated from the Thai

by *Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*

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## INTRODUCTION

Phra Ajaan Mun Bhūridatta Thera was born in 1870 in Baan Kham Bong, a farming village in Ubon Ratchathani province, northeastern Thailand. Ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1893, he spent the remainder of his life wandering through Thailand, Burma, and Laos, dwelling for the most part in the forest, engaged in the practice of meditation. He attracted an enormous following of students and, together with his teacher, Phra Ajaan Sao Kantasīlo, was responsible for the establishment of the forest ascetic tradition that has now spread throughout Thailand and to several countries abroad. He passed away in 1949 at Wat Suddhāvāsa, Sakon Nakhorn province.

Much has been written about his life, but very little was recorded of his teachings during his lifetime. Most of his teachings he left in the form of people: the students whose lives were profoundly shaped by the experience of living and practicing meditation under his guidance. One of the pieces that *was* recorded is the first piece translated here. *A Heart Released (Muttodaya)* is a record of passages from his sermons, made during the years 1944-45 by two monks who were staying under his guidance, and edited by a third monk, an ecclesiastical official who frequently visited him for instruction in meditation. The first edition of the book was printed with his permission for free distribution to the public. The title of the book was taken from a comment made by the Ven. Chao Khun Upāli Guṇūpamācariya (Jan Siricando) who, after listening to a sermon delivered by Phra Ajaan Mun on the root themes of meditation, praised the sermon as having been delivered with '*muttodaya*'—a heart released—and as conveying the heart of release.

The unusual style of Phra Ajaan Mun's sermons may be explained in part by the fact that in the days before his ordination he was skilled in a popular form of informal village entertainment called *maw lam*. *Maw lam* is a contest in extemporaneous rhyming, usually reproducing the war between the sexes, in which the battle of wits can become quite fierce. Much use is made of word play: riddles, puns, metaphors, and simple playing with the sounds of words. The sense of language that Ajaan Mun developed in *maw lam* he carried over into his teachings after becoming a monk. Often he would teach his students in extemporaneous puns and rhymes. This sort of word play he even applied to the Pali language, and a number of instances can be cited in *Muttodaya*: in §3,

the pun on the word *dhātu*, which can mean both physical element and speech element (phoneme); the use of the phonemes *na mo ba dha* (the basic elements in the phrase *namo buddhāya*, homage to the Buddha) to stand for the four physical elements; the play on *namo* and *mano* in §4; the use of the *Paṭṭhāna* as an image for the mind in §5; the extraction of the word *santo* (peaceful) from *pavessanto* in §13 and §16; the grammatical pun on *loke* in §14 and *santo* in §13; the threes in §12; the eights in §16; and so on.

This sort of rhetorical style has gone out of fashion in the West and is going out of style today even in Thailand, but in the Thailand of Ajaan Mun's time it was held in high regard as a sign of quick intelligence and a subtle mind. Ajaan Mun was able to use it with finesse as an effective teaching method, forcing his students to become more quick-witted and alert to implications, correspondences, multiple levels of meaning, and the elusiveness of language; to be less dogmatic in their attachments to the meanings of words, and less inclined to look for the truth in terms of language. As Ajaan Mun once told a pair of visiting monks who were proud of their command of the medieval text, *The Path of Purification*, the *niddesa* (analytical expositions) on virtue, concentration, and discernment contained in that work were simply *nidāna* (fables or stories). If they wanted to know the truth of virtue, concentration, and discernment, they would have to bring these qualities into being in their own hearts and minds.

The second set of selections translated here—*The Ever-present Truth*—are drawn from a collection of sermon fragments appended to the book *A Heart Released* as part of a commemorative volume distributed at Phra Ajaan Mun's cremation in 1950. The collection was drawn from notes of Ajaan Mun's sermons taken by two of his students during the last two years of his life, covering a wide range of topics, including some standard accounts of the Buddha's life. The selections included here comprise all of the passages dealing directly with the practice of virtue and meditation.

Some of Ajaan Mun's direct students have commented that the fragments both in *A Heart Released* and *The Ever-present Truth* would have been more subtle and insightful if the students who recorded them had been more advanced in their own meditation practice. As a result, we can only guess as to what the original sermons were like. Still, the fragments that have been recorded are worth reading and putting into practice, and so they are offered here.

As for the third piece translated here: Ajaan Mun's students generally believed that he himself never wrote down any of his teachings, but at his death a poem—*The Ballad of Liberation from the Khandhas*—was found among the few papers he left behind. As he noted on the final page of the poem, he

composed it during one of his brief stays in Bangkok, at Wat Srapatum (LotusPond Monastery), probably in the early 1930's. He was apparently inspired by an anonymous poem on the theme of meditation composed and printed in Bangkok during that period, inasmuch as both poems share virtually the same beginning—the 39 lines in the following translation beginning with, “Once there was a man who loved himself...” Ajaan Mun's poem, however, then develops in an entirely original direction and shows by far a deeper understanding of the training of the mind.

Translating the poem has presented a number of difficulties, not the least of which has been getting a definitive reading of the original manuscript. Ajaan Mun wrote during the days before Thai spelling became standardized, some of the passages were smudged with age, and a few seem to have been “corrected” by a later hand. Another difficulty has been the more general problem of finding the proper English style for translating Thai poetry, which depends heavily on rhyme, rhythm, and a stripped-down syntax, somewhat like that of telegrams and newspaper headlines. This style gives Thai poetry a lightness of style combined with a richness of meaning, but frustrates any attempt to pin down any one precise message for the sake of translation—an excellent lesson for anyone who feels that the truth is what is conveyed in words.

The translation here is meant to be as literal as possible, although I have fleshed the text out when it seemed necessary to make the English intelligible. Because the original alternates between two poetic forms—*klon* and *rai*—I tried to create a similar effect in English by alternating blank verse and free verse. The result is probably too literal to be poetry, but I felt that anyone reading it would be more interested in the meaning than in verbal effects. The instances where I have taken the most liberty with the text have been included in square brackets, as has one passage—ironically, dealing with the error of being addicted to correcting things—where the reading of the original seems to have been doctored.

The reader will notice that in a few places the poem seems to jump abruptly from one topic to another. In some cases these shifts were dictated by the rhyme scheme, but in others they are not really shifts at all. Keep in mind that the poem operates on several levels. In particular, two parallel themes run throughout: (1) an analysis of the external error of focusing on the faults of other people instead of one's own, and (2) a discussion of the mind's internal error of viewing (and criticizing) the khandhas as somehow separate from its own efforts to know them. Statements made directly about one level apply indirectly to the other as well. Thus the poem covers a wider range of the practice than might appear at first glance. It's a work that rewards repeated readings.

I would like to express my gratitude to Phra Ajaan Suwat Suvaco (Phra Bodhidharmācariya Thera) for the invaluable help he gave me in untangling some of the knottier passages in the poem. Any mistakes that may remain, of course, are mine.

I hope that all three of these translations will help to make Ajaan Mun's teachings available in English in as effective a way as possible.

*Thānissaro Bhikkhu*

METTA FOREST MONASTERY

# A Heart Released

## § 1. Practice is what keeps the true Dhamma pure.

The Lord Buddha taught that his Dhamma, when placed in the heart of an ordinary run-of-the-mill person, is bound to be thoroughly corrupted (*saddhamma-paṭirūpa*); but if placed in the heart of a Noble One, it is bound to be genuinely pure and authentic, something that at the same time can neither be effaced nor obscured.

So as long as we are devoting ourselves merely to the theoretical study of the Dhamma, it can't serve us well. Only when we have trained our hearts to eliminate their 'chameleons' (see §10)—their corruptions (*upakkilesa*)—will it benefit us in full measure. And only then will the true Dhamma be kept pure, free from distortions and deviations from its original principles.

## § 2. To follow the Buddha, we must train ourselves well before training others.

*purisadamma-sārathi satthā deva-manussānam buddho bhagavāti*

Our Lord Buddha first trained and tamed himself to the point where he attained unexcelled right self-awakening (*anuttara-sammā-sambodhi-ñāṇa*), becoming *buddho*, one who knows, before becoming *bhagavā*, one who spreads the teaching to those who are to be taught. Only then did he become *satthā*, the teacher and trainer of human and divine beings whose stage of development qualifies them to be trained. And thus, *kalyāṇo kitti-saddo abbhuggato*: His good name has spread to the four quarters of the compass even up to the present day.

The same is true of all the Noble Disciples of the past. They trained and tamed themselves well before helping the Teacher spread his teachings to people at large, and so their good name has spread just like the Buddha's.

If, however, a person spreads the teaching without first having trained himself well, *pāpako saddo hoti*: His bad name will spread to the four quarters of the compass, due to his error in not having followed the example of the Lord Buddha and all the Noble Disciples of the past.

### § 3. The root inheritance, the starting capital for self-training.

Why is it that wise people—before chanting, receiving the precepts, or performing any other act of merit—always take up *namo* as their starting point? Why is it that *namo* is never omitted or discarded? This suggests that *namo* must be significant. If we take it up for consideration, we find that *na* stands for the water element, and *mo* for the earth element—and with this, a line from the scriptures comes to mind:

*mātā-petika-sambhavo odāna-kummāsa-paccayo:*

‘When the generative elements of the mother and father are combined, the body comes into being. When it is born from the mother’s womb, it is nourished with rice and bread, and so is able to develop and grow.’ *Na* is the mother’s element; *mo*, the father’s element. When these two elements are combined, the mother’s fire element then heats the combination until it becomes what is called a *kalala*, a droplet of oil. This is the point where the connecting consciousness (*paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*) can make its connection, so that the mind becomes joined to the *namo* element. Once the mind has taken up residence, the droplet of oil develops until it is an *ambuja*, a glob of blood. From a glob of blood it becomes a *ghana*, a rod, and then a *pesī*, a lump of flesh. Then it expands itself into a lizard-like shape, with five extensions: two arms, two legs, and a head.

(As for the elements *ba*, breath, and *dha*, fire, these take up residence later, because they are not what the mind holds onto. If the mind lets the droplet of oil drop, the droplet of oil vanishes or is discarded as useless. It has no breath or fire, just as when a person dies and the breath and fire vanish from the body. This is why we say they are secondary elements. The important factors are the two original elements, *namo*.)

