

The Collected Teachings of
AJAHN CHAH

VOLUME THREE

RENUNCIANT PRACTICE





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In order to make this e-book readable in a variety of electronic formats a simplified form of representing Pali words has been used; some of the diacritical marks have therefore not been included in this edition. To check the spelling of any particular Pali word, please consult the Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary

Preface

The teachings of Venerable Ajahn Chah that have been translated into English and made available in this three-volume edition are direct and clear. It gives me great joy to know such wisdom is being widely distributed.

I had the good fortune of living with or being near Ajahn Chah between 1967 and 1977, which were the peak years of his teaching life. After I received bhikkhu ordination in NE Thailand (Nong Khai Province) in May of 1967, my preceptor had sent me to Wat Nong Pah Pong Monastery for training. It was during that first Rains Retreat (*vassa*), living under Ajahn Chah, that my faith and confidence in this way of practice really arose. During those ten years I had an opportunity to study and come to understand the relationship between Dhamma and Vinaya (discipline), to develop insight into emptiness and form and to recognize the suffering that was caused by my ignorant attachments to conditioned phenomena.

Ajahn Chah's approach to teaching and training is simple and practical. It is a perfect tool for cutting through the delusions of self, cultural and social conceits, and our thinking process. Now his recorded teachings have been translated into English and are available for the asking. I am indeed grateful for all the work that has gone into translating and compiling, and to the sponsors who have made this publication freely available.

The teaching of the Buddha is a great gift and most necessary to deal with the problems of modern societies. May this collection of teachings bring benefit to many.

Luang Por Sumedho, November 2010

A Note On The Text

THIS IS the third of three volumes of The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah. These have all been transcribed, translated and edited from talks originally given in the Thai or Laotian language by Ajahn Chah. Some were given to gatherings of lay followers; many, perhaps most, were offered to groups of mainly male monastics living with him in Thailand. These factors inevitably affect not just the content but also the tone and emphasis of the original teachings. Readers are encouraged to bear these circumstances in mind in order to appreciate fully the range and applicability and the full significance of these Dhamma teachings. In a way, Western lay readers will need to make their own inner translation as they go along - finding their own equivalents for all those water buffalo analogies and the context of an ascetic monastic life in the forest - but this kind of engaged reflection, contemplating how these words apply within the ambit of our own lives, is exactly the kind of relationship to the teachings that Ajahn Chah encouraged.

Firstly, amongst these influencing factors there are the inherent difficulties in translating from Thai to English, from a tonal Asian language deeply influenced by Buddhism to a European language with its own cultural resonances. Additionally, several different translators have worked on the teachings gathered in these volumes. The differing nationalities and backgrounds of these translators inevitably mean that there are variations in tone, style and vocabulary between chapters.

Secondly, during the thirty-year period during which these translations were made, Buddhist culture in the West has also greatly changed. Whereas earlier translators perhaps felt that many Buddhist concepts needed to be translated into more familiar Western terms, there is nowadays a greater awareness of the Buddhist worldview; for example, terms like 'kamma' and 'nibbāna' are now part of accepted English vocabulary. The talks gathered in these volumes therefore show a range of ways of translating Buddhist terms and concepts.

Thirdly, the monastic Buddhist context means that Thai and Pāli words with technical meanings were a regular and accepted part of the vernacular teaching style. The various translators have each made their own decisions about how to render such technical terms. For example, in the Thai language the same word can mean either ‘heart’ or ‘mind’, and translators have had to exercise their own judgement as to how to render it into English. Readers should bear this in mind if they encounter English words used in ways that don’t seem quite natural, or seem inconsistent between the various talks. More often than not non-English words are explained either in the context of the talk or with a footnote. In addition, a glossary of the more common terms and a list of further resources can be found at the end of the book.

We trust that in our efforts to render oral instruction in a written form we have not obscured the intentions of the teacher. Inevitably some compromises have been made, as different translators have attempted to strike a balance between literal and liberal renderings. For this compilation we have reedited some of the translations for the sake of standardizing terms and style. However we have kept this to a minimum. Further editions of these works might attempt a greater degree of standardization.

Finally, particularly in Volume Three, Renunciant Practice, Ajahn Chah’s talks were given in a context where the audience was mainly engaged in a celibate renunciant lifestyle. This circumstance inevitably colours much of the way the Dhamma is presented there. Ajahn Chah also very often talked only to men. This fact explains the constant use of exclusively male pronouns in many of these talks. Although the preservation of such language here may appear to some as an obstruction, it seemed an inappropriate liberty to edit it out. Readers may thus again at times have to make an internal translation of their own, or other leaps of the imagination, in order to illuminate the relevance of those teachings to their own lives.

Ajahn Chah would have been teaching in small halls, dimly lit by kerosine lamps, surrounded by the assembly of monks. The teachings often took the form of exhortations given at the end of the fortnightly recitation of the *Pātimokkha*, the monastic code of discipline. These teachings were thus explicitly directed at monastic residents, so the lay readers of these

teachings should remember that they are as much encountering a renunciate style of Buddhist practice as a set of Dhamma teachings.

The three headings, Daily Life Practice, Formal Practice and Renunciant Practice, under which these talks have been organized should not be taken too literally. Within each talk there is a large degree of overlap, accordingly it is not necessary for them to be read in the order in which they have been presented.

The preparation and presentation of this compilation has been a team effort benefiting from the time and skills of many proof-readers, technicians and designers. Particular mention should be made of the offerings of two of the original translators, Paul Breiter and Bruce Evans. We are indebted to all those contributors whose time and effort have brought this project to fruition.

We sincerely hope that with all these perspectives taken to heart, the words contained in these volumes will serve every reader well and be a condition for the realization of Nibbāna. It was with this same intention that Ajahn Chah spoke so much for so many years. May these intentions ripen in the reader's life and lead to complete peace and freedom.

The compilers

What is Contemplation?

Question: When you teach about the value of contemplation, are you speaking of sitting and thinking over particular themes - the thirty-two parts of the body, for instance?

Answer: That is not necessary when the mind is truly still. When tranquillity is properly established the right object of investigation becomes obvious. When contemplation is 'True', there is no discrimination into 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad'; there is nothing even like that. You don't sit there thinking, 'Oh, this is like that and that is like this' etc. That is a coarse form of contemplation. Meditative contemplation is not merely a matter of thinking - rather it's what we call 'contemplation in silence'. Whilst going about our daily routine we mindfully consider the real nature of existence through comparisons. This is a coarse kind of investigation but it leads to the real thing.

Q: When you talk about contemplating the body and mind, though, do we actually use thinking? Can thinking produce true insight? Is this vipassanā?

A: In the beginning we need to work using thinking, even though later on we go beyond it. When we are doing true contemplation all dualistic thinking has ceased; although we need to consider dualistically to get started. Eventually all thinking and pondering comes to an end.

Q: You say that there must be sufficient tranquillity (samādhi) to contemplate. Just how tranquil do you mean?

A: Tranquil enough for there to be presence of mind.

Q: Do you mean staying with the here-and-now, not thinking about the past and future?

A: Thinking about the past and future is all right if you understand what these things really are, but you must not get caught up in them. Treat them the same as you would anything else - don't get caught up. When you see

thinking as just thinking, then that's wisdom. Don't believe in any of it! Recognize that all of it is just something that has arisen and will cease. Simply see everything just as it is - it is what it is - the mind is the mind - it's not anything or anybody in itself. Happiness is just happiness, suffering is just suffering - it is just what it is. When you see this you will be beyond doubt.

Q: I still don't understand. Is true contemplating the same as thinking?

A: We use thinking as a tool, but the knowing that arises because of its use is above and beyond the process of thinking; it leads to our not being fooled by our thinking anymore. You recognize that all thinking is merely the movement of the mind, and also that knowing is not born and doesn't die. What do you think all this movement called 'mind' comes out of? What we talk about as the mind - all the activity - is just the conventional mind. It's not the real mind at all. What is real just IS, it's not arising and it's not passing away.

Trying to understand these things just by talking about them, though, won't work. We need to really consider impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and impersonality (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*); that is, we need to use thinking to contemplate the nature of conventional reality. What comes out of this work is wisdom - and if it's real wisdom everything's completed, finished - we recognize emptiness. Even though there may still be thinking, it's empty - you are not affected by it.

Q: How can we arrive at this stage of the real mind?

A: You work with the mind you already have, of course! See that all that arises is uncertain, that there is nothing stable or substantial. See it clearly and see that there is really nowhere to take a hold of anything - it's all empty.

When you see the things that arise in the mind for what they are, you won't have to work with thinking anymore. You will have no doubt whatsoever in these matters.

To talk about the ‘real mind’ and so on, may have a relative use in helping us understand. We invent names for the sake of study, but actually nature just is how it is. For example, sitting here downstairs on the stone floor. The floor is the base - it’s not moving or going anywhere. Upstairs, above us, is what has arisen out of this. Upstairs is like everything that we see in our minds: form, feeling, memory, thinking. Really, they don’t exist in the way we presume they do. They are merely the conventional mind. As soon as they arise, they pass away again; they don’t really exist in themselves.

There is a story in the scriptures about Venerable Sāriputta examining a bhikkhu before allowing him to go off wandering (*dhutanga vatta*). He asked him how he would reply if he was questioned, ‘What happens to the Buddha after he dies?’ The bhikkhu replied, ‘When form, feeling, perception, thinking and consciousness arise, they pass away.’ Venerable Sāriputta passed him on that.

Practice is not just a matter of talking about arising and passing away, though. You must see it for yourself. When you are sitting, simply see what is actually happening. Don’t follow anything. Contemplation doesn’t mean being caught up in thinking. The contemplative thinking of one on the Way is not the same as the thinking of the world. Unless you understand properly what is meant by contemplation, the more you think the more confused you will become.

The reason we make such a point of the cultivation of mindfulness is because we need to see clearly what is going on. We must understand the processes of our hearts. When such mindfulness and understanding are present, then everything is taken care of. Why do you think one who knows the Way never acts out of anger or delusion? The causes for these things to arise are simply not there. Where would they come from? Mindfulness has got everything covered.

Q: Is this mind you are talking about called the ‘Original Mind’?

A: What do you mean?

Q: It seems as if you are saying there is something else outside of the conventional body-mind (the five *khandhas*). Is there something else? What

do you call it?

A: There isn't anything and we don't call it anything - that's all there is to it! Be finished with all of it. Even the knowing doesn't belong to anybody, so be finished with that, too! Consciousness is not an individual, not a being, not a self, not an other, so finish with that - finish with everything! There is nothing worth wanting! It's all just a load of trouble. When you see clearly like this then everything is finished.

Q: Could we not call it the 'Original Mind'?

A: You can call it that if you insist. You can call it whatever you like, for the sake of conventional reality. But you must understand this point properly. This is very important. If we didn't make use of conventional reality we wouldn't have any words or concepts with which to consider actual reality - Dhamma. This is very important to understand.

Q: What degree of tranquillity are you talking about at this stage? And what quality of mindfulness is needed?

A: You don't need to go thinking like that. If you didn't have the right amount of tranquillity you wouldn't be able to deal with these questions at all. You need enough stability and concentration to know what is going on - enough for clarity and understanding to arise.

Asking questions like this shows that you are still doubting. You need enough tranquillity of mind to no longer get caught in doubting what you are doing. If you had done the practice you would understand these things. The more you carry on with this sort of questioning, the more confusing you make it. It's all right to talk if the talking helps contemplation, but it won't show you the way things actually are. This Dhamma is not understood because somebody else tells you about it, you must see it for yourself - *paccattam*.

If you have the quality of understanding that we have been talking about, then we say that your duty to do anything is over; which means that you don't do anything. If there is still something to do, then it's your duty to do it.

Simply keep putting everything down, and know that that is what you are doing. You don't always need to be checking up on yourself, worrying about things like 'How much samādhi' ... it will always be the right amount. Whatever arises in your practice, let it go; know it all as uncertain, impermanent. Remember that! It's all uncertain. Be finished with all of it. This is the Way that will take you to the source - to your Original Mind.

Dhamma Nature

Sometimes, when a fruit tree is in bloom, a breeze stirs and scatters blossoms to the ground. Some buds remain and grow into a small green fruit. A wind blows and some of them, too, fall! Still others may become fruit or nearly ripe, or some even fully ripe, before they fall.

And so it is with people. Like flowers and fruit in the wind they, too, fall in different stages of life. Some people die while still in the womb, others within only a few days after birth. Some people live for a few years then die, never having reached maturity. Men and women die in their youth. Still others reach a ripe old age before they die.

When reflecting upon people, consider the nature of fruit in the wind: both are very uncertain.

This uncertain nature of things can also be seen in the monastic life. Some people come to the monastery intending to ordain but change their minds and leave, some with heads already shaved. Others are already novices, then they decide to leave. Some ordain for only one Rains Retreat then disrobe. Just like fruit in the wind - all very uncertain!

Our minds are also similar. A mental impression arises, draws and pulls at the mind, then the mind falls - just like fruit.

The Buddha understood this uncertain nature of things. He observed the phenomenon of fruit in the wind and reflected upon the monks and novices who were his disciples. He found that they, too, were essentially of the same nature - uncertain! How could it be otherwise? This is just the way of all things.

Thus, for one who is practising with awareness, it isn't necessary to have someone to advise and teach all that much to be able to see and understand. An example is the case of the Buddha who, in a previous life, was King Mahājanaka. He didn't need to study very much. All he had to do was observe a mango tree.

One day, while visiting a park with his retinue of ministers, from atop his elephant, he spied some mango trees heavily laden with ripe fruit. Not being able to stop at that time, he determined in his mind to return later to partake of some. Little did he know, however, that his ministers, coming along behind, would greedily gather them all up; that they would use poles to knock them down, beating and breaking the branches and tearing and scattering the leaves.

Returning in the evening to the mango grove, the king, already imagining in his mind the delicious taste of the mangoes, suddenly discovered that they were all gone, completely finished! And not only that, but the branches and leaves had been thoroughly thrashed and scattered.

The king, quite disappointed and upset, then noticed another mango tree nearby with its leaves and branches still intact. He wondered why. He then realized it was because that tree had no fruit. If a tree has no fruit nobody disturbs it and so its leaves and branches are not damaged. This lesson kept him absorbed in thought all the way back to the palace: 'It is unpleasant, troublesome and difficult to be a king. It requires constant concern for all his subjects. What if there are attempts to attack, plunder and seize parts of his kingdom?' He could not rest peacefully; even in his sleep he was disturbed by dreams.

He saw in his mind, once again, the mango tree without fruit and its undamaged leaves and branches. 'If we become similar to that mango tree,' he thought, 'our "leaves" and "branches" too, would not be damaged.'

In his chamber he sat and meditated. Finally, he decided to ordain as a monk, having been inspired by this lesson of the mango tree. He compared himself to that mango tree and concluded that if one didn't become involved in the ways of the world, one would be truly independent, free from worries or difficulties. The mind would be untroubled. Reflecting thus, he ordained.