After the child is born, it has to depend on *na*, its mother, and *mo*, its father, to care for it, nurturing it and nourishing it with such foods as rice and bread, at the same time teaching and training it in every form of goodness. The mother and father are thus called the child’s first and foremost teachers. The love and benevolence the mother and father feel for their children cannot be measured or calculated. The legacy they give us—this body—is our primal inheritance. External wealth, silver or gold, comes from this body. If we didn’t have this body, we wouldn’t be able to do anything, which means that we wouldn’t have anything at all. For this reason, our body is the root of our entire inheritance from our mother and father, which is why we say that the good they have done us cannot be measured or calculated. Wise people thus never neglect or forget them.

We first have to take up this body, this *namo*, and only then do we perform the act of bowing it down in homage. To translate *namo* as homage is to translate only the act, not the source of the act.

This same root inheritance is the starting capital we use in training ourselves, so we needn't feel lacking or poor when it comes to the resources needed for the practice.

#### § 4. The root foundation for the practice.

The two elements, *namo*, when mentioned by themselves, aren't adequate or complete. We have to rearrange the vowels and consonants as follows: Take the *a* from the *n*, and give it to the *m*; take the *o* from the *m* and give it to the *n*, and then put the *ma* in front of the *no*. This gives us *mano*, the heart. Now we have the body together with the heart, and this is enough to be used as the root foundation for the practice. *Mano*, the heart, is primal, the great foundation. Everything we do or say comes from the heart, as stated in the Buddha's words:

*mano-pubbaṅgamā dhammā*  
*mano-setṭhā mano-mayā:*

'All dhammas are preceded by the heart, dominated by the heart, made from the heart.' The Buddha formulated the entire Dhamma and Vinaya from out of this great foundation, the heart. So when his disciples contemplate in accordance with the Dhamma and Vinaya until *namo* is perfectly clear, then *mano* lies at the end point of formulation. In other words, it lies beyond all formulations.

All supposings come from the heart. Each of us has his or her own load, which we carry as supposings and formulations in line with the currents of the flood (*ogha*), to the point where they give rise to ignorance (*avijjā*), the factor that creates states of becoming and birth, all from our not being wise to these things, from our deludedly holding them all to be 'me' or 'mine.'

#### § 5. The root cause of everything in the universe.

The seven books of the Abhidhamma, except for the Paṭṭhāna (The Book on Origination), are finite in scope. As for the Paṭṭhāna, it is *ananta-naya*, infinite in scope. Only a Buddha is capable of comprehending it in its entirety.

When we consider the Pali text, which begins *hetu-paccayo*, we find that the cause (*hetu*) that acts as the primal sustaining factor (*paccaya*) for all things in the cosmos is nothing other than the heart. The heart is the great cause—what

is primal, what is important. All things apart from it are effects or conditions. The remaining factors mentioned in the Paṭṭhāna, from *ārammaṇa* (objective support) to *aviggata* (not without) can act as sustaining factors only because the great cause, the heart, comes first. Thus *mano*, discussed in §4; *ṭhītibhūtaṃ*, which will be discussed in §6; and the great cause discussed here all refer to the same thing.

The Buddha was able to formulate the Dhamma and Vinaya, to know things with his ten-powered intuition, and to comprehend all knowable phenomena, all because the great cause acted as the primal factor. His comprehension was thus infinite in scope.

In the same way, all of the disciples had this great cause acting as their primal factor and so were able to know in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. This is why the Venerable Assaji, the fifth of the five brethren, taught Upatissa (the Venerable Sāriputta),

*ye dhammā hetu-pabhavā tesam hetum tathāgato  
tesañca yo nirodho ca evaṃ vādī mahāsamaṇo:*

'Whatever dhammas arise from a cause...' This great cause being the important factor, the primal factor, then when the Venerable Assaji reached this point—the great cause—how could the Venerable Sāriputta's mind help but penetrate down to the current of the Dhamma?—for everything in the world comes about because of the great cause. Even the transcendent dhammas are reached by the great cause. This is why the Paṭṭhāna is said to be infinite in its scope. Whoever trains the heart, the great cause, until it is clear and dazzling, is capable of knowing everything of every sort infinitely, both within and without.

## § 6. The root instigator of the cycle of death and rebirth.

*ṭhītibhūtaṃ avijjā-paccaya  
saṅkhārā ... upādānaṃ ... bhavo ... jāti ...*

Each and every one of us born as a human being has a birthplace: we have our parents as our birthplace. So why did the Buddha formulate the teaching on sustained conditions only from the factor of ignorance onwards? What ignorance comes from, he didn't say. Ignorance has to have a mother and father just as we do, and we learn from the above line that *ṭhītibhūtaṃ* is its mother and father. *Ṭhītibhūtaṃ* refers to the primal mind. When the primal mind is imbued with delusion, there is a sustaining factor: the condition of ignorance. Once there is ignorance, it acts as the sustenance for the fabrication

of *saṅkhāra*, fabrications, together with the act of clinging to them, which gives rise to states of becoming and birth. In other words, these things will have to keep on arising and giving rise to one another continually. They are thus called sustained or sustaining conditions because they support and sustain one another.

Knowledge and ignorance both come from *ṭhītibhūtaṃ*. When *ṭhītibhūtaṃ* is imbued with ignorance, it isn't wise to its conditions; but when it is imbued with knowledge, it realizes its conditions for what they really are. This is how the matter appears when considered with the clear insight leading to emergence (*vuṭṭhāna-gaminī vipassanā*).

To summarize: *Ṭhītibhūtaṃ* is the primal instigator of the cycle of death and rebirth. Thus it is called the root source of the three (see §12). When we are to cut the cycle of death and rebirth so that it disconnects and vanishes into nothingness, we have to train the primal instigator to develop knowledge, alert to all conditions for what they really are. It will then recover from its delusion and never give rise to any conditions again. *Ṭhītibhūtaṃ*, the root instigator, will stop spinning, and this will end our circling through the cycle of death and rebirth.

**§ 7. The supreme position: the foundation for the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*.**

*aggam ṭhānam manussesu maggam satta-visuddhiyā:*

'The supreme position is to be found among human beings: the path to the purification of living beings.' This can be explained as follows: We have received our legacy from *namo*, our parents—i.e., this body, which has taken a human birth, the highest birth there is. We are supreme beings, well-placed in a supreme position, complete with the treasures of thought, word, and deed. If we want to amass external treasures, such as material wealth, money, and gold, we can. If we want to amass internal treasures, such as the extraordinary qualities of the paths, their fruitions, and *nibbāna*, we also can. The Buddha formulated the Dhamma and Vinaya for us human beings, and not at all for cows, horses, elephants, and so on. We human beings are a race that can practice to reach purity. So we shouldn't be discouraged or self-deprecating, thinking that we are lacking in worth or potential, because as human beings we are capable. What we don't have, we can give rise to. What we already have, we can make greater. This is in keeping with the teaching found in the Vessantara Jātaka:

*dānam deti, sīlam rakkhati, bhāvanam bhavetvā ekacco saggam  
gacchati, ekacco mokkham gacchati, nissāsayam:*

‘Having worked at amassing skillfulness through being generous, observing the precepts, and developing the mind in line with the teachings of the Lord Buddha, those who work only a little will have to go to heaven, while those who are determined and really do the work—and at the same time having the help of the potential and perfections (*pāramī*) they have developed in the past—will reach *nibbāna* without a doubt.’

Common animals are said not to be supreme because they can’t act as human beings can. So it is rightly said that human beings are well-placed in a supreme position, able to lead themselves to the paths, their fruitions, and to pure *nibbāna*.

### § 8. The stronghold that forms the practice area for training oneself.

In which set of principles did the Lord Buddha establish our stronghold? When we consider this question, we find that he established our stronghold in the great establishing of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).

To make a comparison with worldly affairs: In armed battles where victory is at stake, it is necessary to find a stronghold. If one obtains a good stronghold, one can successfully ward off the weapons of the enemy. And there one can accumulate great strength to launch an attack, driving the enemy to defeat. Such a place is thus called a stronghold, i.e., a place complete with strong stockades, gates, moats, and embattlements.

So it is with the affairs of the Dhamma when we take the great establishing of mindfulness as our stronghold, in that those who go into battle with the enemy—defilement—must start out by keeping track of the body as their frame of reference, because when such things as sensual passion arise, they arise at the body and mind. Because the sight of a body causes the mind to be aroused, we can conclude that the body is the provocation, and so we must examine the body as a means of stilling the Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) and calming the mind.

This is a point that you should work at and develop as much as possible. In other words, keep investigating that point without giving way at all. When an image (*uggaha nimitta*) of any part of the body arises, take that part of the body as the basic theme for your investigation. You don’t have to go shifting to other parts. To think that, ‘I’ve already seen this part. Other parts I haven’t seen, so I’ll have to go and investigate other parts,’ isn’t advisable at all. Even if you investigate the body until you have it analyzed minutely into all of its parts

that are composed of the properties (*dhātu*) of earth, water, fire, and wind—this is called *paṭibhāga*—you should still keep examining the body as it first appeared in the original image until you have it mastered.

To master it, you have to examine that same point over and over again, just as when you chant. If you memorize a particular discourse and then leave it, without chanting or repeating it again, you'll forget it, and it won't serve any purpose, due to your complacency in not mastering it. The same holds true in your investigation of the body. Once an image of any part arises, if you don't investigate it repeatedly, and instead heedlessly let it pass, it won't serve any purpose at all.

This investigation of the body has many citations, one being in our present-day ordination ceremony. Before all else, the preceptor must tell the ordinand the five meditation themes—hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin, i.e., this very body—because of their importance. In the Commentary to the Dhammapada, it is said that an unwise preceptor who doesn't teach the investigation of the body may destroy his pupil's potential for arahantship. So at present the preceptor must first teach the five meditation themes.

In another spot the Buddha taught that there is no such thing as a Buddha or an arahant who has not fixed on at least one part of the body as a meditation theme. Thus he told a group of 500 monks who were discussing the earth—saying that such and such a village had red soil or black soil, etc.—that they were discussing external earth when they should be investigating internal earth. In other words, they should have been investigating this body intelligently, penetrating it throughout and making it absolutely clear. When the Buddha finished his discussion of this topic, all 500 monks reached the fruition of arahantship.

From this we can conclude that the investigation of the body must be important. Each and every person who is to gain release from all suffering and stress has to investigate the body. If we are to accumulate great strength, we must accumulate it by investigating the body. Even the Lord Buddha, when he was about to attain Awakening, started out by investigating the breath—and what is the breath, if not the body?

So the great establishings of mindfulness, starting with the contemplation of the body, are said to be our stronghold. Once we have obtained a good stronghold—in other words, once we have put the principles of the great establishings of mindfulness into practice until we have them mastered—we should then investigate things as they are in terms of the inherent nature of their elements, using the strategies of clear insight, which will be discussed next.

## § 9. The strategies of clear insight, techniques for uprooting defilement.

The nature of all good things is that they come from things that aren't good, just as lotuses that are fair and lovely are born from mud that is filthy and repulsive. Yet once they rise clear of the mud, they are clean and pure, becoming a fitting headdress for a king, a viceroy, or a courtier, never again returning to the mud. In this they are like the earnest meditator, one engaged in a persistent effort. Such a person must investigate a thing that is filthy and repulsive if the mind is to gain release from all filthy and repulsive things.

The 'thing that is filthy and repulsive' here is the body. The body is an assemblage of filth, urine, and excrement. The things that are exuded from the hair of the head, the hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, and so on are all forms of excrement. When they fall into food, people take offense at it. The food has to be thrown out, for no one can stomach it. Moreover, the body has to be constantly washed and scrubbed if it is to look presentable. If we don't clean it, it will smell rank and no one will let us come near. Clothing and other accessories, when away from the body, are clean and attractive, but as soon as they come into contact with the body they become dirty. If we let them go without washing for a long time, no one will let us come near, because of the smell.

From this we can see that the body is a house of urine and excrement, *asubha*—unattractive; *patikkūla*—repulsive. When still alive, it's bad enough. When there is no more life to it, it's even more disgusting, to the point where nothing else can compare. So from the very beginning, all earnest meditators investigate the body methodically until they have it mastered. Before the body becomes clear, they investigate whichever part or aspect of the body is agreeable to their temperament until a particular aspect of the body appears as an *uggaha nimitta*. Then they focus on that aspect, working at it and developing it repeatedly.

'Working at it and developing it repeatedly' should be understood as follows: When rice farmers grow rice, they work in the soil, plowing the soil and planting rice in the soil. The following year they grow rice in the soil again. They don't grow their rice in the air or in the middle of the sky. They grow it only in the soil, and the rice then fills their granaries of its own accord. When they work repeatedly in the soil, they don't have to plead, 'Rice, O rice, please come and fill our granaries.' The rice pours in of its own accord. And even if they forbid it, saying, 'Rice, O rice, don't come and fill our granaries,' if they have completed their work in the soil, there's no doubt but that the rice will still come and keep their granaries full.

In the same way, we as earnest meditators should keep investigating the body at the point that is agreeable to our temperaments or first appears for us to see. No matter what, we should not neglect or abandon that point. Working at it repeatedly doesn't refer only to the practice of walking meditation. We should be mindful, continuing our investigation in all places and at all times. Sitting, standing, walking, and lying down; eating, drinking, working, speaking, and thinking, we should always have all-round mindfulness of the present: This is what is meant by 'working at it repeatedly.'

Once you have investigated the body until it is clear, you should then consider dividing it up into its various parts, using your own way of being methodical. Separate the body into the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, examining it until you really see it in those terms. At this stage, you may use any strategies of your own devising that are agreeable to your temperament, but you must not in any event abandon the original reference point that first appeared to you. When you are investigating at this stage, you should work at it and develop it repeatedly. Don't investigate once and then let it go for half a month or a month. Investigate in and out, back and forth, again and again. In other words, withdraw inward to quiet the mind and then come out again to investigate the body. Don't exclusively investigate the body or exclusively quiet the mind.

When you have investigated in this way until you have it thoroughly mastered, what happens next is what comes of its own accord. The mind is bound to converge in a big way. And the instant it converges, everything will appear to converge, being one and the same. The entire world will be nothing but elements. At the same time, an image will appear of the world as being level as a drum head, because the entire world is of one and the same inherent nature. Forests, mountains, people, animals—even you yourself—will all ultimately have to be leveled down in one and the same way. Together with this vision, knowledge arises, cutting off all doubts in the heart. This is called *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana vipassanā*: the clear insight that both knows and sees things for what they actually are.

This step is not the end point. It is the beginning of the next stage we have to practice, which we as earnest meditators are to work at and develop repeatedly for heightened awareness to be mastered and complete. Then we will see that the mental fabrications that suppose, 'This is mine... That is me,' are inconstancy; and that because of attachment they are suffering—for all elements have been the way they are all along: arising, aging, growing ill, and dying, arising and deteriorating since before we were born. From time immemorial, this is the way they have been. But because the conditions of the mind and the five *khandhas*—*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*—have

fabricated and labeled throughout every existence up to the present, through lives too numerous to number, the mind has been deluded into following its supposings. It's not the case that our supposings have attached themselves to us. When you come right down to it, there's no doubt but that all phenomena in the world, whether endowed with consciousness or not, have been the way they are—arising and deteriorating on their own—in just this way.

So we realize, *pubbe ananussu tesu dhammesu*—these regularities of behavior [literally: 'dhamma-nesses'] have been this way from the past. Even though no one has told us, we know that this is just the way they have been. This is why the Buddha maintained with regard to this point that he didn't hear this from anyone, wasn't taught this by anyone—for this is just the way these things had been since before his time. So we can see that the regularities in the behavior of all elements are bound to be this way. But because the conditions of the mind have fastened into all of these things for so many lives, they have behaved in line with those supposings. The mind has been overwhelmed by latent tendencies (*anusaya*) to the point where it is deluded into believing them, and so states of becoming and birth have been created through the clinging of the conditions of the mind.

Thus the earnest meditator comes to analyze things down in line with their inherent nature, seeing that,

*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā:*

Acts of mental fabrication—the conditions of the mind—are what's inconstant. The world of living beings is constant: It is simply the way it is. Analyze these things in terms of the four noble truths as a way of rectifying the conditions of the mind, so that you can see for certain, in your own right, that these conditions of the mind are inconstant and stressful. And the fact that you haven't seen in your own right that they are inconstant and stressful is why you have fallen for mental fabrications. When you truly see this, it will rectify the conditions of the mind. The realization will come to you,

*saṅkhārā sassatā n'atthi:*

'There are no mental fabrications that are permanent and lasting.' Mental fabrications are simply conditions of the mind, like mirages. As for living beings, they have been a constant feature of the world all along. When you know both sides—i.e., that living beings are simply the way they are, and that mental fabrications are simply a condition of the mind that supposes them—then *ṭhītibhūtaṃ*, the primal mind that has no conditions, can gain release.

As for the teaching that all phenomena or regularities of behavior are not-self: How could they be the self? Their business is simply to arise the way they do. Thus the Buddha taught,

*sabbe dhammā anattā:*

‘All phenomena are not-self.’ We as earnest meditators should investigate things to see them clearly in this way, until the mind is made to converge, enabling us to see truly and vividly along these lines in our own right, at the same time giving rise to the knowledge that accompanies this vision. This is what is meant by *vuttāhāna-gaminī vipassanā* (clear insight leading to emergence). We should work at this stage until it is mastered, until we see truly and clearly, along with the full convergence of the mind and its concurrent knowledge, converging against the current, curing the latent tendencies, turning supposing into release; or until we converge on the primal mind that is simply the way it is, to the point where it’s absolutely clear, with the concurrent knowledge,

*Khiṇā jāti nāṇam hoti:*

‘There is the knowledge of no more birth.’

This stage is not an assumption or a supposing. It isn’t anything fabricated or conjectured into being, nor is it anything that can be obtained by wanting. It’s something that appears, is, and knows entirely of its own accord. Intense, relentless practice in which we analyze things shrewdly on our own is what will cause it to appear of its own accord.

This can be compared to rice plants. Once we have properly nourished and cared for the rice plant, the results—the grains of rice—are not things that can be obtained by wanting. They will appear of their own accord. If a person who wants to get rice is lazy and doesn’t care for the rice plant, he can keep wanting till the day he dies, but no rice grains will appear for him. The same holds true with the reality of release: It isn’t something that can be obtained by wanting. A person who wants release but who practices wrongly or doesn’t practice—and wastes his time being lazy until the day he dies—won’t meet with release at all.

**§ 10. The primal mind is radiant and clear by nature, but is darkened because of corruptions.**

*pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ  
tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkilittam:*

‘Monks, this mind is originally radiant and clear, but because passing corruptions and defilements come and obscure it, it doesn’t show its radiance.’ This has been compared to a tree in the poem that runs,

A tall tree with 6,000 branches:  
Big chameleons swarm it each day by the hundreds,  
Small chameleons, each day by the thousands.  
If the owner doesn’t watch out,  
They’ll bring along more and more of their friends every day.

This can be explained as follows: The tall tree with 6,000 branches—if we cut off the three zeroes, this leaves us with six, which stands for the six sense doors, the entryway for the chameleons, i.e., things that are counterfeit, not things that are genuine. Defilements aren’t genuine. They are simply things that come drifting in through the sense doors by the hundreds and thousands. Not only that, defilements that haven’t yet arisen will arise more and more every day as long as we don’t find a means for rectifying the nature of the mind.

The mind is something more radiant than anything else can be, but because counterfeits—passing defilements—come and obscure it, it loses its radiance, like the sun when obscured by clouds. Don’t go thinking that the sun goes after the clouds. Instead, the clouds come drifting along and obscure the sun.

So meditators, when they know in this manner, should do away with these counterfeits by analyzing them shrewdly, as explained in the strategies of clear insight, §9. When they develop the mind to the stage of the primal mind, this will mean that all counterfeits are destroyed—or rather, counterfeit things won’t be able to reach into the primal mind, because the bridge making the connection will have been destroyed. Even though the mind may then still have to come into contact with the preoccupations of the world, its contact will be like that of a bead of water rolling over a lotus leaf.