From then on, wherever he went, when asked who his teacher was, he would answer, 'a mango tree.' He didn't need to receive much teaching. A mango tree was the cause of his *Awakening to the *opanayiko dhamma**, the teaching leading inwards. And with this Awakening, he became a monk,

one who has few concerns, is content with little, and who delights in solitude. His royal status given up, his mind was finally at peace.

In this story the Buddha was a *bodhisatta* who developed his practice in this way continuously. Like the Buddha as King Mahajanaka, we, too, should look around us and be observant because everything in the world is ready to teach us.

With even a little intuitive wisdom, we will be able to see clearly through the ways of the world. We will come to understand that everything in the world is a teacher. Trees and vines, for example, can all reveal the true nature of reality. With wisdom there is no need to question anyone, no need to study. We can learn from nature enough to be enlightened, as in the story of King Mahajanaka, because everything follows the way of truth. It does not diverge from truth.

Associated with wisdom are self-composure and restraint which, in turn, can lead to further insight into the ways of nature. In this way, we will come to know the ultimate truth of everything being '*anicca-dukkha-anattā*'.¹ Take trees, for example; all trees upon the earth are equal, they are One, when seen through the reality of '*anicca-dukkha-anattā*'. First, they come into being, then grow and mature, constantly changing, until they finally die as every tree must.

In the same way, people and animals are born, grow and change during their life-times until they eventually die. The multitudinous changes which occur during this transition from birth to death show the Way of Dhamma. That is to say, all things are impermanent, having decay and dissolution as their natural condition.

If we have awareness and understanding, if we study with wisdom and mindfulness, we will see Dhamma as reality. Thus, we will see people as constantly being born, changing and finally passing away. Everyone is subject to the cycle of birth and death, and because of this, everyone in the universe is as One being. Thus, seeing one person clearly and distinctly is the same as seeing every person in the world.

In the same way, everything is Dhamma. Not only the things we see with our physical eye, but also the things we see in our minds. A thought arises, then changes and passes away. It is '*nāma dhamma*', simply a mental impression that arises and passes away. This is the real nature of the mind. Altogether, this is the noble truth of Dhamma. If one doesn't look and observe in this way, one doesn't really see! If one does see, one will have the wisdom to listen to the Dhamma as proclaimed by the Buddha.

Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is in the Dhamma.

Where is the Dhamma? The Dhamma is in the Buddha.

Right here, now! Where is the Sangha?

The Sangha is in the Dhamma.

The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha exist in our minds, but we have to see it clearly. Some people just pick this up casually saying, 'Oh! The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha exist in my mind.' Yet their own practice is not suitable or appropriate. It is thus not befitting that the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha should be found in their minds, namely, because the 'mind' must first be that mind which knows the Dhamma.

Bringing everything back to this point of Dhamma, we will come to know that truth does exist in the world, and thus it is possible for us to practise to realize it.

For instance, '*nāma dhamma*', feelings, thoughts, imagination, etc., are all uncertain. When anger arises, it grows and changes and finally disappears. Happiness, too, arises, grows and changes and finally disappears. They are empty. They are not any 'thing'. This is always the way of all things, both mentally and materially. Internally, there are this body and mind. Externally, there are trees, vines and all manner of things which display this universal law of uncertainty.

Whether a tree, a mountain or an animal, it's all Dhamma, everything is Dhamma. Where is this Dhamma? Speaking simply, that which is not

Dhamma doesn't exist. Dhamma is nature. This is called the '*saccadhamma*', the True Dhamma. If one sees nature, one sees Dhamma; if one sees Dhamma, one sees nature. Seeing nature, one knows the Dhamma.

And so, what is the use of a lot of study when the ultimate reality of life, in its every moment, in its every act, is just an endless cycle of births and deaths? If we are mindful and clearly aware when in all postures (sitting, standing, walking, lying), then self-knowledge is ready to be born; that is, knowing the truth of Dhamma already in existence right here and now.

At present, the Buddha, the real Buddha, is still living, for he is the Dhamma itself, the '*saccadhamma*'. And '*saccadhamma*', that which enables one to become Buddha, still exists. It hasn't fled anywhere! It gives rise to two Buddhas: one in body and the other in mind.

'The real Dhamma,' the Buddha told Ānanda, 'can only be realized through practice.' Whoever sees the Buddha, sees the Dhamma. And how is this? Previously, no Buddha existed; it was only when Siddhattha Gotama realized the Dhamma that he became the Buddha. If we explain it in this way, then he is the same as us. If we realize the Dhamma, then we will likewise be the Buddha. This is called the Buddha in mind or '*nāma dhamma*'.

We must be mindful of everything we do, for we become the inheritors of our own good or evil actions. In doing good, we reap good. In doing evil, we reap evil. All you have to do is look into your everyday lives to know that this is so. Siddhattha Gotama was enlightened to the realization of this truth, and this gave rise to the appearance of a Buddha in the world. Likewise, if each and every person practises to attain to this truth, then they, too, will change to be Buddha.

Thus, the Buddha still exists. Some people are very happy saying, 'If the Buddha still exists, then I can practise Dhamma!' That is how you should see it.

The Dhamma that the Buddha realized is the Dhamma which exists permanently in the world. It can be compared to ground water which

permanently exists in the ground. When a person wishes to dig a well, he must dig down deep enough to reach the ground water. The ground water is already there. He does not create the water, he just discovers it. Similarly, the Buddha did not invent the Dhamma, he did not decree the Dhamma. He merely revealed what was already there. Through contemplation, the Buddha saw the Dhamma. Therefore, it is said that the Buddha was enlightened, for enlightenment is knowing the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the truth of this world. Seeing this, Siddhattha Gotama is called 'The Buddha'. The Dhamma is that which allows other people to become a Buddha, 'One-who-knows', one who knows Dhamma.

If beings have good conduct and are loyal to the Buddha-Dhamma, then those beings will never be short of virtue and goodness. With understanding, we will see that we are really not far from the Buddha, but sitting face to face with him. When we understand the Dhamma, then at that moment we will see the Buddha.

If one really practises, one will hear the Buddha-Dhamma whether sitting at the root of a tree, lying down or in whatever posture. This is not something to merely think about. It arises from the pure mind. Just remembering these words is not enough, because this depends upon seeing the Dhamma itself, nothing other than this. Thus we must be determined to practise to be able to see this, and then our practice will really be complete. Wherever we sit, stand, walk or lie down, we will hear the Buddha's Dhamma.

In order to practise his teaching, the Buddha taught us to live in a quiet place so that we can learn to collect and restrain the senses of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. This is the foundation for our practice since these are the only places where all things arise. Thus we collect and restrain these six senses in order to know the conditions that arise there. All good and evil arise through these six senses. They are the predominant faculties in the body. The eye is predominant in seeing, the ear in hearing, the nose in smelling, the tongue in tasting, the body in contacting hot, cold, hard and soft, and the mind in the arising of mental impressions. All that remains for us to do is to build our practice around these points.

The practice is easy because all that is necessary has already been set down by the Buddha. This is comparable to the Buddha planting an orchard and

inviting us to partake of its fruit. We, ourselves, do not need to plant one.

Whether concerning morality, meditation or wisdom, there is no need to create, decree or speculate, because all that we need to do is follow the things which already exist in the Buddha's teaching.

Therefore, we are beings who have much merit and good fortune in having heard the teachings of the Buddha. The orchard already exists, the fruit is already ripe. Everything is already complete and perfect. All that is lacking is someone to partake of the fruit, someone with faith enough to practise!

We should consider that our merit and good fortune are very valuable. All we need to do is look around to see how much other creatures are possessed of ill-fortune; take dogs, pigs, snakes and other creatures, for instance. They have no chance to study Dhamma, no chance to know Dhamma, no chance to practise Dhamma. These beings possessed of ill-fortune are receiving karmic retribution. When one has no chance to study, to know, to practise Dhamma, then one has no chance to be free from suffering.

As human beings we should not allow ourselves to become victims of ill-fortune, deprived of proper manners and discipline. Do not become a victim of ill-fortune! That is to say, one without hope of attaining the path of freedom, to nibbāna, one without hope of developing virtue. Do not think that we are already without hope! By thinking in that way, we become possessed of ill-fortune the same as other creatures.

We are beings who have come within the sphere of influence of the Buddha. We human beings are already of sufficient merit and resources. If we correct and develop our understanding, opinions and knowledge in the present, it will lead us to behave and practise in such a way as to see and know Dhamma in this present life as human beings.

We are beings that should be enlightened to the Dhamma and thus different from other creatures. The Buddha taught that at this present moment, the Dhamma exists here in front of us. The Buddha sits facing us right here and now! At what other time or place are you going to look?

If we don't think rightly, if we don't practise rightly, we will fall back to being animals or creatures in Hell or hungry ghosts or demons.² How is this? Just look in your mind. When anger arises, what is it? There it is, just look! When delusion arises, what is it? That's it, right there! When greed arises, what is it? Look at it right there!

By not recognizing and clearly understanding these mental states, the mind changes from being that of a human being. All conditions are in the state of becoming. Becoming gives rise to birth or existence as determined by the present conditions. Thus we become and exist as our minds condition us.

¹: *anicca-dukkha-anattā*: the three characteristics of existence, namely: impermanence / instability, suffering / unsatisfactoriness, and not-self / impersonality.

²: According to Buddhist thought, beings are born in any of eight states of existence depending on their kamma. These include three heavenly states (where happiness is predominant), the human state, and the four above-mentioned woeful or hell states (where suffering is predominant). The Venerable Ajahn always stresses that we should see these states in our own minds in the present moment. So that depending on the condition of the mind, we can say that we are continually being born in these different states. For instance, when the mind is on fire with anger then we have fallen from the human state and have been born in hell right here and now.

Two Faces of Reality

In our lives we have two possibilities: indulging in the world or going beyond the world. The Buddha was someone who was able to free himself from the world and thus realized spiritual liberation.

In the same way, there are two types of knowledge: knowledge of the worldly realm and knowledge of the spiritual, or true wisdom. If we have not yet practised and trained ourselves, no matter how much knowledge we have, it is still worldly, and thus can not liberate us.

Think and really look closely! The Buddha said that things of the world spin the world around. Following the world, the mind is entangled in the world, it defiles itself whether coming or going, never remaining content. Worldly people are those who are always looking for something, never finding enough. Worldly knowledge is really ignorance; it isn't knowledge with clear understanding, therefore there is never an end to it. It revolves around the worldly goals of accumulating things, gaining status, seeking praise and pleasure; it's a mass of delusion which has us stuck fast.

Once we get something, there is jealousy, worry and selfishness. And when we feel threatened and can't ward it off physically, we use our minds to invent all sorts of devices, right up to weapons and even nuclear bombs, only to blow each other up. Why all this trouble and difficulty?

This is the way of the world. The Buddha said that if one follows it around there is no reaching an end.

Come to practise for liberation! It isn't easy to live in accordance with true wisdom, but whoever earnestly seeks the path and fruit and aspires to Nibbāna will be able to persevere and endure. Endure being contented and satisfied with little; eating little, sleeping little, speaking little and living in moderation. By doing this we can put an end to worldliness.

If the seed of worldliness has not yet been uprooted, then we are continually troubled and confused in a never-ending cycle. Even when you come to

ordain, it continues to pull you away. It creates your views, your opinions. It colours and embellishes all your thoughts - that's the way it is.

People don't realize! They say that they will get things done in the world. It's always their hope to complete everything. Just like a new government minister who is eager to get started with his new administration. He thinks that he has all the answers, so he carts away everything of the old administration saying, 'Look out! I'll do it all myself.' That's all they do, cart things in and cart things out, never getting anything done. They try, but never reach any real completion.

You can never do something which will please everyone - one person likes a little, another likes a lot; one likes short and one likes long; some like salty and some like spicy. To get everyone together and in agreement just can not be done.

All of us want to accomplish something in our lives, but the world, with all of its complexities, makes it almost impossible to bring about any real completion. Even the Buddha, born with all the opportunities of a noble prince, found no completion in the worldly life.

The Trap of the Senses

The Buddha talked about desire and the six things by which desire is gratified: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects. Desire and lust for happiness, for suffering, for good, for evil and so on, pervade everything!

Sights ... There isn't any sight that's quite the same as that of a woman. Isn't that so? Doesn't a really attractive woman make you want to look? One with a really attractive figure comes walking along, 'sak, sek, sak, sek, sak, sek', you can't help but stare! How about sounds? There's no sound that grips you more than that of a woman. It pierces your heart! Smell is the same; a woman's fragrance is the most alluring of all. There's no other smell that's quite the same. Taste - even the taste of the most delicious food can not compare with that of a woman. Touch is similar; when you caress a woman you are stunned, intoxicated and sent spinning all around.

There was once a famous master of magical spells from Taxila in ancient India. He taught his disciple all his knowledge of charms and incantations. When the disciple was well-versed and ready to fare on his own, he left with this final instruction from his teacher: 'I have taught you all that I know of spells, incantations and protective verses. Creatures with sharp teeth, antlers or horns, and even big tusks, you have no need to fear. You will be guarded from all of these, I can guarantee that. However, there is only one thing that I can not ensure protection against, and that is the charms of a woman.¹ I can not help you here. There's no spell for protection against this one, you'll have to look after yourself.'

Mental objects arise in the mind. They are born out of desire: desire for valuable possessions, desire to be rich, and just restless seeking after things in general. This type of greed isn't all that deep or strong, it isn't enough to make you faint or lose control. However, when sexual desire arises, you're thrown off balance and lose your control. You would even forget those who raised and brought you up - your own parents!

The Buddha taught that the objects of our senses are a trap - a trap of *Māra*. *Māra* should be understood as something which harms us. The trap is something which binds us, the same as a snare. It's a trap of *Māra*'s, a hunter's snare, and the hunter is *Māra*.

If animals are caught in the hunter's trap, it's a sorrowful predicament. They are caught fast and held waiting for the owner of the trap. Have you ever snared birds? The snare springs and 'boop' - caught by the neck! A good strong string now holds it fast. Wherever the bird flies, it can not escape. It flies here and flies there, but it's held tight waiting for the owner of the snare. When the hunter comes along, that's it - the bird is struck with fear, there's no escape!

The trap of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects is the same. They catch us and bind us fast. If you attach to the senses, you're the same as a fish caught on a hook. When the fisherman comes, struggle all you want, but you can't get loose. Actually, you're not caught like a fish, it's more like a frog - a frog gulps down the whole hook right to its guts, a fish just gets caught in its mouth.

Anyone attached to the senses is the same. Like a drunk whose liver is not yet destroyed, he doesn't know when he has had enough. He continues to indulge and drink carelessly. He's caught and later suffers illness and pain.