**§ 11. One’s self-training as a meditator has to be in keeping with one’s temperament.**

A famous horse-trainer once approached the Lord Buddha and asked him how he trained his disciples. The Buddha responded by asking the trainer how he trained horses. The trainer replied that there were four kinds of horses: (1) those easy to tame, (2) those of an intermediate sort, (3) those genuinely hard to tame, and (4) those that couldn’t be tamed at all, and had to be killed.

The Buddha replied, ‘so it is with me.’ (1) Those easy to tame, i.e., those whose minds gather easily, should eat enough food to nourish the body. (2) Those of an intermediate sort, i.e., those whose minds have some trouble settling down, should not be allowed to eat much—only a little food. (3) Those genuinely hard to tame, i.e., those who really have trouble getting their minds to settle down, shouldn’t eat at all, but they have to be *attaññū*: They have to know their own strength and exactly how much they will be able to endure. (4) As for those who couldn’t be tamed and had to be killed—i.e., those termed *pada-parama* who couldn’t subdue their minds at all—the Buddha would withdraw the bridge. In other words, he wouldn’t teach them, which was tantamount to killing them.

### § 12. The Mūlatika Discourse.

*Tika* means three. *Mūla* means root. Together they mean ‘roots in sets of three.’ Passion, aversion, and delusion are three, termed the roots of what is unskillful. Craving comes in threes: sensual craving, craving for becoming, and craving for no becoming. The floods and fermentations (*āsava*) of the mind each come in threes: sensuality, states of becoming, and ignorance. If a person falls in with these sorts of threes, then,

*tiparivattaṃ:*

He or she will have to keep spinning around in threes, and so the three realms—the realms of sensuality, form, and formlessness—will have to continue as they are, for these threes are the roots of the three realms.

The remedy also comes in threes: virtue, concentration, and discernment. When people practice in line with the virtue, concentration, and discernment forming the cure, then,

*na tiparivattaṃ:*

They won’t have to keep spinning in threes. The three realms won’t exist. In other words, they will gain utter release from the three realms.

### § 13. Only a *visuddhi deva* is an individual truly at peace.

*akuppaṃ sabba-dhammesu ñeyyadhammā pavessanto:*

‘One must have a mind unaroused with regard to any defilements and must know all phenomena both within and without,

- *santo*

in order to be calm and at peace.’ A person at peace in this way will have a fully developed sense of conscience and shame, mental qualities that are pure and clean, a firm, steady mind, and a personal integrity endowed with the qualities of a *deva* (celestial being), as stated in the stanza that runs,

*hiri-ottappa-sampannā sukkadhamma-samāhitā*  
*santo sappurisā loke deva-dhammāti vuccare.*

*Devas* by birth—the inhabitants of the celestial realms—are replete with sensual pleasures and restless with defilement. How then can they be at peace? This stanza thus must surely refer to *visuddhi devas* (*devas* through purity), i.e., to arahants. Such people are genuinely at peace and qualify as having a fully developed sense of conscience and shame, together with ‘clear qualities,’ i.e., true purity.

**§ 14. Activityless-ness is the end point of the world, beyond supposing and formulation.**

*saccānaṃ caturo padā*  
*khīṇāsavā jutimanto te loke parinibbutā*

The four noble truths—suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation—are activities in that each truth has an aspect that has to be done: Suffering has to be comprehended, its cause abandoned, its cessation made clear, and the path to its cessation developed. All of these are aspects that have to be done—and if they have to be done, they must be activities. So we can conclude that all four truths are activities. This is in keeping with the first verse quoted above, which speaks of the four truths as feet, stair treads, or steps that must be taken for the task to be finished.

What follows is thus termed activityless-ness—like writing the numerals 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0, then erasing 1 through 9, leaving just 0, and not writing anything more. What is left is read as ‘zero,’ but it doesn’t have any value at all. You can’t use it to add, subtract, multiply, or divide with any other numerals, yet at the same time you can’t say that it doesn’t exist, for there it is: 0 (zero).

This is like the discernment that knows all around, because it destroys the activity of supposing. In other words, it erases supposing completely and doesn’t become involved with or hold on to any supposings at all.

With the words ‘erasing’ or ‘destroying’ the activity of supposing, the question arises, ‘When supposing is entirely destroyed, where will we stay?’ The answer is that we will stay in a place that isn’t supposed: right there with activityless-ness.

This explanation is in line with the aspects of reality that appear clearly only to those who practice, and that people who don’t practice can’t know. Only when we listen and then practice accordingly until we see and know of our own accord will we be able to understand.

The meaning of the next verse is this: ‘Those who have no more fermentations extinguish the three realms and are dazzling.’ In other words, they have practiced persistence and made an investigation ‘*bhāvito bahulīkato.*’ In other words, they have worked at it and developed it repeatedly to the point where the mind has the strength capable of analyzing and destroying all supposings so as to reach activityless-ness. They can thus gain release from the three realms.

In extinguishing the three realms, arahants don’t fly up into the realms of sensuality, form, and formlessness. They stay right where they are. The same was true of the Buddha: When he extinguished the three realms, he was sitting in one spot, under the Bodhi tree. He didn’t fly up into the three realms. He extinguished them at the mind—for right there in the mind is where the three realms exist.

Those who aim at extinguishing the three realms should thus extinguish them in their own hearts. Only then will they obliterate activity—the act of supposing—from the heart, leaving just activityless-ness. This is the primal heart, the primal Dhamma, which knows no death.

### § 15. The nine abodes of living beings.

The realms of the heavenly beings, the human realm, and the realms of destitution (*apāya*) are classed as the sensual realm, the abode of living beings who indulge in sensuality. Taken together, they count as one. The realms of form, the abodes of living beings who have attained *rūpa jhāna*, are four. The realms of formlessness, the abodes of living beings who have attained *arūpa jhāna*, are also four. So altogether there are nine abodes for living beings. Those—the arahants—who are wise to the nine abodes leave them and don’t have to live in any of them. This appears in the last of the Novice’s Questions (*Sāmañera-pañhā*), ‘*dasa nāma kim*’—What is ten?—which is answered, ‘*das’ahaṅgehi samannāgato arahāti vuccatī ti*’—The arahant, one who is endowed with ten qualities, gains release from the nine abodes of living beings.

This can be compared to writing the numerals 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10. 1 to 9 are numbers that can be counted, named, added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided. As for ten—1 and 0 (zero)—when we erase the 1, because it's a repetition, we are left with 0 (zero). If we use 0 to add, subtract, multiply, or divide with any other number, it won't increase the value of that number; and 0 by itself has no value at all—but you can't say that it doesn't exist, because there it is.

The same is true with the heart: It's a nature whose attributes are like 0. When 0 is connected to any other number, it greatly increases the value of that number. For instance, 1 connected with 0 becomes 10. So it is with the heart. When connected with anything, it instantly proliferates into things elaborate and fantastic. But when trained until it is wise and discerning with regard to all knowable phenomena, it returns to its state as 0 (zero)—empty, open, and clear, beyond all counting and naming. It doesn't stay in the nine places that are abodes for living beings. Instead, it stays in a place devoid of supposing and formulation: its inherent nature as 0 (zero), or activityless-ness, as mentioned in [§14](#).

#### **§ 16. The significance of the first sermon, the middle sermon, and the final sermon.**

The sermons delivered by the Lord Buddha at three points in his career have a great significance to which Buddhists should give special thought and consideration.

A. *At the beginning of the Buddha's career* he delivered a sermon to the five brethren at the forest in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Vārānasī. This was his first sermon, called the Wheel of Dhamma. He started with the two extremes that those who have gone forth from the household life should not indulge in, saying,

*dv'eme bhikkhave antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā:*

'Monks, there are these two extremes that those who have gone forth from the household life should not pursue: indulgence in sensual pleasure and indulgence in self-affliction.' To explain: Indulgence in sensual pleasure lies on the side of love; indulgence in self-affliction, on the side of hate. Both sides are causes of suffering and stress. When we practice self-purification and yet fall into either of these two sides, we can't be said to have entered the middle way, for when we are making a persistent effort to practice and the mind becomes fully calm and relaxed, we are pleased; when the mind thinks and becomes

restless and distracted, we are displeased. Being pleased is indulgence in pleasure; being displeased, indulgence in self-affliction. Being pleased is passion, being displeased is aversion, and not being wise to passion and aversion is delusion.

Whoever makes an effort to develop persistence in concentration has to start out by running into these two extremes. If we run into these extremes, we are classed as wrong, but it's only normal that we be wrong before we can be right. Even the Buddha, before his Awakening, was completely wrong in just the same way. Even his two foremost disciples were wrong—and held pernicious doctrines to boot. All the other disciples started out wrong from the beginning as well.

But when the Buddha came to follow the middle way while meditating under the shade of the Bodhi tree, after having gained the first two knowledges—remembrance of previous lifetimes and knowledge of the death and rebirth of living beings—in the first two watches of the night, he gained the third knowledge—knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations—in the watch toward dawn. This was when he found the genuine middle way, releasing his mind from the error of the two extremes. Released from the clan, class, abodes, lineage, and legacy of convention and supposing, he attained the clan, class, abode, lineage, and legacy of the Noble Ones. The Noble Disciples came to know following the Buddha, acting correctly in line with the knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations, and gained release from error just as he had.

As for us as meditators, in the very beginning it's only normal that we will have to be wrong. As long as we let ourselves be pleased and displeased in the development of merit and skillfulness, we fall under the sway of the ways of the world (*lokadhamma*), and when we are under the sway of the ways of the world, we are shaken by pleasure and displeasure. This is called being shaken back and forth.

*uppanno kho me:*

Where do the ways of the world arise? In ourselves. The ways of the world have eight factors, and the path that cures them has eight as well. The eightfold path is the cure for the eight ways of the world. Thus the Buddha taught the middle way as the cure for the two extremes.

Once we have cured ourselves of the two extremes, we enter the noble path, cutting across the currents of the world, making the mind *cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo*—relinquish, release, and rest easy.

To summarize: As long as the two extremes still exist in the heart, it is not on the right track. But when the heart gains release from the two extremes, it becomes unshakable: free from impurities and safe from the flood. This is why the meaning of the Wheel of Dhamma is very significant. When the Buddha explained the Wheel of Dhamma, it caused the elements of the world to tremble. And when the message is so significant, how could they help but tremble? The elements of the world are nothing else but this very body of ours. Our body is composed of the world's elements and it trembles because the mind sees into something it has never seen before. The fact that the mind is released from the two extremes is what causes the elements of the world to tremble. They tremble because the mind is not coming back to give rise to them ever again.

*B. At the mid-point of the Buddha's career he delivered the Pāṭimokkha Exhortation to an assembly of 1,250 arahants at the Squirrels' Feeding Ground in the Royal Bamboo Forest near Rājagaha. One of the important points was,*

*adhicitte ca āyogo etaṃ buddhāna-sāsanam:*

'Commitment to the heightened mind: That is the teaching of the Buddhas.' To heighten the mind, we have to be calm and at peace.

*icchā lobha-samāpanno samaṇo kiṃ bhavissati:*

'When we are endowed with desire—greedy, struggling, and deluded—how can we be calm and at peace?' We need to practice by following the discipline as our starting point and by developing our meditation theme, beginning with walking and sitting meditation. We must work at our contemplation of the great establishings of mindfulness and develop it repeatedly, starting by keeping track of the body as our frame of reference. At first we should contemplate the parts of the body by means of *parikamma savana*, i.e., by means of conjecture—that this part is like that, and that is like this—because if we do this mindfully, with alertness, the mind won't wander far from the body and will settle down easily. When we practice *parikamma savana* repeatedly, an *uggaha nimitta* will arise. We should then master that stage until we reach *paṭibhāga*, analyzing the vision into its parts. When we master *paṭibhāga* fully, it will turn into insight meditation. We then develop insight meditation to its highest degree so that the mind will reach *ṭhītibhūtam*, as discussed in the strategies of clear insight. This is what is meant by 'practice.' When we have practiced,

*mokkham:*

We will cross over and beyond. It's because of the practices that we have done to completion that we will cross over and beyond—i.e., beyond the world. This is what is meant by the transcendent dhammas.

*khemam:*

We will gain relief from bondage.

Thus the message of the middle sermon is significant because it aims at release.

C. *At the end of his career*, when he was about to enter total *nibbāna*, the Buddha delivered his final sermon in the midst of a gathering of Noble Disciples in the Royal Sāla Forest of the Mallan gentry of Kusināra, saying,

*handadāni āmantayāmi vo bhikkhave, paṭivediyāmi vo bhikkhave, khaya-vaya-dhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetha:*

'I say to you, monks, do not be complacent. Contemplate fabrications that arise and then decay. When you contemplate in this manner, you will penetrate completely.' That was all he said, and he never said anything further. This is thus said to be his final sermon.

To explain the meaning: Where do fabrications arise? What are fabrications? Fabrications arise in our own minds. They are an effect or condition of the mind that gives rise to all supposings. These fabrications are the culprits that suppose and formulate everything in the world. Actually, the things of the world—in their elementary properties as phenomena—are simply the way they are. Earth, trees, mountains, sky, and sunshine don't say that they are anything at all. Even the human body, which is also composed of the world's elements, doesn't say that it is this or that. Mental fabrication is the culprit that styles these things as being this or that—and we fall for what it says as being true, holding that all these things are ours or ourselves. Passion, aversion, and delusion thus arise, causing the primal mind to stray deludedly after birth, aging, illness, and death, circling around endlessly through innumerable states of becoming and birth—all through the instigation of mental fabrication.

This is why the Buddha taught us to contemplate mental fabrications as inconstant and stressful:

*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā.*

We keep at this until we see them with full and clear comprehension—which arises as the fruit of having earlier developed *paṭibhāga*—to the point where the mind enters the *bhavaṅga*, its underlying state. When the current of the *bhavaṅga* disappears, a genuinely intuitive understanding will arise right at

the heart: ‘That’s just how they are—inconstant and stressful.’ When we master this and see it clearly and distinctly, we will then be wise to mental fabrications. Mental fabrications will no longer be able to fabricate the mind into becoming aroused ever again, as stated in the verse,

*akuppaṃ sabba-dhammesu ñeyyadhammā pavessanto:*

When mental fabrication can no longer fabricate the mind, the mind doesn’t become aroused. It is wise to all knowable dhammas,

*- santo:*

and thus calm and at peace, reaching release.

The words of this final sermon are truly significant. They can make the person who contemplates them awaken to the ultimate degree—which is why the Buddha stopped speaking and said no more.

The sermons given at these three points in the Buddha’s career have a significance over and beyond that of any other he ever gave. The first sermon aims at release, the middle sermon aims at release, the final sermon aims at release. In this way all three of them without exception aim at nothing but release.

**§ 17. Arahants of every sort attain both release through concentration and release through discernment, having developed the threefold training to completion.**

*anāsavaṃ ceto-vimuttiṃ paññā-vimuttiṃ  
ditṭheva dhamme sayāṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā  
upasampajja viharanti:*

‘They dwell without fermentation, having entered the release through concentration and release through discernment realized and verified by themselves in the very present.’

This passage from the Canon shows that arahants of no matter what sort reach both release through concentration and release through discernment, free from fermentations in the present. No distinctions are made, saying that this or that group reaches release only through concentration or only through discernment. The explanation given by the Commentators—that release through concentration pertains to those arahants who develop concentration first, while release through discernment pertains to the ‘dry insight’ arahants, who develop insight exclusively without having first developed concentration

—runs counter to the path. The eightfold path includes both right view and right concentration. A person who is to gain release has to develop all eight factors of the path. Otherwise he or she won't be able to gain release. The threefold training includes both concentration and discernment. A person who is to attain knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations has to develop all three parts of the threefold training completely.

This is why we say that arahants of every sort have to reach both release through concentration and release through discernment.

# *The Ever-present Truth*

## § 1. The root meditation themes

Has anyone ever been ordained in the Buddha's religion without having studied meditation? We can say categorically no—there hasn't. There isn't a single preceptor who doesn't teach meditation to the ordinand before presenting him with his robes. If a preceptor doesn't teach meditation beforehand, he can no longer continue being a preceptor. So every person who has been ordained can be said to have studied meditation. There is no reason to doubt this.

The preceptor teaches the five meditation themes: *kesā*, hair of the head; *lomā*, hair of the body; *nakhā*, nails; *dantā*, teeth; and *taco*, skin. These five meditation themes end with the skin. Why are we taught only as far as the skin? Because the skin is an especially important part of the body. Each and every one of us has to have skin as our wrapping. If we didn't have skin, our head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, and teeth wouldn't hold together. They'd have to scatter. Our flesh, bones, tendons, and all the other parts of the body wouldn't be able to stay together at all. They'd have to separate, to fall apart.

When we get infatuated with the human body, the skin is what we are infatuated with. When we conceive of the body as being beautiful and attractive, and develop love, desire, and longing for it, it's because of what we conceive of the skin. When we see a body, we suppose it to have a complexion—fair, ruddy, dark, etc.—because of what we conceive the color of the skin to be. If the body didn't have skin, who would conceive it to be beautiful or attractive? Who would love it, like it, or desire it? We'd regard it with nothing but hatred, loathing, and disgust. If it weren't wrapped in skin, the flesh, tendons, and other parts of the body wouldn't hold together and couldn't be used to accomplish anything at all—which is why we say the skin is especially important. The fact that we can keep on living is because of the skin. The fact that we get deluded into seeing the body as beautiful and attractive is because it has skin. This is why preceptors teach only as far as the skin.

If we set our minds on considering the skin until we see it as disgusting and gain a vision of its unloveliness appearing unmistakably to the heart, we are bound to see the inherent truths of inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness. This will cure our delusions of beauty and attractiveness that are fixated on the skin. We will no longer focus any conceivings on it or find it appealing or desirable, for we have seen it for what it is. Only when we heed our preceptors' instructions and not take them lightly will we see these inherent truths. If we don't heed our preceptors' instructions, we won't be able to cure our delusions, and instead will fall into the snares of enticing preoccupations—into the wheels of the cycle of rebirth.

So we've already been well-taught by our preceptors since the day of our ordination. There is no reason to look for anything further. If we're still unsure, if we're still looking for something more, that shows that we are still confused and lost. If we weren't confused, what would we be looking for? An unconfused person doesn't have to look for anything. Only a confused person has to go looking. The more he goes looking, the further he gets lost. If a person doesn't go looking, but simply considers what is already present, he will see clearly the reality that is inherently primal and unmoving, free from the yokes and fermentations of defilement.

This subject is not something thought up by the preceptors to be taught to the ordinand in line with anyone's opinion. It comes from the word of the Lord Buddha, who decreed that the preceptor should teach the ordinand these essential meditation themes for his constant consideration. Otherwise, our ordination wouldn't be in keeping with the fact that we have relinquished the life of home and family and have come out to practice renunciation for the sake of freedom. Our ordination would be nothing more than a sham. But since the Buddha has decreed this matter, every preceptor has continued this tradition down to the present. What our preceptors have taught us isn't wrong. It's absolutely true. But we simply haven't taken their teachings to heart. We've stayed complacent and deluded of our own accord—for people of discretion have affirmed that these teachings are the genuine path to purity.

## § 2. Virtue.

*sīlam silā viya:*  
Virtue is like rock.

Virtue—normalcy—is like rock, which is solid and forms the basis of the ground. No matter how much the wind may buffet and blow, rock doesn't waver or flinch.

If we simply hold to the word “virtue,” though, we can still go astray. We need to know where virtue lies, what it is, and who maintains it. If we know the factor maintaining it, we will see how that factor forms the essence of virtue. If we don’t understand virtue, we’ll end up going astray and holding just to the externals of virtue, believing that we have to look for virtue here or ask for the precepts there before we can have virtue. If we have to look for it and ask for it, doesn’t that show that we’re confused about it? Isn’t that a sign of attachment to the externals of precepts and practices?

People who aren’t confused about virtue don’t have to go looking or asking for it, because they know that virtue exists within themselves. They themselves are the ones who maintain their virtue by avoiding faults of various kinds.