A man comes walking along a road. He is very thirsty from his journey and is craving a drink of water. The owner of the water says, 'You can drink this water if you like; the colour is good, the smell is good, the taste is good, but if you drink it you will become ill. I must tell you this beforehand, it'll make you sick enough to die or nearly die.' The thirsty man does not listen. He's as thirsty as a person after an operation who has been denied water for seven days - he's crying for water!

It's the same with a person thirsting after the senses. The Buddha taught that they are poisonous - sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects are poison; they are a dangerous trap. But this man is thirsty and doesn't listen; because of his thirst he is in tears, crying, 'Give me water, no matter how painful the consequences, let me drink!' So he dips out a bit and swallows it down finding it very tasty. He drinks his fill and gets so sick that he almost dies. He didn't listen because of his overpowering desire.

This is how it is for a person caught in the pleasures of the senses. He drinks in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects - they are all very delicious! So he drinks without stopping and there he remains, stuck fast until the day he dies.

The Worldly Way and Liberation

Some people die, some people almost die - that's how it is to be stuck in the way of the world. Worldly wisdom seeks after the senses and their objects. However wise it is, it's only wise in a worldly sense. No matter how appealing it is, it's only appealing in a worldly sense. However much happiness it is, it's only happiness in a worldly sense. It isn't the happiness of liberation; it won't free you from the world.

We have come to practise as monks in order to penetrate true wisdom, to rid ourselves of attachment. Practise to be free of attachment! Investigate the body, investigate everything around you until you become weary and fed up

with it all and then dispassion will set in. Dispassion will not arise easily however, because you still don't see clearly.

We come and ordain; we study, we read, we practise, we meditate. We determine to make our minds resolute but it's hard to do. We resolve to do a certain practice, we say that we'll practise in this way - only a day or two goes by, maybe just a few hours pass and we forget all about it. Then we remember and try to make our minds firm again, thinking, 'This time I'll do it right!' Shortly after that we are pulled away by one of our senses and it all falls apart again, so we have to start all over again! This is how it is.

Like a poorly built dam, our practice is weak. We are still unable to see and follow true practice. And it goes on like this until we arrive at true wisdom. Once we penetrate to the truth, we are freed from everything. Only peace remains.

Our minds aren't peaceful because of our old habits. We inherit these because of our past actions and thus they follow us around and constantly plague us. We struggle and search for a way out, but we're bound by them and they pull us back. These habits don't forget their old grounds. They grab onto all the old familiar things to use, to admire and to consume - that's how we live.

The sexes of men and women - women cause problems for men, men cause problems for women. That's the way it is, they are opposites. If men live together with men, then there's no trouble. If women live together with women, then there's no trouble. When a man sees a woman his heart pounds like a rice pounder, 'deung, dung, deung, dung, deung, dung.' What is this? What are those forces? It pulls and sucks you in - no one realizes that there's a price to pay!

It's the same in everything. No matter how hard you try to free yourself, until you see the value of freedom and the pain in bondage, you won't be able to let go. People usually just practise enduring hardships, keeping the discipline, following the form blindly but not in order to attain freedom or liberation. You must see the value in letting go of your desires before you can really practise; only then is true practise possible.

Everything that you do must be done with clarity and awareness. When you see clearly, there will no longer be any need for enduring or forcing yourself. You have difficulties and are burdened because you miss this point! Peace comes from doing things completely with your whole body and mind. Whatever is left undone leaves you with a feeling of discontent. These things bind you with worry wherever you go. You want to complete everything, but it's impossible to get it all done.

Take the case of the merchants who regularly come here to see me. They say, 'Oh, when my debts are all paid and properly in order, I'll come to ordain.' They talk like that but will they ever finish and get it all in order? There's no end to it. They pay off their debts with another loan, they pay off that one and do it all again. A merchant thinks that if he frees himself from debt he will be happy, but there's no end to paying things off. That's the way worldliness fools us - we go around and around like this never realizing our predicament.

Constant Practice

In our practice we just look directly at the mind. Whenever our practice begins to slacken off, we see it and make it firm - then shortly after, it goes again. That's the way it pulls you around. But the person with good mindfulness takes a firm hold and constantly re-establishes himself, pulling himself back, training, practising and developing himself in this way.

The person with poor mindfulness just lets it all fall apart, he strays off and gets side-tracked again and again. He's not strong and firmly rooted in practice. Thus he's continuously pulled away by his worldly desires - something pulls him here, something pulls him there. He lives following his whims and desires, never putting an end to this worldly cycle.

Coming to ordain is not so easy. You must determine to make your mind firm. You should be confident in the practice, confident enough to continue practising until you become fed up with both your likes and dislikes and see in accordance with truth. Usually, you are dissatisfied with only what you dislike, if you like something then you aren't ready to give it up. You have to become fed up with both what you like and what you dislike, your suffering and your happiness.

You don't see that this is the very essence of the Dhamma! The Dhamma of the Buddha is profound and refined. It isn't easy to comprehend. If true wisdom has not yet arisen, then you can't see it. You don't look forward and you don't look back. When you experience happiness, you think that there will only be happiness. Whenever there is suffering, you think that there will only be suffering. You don't see that wherever there is big, there is small; wherever there is small, there is big. You don't see it that way. You see only one side and thus it's never-ending.

There are two sides to everything; you must see both sides. Then, when happiness arises, you don't get lost; when suffering arises, you don't get lost. When happiness arises, you don't forget the suffering, because you see that they are interdependent.

In a similar way, food is beneficial to all beings for the maintenance of the body. But actually, food can also be harmful, for example, when it causes various stomach upsets. When you see the advantages of something, you must perceive the disadvantages also, and vice versa. When you feel hatred and aversion, you should contemplate love and understanding. In this way, you become more balanced and your mind becomes more settled.

The Empty Flag

I once read a book about Zen. In Zen, you know, they don't teach with a lot of explanation. For instance, if a monk is falling asleep during meditation, they come with a stick and 'whack!' they give him a hit on the back. When the erring disciple is hit, he shows his gratitude by thanking the attendant. In Zen practice one is taught to be thankful for all the feelings which give one the opportunity to develop.

One day there was an assembly of monks gathered for a meeting. Outside the hall a flag was blowing in the wind. There arose a dispute between two monks as to how the flag was actually blowing in the wind. One of the monks claimed that it was because of the wind, while the other argued that it was because of the flag. Thus they quarrelled because of their narrow views and couldn't come to any kind of agreement. They would have argued like this until the day they died. However, their teacher intervened

and said, 'Neither of you is right. The correct understanding is that there is no flag and there is no wind.'

This is the practice, not to have anything, not to have the flag and not to have the wind. If there is a flag, then there is a wind; if there is a wind, then there is a flag. You should contemplate and reflect on this thoroughly until you see in accordance with truth. If considered well, then there will remain nothing. It's empty - void; empty of the flag and empty of the wind. In the great void there is no flag and there is no wind. There is no birth, no old age, no sickness or death. Our conventional understanding of flag and wind is only a concept. In reality there is nothing. That's all! There is nothing more than empty labels.

If we practise in this way, we will come to see completeness and all of our problems will come to an end. In the great void the King of Death will never find you. There is nothing for old age, sickness and death to follow. When we see and understand in accordance with truth, that is, with right understanding, then there is only this great emptiness. It's here that there is no more 'we', no 'they', no 'self' at all.

The Forest of the Senses

The world with its never-ending ways goes on and on. If we try to understand it all, it leads us only to chaos and confusion. However, if we contemplate the world clearly, then true wisdom will arise. The Buddha himself was one who was well-versed in the ways of the world. He had great ability to influence and lead because of his abundance of worldly knowledge. Through the transformation of his worldly mundane wisdom, he penetrated and attained to supramundane wisdom, making him a truly superior being.

So, if we work with this teaching, turning it inwards for contemplation, we will attain to an understanding on an entirely new level. When we see an object, there is no object. When we hear a sound, there is no sound. In smelling, we can say that there is no smell. All of the senses are manifest, but they are void of anything stable. They are just sensations that arise and then pass away.

If we understand according to this reality, then the senses cease to be substantial. They are just sensations which come and go. In truth there isn't any 'thing.' If there isn't any 'thing', then there is no 'we' and no 'they'. If there is no 'we' as a person, then there is nothing belonging to 'us'. It's in this way that suffering is extinguished. There isn't anybody to acquire suffering, so who is it who suffers?

When suffering arises, we attach to the suffering and thereby must really suffer. In the same way, when happiness arises, we attach to the happiness and consequently experience pleasure. Attachment to these feelings gives rise to the concept of 'self' or 'ego', and thoughts of 'we' and 'they' continually manifest. Nah!! Here is where it all begins and then carries us around in its never-ending cycle.

So, we come to practise meditation and live according to the Dhamma. We leave our homes to come and live in the forest and absorb the peace of mind it gives us. We have fled in order to contend with ourselves and not through fear or escapism. But people who come and live in the forest become attached to living in it; just as people who live in the city become attached to the city. They lose their way in the forest and they lose their way in the city.

The Buddha praised living in the forest because the physical and mental solitude that it gives us is conducive to the practice for liberation. However, He didn't want us to become dependent upon living in the forest or get stuck in its peace and tranquillity. We come to practise in order for wisdom to arise. Here in the forest we can sow and cultivate the seeds of wisdom. Living amongst chaos and turmoil these seeds have difficulty in growing, but once we have learned to live in the forest, we can return and contend with the city and all the stimulation of the senses that it brings us. Learning to live in the forest means to allow wisdom to grow and develop. We can then apply this wisdom no matter where we go.

When our senses are stimulated, we become agitated and the senses become our antagonists. They antagonize us because we are still foolish and don't have the wisdom to deal with them. In reality they are our teachers, but, because of our ignorance, we don't see it that way. When we lived in the city we never thought that our senses could teach us anything. As long as

true wisdom has not yet manifested, we continue to see the senses and their objects as enemies. Once true wisdom arises, they are no longer our enemies but become the doorway to insight and clear understanding.

A good example are the wild chickens here in the forest. We all know how much they are afraid of humans. However, since I have lived here in the forest I have been able to teach them and learn from them as well. At one time I began throwing out rice for them to eat. At first they were very frightened and wouldn't go near the rice. However, after a long time they got used to it and even began to expect it. You see, there is something to be learned here - they originally thought that there was danger in the rice, that the rice was an enemy. In truth there was no danger in the rice, but they didn't know that the rice was food and so were afraid. When they finally saw for themselves that there was nothing to fear, they could come and eat without any danger.

The chickens learn naturally in this way. Living here in the forest we learn in a similar way. Formerly we thought that our senses were a problem, and because of our ignorance in the proper use of them, they caused us a lot of trouble. However, by experience in practice we learn to see them in accordance with truth. We learn to make use of them just as the chickens could use the rice. Then we no longer see them as opposed to us and our problems disappear.

As long as we think, investigate and understand wrongly, these things will appear to oppose us. But as soon as we begin to investigate properly, that which we experience will bring us to wisdom and clear understanding, just as the chickens came to their understanding. In this way, we can say that they practised 'vipassanā'. They know in accordance with truth, it's their insight.

In our practice, we have our senses as tools which, when rightly used, enable us to become enlightened to the Dhamma. This is something which all meditators should contemplate. When we don't see this clearly, we remain in perpetual conflict.

So, as we live in the quietude of the forest, we continue to develop subtle feelings and prepare the ground for cultivating wisdom. Don't think that

when you have gained some peace of mind living here in the quiet forest that that's enough. Don't settle for just that! Remember that we have to cultivate and grow the seeds of wisdom.

As wisdom matures and we begin to understand in accordance with the truth, we will no longer be dragged up and down. Usually, if we have a pleasant mood, we behave one way; and if we have an unpleasant mood, we are another way. We like something and we are up; we dislike something and we are down. In this way we are still in conflict with enemies. When these things no longer oppose us, they become stabilized and balance out. There are no longer ups and downs or highs and lows. We understand these things of the world and know that that's just the way it is. It's just 'worldly dhamma'.

'Worldly dhamma'² changes to become the 'path'. 'Worldly dhamma' have eight ways; the 'path' has eight ways. Wherever 'worldly dhamma' exist, the 'path' is to be found also. When we live with clarity, all of our worldly experience becomes the practising of the 'eightfold path'. Without clarity, 'worldly dhamma' predominates and we are turned away from the 'path'. When right understanding arises, liberation from suffering lies right here before us. You will not find liberation by running around looking elsewhere!

So don't be in a hurry and try to push or rush your practice. Do your meditation gently and gradually step by step. In regard to peacefulness, if you want to become peaceful, then accept it; if you don't become peaceful, then accept that also. That's the nature of the mind. We must find our own practice and persistently keep at it.

Perhaps wisdom does not arise! I used to think, about my practice, that when there is no wisdom, I could force myself to have it. But it didn't work, things remained the same. Then, after careful consideration, I saw that to contemplate things that we don't have can not be done. So what's the best thing to do? It's better just to practise with equanimity. If there is nothing to cause us concern, then there's nothing to remedy. If there's no problem, then we don't have to try to solve it. When there is a problem, that's when you must solve it, right there! There's no need to go searching for anything special, just live normally. But know what your mind is! Live mindfully and

clearly comprehending. Let wisdom be your guide; don't live indulging in your moods. Be heedful and alert! If there is nothing, that's fine; when something arises, then investigate and contemplate it.

Coming to the Centre

Try watching a spider. A spider spins its web in any convenient niche and then sits in the centre, staying still and silent. Later, a fly comes along and lands on the web. As soon as it touches and shakes the web, 'boop!' - the spider pounces and winds it up in thread. It stores the insect away and then returns again to collect itself silently in the centre of the web.

Watching a spider like this can give rise to wisdom. Our six senses have mind at the centre surrounded by eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. When one of the senses is stimulated, for instance, form contacting the eye, it shakes and reaches the mind. The mind is that which knows, that which knows form. Just this much is enough for wisdom to arise. It's that simple.

Like a spider in its web, we should live keeping to ourselves. As soon as the spider feels an insect contact the web, it quickly grabs it, ties it up and once again returns to the centre. This is not at all different from our own minds. 'Coming to the centre' means living mindfully with clear comprehension, being always alert and doing everything with exactness and precision - this is our centre. There's really not a lot for us to do; we just carefully live in this way. But that doesn't mean that we live heedlessly thinking, 'There is no need to do sitting or walking meditation!' and so forget all about our practice. We can't be careless! We must remain alert just as the spider waits to snatch up insects for its food.

This is all that we have to know - sitting and contemplating that spider. Just this much and wisdom can arise spontaneously. Our mind is comparable to the spider, our moods and mental impressions are comparable to the various insects. That's all there is to it! The senses envelop and constantly stimulate the mind; when any of them contact something, it immediately reaches the mind. The mind then investigates and examines it thoroughly, after which it returns to the centre. This is how we abide - alert, acting with precision and always mindfully comprehending with wisdom. Just this much and our practice is complete.

This point is very important! It isn't that we have to do sitting practice throughout the day and night, or that we have to do walking meditation all day and all night long. If this is our view of practice, then we really make it difficult for ourselves. We should do what we can according to our strength and energy, using our physical capabilities in the proper amount.

It's very important to know the mind and the other senses well. Know how they come and how they go, how they arise and how they pass away. Understand this thoroughly! In the language of Dhamma we can also say that, just as the spider traps the various insects, the mind binds up the senses with *anicca-dukkha-anattā* (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self). Where can they go? We keep them for food, these things are stored away as our nourishment.³ That's enough; there's no more to do, just this much! This is the nourishment for our minds, nourishment for one who is aware and understanding.

If you know that these things are impermanent, bound up with suffering and that none of it is you, then you would be crazy to go after them! If you don't see clearly in this way, then you must suffer. When you take a good look and see these things as really impermanent, even though they may seem worth going after, really they are not. Why do you want them when their nature is pain and suffering? It's not ours, there is no self, there is nothing belonging to us. So why are you seeking after them? All problems are ended right here. Where else will you end them?

Just take a good look at the spider and turn it inwards, turn it back unto yourself. You will see that it's all the same. When the mind has seen *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, it lets go and releases itself. It no longer attaches to suffering or to happiness. This is the nourishment for the mind of one who practises and really trains himself. That's all, it's that simple! You don't have to go searching anywhere! So no matter what you are doing, you are there, no need for a lot of fuss and bother. In this way the momentum and energy of your practice will continuously grow and mature.

Escape

This momentum of practice leads us towards freedom from the cycle of birth and death. We haven't escaped from that cycle because we still insist

on craving and desiring. We don't commit unwholesome or immoral acts, but doing this only means that we are living in accordance with the Dhamma of morality: for instance, the chanting when people ask that all beings not be separated from the things that they love and are fond of. If you think about it, this is very childish. It's the way of people who still can't let go.

This is the nature of human desire - desire for things to be other than the way that they are; wishing for longevity, hoping that there is no death or sickness. This is how people hope and desire. When you tell them that whatever desires they have which are not fulfilled cause suffering, it clobbers them right over the head. What can they say? Nothing, because it's the truth! You're pointing right at their desires.

When we talk about desires we know that everyone has them and wants them fulfilled, but nobody is willing to stop, nobody really wants to escape. Therefore, our practice must be patiently refined down. Those who practise steadfastly, without deviation or slackness, and have a gentle and restrained manner, always persevering with constancy, those are the ones who will know. No matter what arises, they will remain firm and unshakeable.

1: Lit.: creatures with soft horns on their chest.

2: Worldly dhamma: the eight worldly conditions are: gain and loss, honour and dishonour, happiness and misery, praise and blame.

3: Nourishment for contemplation, to feed wisdom.

The Training of the Heart

In the time of Ajahn Mun¹ and Ajahn Sao² life was a lot simpler, a lot less complicated than it is today. In those days monks had few duties and ceremonies to perform. They lived in the forests without permanent resting places. There they could devote themselves entirely to the practice of meditation.

In those times one rarely encountered the luxuries that are so commonplace today, there simply weren't any. One had to make drinking cups and spittoons out of bamboo and laypeople seldom came to visit. One didn't want or expect much and was content with what one had. One could live and breathe meditation!

The monks suffered many privations living like this. If someone caught malaria and went to ask for medicine, the teacher would say, 'You don't need medicine! Keep practising.' Besides, there simply weren't all the drugs that are available now. All one had were the herbs and roots that grew in the forest. The environment was such that monks had to have a great deal of patience and endurance; they didn't bother over minor ailments. Nowadays you get a bit of an ache and you're off to the hospital!

Sometimes one had to walk ten to twelve kilometres on almsround. You would leave as soon as it was light and maybe return around ten or eleven o'clock. One didn't get very much either, perhaps some glutinous rice, salt or a few chillies. Whether you got anything to eat with the rice or not didn't matter. That's the way it was. No one dared complain of hunger or fatigue; they were just not inclined to complain but learned to take care of themselves. They practised in the forest with patience and endurance alongside the many dangers that lurked in the surroundings. There were many wild and fierce animals living in the jungles and there were many hardships for body and mind in the ascetic practice of the *dhutanga* or forest-dwelling monk. Indeed, the patience and endurance of the monks in those days was excellent because the circumstances compelled them to be so.

In the present day, circumstances compel us in the opposite direction. In ancient times, one had to travel by foot; then came the ox cart and then the automobile. Aspiration and ambition increased, so that now, if the car is not air-conditioned, one will not even sit in it; impossible to go if there is no air-conditioning! The virtues of patience and endurance are becoming weaker and weaker. The standards for meditation and practice are lax and getting laxer, until we find that meditators these days like to follow their own opinions and desires. When the old folks talk about the old days, it's like listening to a myth or a legend. You just listen indifferently, but you don't understand. It just doesn't reach you!

As far as we should be concerned about the ancient monks' tradition, a monk should spend at least five years with his teacher. Some days you should avoid speaking to anyone. Don't allow yourself to speak or talk very much. Don't read books! Read your own heart instead. Take Wat Pah Pong for example. These days many university graduates are coming to ordain. I try to stop them from spending their time reading books about Dhamma, because these people are always reading books. They have so many opportunities for reading books, but opportunities for reading their own hearts are rare. So, when they come to ordain for three months following the Thai custom, we try to get them to close their books and manuals. While they are ordained they have this splendid opportunity to read their own hearts.

Listening to your own heart is really very interesting. This untrained heart races around following its own untrained habits. It jumps about excitedly, randomly, because it has never been trained. Therefore train your heart! Buddhist meditation is about the heart; developing the heart or mind, developing your own heart. This is very, very important. This training of the heart is the main emphasis. Buddhism is the religion of the heart. Only this! One who practises to develop the heart is one who practises Buddhism.

This heart of ours lives in a cage, and what's more, there's a raging tiger in that cage. If this maverick heart of ours doesn't get what it wants, it makes trouble. You must discipline it with meditation, with samādhi. This is called 'training the heart'. At the very beginning, the foundation of practice is the establishment of moral discipline (sīla). Sīla is the training of the body and

speech. From this arises conflict and confusion. When you don't let yourself do what you want to do, there is conflict.

Eat little! Sleep little! Speak little! Whatever worldly habits you may have; lessen them, go against their power. Don't just do as you like, don't indulge in your thought. Stop this slavish following. You must constantly go against the stream of ignorance. This is called 'discipline'. When you discipline your heart, it becomes very dissatisfied and begins to struggle. It becomes restricted and oppressed. When the heart is prevented from doing what it wants to do, it starts wandering and struggling. Suffering (*dukkha*) becomes apparent to us.

This *dukkha*, this suffering, is the first of the four noble truths. Most people want to get away from it. They don't want to have any kind of suffering at all. Actually, this suffering is what brings us wisdom; it makes us contemplate *dukkha*. Happiness (*sukha*) tends to make us close our eyes and ears. It never allows us to develop patience. Comfort and happiness make us careless. Of these two defilements, *dukkha* is the easiest to see. Therefore we must bring up suffering in order to put an end to our suffering. We must first know what *dukkha* is before we can know how to practise meditation.

In the beginning you have to train your heart like this. You may not understand what is happening or what the point of it is, but when the teacher tells you to do something you must do it. You will develop the virtues of patience and endurance. Whatever happens, you endure, because that is the way it is. For example, when you begin to practise samādhi you want peace and tranquillity. But you don't get any. You don't get any because you have never practised this way. Your heart says, 'I'll sit until I attain tranquillity,' but when tranquillity doesn't arise, you suffer. And when there is suffering, you get up and run away! To practise like this can not be called 'developing the heart'. It's called 'desertion'.

Instead of indulging in your moods, train yourself with the Dhamma of the Buddha. Lazy or diligent, just keep on practising. Don't you think that this is a better way? The other way, the way of following your moods, will never reach the Dhamma. If you practise the Dhamma, then whatever the mood may be, you keep on practising, constantly practising. The other way of self-indulgence is not the way of the Buddha. When we follow our own

views on practice, our own opinions about the Dhamma, we can never see clearly what is right and what is wrong. We don't know our own heart. We don't know ourselves.

Therefore, to practise following your own teachings is the slowest way. To practise following the Dhamma is the direct way. When you are lazy you practise; when you are diligent you practise. You are aware of time and place. This is called 'developing the heart'.

If you indulge in following your own views and try to practise accordingly, you will start thinking and doubting a lot. You think to yourself, 'I don't have very much merit. I don't have any luck. I've been practising meditation for years now and I'm still unenlightened. I still haven't seen the Dhamma.' To practise with this kind of attitude can not be called 'developing the heart'. It's called 'developing disaster'.

If, at this time, you are like this, if you are a meditator who still doesn't know, who doesn't see, if you haven't renewed yourself yet, it's because you've been practising wrongly. You haven't been following the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha taught like this: 'Ānanda, practise a lot! Develop your practice constantly! Then all your doubts, all your uncertainties, will vanish.' These doubts will never vanish through thinking, nor through theorizing, nor through speculation, nor through discussion. Nor will doubts disappear by not doing anything. All defilements will vanish through developing the heart, through right practice only.

The way of developing the heart as taught by the Buddha is the exact opposite of the way of the world, because his teachings come from a pure heart. A pure heart, unattached to defilements, is the Way of the Buddha and his disciples.

If you practise the Dhamma, you must bow your heart to the Dhamma. You must not make the Dhamma bow to you. When you practise this way suffering arises. There isn't a single person who can escape this suffering. So when you commence your practice suffering is right there.

The duties of meditators are to develop mindfulness, collectedness and contentment. These things stop us. They stop the habits of the hearts of

those who have never trained. And why should we bother to do this? If you don't bother to train your heart, then it remains wild, following the ways of nature. It's possible to train that nature so that it can be used to advantage. This is comparable to the example of trees. If we just left trees in their natural state we would never be able to build a house with them. We couldn't make planks or anything of use in building a house. However, if a carpenter came along wanting to build a house, he would go looking for trees such as these. He would take this raw material and use it to advantage. In a short time he could have a house built.

Meditation and developing the heart are similar to this. You must take this untrained heart, the same as you would take a tree in its natural state in the forest, and train this natural heart so that it is more refined, so that it's more aware of itself and is more sensitive. Everything is in its natural state. When we understand nature, then we can change it, we can detach from it, we can let go of it. Then we won't suffer anymore.

The nature of our heart is such that whenever it clings and grasps there is agitation and confusion. First it might wander over there, then it might wander over here. When we come to observe this agitation, we might think that it's impossible to train the heart and so we suffer accordingly. We don't understand that this is the way the heart is. There will be thoughts and feelings moving about like this even though we are practising, trying to attain peace. That's the way it is.

When we have contemplated many times the nature of the heart, we will come to understand that this heart is just as it is and can't be otherwise. We will know that the heart's ways are just as they are. That's its nature. If we see this clearly, then we can detach from thoughts and feelings. And we don't have to add on anything more by constantly having to tell ourselves that 'that's just the way it is.' When the heart truly understands, it lets go of everything. Thinking and feeling will still be there, but that very thinking and feeling will be deprived of power.

This is similar to a child who likes to play and frolic in ways that annoy us, to the extent that we scold or spank him. We should understand that it's natural for a child to act that way. Then we could let go and leave him to play in his own way. So our troubles are over. How are they over? Because

we accept the ways of children. Our outlook changes and we accept the true nature of things. We let go and our heart becomes more peaceful. We have 'right understanding'.

If we have wrong understanding, then even living in a deep, dark cave would be chaos, or living high up in the air would be chaos. The heart can only be at peace when there is 'right understanding'. Then there are no more riddles to solve and no more problems to arise.

This is the way it is. You detach. You let go. Whenever there is any feeling of clinging, we detach from it, because we know that that very feeling is just as it is. It didn't come along especially to annoy us. We might think that it did, but in truth it is just that way. If we start to think and consider it further, that too, is just as it is. If we let go, then form is merely form, sound is merely sound, odour is merely odour, taste is merely taste, touch is merely touch and the heart is merely the heart. It's similar to oil and water. If you put the two together in a bottle, they won't mix because of the difference in their nature.

Oil and water are different in the same way that a wise man and an ignorant man are different. The Buddha lived with form, sound, odour, taste, touch and thought. He was an arahant, so he turned away from, rather than toward these things. He turned away and detached little by little since he understood that the heart is just the heart and thought is just thought. He didn't confuse and mix them together.

The heart is just the heart; thoughts and feelings are just thoughts and feelings. Let things be just as they are! Let form be just form, let sound be just sound, let thought be just thought. Why should we bother to attach to them? If we think and feel in this way, then there is detachment and separateness. Our thoughts and feelings will be on one side and our heart will be on the other. Just like oil and water - they are in the same bottle but they are separate.

The Buddha and his enlightened disciples lived with ordinary, unenlightened people. They not only lived with these people, but they taught these ordinary, unenlightened, ignorant ones how to be noble,

enlightened, wise ones. They could do this because they knew how to practise. They knew that it's a matter of the heart, just as I have explained.

So, as far as your practice of meditation goes, don't bother to doubt it. If we run away from home to ordain, it's not running away to get lost in delusion. Nor out of cowardice or fear. It's running away in order to train ourselves, in order to master ourselves. If we have understanding like this, then we can follow the Dhamma. The Dhamma will become clearer and clearer. The one who understands the Dhamma, understands himself; and the one who understands himself, understands the Dhamma. Nowadays, only the sterile remains of the Dhamma have become the accepted order. In reality, the Dhamma is everywhere. There is no need to escape to somewhere else. Instead escape through wisdom. Escape through intelligence. Escape through skill, don't escape through ignorance. If you want peace, then let it be the peace of wisdom. That's enough!

Whenever we see the Dhamma, there is the right way, the right path. Defilements are just defilements, the heart is just the heart. Whenever we detach and separate so that there are just these things as they really are, then they are merely objects to us. When we are on the right path, then we are impeccable. When we are impeccable, there is openness and freedom all the time.

The Buddha said, 'Listen, monks. You must not cling to any dhammas.'³ What are these dhammas? They are everything; there isn't anything which is not dhamma. Love and hate are dhammas, happiness and suffering are dhammas, like and dislike are dhammas; all of these things, no matter how insignificant, are dhammas. When we practise the Dhamma, when we understand, then we can let go. And thus we can comply with the Buddha's teaching of not clinging to any dhammas.

All conditions that are born in our heart, all conditions of our mind, all conditions of our body, are always in a state of change. The Buddha taught not to cling to any of them. He taught his disciples to practise in order to detach from all conditions and not to practise in order to attain to anything.

If we follow the teachings of the Buddha, then we are right. We are right but it is also troublesome. It's not that the teachings are troublesome, but

our defilements. The defilements wrongly comprehended obstruct us and cause us trouble. There isn't really anything troublesome with following the Buddha's teaching. In fact we can say that clinging to the path of the Buddha doesn't bring suffering, because the path is simply 'let go' of every single dhamma!