Intention is what forms the essence of virtue. What is intention (*cetanā*)? We have to play with this word *cetanā* in order to understand it. Change the “e” to an “i,” and add another “t.” That gives us *citta*, the mind. A person without a mind can’t be called a person. If we had only a body, what could we accomplish? The body and mind have to rely on each other. If the mind isn’t virtuous, the body will misbehave in all sorts of ways. This is why we say that there is only one virtue: that of the mind. The precepts deal simply with the flaws we should avoid. Whether you avoid the five flaws, the eight, the ten, or the 227, you succeed in maintaining the one and the same virtue. If you can maintain this one virtue, your words and deeds will be flawless. The mind will be at normalcy—simple, solid, and unwavering.

This sort of virtue isn’t something you go looking or asking for. When people go looking and asking, it’s a sign they’re poor and destitute. They don’t have anything, so they have to go begging. They keep requesting the precepts, over and over again. The more they request them, the more they lack them. The poorer they become.

We are already endowed with body and mind. Our body we have received from our parents; our mind is already with us, so we have everything we need in full measure. If we want to make the body and mind virtuous, we should go right ahead and do it. We don’t have to think that virtue lies here or there, at this or that time. Virtue already lies right here with us. *Akālika*: If we maintain it at all times, we will reap its rewards at all times.

This point can be confirmed with reference to the time of the Buddha. When the five brethren; Ven. Yasa, his parents, and his former wife; the Kassapa brothers and their disciples; King Bimbisāra and his following, etc., listened to the Buddha’s teachings, they didn’t ask for the precepts beforehand. The Buddha started right in teaching them. So why were they able to attain the noble paths and fruitions? Where did their virtue, concentration, and discernment come from? The Buddha never told them to ask him for virtue,

concentration, and discernment. Once they had savored the taste of his teachings, then virtue, concentration, and discernment developed within them of their own accord, without any asking or giving taking place. No one had to take the various factors of the path and put them together into a whole, *for in each case, virtue, concentration, and discernment were qualities of one and the same heart.*

So only if we aren't deluded into searching outside for virtue can we be ranked as truly discerning.

### § 3. Potential

The traits that people have carried over from the past differ in being good, bad, and neutral. Their potential follows along with their traits—i.e., higher than what they currently are, lower, or on a par. Some people have developed a high potential to be good, but if they associate with fools, their potential will develop into that of a fool. Some people are weak in terms of their potential, but if they associate with sages, their potential improves and they become sages, too. Some people associate with friends who are neither good nor bad, who lead them neither up nor down, and so their potential stays on a mediocre level.

For this reason, we should try to associate with sages and wise people so as to raise the level of our potential progressively higher and higher, step by step.

### § 4. Contemplating the body

We have all come here to study of our own accord. Not one of us was invited to come. So, as we have come to study and practice, we should really give ourselves to the practice, in line with the example set by the Buddha and his arahant disciples.

At the very beginning, you should contemplate all four truths—birth, aging, illness, and death—that all the Noble Ones have contemplated before us. Birth: We have already been born. What is your body if not a heap of birth? Illness, aging, and death are all an affair of this heap. When we contemplate these things in all four positions—by practicing sitting meditation, walking meditation, meditation while standing or lying down—the mind will gather into concentration. If it gathers briefly, that's called momentary concentration. In other words, the mind gathers and reverts to its underlying level for a short while and then withdraws. If you contemplate without retreating, until an *uggaha nimitta* (arising image) of a part of the body appears within or without,

contemplate that image until the mind lets go of it and reverts to its underlying level and stays there for a fair while before withdrawing again. Concentration on this level is called threshold concentration.

Keep on contemplating that image until the mind reverts to a firm stance on its underlying level, reaching the singleness of the first level of *jhāna*. When the mind withdraws, keep contemplating that image over and over again until you can take it apart as a *paṭibhāga nimitta* (counterpart image). In others words, contemplate what the body will be like after it dies. It'll have to disintegrate until only the bones are left. Focus on this truth within you—as it applies to your own body—as well as without—as it applies to the bodies of others. See what the various parts of the body are: “This is hair” ... “These are nails” ... “These are teeth” ... “This is skin.” How many tendons are there? How many bones? Get so that you can see these things clearly. Visualize the body coming together again—sitting, standing, walking, and lying down—and then dying and reverting to its original state: its original properties of earth, water, fire, and wind.

When you contemplate this way repeatedly both within and without, visualizing the body newly dead and long dead, with dogs and vultures fighting over it, your mind will eventually come to gain intuitive insight in line with your potential.

## § 5. Purifying the mind

*sacitta-pariyodapanam*

*etam buddhāna-sāsanam:*

To purify one's own mind

is to follow the Buddhas' teachings.

The Buddha, our foremost teacher, taught about body, speech, and mind. He didn't teach anything else. He taught us to practice, to train our minds, to use our minds to investigate the body: This is called the contemplation of the body as a frame of reference. We are taught to train our mindfulness thoroughly in the practice of investigating—this is called the analysis of phenomena (*dhmma-vicaya*, one of the factors of Awakening)—until it reaches a point of sufficiency. When we have investigated enough to make mindfulness itself a factor of Awakening, the mind settles down into concentration of its own accord.

There are three levels of concentration. In momentary concentration, the mind gathers and settles down to a firm stance and rests there for a moment before withdrawing. In threshold concentration, the mind gathers and settles

down to its underlying level and stays there a fair while before withdrawing to be aware of a nimitta of one sort or another. In fixed penetration, the mind settles down to a firm stance on its underlying level and stops there in singleness, perfectly still—aware that it is staying there—endowed with the five factors of jhāna, which then become gradually more and more refined.

When we train the mind in this way, we are said to be heightening the mind, as in the Pali phrase,

*adhicitte ca āyogo*  
*etaṃ buddhāna-sāsanam:*  
To heighten the mind  
is to follow the Buddhas' teachings.

The contemplation of the body is a practice that sages—including the Lord Buddha—have described in many ways. For example, in the Mahasatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Great Establishings of Mindfulness Discourse), he calls it the contemplation of the body as a frame of reference. In the root themes of meditation, which a preceptor must teach at the beginning of the ordination ceremony, he describes the contemplation of hairs of the head, hairs of the body, nails, teeth, and skin. In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma), he teaches that birth, aging, and death are stressful.

We have all taken birth now, haven't we? When we practice so as to *opanayiko*—take these teachings inward and contemplate them by applying them to ourselves—we are not going wrong in the practice, because the Dhamma is *akāliko*, ever-present; and *āloko*, blatantly clear both by day and by night, with nothing to obscure it.

## § 6. The method of practice for those who have studied a great deal

People who have studied a lot of the Dhamma and Vinaya—who have learned a large number of approaches together with their many ramifications—when they then come to train their minds, find that their minds don't settle down easily into concentration. They need to realize that they must first take their learning and put it back on the shelf for the time being. They need to train “what knows”—this very mind—developing their mindfulness until it is super-mindfulness, their discernment until it is super-discernment, so that they can see through the super-deceits of conventional truth and common assumptions that set things up, naming them, “This is this,” and “That is

that”—days, nights, months, years, earth, sky, sun, moon, constellations, everything—all the things that thought-formations, the conditions or effects of the mind, set up as being this or that.

Once the mind can see through these effects of the mind, this is called knowing stress and its cause. Once you practice this theme and develop it repeatedly until you are quick at seeing through these things, the mind will be able to gather and settle down. To focus in this way is called developing the path. And when the path reaches a point of sufficiency, there is no need to speak of the cessation of stress: It will appear of its own accord to the person who practices—because virtue, concentration, and discernment all exist in our very own body, speech, and mind. These things are said to be *akāliko*: ever-present. *Opanayiko*: When meditators contemplate what already exists within them, then—*paccattam*—they will know for themselves. In other words, we contemplate the body so as to see it as unattractive and visualize it as disintegrating back into its primary properties in terms of the primal Dhamma that is blatantly clear both by day and by night.

When contemplating, you should keep this analogy in mind: When people grow rice, they have to grow it in the earth. They have to go wading through the mud, exposed to the sun and rain, before they can get the rice grains, the husked rice, the cooked rice, and can finally eat their fill. When they do this, they are getting their rice entirely from things that already exist. In the same way, meditators must develop virtue, concentration, and discernment, which already exist in the body, speech, and mind of every person.

## § 7. The principles of the practice are ever-present

With regard to the principles of our practice, there's no real problem. *Opanayiko*: Bring the mind inward to investigate body, speech, and mind—things that are *akāliko*, ever-present; *āloko*, blatantly clear both by day and by night; *paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*, to be known by the wise for themselves—just as the sages of the past, such as the Buddha and the Noble Disciples, knew clearly for themselves after bringing their minds inward to contemplate what was already there.

It's not the case that these things exist at some times and not at others. They exist at all times, in every era. This is something we as meditators can know for ourselves. In others words, when we make a mistake, we know it. When we do things correctly, we know it within ourselves. How good or bad we are, we are bound to know better than anyone else—as long as we are persistent in our contemplation and don't let ourselves grow complacent or heedless.

An example from the past is that of the sixteen young students of the Brahmin teacher, Bāvarī. They had practiced jhāna to the point where they were stuck on rūpa jhāna and arūpa jhāna. The Buddha thus taught them to contemplate what was already inside them so as to see it clearly with discernment—to see the level of sensuality as lying below, the level of formlessness as lying above, and the level of form as in the middle; to see the past as below, the future as above, and the present as in the middle. Then he taught them to look inside themselves—from the feet below, to the tips of the hair above, and all around in between.

Once they had contemplated in this way, they came to know clearly for themselves. This ended their doubts about how to practice, and they no longer had to go to the trouble of looking anywhere else.

### § 8. Listening to the Dhamma at all times

As a meditator, you should use the strategy of listening to the Dhamma at all times, even when living alone. In other words, contemplate the Dhamma both day and night. The eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are physical phenomena (*rūpa-dhamma*) that are always present. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations are also present for you to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. The mind? It too is present. Your thoughts and feelings about various topics—good and bad—are present as well. Development and decay, both within you and without, are also present. These things naturally display the truth—inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness—for you to see at all times. When a leaf grows yellow and falls from the tree, for instance, it's showing you the truth of inconstancy.

So when you continually use this approach to contemplate things with your mindfulness and discernment, you are said to be listening to the Dhamma at all times, both by day and by night.