For the ultimate in the practice of Buddhist meditation, the Buddha taught the practice of 'letting go'. Don't carry anything around! Detach! If you see goodness, let it go. If you see rightness, let it go. These words, 'let go', do not mean that we don't have to practise. It means that we have to practise following the method of 'letting go' itself. The Buddha taught us to contemplate all dhammas, to develop the path through contemplating our own body and heart. The Dhamma isn't anywhere else. It's right here! Not someplace far away. It's right here in this very body and heart of ours.

Therefore a meditator must practise with energy. Make the heart grander and brighter. Make it free and independent. Having done a good deed, don't carry it around in your heart, let it go. Having refrained from doing an evil deed, let it go. The Buddha taught us to live in the immediacy of the present, in the here and now. Don't lose yourself in the past or the future.

The teaching that people least understand and which conflicts the most with their own opinions, is this teaching of 'letting go' or 'working with an empty mind'. This way of talking is called 'Dhamma language'. When we conceive this in worldly terms, we become confused and think that we can do anything we want. It can be interpreted this way, but its real meaning is closer to this: it's as if we are carrying a heavy rock. After a while we begin to feel its weight but we don't know how to let it go. So we endure this heavy burden all the time. If someone tells us to throw it away, we say, 'If I throw it away, I won't have anything left!' If told of all the benefits to be gained from throwing it away, we wouldn't believe them but would keep thinking, 'If I throw it away, I will have nothing!' So we keep on carrying this heavy rock until we become so weak and exhausted that we can no longer endure, then we drop it.

Having dropped it, we suddenly experience the benefits of letting go. We immediately feel better and lighter and we know for ourselves how much of a burden carrying a rock can be. Before we let go of the rock, we couldn't

possibly know the benefits of letting go. So if someone tells us to let go, an unenlightened man wouldn't see the purpose of it. He would just blindly clutch at the rock and refuse to let go until it became so unbearably heavy that he just had to let go. Then he can feel for himself the lightness and relief and thus know for himself the benefits of letting go. Later on we may start carrying burdens again, but now we know what the results will be, so we can now let go more easily. This understanding that it's useless to carry burdens around and that letting go brings ease and lightness is an example of knowing ourselves.

Our pride, our sense of self that we depend on, is the same as that heavy rock. Like that rock, if we think about letting go of self-conceit, we are afraid that without it, there would be nothing left. But when we can finally let it go, we realize for ourselves the ease and comfort of not clinging.

In the training of the heart, you mustn't cling to either praise or blame. To just want praise and not to want blame is the way of the world. The Way of the Buddha is to accept praise when it is appropriate and to accept blame when it is appropriate. For example, in raising a child it's very good not to just scold all the time. Some people scold too much. A wise person knows the proper time to scold and the proper time to praise. Our heart is the same. Use intelligence to know the heart. Use skill in taking care of your heart. Then you will be one who is clever in the training of the heart. And when the heart is skilled, it can rid us of our suffering. Suffering exists right here in our hearts. It's always complicating things, creating and making the heart heavy. It's born here. It also dies here.

The way of the heart is like this. Sometimes there are good thoughts, sometimes there are bad thoughts. The heart is deceitful. Don't trust it! Instead look straight at the conditions of the heart itself. Accept them as they are. They're just as they are. Whether it's good or evil or whatever, that's the way it is. If you don't grab hold of these conditions, they don't become anything more or less than what they already are. If we grab hold we'll get bitten and will then suffer.

With 'right view' there's only peace. Samādhi is born and wisdom takes over. Wherever you may sit or lie down, there is peace. There is peace everywhere, no matter where you may go.

So today you have brought your disciples here to listen to the Dhamma. You may understand some of it, some of it you may not. In order for you to understand more easily, I've talked about the practice of meditation. Whether you think it is right or not, you should take it and contemplate it.

As a teacher myself, I've been in a similar predicament. I, too, have longed to listen to Dhamma talks because, wherever I went, I was giving talks to others but never had a chance to listen. So, at this time, you really appreciate listening to a talk from a teacher. Time passes by so quickly when you're sitting and listening quietly. You're hungry for Dhamma so you really want to listen. At first, giving talks to others is a pleasure, but after a while, the pleasure is gone. You feel bored and tired. Then you want to listen. So when you listen to a talk from a teacher, you feel much inspiration and you understand easily. When you are getting old and there's hunger for Dhamma, its flavour is especially delicious.

Being a teacher of others you are an example to them, you're a model for other bhikkhus. You're an example to your disciples. You're an example to everybody, so don't forget yourself. But don't think about yourself either. If such thoughts do arise, get rid of them. If you do this then you will be one who knows himself.

There are a million ways to practise Dhamma. There's no end to the things that can be said about meditation. There are so many things that can make us doubt. Just keep sweeping them out, then there's no more doubt! When we have right understanding like this, no matter where we sit or walk, there is peace and ease. Wherever we may meditate, that's the place you bring your awareness. Don't hold that one only meditates while sitting or walking. Everything and everywhere is our practice. There's awareness all the time. There is mindfulness all the time. We can see birth and death of mind and body all the time and we don't let it clutter our hearts. Let it go constantly. If love comes, let it go back to its home. If greed comes, let it go home. If anger comes, let it go home. Follow them! Where do they live? Then escort them there. Don't keep anything. If you practise like this you are like an empty house. Or, explained another way, this is an empty heart, a heart empty and free of all evil. We call it an 'empty heart', but it isn't empty as if there was nothing, it's empty of evil but filled with wisdom.

Then whatever you do, you'll do with wisdom. You'll think with wisdom. You'll eat with wisdom. There will only be wisdom.

This is the teaching for today and I offer it to you. I've recorded it on tape. If listening to Dhamma makes your heart at peace, that's good enough. You don't need to remember anything. Some may not believe this. If we make our heart peaceful and just listen, letting it pass by but contemplating continuously like this, then we're like a tape recorder. After some time when we turn on, everything is there. Have no fear that there won't be anything. As soon as you turn on your tape recorder, everything is there.

I wish to offer this to every bhikkhu and to everyone. Some of you probably know only a little Thai, but that doesn't matter. May you learn the language of the Dhamma. That's good enough!

1: Ajahn Sao: Ajahn Mun's teacher.

2: Ajahn Sao: Ajahn Mun's teacher.

3: Dhamma and dhamma: please note the various meanings of the words 'Dhamma' (the liberating law discovered and proclaimed by the Buddha), and dhamma (any quality, thing, object of mind and/or any conditioned or unconditioned phenomena). Sometimes the meanings also overlap.

The Wave Ends

Question: There are those periods when our hearts happen to be absorbed in things and become blemished or darkened, but we are still aware of ourselves; such as when some form of greed, hatred, or delusion comes up. Although we know that these things are objectionable, we are unable to prevent them from arising. Could it be said that even as we are aware of them, this is providing the basis for increased clinging and attachment and maybe is putting us further back to where we started from?

Answer: That's it! One must keep knowing them at that point, that's the method of practice.

Q: I mean that simultaneously we are both aware of them and repelled by them, but lacking the ability to resist them, they just burst forth.

A: By then, it's already beyond one's capability to do anything. At that point one has to re-adjust oneself and then continue contemplation. Don't just give up on them there and then. When one sees things arise in that way one tends to get upset or feel regret, but it is possible to say that they are uncertain and subject to change. What happens is that one sees these things are wrong, but one is still not ready or able to deal with them. It's as if they are independent entities, the leftover karmic tendencies that are still creating and conditioning the state of the heart. One doesn't wish to allow the heart to become like that, but it does and it indicates that one's knowledge and awareness is still neither sufficient nor fast enough to keep abreast of things.

One must practise and develop mindfulness as much as one can in order to gain a greater and more penetrating awareness. Whether the heart is soiled or blemished in some way, it doesn't matter, one should contemplate the impermanence and uncertainty of whatever comes up. By maintaining this contemplation at each instant that something arises, after some time one will see the impermanent nature inherent in all sense objects and mental states. Because one sees them as such, gradually they will lose their importance and one's clinging and attachment to that which is a blemish on

the heart will continue to diminish. Whenever suffering arises one will be able to work through it and readjust oneself, but one shouldn't give up on this work or set it aside. One must keep up a continuity of effort and try to make one's awareness fast enough to keep in touch with the changing mental conditions. It could be said that so far one's development of the Path still lacks sufficient energy to overcome the mental defilements. Whenever suffering arises the heart becomes clouded over, but one must keep developing that knowledge and understanding of the clouded heart; that is what one reflects on.

One must really take hold of it and repeatedly contemplate that this suffering and discontentment is just not a sure thing. It is something that is ultimately impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Focusing on these three characteristics, whenever these conditions of suffering arise again one will know them straight away, having experienced them before.

Gradually, little by little, one's practice should gain momentum and as time passes, whatever sense objects and mental states arise will lose their value in this way. One's heart will know them for what they are and accordingly put them down. The path has matured internally when, having reached the point where one is able to know things and put them down with ease, one will have the ability to swiftly bear down upon the defilements. From then on there will just be the arising and passing away in this place, the same as waves striking the seashore. When a wave comes in and finally reaches the shoreline, it just disintegrates and vanishes; a new wave comes and it happens again - the wave going no further than the limit of the shoreline. In the same way, nothing will be able to go beyond the limits established by one's own awareness.

That's the place where one will meet and come to understand impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. It is there that things will vanish - the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self are the same as the seashore, and all sense objects and mental states that are experiences go in the same way as the waves. Happiness is uncertain, it's arisen many times before. Suffering is uncertain, it's arisen many times before; that's the way they are. In one's heart one will know that they are like that, they are 'just that much'. The heart will experience

these conditions in this way and they will gradually keep losing their value and importance. This is talking about the characteristics of the heart, the way it is; it is the same for everybody, even the Buddha and all his disciples were like this.

If one's practice of the Path matures it will become automatic and it will no longer be dependent on anything external. When a defilement arises, one will immediately be aware of it and accordingly be able to counteract it. However, that stage when the Path is still not mature enough nor fast enough to overcome the defilements is something that everybody has to experience - it's unavoidable. But it is at that point where one must use skilful reflection. Don't go investigating elsewhere or trying to solve the problem at some other place. Cure it right there. Apply the cure at that place where things arise and pass away. Happiness arises and then passes away, doesn't it? Suffering arises and then passes away, doesn't it? One will continuously be able to see the process of arising and ceasing, and see that which is good and bad in the heart. These are phenomena that exist and are part of nature. Don't cling tightly to them or create anything out of them at all.

If one has this kind of awareness, then even though one will be coming into contact with things, there will not be any noise. In other words, one will see the arising and passing away of phenomena in a very natural and ordinary way. One will just see things arise and then cease. One will understand the process of arising and ceasing in the light of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

The nature of the Dhamma is like this. When one can see things as 'just that much', then they will remain as 'just that much'. There will be none of that clinging or holding on - as soon as one becomes aware of attachment it will disappear. There will be just the arising and ceasing, and that is peaceful. That it's peaceful is not because one doesn't hear anything; there is hearing, but one understands the nature of it and doesn't cling or hold on to anything. This is what is meant by peaceful - the heart is still experiencing sense objects, but it doesn't follow or get caught up in them. A division is made between the heart's sense objects and the defilements. When one's heart comes into contact with a sense object and there is an emotional

reaction of liking, this gives rise to defilement; but if one understands the process of arising and ceasing, there is nothing that can really arise from it - it will end just there.

Q: Does one have to practise and gain samādhi before one can contemplate the Dhamma?

A: One can say that's correct from one point of view, but talking about it from the aspect of practice, then paññā has to come first, but following the conventional framework it has to be sīla, samādhi and then paññā. If one is truly practising the Dhamma, then paññā comes first. If paññā is there from the beginning, it means that one knows that which is right and that which is wrong; and one knows the heart that is calm and the heart that is disturbed and agitated. Talking from the scriptural basis, one has to say that the practice of restraint and composure will give rise to a sense of shame and fear of any form of wrongdoing that potentially may arise. Once one has established the fear of that which is wrong and one is no longer acting or behaving wrongly, then that which is a wrong will not be present within one. When there is no longer anything wrong present within, this provides the conditions from which calm will arise in its place. That calm forms a foundation from which samādhi will grow and develop over time.

When the heart is calm, that knowledge and understanding which arises from within that calm is called vipassanā. This means that from moment to moment there is a knowing in accordance with the truth, and within this are contained different properties. If one was to set them down on paper they would be sīla, samādhi and paññā. Talking about them, one can bring them together and say that these three dhammas form one mass and are inseparable. But if one was to talk about them as different properties, then it would be correct to say sīla, samādhi and paññā.

However, when one is acting in an unwholesome way, it is impossible for the heart to become calm. So it is most accurate to see them as developing together, and it would be right to say that this is the way that the heart will become calm. The practice of samādhi involves preserving sīla, which includes looking after the sphere of one's bodily actions and speech, in order not to do anything which is unwholesome or would lead one to remorse or suffering. This provides the foundation for the practice of calm,

and once one has a foundation in calm, this in turn provides a foundation which supports the arising of paññā.

In formal teaching they emphasize the importance of sīla. *Ādikalyāna*, *majjhakalyāna*, *pariyosānakalyāna* - the practice should be beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. This is how it is. Have you ever practised samādhi?

Q: I am still learning. The day after I went to see Tan Ajahn at Wat Keuan my aunt brought a book containing some of your teachings for me to read. That morning at work I started to read some passages which contained questions and answers to different problems. In it you said that the most important point was for the heart to watch over and observe the process of cause and effect that takes place within. Just to watch and maintain the knowing of the different things that come up.

That afternoon I was practising meditation and during the sitting, the characteristics that appeared were that I felt as though my body had disappeared. I was unable to feel the hands or legs and there were no bodily sensations. I knew that the body was still there, but I couldn't feel it. In the evening I had the opportunity to go and pay respects to Tan Ajahn Tate and I described to him the details of my experience. He said that these were the characteristics of the heart that appear when it unifies in samādhi, and that I should continue practising. I had this experience only once; on subsequent occasions I found that sometimes I was unable to feel only certain areas of the body, such as the hands, whereas in other areas there was still feeling. Sometimes during my practice I start to wonder whether just sitting and allowing the heart to let go of everything is the correct way to practise; or else should I think about and occupy myself with the different problems or unanswered questions concerning the Dhamma, which I still have.

A: It's not necessary to keep going over or adding anything on at this stage. This is what Tan Ajahn Tate was referring to; one must not repeat or add on to that which is there already. When that particular kind of knowing is present, it means that the heart is calm and it is that state of calm which one must observe. Whatever one feels, whether it feels like there is a body or a self or not, this is not the important point. It should all come within the field

of one's awareness. These conditions indicate that the heart is calm and has unified in *samādhi*.

When the heart has unified for a long period, on a few occasions, then there will be a change in the conditions and one withdraws. That state is called *appanā samādhi* (absorption) and having entered, the heart will subsequently withdraw. In fact, although it would not be incorrect to say that the heart withdraws, it doesn't actually withdraw. Another way is to say that it flips back, or that it changes, but the style used by most teachers is to say that once the heart has reached the state of calm it will withdraw. However, people can get caught up in disagreements over the use of language. It can cause difficulties and one might start to wonder, 'how on earth can it withdraw? This business of withdrawing is just confusing!' It can lead to much foolishness and misunderstanding just because of the language.

What one must understand is that the way to practise is to observe these conditions with *sati-sampajañña*. In accordance with the characteristic of impermanence, the heart will turn about and withdraw to the level of *upacāra-samādhi*. If it withdraws to this level, one can gain some knowledge and understanding, because at the deeper level there is not knowledge and understanding. If there is knowledge and understanding at this point it will resemble *sankhārā* (thinking).

It's similar to two people having a conversation and discussing the Dhamma together. One who understands this might feel disappointed that their heart is not really calm, but in fact this dialogue takes place within the confines of the calm and restraint which has developed. These are the characteristics of the heart once it has withdrawn to the level of *upacāra* - there will be the ability to know about and understand different things.

The heart will stay in this state for a period and then it will turn inwards again. In other words, it will turn and go back into the deeper state of calm as it was before; or it is even possible that it might obtain purer and calmer levels of concentrated energy than were experienced before. If it does reach such a level of concentration, one should merely note the fact and keep observing until the time when the heart withdraws again. Once it has withdrawn one will be able to develop knowledge and understanding as

different problems arise. Here is where one should investigate and examine the different matters and issues which affect the heart in order to understand and penetrate them. Once these problems are finished with, the heart will gradually move inwards towards the deeper level of concentration again. The heart will stay there and mature, freed from any other work or external impingement. There will just be the one-pointed knowing and this will prepare and strengthen one's mindfulness until the time is reached to re-emerge.

These conditions of entering and leaving will appear in one's heart during the practice, but this is something that is difficult to talk about. It is not harmful or damaging to one's practice. After a period the heart will withdraw and the inner dialogue will start in that place, taking the form of *sankhārā* or mental formations conditioning the heart. If one doesn't know that this activity is *sankhārā*, one might think that it is *paññā*, or that *paññā* is arising. One must see that this activity is fashioning and conditioning the heart and the most important thing about it is that it is impermanent. One must continually keep control and not allow the heart to start following and believing in all the different creations and stories that it cooks up. All that is just *sankhārā*, it doesn't become *paññā*.

The way *paññā* develops is when one listens and knows the heart, as the process of creating and conditioning takes it in different directions; and then reflects on the instability and uncertainty of this. The realization of the impermanence of the creations will provide the cause by which one can let go of things at that point. Once the heart has let go of things and put them down at that point, it will gradually become more and more calm and steady. One must keep entering and leaving *samādhi* like this for *paññā* to arise at that point. There one will gain knowledge and understanding.

As one continues to practise, many different kinds of problems and difficulties will tend to arise in the heart; but whatever problems the world, or even the universe might bring up, one will be able to deal with them all. One's wisdom will follow them up and find answers for every question and doubt. Wherever one meditates, whatever thoughts come up, whatever happens, everything will be providing the cause for *paññā* to arise. This is a process that will take place by itself, free from external influence. *Paññā*

will arise like this, but when it does, one should be careful not to become deluded and see it as *sankhārā*. Whenever one reflects on things and sees them as impermanent and uncertain, one shouldn't cling or attach to them in any way. If one keeps developing this state, when *paññā* is present in the heart, it will take the place of one's normal way of thinking and reacting and the heart will become fuller and brighter in the centre of everything. As this happens, one knows and understands all things as they really are; and one's heart will be able to progress with meditation in the correct way without being deluded. That is how it should be.

Dhamma Fighting

Fight greed, fight aversion, fight delusion - these are the enemy. In the practice of Buddhism, the path of the Buddha, we fight with Dhamma, using patient endurance. We fight by resisting our countless moods.

Dhamma and the world are interrelated. Where there is Dhamma there is the world, where there is the world there is Dhamma. Where there are defilements there are those who conquer defilements, who do battle with them. This is called fighting inwardly. To fight outwardly people take hold of bombs and guns to throw and to shoot; they conquer and are conquered. Conquering others is the way of the world. In the practice of Dhamma we don't have to fight others, but instead conquer our own minds, patiently enduring and resisting all our moods.

When it comes to Dhamma practice we don't harbour resentment and enmity amongst ourselves, but instead let go of all forms of ill will in our own actions and thoughts, freeing ourselves from jealousy, aversion and resentment. Hatred can only be overcome by not harbouring resentment and bearing grudges.

Hurtful actions and reprisals are different but closely related. Actions once done are finished with; there's no need to answer with revenge and hostility. This is called 'action' (kamma). 'Reprisal' (*vera*) means to continue that action further with thoughts of 'You did it to me so I'm going to get you back.' There's no end to this. It brings about the continual seeking of revenge, and so hatred is never abandoned. As long as we behave like this the chain remains unbroken, there's no end to it. No matter where we go, the feuding continues.

The supreme teacher¹ taught the world; he had compassion for all worldly beings. But the world nevertheless goes on like this. The wise should look into this and select those things which are of true value. The Buddha had trained in the various arts of warfare as a prince, but he saw that they weren't really useful; they are limited to the world with its fighting and aggression.

Therefore, we who have left the world, need to train ourselves; we must learn to give up all forms of evil, giving up all those things which are the cause for enmity. We conquer ourselves, we don't try to conquer others. We fight, but we fight only the defilements; if there is greed, we fight that; if there is aversion, we fight that; if there is delusion, we strive to give it up.

This is called 'Dhamma fighting'. This warfare of the heart is really difficult, in fact it's the most difficult thing of all. We become monks in order to contemplate this, to learn the art of fighting greed, aversion and delusion. This is our prime responsibility.

This is the inner battle, fighting with defilements. But there are very few people who fight like this. Most people fight with other things, they rarely fight defilements. They rarely even see them.

The Buddha taught us to give up all forms of evil and to cultivate virtue. This is the right path. Teaching in this way is like the Buddha picking us up and placing us at the beginning of the path. Having reached the path, whether we walk along it or not is up to us. The Buddha's job is finished right there. He shows the way, that which is right and that which is not right. This much is enough, the rest is up to us.

Now, having reached the path we still don't know anything, we still haven't seen anything; so we must learn. To learn we must be prepared to endure some hardship, just like students in the world. It's difficult enough to obtain the knowledge and learning necessary for them to pursue their careers. They have to endure. When they think wrongly or feel averse or lazy they must force themselves to continue before they can graduate and get a job. The practice for a monk is similar. If we determine to practise and contemplate, then we will surely see the way.

Ditthi-māna is a harmful thing. *Ditthi* means 'view' or 'opinion'. All forms of view are called *ditthi*: seeing good as evil, seeing evil as good - any way whatsoever that we see things. This is not the problem. The problem lies with the clinging to those views, called *māna*; holding on to those views as if they were the truth. This leads us to spin around from birth to death, never reaching completion, just because of that clinging. So the Buddha urged us to let go of views.

If many people live together, as we do here, they can still practise comfortably if their views are in harmony. But even two or three monks would have difficulty living together if their views were not good or harmonious. When we humble ourselves and let go of our views, even if there are many of us, we come together at the place of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

It's not true to say that there will be disharmony just because there are many of us. Just look at a millipede. A millipede has many legs, doesn't it? Just looking at it you'd think it would have difficulty walking, but actually it doesn't. It has its own order and rhythm. In our practice it's the same. If we practise as the Noble Sangha of the Buddha practised, then it's easy. That is, *supatipanno* - those who practise well; *ujupatipanno* - those who practise straightly; *ñāyapatipanno* - those who practise to transcend suffering, and *sāmīcipatipanno* - those who practise properly. These four qualities, established within us, will make us true members of the Sangha. Even if we number in the hundreds or thousands, no matter how many we are, we all travel the same path. We come from different backgrounds, but we are the same. Even though our views may differ, if we practise correctly there will be no friction. Just like all the rivers and streams which flow to the sea, once they enter the sea they all have the same taste and colour. It's the same with people. When they enter the stream of Dhamma, it's the one Dhamma. Even though they come from different places, they harmonize, they merge.

But the thinking which causes all the disputes and conflict is *ditthi-māna*. Therefore the Buddha taught us to let go of views. Don't allow *māna* to cling to those views beyond their relevance.

The Buddha taught the value of constant sati, recollection. Whether we are standing, walking, sitting or reclining, wherever we are, we should have this power of recollection. When we have sati we see ourselves, we see our own minds. We see the 'body within the body', 'the mind within the mind'. If we don't have sati we don't know anything, we aren't aware of what is happening.

So sati is very important. With constant sati we will listen to the Dhamma of the Buddha at all times. This is because 'eye seeing forms' is Dhamma; 'ear hearing sounds' is Dhamma; 'nose smelling odours' is Dhamma;

‘tongue tasting flavours’ is Dhamma; ‘body feeling sensations’ is Dhamma; when impressions arise in the mind, that is Dhamma also. Therefore one who has constant sati always hears the Buddha’s teaching. The Dhamma is always there. Why? Because of sati, because we are aware.

Sati is recollection, *sampajañña* is self-awareness. This awareness is the actual *Buddho*, the Buddha. When there is *sati-sampajañña*, understanding will follow. We know what is going on. When the eye sees forms: is this proper or improper? When the ear hears sound: is this appropriate or inappropriate? Is it harmful? Is it wrong, is it right? And so on like this with everything. If we understand we hear the Dhamma all the time.

So let us all understand that right now we are learning in the midst of Dhamma. Whether we go forward or step back, we meet the Dhamma - it’s all Dhamma if we have sati. Even seeing the animals running around in the forest we can reflect, seeing that all animals are the same as us. They run away from suffering and chase after happiness, just as people do. Whatever they don’t like they avoid; they are afraid of dying, just like people. If we reflect on this, we see that all beings in the world, people as well, are the same in their various instincts. Thinking like this is called ‘*bhāvanā*’, seeing according to the truth, that all beings are companions in birth, old age, sickness and death. Animals are the same as human beings and human beings are the same as animals. If we really see things the way they are our mind will give up attachment to them.

Therefore it is said we must have sati. If we have sati we will see the state of our own mind. Whatever we are thinking or feeling we must know it. This knowing is called *Buddho*, the Buddha, the one who knows, who knows thoroughly, who knows clearly and completely. When the mind knows completely we find the right practice.

So the straight way to practise is to have mindfulness, sati. If you are without sati for five minutes you are crazy for five minutes, heedless for five minutes. Whenever you are lacking in sati you are crazy. So sati is essential. To have sati is to know yourself, to know the condition of your mind and your life. This is to have understanding and discernment, to listen to the Dhamma at all times. After leaving the teacher’s discourse, you still hear the Dhamma, because the Dhamma is everywhere.

So therefore, all of you, be sure to practise every day. Whether you are lazy or diligent, practise just the same. Practice of the Dhamma is not done by following your moods. If you practise following your moods then it's not Dhamma. Don't discriminate between day and night, whether the mind is peaceful or not - just practise.

It's like a child who is learning to write. At first he doesn't write nicely - big, long loops and squiggles - he writes like a child. After a while the writing improves through practice. Practising the Dhamma is like this. At first you are awkward, sometimes you are calm, sometimes not, you don't really know what's what. Some people get discouraged. Don't slacken off! You must persevere with the practice. Live with effort, just like the schoolboy: as he gets older he writes better and better. From writing badly he grows to write beautifully, all because of the practice from childhood.

Our practice is like this. Try to have recollection at all times: standing, walking, sitting or reclining. When we perform our various duties smoothly and well, we feel peace of mind. When there is peace of mind in our work it's easy to have peaceful meditation; they go hand in hand. So make an effort. You should all make an effort to follow the practice. This is training.

[1](#): That is, the Buddha.

Understanding Vinaya

This practice of ours is not easy. We may know some things but there is still much that we don't know. For example, when we hear teachings such as 'know the body, then know the body within the body'; or 'know the mind, then know the mind within the mind'. If we haven't yet practised these things, then when we hear them we may feel baffled. The Vinaya is like this. In the past I used to be a teacher,¹ but I was only a 'small teacher', not a big one. Why do I say a 'small teacher?' Because I didn't practise. I taught the Vinaya but I didn't practise it. This I call a small teacher, an inferior teacher. I say an 'inferior teacher' because when it came to the practice I was deficient. For the most part my practice was a long way off the theory, just as if I hadn't learned the Vinaya at all.

However, I would like to state that in practical terms it's impossible to know the Vinaya completely, because some things, whether we know them or not, are still offences. This is tricky. And yet it is stressed that if we do not yet understand any particular training rule or teaching, we must study that rule with enthusiasm and respect. If we don't know, then we should make an effort to learn. If we don't make an effort, that is in itself an offence.

For example, if you doubt - suppose there is a woman and, not knowing whether she is a woman or a man, you touch her.² You're not sure, but still go ahead and touch - that's still wrong. I used to wonder why that should be wrong, but when I considered the practice, I realized that a meditator must have sati, he must be circumspect. Whether talking, touching or holding things, he must first thoroughly consider. The error in this case is that there is no sati, or insufficient sati, or a lack of concern at that time.

Take another example: it's only eleven o'clock in the morning but at the time the sky is cloudy, we can't see the sun, and we have no clock. Now suppose we estimate that it's probably afternoon - we really feel that it's afternoon - and yet we proceed to eat something. We start eating and then the clouds part and we see from the position of the sun that it's only just

past eleven. This is still an offence.³ I used to wonder, ‘Eh? It’s not yet past midday, why is this an offence?’

An offence is incurred here because of negligence, carelessness; we don’t thoroughly consider. There is a lack of restraint. If there is doubt and we act on the doubt, there is a *dukkata*⁴ offence just for acting in the face of the doubt. We think that it is afternoon when in fact it isn’t. The act of eating is not wrong in itself, but there is an offence here because we are careless and negligent. If it really is afternoon but we think it isn’t, then it’s the heavier *pācittiya* offence. If we act with doubt, whether the action is wrong or not, we still incur an offence. If the action is not wrong in itself it is the lesser offence; if it is wrong then the heavier offence is incurred. Therefore the Vinaya can get quite bewildering.