# *The Ballad of Liberation from the Khandhas*

*Namatthu sugatassa  
Pañca dhamma-khandhāni*

I pay homage to the one Well-gone,  
the Foremost Teacher, the Sakyan Sage,  
the Rightly Self-Awakened One;  
& to the nine transcendent Dhammas;  
& to the Noble Saṅgha.

I will now give a brief exposition  
of the Dhamma khandhas,  
as far as I understand them.

Once there was a man who loved himself  
and feared distress. He wanted happiness  
beyond the reach of danger, so he wandered  
endlessly. Wherever people said  
that happiness was found, he longed to go,  
but wandering took a long, long time.  
He was the sort of man who loved himself  
and really dreaded death. He truly wanted  
release from aging & mortality.  
Then one day he came to know the truth,  
abandoning the cause of suffering &  
compounded things. He found a cave of wonders,  
of endless happiness, i.e., the body.  
As he gazed throughout the cave of wonders,  
his suffering was destroyed, his fears appeased.  
He gazed and gazed around the mountain side,  
Experiencing unbounded peace.

He feared if he were to go and tell his friends,  
they'd say he'd gone insane. He'd better stay  
alone, engaged in peace, abandoning  
his thoughts of contact, than to roam around,  
a sycophant, both criticized & flattered,  
exasperated & annoyed.

But then there was another man afraid  
of death, his heart all withered & discouraged.  
He came to me and spoke frankly  
in a pitiful way. He said,  
"You've made an effort at your meditation  
for a long time now.  
Have you seen it yet, the true Dhamma of your dreams?"  
(Eh! How is it that he knows my mind?)  
He asked to stay with me, so I agreed.  
"I'll take you to a massive mountain  
with a cave of wonders  
free from suffering & stress:  
    mindfulness immersed in the body.  
You can view it at your leisure to cool your heart  
and end your troubles.  
This is the path of the Noble lineage.  
It's up to you to go or not.  
I'm not deceiving or compelling you,  
just telling you the truth for what it is."  
And then I challenged him with riddles. First:

*"What runs?"*

"What runs quickly is viññāṇa,  
movements walking in a row,  
one after another. Not doubting that saññās are right,  
the heart gets caught up in the running back & forth.  
Saññās grab hold of things outside  
and pull them in to fool the mind,  
Making it think in confusion & go out searching,  
wandering astray.  
They fool it with various dhammas,  
like a mirage."

*"What gains total release from the five khandhas?"*

"The heart, of course, & the heart alone.  
It doesn't grasp or get entangled.  
No more poison of possessiveness,  
no more delusion,  
it stands alone.  
No saññās can fool it into following along  
behind them."

*"When they say there's death, what dies?"*

"Saṅkhāras die, destroying their effects."

*"What connects the mind into the cycle?"*

"The tricks of saññā make it spin.  
The mind goes wrong because it trusts its saññās,  
attached to its likes,  
leaving this plane of being,  
going to that, wandering till it's dizzy,  
forgetting itself,  
completely obscure to itself.  
No matter how hard it tries to find the Dhamma,  
it can't catch a glimpse."

*"What ferrets out the Dhamma?"*

"The heart ferrets it out,  
trying to find out how saññās say 'good'  
and grasp at 'bad'  
and force it to fasten on loving & hating."

*"To eat once & never look for more?"*

"The end of wanting to look, to know,  
to hope for knowing more,  
The end of entanglements.  
The mind sits still on its dais,  
discarding its attachments."

*"A four-sided pool, brimming full?"*

“The end of desire, abandoning doubt,  
clean, without a mote, & danger-free.  
Saññās settle out, sañkhāras don’t disturb it.  
The heart is thus brimming, with nothing lacking.  
Quiet & still, the mind  
has no lamenting thoughts:  
something worth admiring day after day.  
Even if one were to gain  
heavenly treasures by the millions,  
they’d be no match for the true knowing  
that abandons all sañkhāras.

The crucial thing: the ending of desire.  
Labels stay in their own sphere and don’t intrude.  
The mind, unenthralled with anything,  
stops its struggling.  
Like taking a mirror to look at your reflection:  
Don’t get attached to the saññās,  
which are like the image.  
Don’t get intoxicated with the issues of sañkhāras.  
“When the heart moves, you can catch sight  
of the unadulterated heart.  
You know for sure that the movement is in yourself  
because it changes.  
Inconstancy is a feature of the heart itself,  
no need to criticize anyone else.  
You know the different sorts of khandhas  
in the moving of the mind.

“Before, I used to think that saññās were the heart,  
labeling ‘outer’ & ‘inner,’  
which was why I was fooled.  
Now the heart’s in charge, with no concerns,  
no hopes of relying on any one saññā at all.  
Whatever arises or passes away  
there’s no need to be possessive of saññās  
or to try to prevent them.”

*“Like climbing to the top of a truly tall mountain  
and looking at the lowlands below,  
seeing every living being.”*

“Way up high, looking back  
you see all your affairs  
from the very beginning,  
forming a path, like stairs.”

*“Does the rise & fall of the river  
accord with the Truth?”*

“You can’t remedy the changing of saṅkhāras.  
Fashioned by kamma,  
they’re out to spite no one.  
If you grasp hold of them  
to push them this way & that,  
the mind has to become defiled & wrong.  
Don’t think of resisting  
the natural way of all things.  
Let good & evil follow their own affairs.

We simply free  
ourselves.

Unentangled in saṅkhāras:  
That’s what’s peaceful & cool.  
When you know the truth,  
you have to let go of saṅkhāras  
as soon as you see their changing.  
When you weary of them,  
you let them go easily,  
with no need to be forced.

The Dhamma is cooling.  
The mind will stop  
being subjected to things.”

*“The five duties complete?”*

“Khandhas divide the issues of fashioning  
into five realms,  
each filled with its duties & affairs,  
with no room for any other,  
because their hands are full—  
no room even for fortune, status, praise, pleasure,  
loss of fortune, loss of status, criticism, pain.  
They let each of these follow its own nature,

in line with its truth.  
The mind's not entangled  
with any of these eight,  
because physical khandhas keep creating  
aging & illness without pause.  
The mental khandhas never rest.  
They work like motors  
because they must take on the kamma  
of what they have done:  
Good things make them enthralled & happy,  
bad things agitate and darken the heart,  
making it think without stop,  
as if it were aflame.  
The mind is defiled & dull.  
Its loves & hates  
are things it has thought up on its own,  
so who else can it blame?

"Do you want to escape aging & death?  
It's beyond the range of possibility,  
as when we want the mind to stop  
wandering around and thinking,  
when we want it to stay at one  
and hope to depend on its stillness.  
The mind is something that changes,  
totally uncertain.  
Saññās stay in place only from time to time.  
Once we grow wise to the nature  
of all five khandhas,  
the mind will be clear & clean,  
free from stain, with no more issues.  
If you can know in this way,  
it's superlative,  
because you see the truth,  
withdraw,  
and gain release.  
That's the end of the path.  
You don't resist the natural way  
of the truth of things.  
Poverty & wealth, good & bad,  
in line with events both within & without,

all have to pass and vanish.  
You can't grasp hold of anything  
at which the mind takes aim.

"Now, when the mind's inconstant on its own  
—aquiver, quick—and you catch sight of it,  
that's when you find the ultimate in ease.  
Small things obscure our knowledge of the large.  
The khandhas totally obscure the Dhamma,  
and that's where we go wrong. We waste our time  
in watching khandhas so that we don't see  
the Dhamma that, though greater than the khandhas,  
seems like dust."

*"There is, there isn't. There isn't, yet there is."*

"Here I'm totally stymied  
and can't figure it out.  
Please explain what it means."

"There is birth of various causes & effects,  
but they are not beings,  
they all pass away.

    This is clear,  
the meaning of the first point:  
There is, there isn't.  
The second point, there isn't, yet there is:  
This refers to the deep Dhamma,  
the end of all three levels of existence,  
where there are no saṅkhāras,  
and yet there is the stable Dhamma.  
This is the Singular Dhamma, truly solitary.  
The Dhamma is One & unchanging.  
excelling all being, extremely still.  
The object of the unmoving heart,  
    still & at respite,  
    quiet & clear.  
No longer intoxicated,  
no longer feverish,  
its desires all uprooted,  
its uncertainties shed,

its entanglement with the khandhas  
all ended & appeased,  
the gears of the three levels of the cosmos all broken,  
overweening desire thrown away,  
its loves brought to an end,  
with no more possessiveness,  
all troubles cured  
as the heart had aspired."

"Please explain the mind's path  
in yet another way,  
& the cause of suffering in the mind  
that obscures the Dhamma."

"The cause is enormous,  
but to put it briefly,  
it's the love  
that puts a squeeze on the heart,  
making it concerned for the khandhas.  
If the Dhamma is with the heart  
throughout time,  
that's the end of attachment,  
with no more cause for suffering:  
Remember this, it's the path of the mind.  
You won't have to wonder,  
spinning around till you're dizzy.  
The mind, when the Dhamma's not always with it,  
gets attached to its likes,  
concerned for the khandhas,  
sunk in the cause of suffering.

"So in brief, there's suffering  
& there's the Dhamma  
always with the mind.  
Contemplate this until you see the truth,  
and the mind will be completely cool.  
However great the pleasure or pain,  
they'll cause you no fear.  
No longer drunk with the cause of suffering,  
the mind's well-gone.  
Knowing just this much is enough

to soothe your fevers,  
and to rest from your search for a path to release.  
The mind knowing the Dhamma forgets  
the mind attached to dust.  
The heart knowing the Dhamma of ultimate ease  
sees for sure that the khandhas are always stressful.  
The Dhamma stays as the Dhamma,  
the khandhas stay as khandhas, that's all.

"And as for the phrase,  
'Cool, at ease, & freed from fever,'  
this refers to the mind that's rescued itself  
from the addictive error  
[of correcting other things].  
The saṅkhāra aggregate offers no pleasure  
and truly is painful,  
for it has to age, grow ill, and die every day.  
When the mind knows the unexcelled Dhamma,  
it extracts itself from its defiling error  
that aggravates disease.  
This error is a fierce fault of the mind.  
But when it clearly sees the Dhamma,  
it removes its error,  
and there's no more poison in the heart.  
When the mind sees the Dhamma,  
abundantly good  
& released from error,  
meeting the Dhamma, it sheds all things  
that would make it restless.  
It's mindful, in & of itself,  
& unentangled.  
Its love for the khandhas comes to an end,  
its likes are cured,  
its worries cease,  
all dust is gone.  
Even if the mind thinks in line with its nature,  
we don't try to stop it.  
And when we don't stop it,  
it stops running wild.  
This frees us from turmoil.