At one time I went to see Venerable Ajahn Mun.⁵ At that time I had just begun to practise. I had read the *Pubbasiṅkhā*⁶ and could understand that fairly well. Then I went on to read the *Viśuddhimagga*, where the author writes of the *Sīlaniddesa* (Book of Precepts), *Samādhiniddesa* (Book of Mind-Training) and *Paññāniddesa* (Book of Understanding). I felt my head was going to burst! After reading that, I felt that it was beyond the ability of a human being to practise. But then I reflected that the Buddha would not teach something that is impossible to practise. He wouldn’t teach it and he wouldn’t declare it, because those things would be useful neither to himself nor to others. The *Sīlaniddesa* is extremely meticulous, the *Samādhiniddesa* more so, and the *Paññāniddesa* even more so! I sat and thought, ‘Well, I can’t go any further. There’s no way ahead.’ It was as if I’d reached a dead end.

At this stage I was struggling with my practice, I was stuck. It so happened that I had a chance to go and see Venerable Ajahn Mun, so I asked him: ‘Venerable Ajahn, what am I to do? I’ve just begun to practise but I still don’t know the right way. I have so many doubts I can’t find any foundation at all in the practice.’

He asked, ‘What’s the problem?’

‘In the course of my practice I picked up the *Viśuddhimagga* and read it, but it seems impossible to put into practice. The contents of the *Sīlaniddesa*,

Samādhiniddesa and *Paññāniddesa* seem to be completely impractical. I don't think there is anybody in the world who could do it, it's so detailed and meticulous. To memorize every single rule would be impossible, it's beyond me.'

He said to me: 'Venerable, there's a lot, it's true, but it's really only a little. If we were to take account of every training rule in the *Sīlaniddesa* that would be difficult, that is true; but actually, what we call the *Sīlaniddesa* has evolved from the human mind. If we train this mind to have a sense of shame and a fear of wrongdoing, we will then be restrained, we will be cautious

'This will condition us to be content with little, with few wishes, because we can't possibly look after a lot. When this happens our sati becomes stronger. We will be able to maintain sati at all times. Wherever we are we will make the effort to maintain thorough sati. Caution will be developed. Whatever you doubt don't say it, don't act on it. If there's anything you don't understand, ask the teacher. Trying to practise every single training rule would indeed be burdensome, but we should examine whether we are prepared to admit our faults or not. Do we accept them?'

This teaching is very important. It's not so much that we must know every single training rule, if we know how to train our own minds.

'All that stuff that you've been reading arises from the mind. If you still haven't trained your mind to have sensitivity and clarity, you will be doubting all the time. You should try to bring the teachings of the Buddha into your mind. Be composed in mind. Whatever arises that you doubt, just give it up. If you don't really know for sure, then don't say it or do it. For instance, if you wonder, "Is this wrong or not?" - that is, you're not really sure - then don't say it, don't act on it, don't discard your restraint.'

As I sat and listened, I reflected that this teaching conformed with the eight ways for measuring the true teaching of the Buddha: any teaching that speaks of the diminishing of defilements; which leads out of suffering; which speaks of renunciation (of sensual pleasures); of contentment with little; of humility and disinterest in rank and status; of aloofness and seclusion; of diligent effort; of being easy to maintain - these eight qualities

are characteristics of the true Dhamma-Vinaya, the teaching of the Buddha. Anything in contradiction to these is not.

If we are genuinely sincere we will have a sense of shame and a fear of wrongdoing. We will know that if there is doubt in our mind we will not act on it nor speak on it. The *Sīlaniddesa* is only words. For example, *hiri-ottappa* in the books is one thing, but in our minds it is another.

Studying the Vinaya with Venerable Ajahn Mun I learned many things. As I sat and listened, understanding arose.

So, when it comes to the Vinaya, I've studied considerably. Some days during the Rains Retreat I would study from six o'clock in the evening through till dawn. I understand it sufficiently. All the factors of *āpatti*⁷ which are covered in the *Pubbasikkhā* I wrote down in a notebook and kept in my bag. I really put effort into it, but in later times I gradually let go. It was too much. I didn't know which was the essence and which was the trimming, I had just taken all of it. When I understood more fully I let it drop off because it was too heavy. I just put my attention into my own mind and gradually did away with the texts.

However, when I teach the monks here I still take the *Pubbasikkhā* as my standard. For many years here at Wat Pah Pong it was I myself who read it to the assembly. In those days I would ascend the Dhamma-seat and go on until at least eleven o'clock or midnight, some days even until one or two o'clock in the morning. We were interested. And we trained. After listening to the Vinaya reading we would go and consider what we'd heard. You can't really understand the Vinaya just by listening to it. Having listened to it you must examine it and delve into it further.

Even though I studied these things for many years my knowledge was still not complete, because there were so many ambiguities in the texts. Now that it's been such a long time since I looked at the books, my memory of the various training rules has faded somewhat, but within my mind there is no deficiency. There is a standard there. There is no doubt, there is understanding. I put away the books and concentrated on developing my own mind. I don't have doubts about any of the training rules. The mind has an appreciation of virtue, it won't dare do anything wrong, whether in

public or in private. I do not kill animals, even small ones. If someone were to ask me to intentionally kill an ant or a termite, to squash one with my hand, for instance, I couldn't do it, even if they were to offer me thousands of *baht* to do so. Even one ant or termite! The ant's life would have greater value to me.

However, it may be that I may cause one to die, such as when something crawls up my leg and I brush it off. Maybe it dies, but when I look into my mind there is no feeling of guilt. There is no wavering or doubt. Why? Because there was no intention. *Cetanāham bhikkhave sīlam vadāmi*: intention is the essence of moral training. Looking at it in this way I see that there was no intentional killing. Sometimes while walking I may step on an insect and kill it. In the past, before I really understood, I would really suffer over things like that. I would think I had committed an offence.

'What? There was no intention.' 'There was no intention, but I wasn't being careful enough!' I would go on like this, fretting and worrying.

So this Vinaya is something which can disturb practitioners of Dhamma, but it also has its value, in keeping with what the teachers say - 'Whatever training rules you don't yet know you should learn. If you don't know you should question those who do.' They really stress this.

Now if we don't know the training rules, we won't be aware of our transgressions against them. Take, for example, a Venerable Thera of the past, Ajahn Pow of Wat Kow Wong Got in Lopburi Province. One day a certain *Mahā*, a disciple of his, was sitting with him, when some women came up and asked,

'Luang Por! We want to invite you to go with us on an excursion, will you go?'

Luang Por Pow didn't answer. The *Mahā* sitting near him thought that Venerable Ajahn Pow hadn't heard, so he said, 'Luang Por, Luang Por! Did you hear? These women invited you to go for a trip.'

He said, 'I heard.'

The women asked again, ‘Luang Por, are you going or not?’

He just sat there without answering, and so nothing came of the invitation. When they had gone, the *Mahā* said,

‘Luang Por, why didn’t you answer those women?’

He said, ‘Oh, *Mahā*, don’t you know this rule? Those people who were here just now were all women. If women invite you to travel with them you should not consent. If they make the arrangements themselves that’s fine. If I want to go I can, because I didn’t take part in making the arrangements.’

The *Mahā* sat and thought, ‘Oh, I’ve really made a fool of myself.’

The Vinaya states that to make an arrangement, and then travel together with women, even though it isn’t as a couple, is a *pācittiya* offence.

Take another case. Lay people would bring money to offer Venerable Ajahn Pow on a tray. He would extend his receiving cloth,⁸ holding it at one end. But when they brought the tray forward to lay it on the cloth he would retract his hand from the cloth. Then he would simply abandon the money where it lay. He knew it was there, but he would take no interest in it. He would just get up and walk away, because in the Vinaya it is said that if one doesn’t consent to the money it isn’t necessary to forbid laypeople from offering it. If he had desire for it, he would have to say, ‘Householder, this is not allowable for a monk.’ He would have to tell them. If you have desire for it, you must forbid them from offering that which is unallowable. However, if you really have no desire for it, it isn’t necessary. You just leave it there and go.

Although the Ajahn and his disciples lived together for many years, still some of his disciples didn’t understand Ajahn Pow’s practice. This is a poor state of affairs. As for myself, I looked into and contemplated many of Venerable Ajahn Pow’s subtler points of practice.

The Vinaya can even cause some people to disrobe. When they study it all the doubts come up. It goes right back into the past ... ‘My ordination, was it proper?⁹ Was my preceptor pure? None of the monks who sat in on my

ordination knew anything about the Vinaya, were they sitting at the proper distance? Was the chanting correct?' The doubts come rolling on ... 'The hall I ordained in, was it proper? It was so small ...' They doubt everything and fall into hell.

So until you know how to ground your mind it's really difficult. You have to be very cool, you can't just jump into things. But to be so cool that you don't bother to look into things is wrong also. I was so confused I almost disrobed because I saw so many faults within my own practice and that of some of my teachers. I was on fire and couldn't sleep because of those doubts.

The more I doubted, the more I meditated, the more I practised. Wherever doubt arose I practised right at that point. Wisdom arose. Things began to change. It's hard to describe the change that took place. The mind changed until there was no more doubt. I don't know how it changed. If I were to tell someone they probably wouldn't understand.

So I reflected on the teaching *Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi* - the wise must know for themselves. It must be a knowing that arises through direct experience. Studying the Dhamma-Vinaya is certainly correct but if it's just the study it's still lacking. If you really get down to the practice you begin to doubt everything. Before I started to practise I wasn't interested in the minor offences, but when I started practising, even the *dukkata* offences became as important as the *pārājika* offences. Before, the *dukkata* offences seemed like nothing, just a trifle. That's how I saw them. In the evening you could confess them and they would be done with. Then you could commit them again. This sort of confession is impure, because you don't stop, you don't decide to change. There is no restraint, you simply do it again and again. There is no perception of the truth, no letting go.

Actually, in terms of ultimate truth, it's not necessary to go through the routine of confessing offences. If we see that our mind is pure and there is no trace of doubt, then those offences drop off right there. That we are not yet pure is because we still doubt, we still waver. We are not really pure so we can't let go. We don't see ourselves, this is the point. This Vinaya of ours is like a fence to guard us from making mistakes, so it's something we need to be scrupulous with.

If you don't see the true value of the Vinaya for yourself it's difficult. Many years before I came to Wat Pah Pong I decided I would give up money. For the greater part of a Rains Retreat I had thought about it. In the end I grabbed my wallet and walked over to a certain *Mahā* who was living with me at the time, setting the wallet down in front of him.

'Here, *Mahā*, take this money. From today onwards, as long as I'm a monk, I will not receive or hold money. You can be my witness.'

'You keep it, Venerable, you may need it for your studies.' The Venerable *Mahā* wasn't keen to take the money, he was embarrassed. 'Why do you want to throw away all this money?'

'You don't have to worry about me. I've made my decision. I decided last night.'

From the day he took that money it was as if a gap had opened between us. We could no longer understand each other. He's still my witness to this very day. Ever since that day I haven't used money or engaged in any buying or selling. I've been restrained in every way with money. I was constantly wary of wrongdoing, even though I hadn't done anything wrong. Inwardly I maintained the meditation practice. I no longer needed wealth, I saw it as a poison. Whether you give poison to a human being, a dog or anything else, it invariably causes death or suffering. If we see clearly like this we will be constantly on our guard not to take that 'poison'. When we clearly see the harm in it, it's not difficult to give up.

Regarding food and meals brought as offerings, if I doubted them, then I wouldn't accept them. No matter how delicious or refined the food might be, I wouldn't eat it. Take a simple example, like raw pickled fish. Suppose you are living in a forest and you go on almsround and receive only rice and some pickled fish wrapped in leaves. When you return to your dwelling and open the packet you find that it's raw pickled fish, just throw it away!¹⁰ Eating plain rice is better than transgressing the precepts. It has to be like this before you can say you really understand, then the Vinaya becomes simpler.

If other monks wanted to give me requisites, such as bowl, razor or whatever, I wouldn't accept, unless I knew them as fellow practitioners with a similar standard of Vinaya. Why not? How can you trust someone who is unrestrained? They can do all sorts of things. Unrestrained monks don't see the value of the Vinaya, so it's possible that they could have obtained those things in improper ways. I was as scrupulous as this.

As a result, some of my fellow monks would look askance at me. 'He doesn't socialize, he won't mix ...' I was unmoved: 'Sure, we can mix when we die. When it comes to death we are all in the same boat,' I thought. I lived with endurance. I was one who spoke little. If others criticized my practice I was unmoved. Why? Because even if I explained to them they wouldn't understand. They knew nothing about practice. Like those times when I would be invited to a funeral ceremony and somebody would say, 'Don't listen to him! Just put the money in his bag and don't say anything about it, don't let him know.'¹¹ I would say, 'Hey, do you think I'm dead or something? Just because one calls alcohol perfume doesn't make it become perfume, you know. But you people, when you want to drink alcohol you call it perfume, then go ahead and drink. You must be crazy!'

The Vinaya, then, can be difficult. You have to be content with little, aloof. You must see, and see right. Once, when I was travelling through Saraburi, my group went to stay in a village temple for a while. The Abbot there had about the same seniority as myself. In the morning, we would all go on almsround together, then come back to the monastery and put down our bowls. The laypeople would then bring dishes of food into the hall and set them down. Then the monks would go and pick them up, open them and lay them in a line to be formally offered. One monk would put his hand on the dish at the other end. And that was it! With that the monks would bring them over and distribute them to be eaten.

About five monks were travelling with me at the time, but not one of us would touch that food. On almsround all we received was plain rice, so we sat with them and ate plain rice. None of us would dare eat the food from those dishes.

This went on for quite a few days, until I began to sense that the Abbot was disturbed by our behaviour. One of his monks had probably gone to him and said, ‘Those visiting monks won’t eat any of the food. I don’t know what they’re up to.’

I had to stay there for a few days more, so I went to the Abbot to explain.

I said, ‘Venerable Sir, may I have a moment please? At this time I have some business which means I must call on your hospitality for some days, but in doing so I’m afraid there may be one or two things which you and your fellow monks find puzzling: namely, concerning our not eating the food which has been offered by the laypeople. I’d like to clarify this with you, sir. It’s really nothing, it’s just that I’ve learned to practise like this, that is, the receiving of the offerings, sir. When the laypeople lay the food down and then the monks go and open the dishes, sort them out and then have them formally offered, this is wrong. It’s a *dukkata* offence. Specifically, to handle or touch food which hasn’t yet been formally offered into a monk’s hands, ‘ruins’ that food. According to the Vinaya, any monk who eats that food incurs an offence.’

‘It’s simply this one point, sir. It’s not that I’m criticizing anybody, or that I’m trying to force you or your monks to stop practising like this - not at all. I just wanted to let you know of my good intentions, because it will be necessary for me to stay here for a few more days.’

He lifted his hands in añjali, ‘*Sādhu!* Excellent! I’ve never yet seen a monk who keeps the minor rules in Saraburi. There aren’t any to be found these days. If there still are such monks they must live outside of Saraburi. May I commend you. I have no objections at all, that’s very good.’

The next morning when we came back from almsround not one of the monks would go near those dishes. The laypeople themselves sorted them out and offered them, because they were afraid the monks wouldn’t eat. From that day onwards the monks and novices there seemed really on edge, so I tried to explain things to them, to put their minds at rest. I think they were afraid of us, they just went into their rooms and closed themselves in, in silence.