*“Know that evil comes  
from resisting the truth.*

“Evil comes from not knowing.  
If we can close the door on stupidity,  
there’s ultimate ease.  
All evil grows silent, perfectly still.  
All the khandhas are suffering, with no pleasure at all.  
“Before I was stupid & in the dark,  
as if I were in a cave.  
In my desire to see the Dhamma,  
I tried to grab hold of the heart to still it.  
I grabbed hold of mental labels,  
thinking they were the heart  
until it became a habit.  
Doing this I was long enthralled  
with watching them.  
Wrong mental labels obscured the mind  
and I was deluded into playing around  
with the khandhas—  
Poor me!

“Exalting myself endlessly,  
I went around passing judgment on others  
but accomplishing nothing.  
Looking at the faults of others  
embitters the heart,  
as if we were to set ourselves on fire,  
becoming sooty & burned.  
Whoever’s right or wrong, good or bad,  
that’s their business.  
Ours is to make sure  
the heart looks after itself.  
Don’t let unskillful attitudes buzz around it & land.  
Make it consummate  
in merit & skill,  
and the result will be peace.  
Seeing others as bad and oneself as good  
is a stain on the heart,  
for one latches onto the khandha  
that holds to that judgment.

If you latch onto the khandhas  
they'll burn you for sure,  
for aging, defilement, & death will join in the fray:  
full of anger & love, obvious faults,  
worries, sorrows, & fears,  
while the five forms of sensuality  
bring in their multifarious troops.  
We gain no release from suffering & danger  
because we hold to the five khandhas as ours.  
Once you see your error, don't delay.  
Keep constant watch on the inconstancy of saṅkhāras.  
When the mind gets used to this,  
you're sure to see the Singular Dhamma,  
solitary in the mind.

“Inconstancy’ refers to the heart  
as it moves from its labels.  
When you see this, watch it  
again & again,  
right at the moving.  
When all external objects have faded away,  
the Dhamma will appear.  
When you see that Dhamma, you recover  
from mental unrest.  
The mind then won't be attached to dualities.  
Just this much truth can end the game.  
Knowing not-knowing:  
That's the method for the heart.

Once we see through inconstancy,  
the mind-source stops creating issues.  
All that remains is the primal mind,  
true & unchanging.  
Knowing the mind-source  
brings release from all worry & error.  
If you go out to the mind-ends,  
you're immediately wrong.

“Darkness’ comes from the mind  
possessive of what's good.  
This possessiveness is thought up

by the mind-ends.  
The mind-source is already good  
when the Dhamma appears, erasing doubt.  
When you see the superlative Dhamma,  
surpassing the world,  
all your old confused searchings  
are uprooted and let go.  
The [only] suffering left  
is the need to sleep and eat  
in line with events.  
The heart stays, tamed, near the mind-source,  
Thinking, yet not dwelling on its thoughts.  
The nature of the mind is that it has to think,  
But when it senses the mind-source  
it's released from its sorrows,  
secluded from disturbances, & still.

The nature of saṅkhāras  
when they appear  
is to vanish.  
They all decay; none remain.

Beware of the mind  
when you focus on making it refined,  
for you'll tend to force it  
to get stuck on the stillness.  
Get the heart to look again & again  
at its inconstancy, until it's a habit.  
When you reach 'Oh!'  
it will come on its own:  
    awareness of the heart's song,  
    like a mirage.  
The Buddha says the corruptions of insight  
disguise themselves as true  
when actually they're not.  
The awareness of mental phenomena  
that comes on its own,  
    is direct vision,  
not like hearing & understanding  
on the level of questioning.  
The analysis of phenomena,

mental & physical,  
is also not vision that comes on its own:  
so look.

The awareness that comes on its own  
is not the thought-song.  
Knowing the mind-source  
& mind-moments,  
the source-mind is released from sorrow.  
The mind-source's certain  
automatic knowledge of saṅkhāras  
—the affairs of change—  
is not a matter of parading out  
to see or know a thing.  
It's also not a knowledge based  
on labeling in pairs.

The mind knows itself  
from the motion of the song.  
The mind's knowledge of the motion  
is simply adjacent mind-moments.  
In fact, they can't be divided:  
They're all one & the same.  
When the mind is two, that's called  
Saññā entangling things.  
Inconstancy is itself, so why focus on anyone else?

“When the heart sees its own decaying,  
it's released from darkness.  
It loses its taste for them,  
and abandons its doubts.  
It stops searching for things within & without.  
Its attachments all fall away.  
It leaves its loves & hates,  
whatever weighs it down.  
It can end its desires,  
its sorrows all vanish—  
together with the weighty cares  
that made it moan—  
as if a shower of rain were to refresh the heart.  
The cool heart is realized by the heart itself.  
The heart is cool for it has no need  
to wander around, looking at people.

Knowing the mind-source in the present,  
it's unshakeable & unconcerned  
with any good or evil,  
for they must pass away,  
with all other impediments.  
Perfectly still, the mind-source  
neither thinks nor interprets.  
It stays only with its own affairs:  
    no expectations,  
    no need to be entangled or troubled,  
    no need to keep up its guard.  
Sitting or lying down, one thinks  
at the source-mind: 'Released.'"

    "Your explanation of the path  
    is penetrating,  
    so encompassing & clear.  
        Just one more thing:  
    Please explain in detail the mind  
    unreleased from the cause of suffering."

"The cause of suffering is attachment & love,  
extremely enthralled,  
creating new becomings  
without wearying.  
On the lower level, the stains  
are the five strands of sensuality;  
on the higher level,  
attachment to jhāna.  
In terms of how these things  
    act in the mind:  
It's all an affair of being enthralled with saṅkhāras,  
enthralled with all that have happened  
for a long, long time—  
    seeing them as good,  
    nourishing the heart on error,  
    making it branch out  
    in restlessness distraction.  
Smitten by error, with no sense of shame,  
enthralled with admiring  
whatever it fancies—

enthralled to the point where it forgets itself  
and loses its sense of danger;  
enthralled with viewing the faults of others,  
upset by their evil,  
not seeing its own faults as anything at all.  
No matter how great the faults of others,  
they can't make us fall into hell.  
While our own faults can take us  
to the severest hell straightaway,  
even if they aren't very defiling at all.  
So keep watch on your faults  
until it comes naturally.  
Avoid those faults  
and you're sure to see  
    happiness free  
    from danger & fear.  
When you see your faults clearly  
cut them right away.  
Don't dawdle or delay  
or you'll never be rid of them.

"Wanting what's good, without stop:  
That's the cause of suffering.  
It's a great fault: the strong fear of bad.  
'Good' & 'bad' are poisons to the mind,  
like foods that enflame a high fever.  
The Dhamma isn't clear  
because of our basic desire for good.  
Desire for good, when it's great,  
drags the mind into turbulent thought  
until the mind gets inflated with evil,  
and all its defilements proliferate.  
The greater the error, the more they flourish,  
taking one further & further away  
from the genuine Dhamma."

"This way of explaining  
the cause of suffering  
chastens my heart.  
[At first] the meaning  
was tattered & tangled,

but when you explained the path  
my heart didn't move:  
at respite, still, & at peace,  
reaching an end at last."

"This is called the attainment  
of liberation from the khandhas,  
a Dhamma that remains in place,  
with no coming or going,  
a genuine nature—the only one—  
with nothing to make it stray or spin."

With that, the tale is ended. Right or wrong,  
please ponder with discernment till you know.

—*Composed by Phra Bhūridatto (Mun)*

WAT SRAPATHUM, [BANGKOK]

## GLOSSARY

*Anusaya*: Latent obsession—sensual passion, irritation, views, doubt, pride, passion for becoming, and ignorance.

*Apāya*: State of deprivation; the four lowest levels of existence—rebirth in hell, as a hungry shade, as an angry demon, or as a common animal.

*Arahant*: A person whose heart is freed from mental fermentations (see *āsava*) and is thus not destined for further rebirth .

*Āsava*: Mental fermentation or effluent—sensual passion, states of becoming, and ignorance. Some lists add views as a fourth member of the list.

*Avijjā*: Ignorance, unawareness, counterfeit knowledge.

*Dhamma*: Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles underlying their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize nine transcendent qualities: the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna. By extension, ‘Dhamma’ is used also to refer to any doctrine that teaches such things.

*Dhātu*: Element; property; potential. The four physical properties are those of earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (heat), and wind (energy or motion).

*Jhāna*: Meditative absorption. *Rūpa jhāna* denotes absorption in a physical object; *arūpa jhāna*, absorption in a non-physical object.

*Kamma*: Intentional acts that lead to renewed states of becoming and birth.

*Khandha*: Component parts of sensory perception—which, when clung to, constitute suffering and stress: *rūpa* (physical phenomena); *vedanā* (feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain); *saññā* (perceptions, labels, concepts, allusions); *saṅkhāra* (mental fabrications, formations, processes); and *viññāṇa* (consciousness).

*Lokadhamma*: Ways of the world—fortune, loss, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure, and pain.

*Nibbāna*: Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and thus from the round of death and rebirth.

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

*Ogha*: Flood; factors that sweep the mind along the round of death and rebirth—sensual passion, becoming, and ignorance. Some lists add views as a fourth member of the list.

*Pāramī*: Perfection; qualities that lead to awakening—generosity, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, endurance, truthfulness, determination, goodwill, and equanimity.

*Paṭibhāga*: The manipulation of visions that appear in meditation.

*Satipaṭṭhāna*: Establishing of mindfulness: the practice of staying focused on body, feelings, mind, or mental qualities in and of themselves.

*Uggaha nimitta*: An image appearing spontaneously during meditation.

*Upakkilesa*: Mental corruption or defilement—passion, aversion, and delusion in their various forms.

*Vinaya*: The monastic discipline.

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