For two or three days I tried to make them feel at ease because they were so ashamed, I really had nothing against them. I didn't say things like 'There's not enough food,' or 'Bring this or that food.' Why not? Because I had fasted before, sometimes for seven or eight days. Here I had plain rice, I knew I wouldn't die. Where I got my strength from was the practice, from having studied and practised accordingly.

I took the Buddha as my example. Wherever I went, whatever others did, I wouldn't involve myself. I devoted myself solely to the practice, because I cared for myself, I cared for the practice.

Those who don't keep the Vinaya or practise meditation and those who do practise can't live together, they must go their separate ways. I didn't understand this myself in the past. As a teacher I taught others but I didn't practise. This is really bad. When I looked deeply into it, my practice and my knowledge were as far apart as earth and sky.

Therefore, those who want to go and set up meditation centres in the forest, don't do it. If you don't yet really know, don't bother trying, you'll only make a mess of it. Some monks think that by going to live in the forest they will find peace, but they still don't understand the essentials of practice. They cut grass for themselves,¹² do everything themselves. Those who really know the practice aren't interested in places like this, they won't prosper. Doing it like that won't lead to progress. No matter how peaceful the forest may be you can't progress if you do it wrong.

They see the forest monks living in the forest and go to live in the forest like them, but it's not the same. The robes are not the same, eating habits are not the same, everything is different. Namely, they don't train themselves, they don't practise. The place is wasted, it doesn't really work. If it does work, it does so only as a venue for showing off or publicizing, just like a medicine show. It goes no further than that. Those who have only practised a little and then go to teach others are not yet ripe, they don't really understand. In a short time they give up and it falls apart. It just brings trouble.

So we must study somewhat, look at the *Navakovāda*,¹³ what does it say? Study it, memorize it, until you understand. From time to time ask your

teacher concerning the finer points, he will explain them. Study like this until you really understand the Vinaya.

1: This refers to the Venerable Ajahn's early years in the monkhood, before he had begun to practise in earnest.

2: The second *sanghādisesa* offence, deals with touching a woman with lustful intentions.

3: Referring to *pācittiya* offence No. 36, for eating food outside of the allowed time, which is from dawn until noon.

4: *Dukkata*, offences of 'wrongdoing', the lightest class of offences in the Vinaya, of which there are a great number; *pārājika* - offences of defeat, of which there are four, are the most serious, involving expulsion from the Bhikkhu Sangha.

5: *Pubbasikkhā Vannanā*, 'The Elementary Training', a Thai Commentary on Dhamma-Vinaya based on the Pāli Commentaries; *Visuddhimagga*, 'The Path to Purity', Ācariya Buddhaghosa's exhaustive commentary on Dhamma-Vinaya.

6: *Pubbasikkhā Vannanā*, 'The Elementary Training', a Thai Commentary on Dhamma-Vinaya based on the Pāli Commentaries; *Visuddhimagga*, 'The Path to Purity', Ācariya Buddhaghosa's exhaustive commentary on Dhamma-Vinaya.

7: *Āpatti*: the offences of various classes for a Buddhist monk or nun.

8: A 'receiving cloth' is a cloth used by Thai monks for receiving things from women, from whom they do not receive things directly. That Venerable Ajahn Pow lifted his hand from the receiving cloth indicated that he was not actually receiving the money.

9: There are very precise and detailed regulations governing the ordination procedure which, if not adhered to, may render the ordination invalid.

10: The Vinaya forbids bhikkhus from eating raw meat or fish.

[11:](#) Although it is an offence for monks to accept money, there are many who do. Some may accept it while appearing not to, which is probably how the laypeople in this instance saw the Venerable Ajahn's refusal to accept money. They thought that he actually would accept it if they didn't overtly offer it to him, but just slipped it into his bag.

[12:](#) Another transgression of the precepts, a *pācittiya* offence.

[13:](#) Navakovāda: a simplified synopsis of elementary Dhamma-Vinaya.

Maintaining the Standard

Today we are meeting together as we do every year after the annual Dhamma examinations.¹ At this time all of you should reflect on the importance of carrying out the various duties of the monastery; those toward the preceptor and those toward the teachers. These are what hold us together as a single group, enabling us to live in harmony and concord. They are also what lead us to have respect for each other, which in turn benefits the community.

In all communities, from the time of the Buddha till the present, no matter what form they may take, if the residents have no mutual respect they can not succeed. Whether they be secular communities or monastic ones, if they lack mutual respect they have no solidarity. If there is no mutual respect, negligence sets in and the practice eventually degenerates.

Our community of Dhamma practitioners has lived here for about twenty-five years now, steadily growing, but it could deteriorate. We must understand this point. But if we are all heedful, have mutual respect and continue to maintain the standards of practice, I feel that our harmony will be firm. Our practice as a group will be a source of growth for Buddhism for a long time to come.

Now in regard to study and practice, they are a pair. Buddhism has grown and flourished until the present time because of study going hand in hand with practice. If we simply learn the scriptures in a heedless way, negligence sets in. For example, in the first year here we had seven monks for the Rains Retreat. At that time, I thought to myself, 'Whenever monks start studying for Dhamma Examinations the practice seems to degenerate.' Considering this, I tried to determine the cause, so I began to teach the monks who were there for the Rains Retreat - all seven of them. I taught for about forty days, from after the meal till six in the evening, every day. The monks went for the exams and it turned out there was a good result in that respect, all seven of them passed.

That much was good, but there was a certain complication regarding those who were lacking in circumspection. To study, it is necessary to do a lot of reciting and repeating. Those who are unrestrained and unreserved tend to grow lax with meditation practice and spend all their time studying, repeating and memorizing. This causes them to throw out their old abiding, their standards of practice. And this happens very often.

So it was that when they had finished their studies and taken their exams I could see a change in the behaviour of the monks. There was no walking meditation, only a little sitting, and an increase in socializing. There was less restraint and composure.

Actually, in our practice, when you do walking meditation, you should really determine to walk; when sitting in meditation, you should concentrate on doing just that. Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, you should strive to be composed. But when people do a lot of study, their minds are full of words, they get high on the books and forget themselves. They get lost in externals. Now this is so only for those who don't have wisdom, who are unrestrained and don't have steady sati. For these people studying can be a cause for decline. When such people are engaged in study they don't do any sitting or walking meditation and become less and less restrained. Their minds become more and more distracted. Aimless chatter, lack of restraint and socializing become the order of the day. This is the cause for the decline of the practice. It's not because of the study in itself, but because certain people don't make the effort, they forget themselves.

Actually the scriptures are pointers along the path of practice. If we really understand the practice, then reading or studying are both further aspects of meditation. But if we study and then forget ourselves, it gives rise to a lot of talking and fruitless activity. People throw out the meditation practice and soon want to disrobe. Most of those who study and fail soon disrobe. It's not that study is not good, or that the practice is not right. It's that people fail to examine themselves.

Seeing this, in the second Rains Retreat I stopped teaching the scriptures. Many years later more and more young men came to become monks. Some of them knew nothing about the Dhamma-Vinaya and were ignorant of the

texts, so I decided to rectify the situation; asking those senior monks who had already studied to teach, and they have taught up until the present time. This is how we came to have studying here.

However, every year when the exams are finished, I ask all the monks to re-establish their practice. So all those scriptures which aren't directly concerned with the practice, put them away in the cupboards. Re-establish yourselves, go back to the regular standards. Re-establish the communal practices such as coming together for the daily chanting. This is our standard. Do it even if only to resist your own laziness and aversion. This encourages diligence.

Don't discard your basic practices: eating little, speaking little, sleeping little; restraint and composure; aloofness; regular walking and sitting meditation; meeting together regularly at the appropriate times. Please make an effort with these, every one of you. Don't let this excellent opportunity go to waste. Do the practice. You have this chance to practise here because you live under the guidance of the teacher. He protects you on one level, so you should all devote yourselves to the practice. You've done walking meditation before, now also you should walk. You've done sitting meditation before, now also you should sit. In the past you've chanted together in the mornings and evenings, and now also you should make the effort. These are your specific duties, please apply yourselves to them.

Those who simply 'kill time' in the robes don't have any strength, you know. The ones who are floundering, homesick, confused - do you see them? These are the ones who don't put their minds into the practice. They don't have any work to do. We can't just lie around here. Being a Buddhist monk or novice you live and eat well; you shouldn't take it for granted. *Kāmasukhallikānyogo*² is a danger. Make an effort to find your own practice. Whatever is faulty, work to rectify, don't get lost in externals.

One who has zeal never misses walking and sitting meditation, never lets up in the maintenance of restraint and composure. Just observe the monks here. Whoever, having finished the meal and any business, having hung out his robes, walks meditation - and when we walk past his kutī we see that this walking path is a well-worn trail, and we see him often walking on it - this

monk is not bored with the practice. This is one who has effort, who has zeal.

If all of you devote yourselves to the practice like this, not many problems will arise. If you don't abide with the practice, the walking and sitting meditation, you are doing nothing more than just travelling around. Not liking it here you go travelling over there; not liking it there you come touring back here. That's all you are doing, following your noses everywhere. These people don't persevere, it's not good enough. You don't have to do a lot of travelling around, just stay here and develop the practice, learn it in detail. Travelling around can wait till later, it's not difficult. Make an effort, all of you.

Prosperity and decline hinge on this. If you really want to do things properly, then study and practise in proportion; use both of them together. It's like the body and the mind. If the mind is at ease and the body free of disease and healthy, then the mind becomes composed. If the mind is confused, even if the body is strong there will be difficulty, let alone when the body experiences discomfort.

The study of meditation is the study of cultivation and relinquishment. What I mean by study here is: whenever the mind experiences a sensation, do we still cling to it? Do we create problems around it? Do we experience enjoyment or aversion over it? To put it simply: do we still get lost in our thoughts? Yes, we do. If we don't like something we react with aversion; if we do like it we react with pleasure the mind becomes defiled and stained. If this is the case then we must see that we still have faults, we are still imperfect, we still have work to do. There must be more relinquishing and more persistent cultivation. This is what I mean by studying. If we get stuck on anything, we recognize that we are stuck. We know what state we're in, and we work to correct ourselves.

Living with the teacher or apart from the teacher should be the same. Some people are afraid. They're afraid that if they don't do walking meditation the teacher will upbraid or scold them. This is good in a way, but in the true practice you don't need to be afraid of others, just be wary of faults arising within your own actions, speech or thoughts. When you see faults in your actions, speech or thoughts you must guard yourselves. *Attano*

codayattānam - 'you must exhort yourself,' don't leave it to others to do. We must quickly improve ourselves, know ourselves. This is called 'studying', cultivating and relinquishing. Look into this till you see it clearly.

Living in this way we rely on endurance, persevering in the face of all defilements. Although this is good, it is still on the level of 'practising the Dhamma without having seen it'. If we have practised the Dhamma and seen it, then whatever is wrong we will have already given up, whatever is useful we will have cultivated. Seeing this within ourselves, we experience a sense of well-being. No matter what others say, we know our own mind, we are not moved. We can be at peace anywhere.

Now, the younger monks and novices who have just begun to practise may think that the senior Ajahn doesn't seem to do much walking or sitting meditation. Don't imitate him in this. You should emulate, but not imitate. To emulate is one thing, to imitate another. The fact is that the senior Ajahn dwells within his own particular contented abiding. Even though he doesn't seem to practise externally, he practises inwardly. Whatever is in his mind can not be seen by the eye. The practice of Buddhism is the practice of the mind. Even though the practice may not be apparent in his actions or speech, the mind is a different matter.

Thus, a teacher who has practised for a long time, who is proficient in the practice, may seem to let go of his actions and speech, but he guards his mind. He is composed. Seeing only his outer actions you may try to imitate him, letting go and saying whatever you want to say, but it's not the same thing. You're not in the same league. Think about this.

There's a real difference, you are acting from different places. Although the Ajahn seems to simply sit around, he is not being careless. He lives with things but is not confused by them. We can't see this, because whatever is in his mind is invisible to us. Don't judge simply by external appearances, the mind is the important thing. When we speak, our minds follow that speech. Whatever actions we do, our minds follow, but one who has practised already may do or say things which his mind doesn't follow, because it adheres to Dhamma and Vinaya. For example, sometimes the Ajahn may be severe with his disciples, his speech may appear to be rough

and careless, his actions may seem coarse. Seeing this, all we can see are his bodily and verbal actions, but the mind which adheres to Dhamma and Vinaya can't be seen. Adhere to the Buddha's instruction: 'Don't be heedless.' 'Heedfulness is the way to the Deathless. Heedlessness is death.' Consider this. Whatever others do is not important, just don't be heedless yourself, this is the important thing.

All I have been saying here is simply to warn you that now, having completed the exams, you have a chance to travel around and do many things. May you all constantly remember yourselves as practitioners of the Dhamma; a practitioner must be collected, restrained and circumspect.

Consider the teaching which says 'Bhikkhu: one who seeks alms.' If we define it this way our practice takes on one form - a very coarse one. If we understand this word the way the Buddha defined it, as one who sees the danger of samsāra, this is much more profound.

One who sees the danger of samsāra is one who sees the faults, the liability of this world. In this world there is so much danger, but most people don't see it, they see the pleasure and happiness of the world. Now, the Buddha says that a bhikkhu is one who sees the danger of samsāra. What is samsāra? The suffering of samsāra is overwhelming, it's intolerable. Happiness is also samsāra. The Buddha taught us not to cling to it. If we don't see the danger of samsāra, then when there is happiness we cling to the happiness and forget suffering. We are ignorant of it, like a child who doesn't know fire.

If we understand Dhamma practice in this way, Bhikkhu: one who sees the danger of samsāra; if we have this understanding, walking, sitting or lying down, wherever we may be, we will feel dispassion. We reflect on ourselves, heedfulness is there. Even sitting at ease, we feel this way. Whatever we do we see this danger, so we are in a very different state. This practice is called being 'one who sees the danger of samsāra'.

One who sees the danger of samsāra lives within samsāra and yet doesn't. That is, he understands concepts and he understands their transcendence. Whatever such a person says is not like that of ordinary people. Whatever

he does is not the same, whatever he thinks is not the same. His behaviour is much wiser.

Therefore it is said: 'Emulate but don't imitate.' There are two ways - emulation and imitation. One who is foolish will grab on to everything. You mustn't do that! Don't forget yourselves.

As for me, this year my body is not so well. Some things I will leave to the other monks and novices to help take care of. Perhaps I will take a rest. From time immemorial it's been this way, and in the world it's the same: as long as the father and mother are still alive, the children are well and prosperous. When the parents die, the children separate. Having been rich they become poor. This is usually how it is, even in the lay life, and one can see it here as well. For example, while the Ajahn is still alive everybody is well and prosperous. As soon as he passes away decline begins to set in immediately. Why is this? Because while the teacher is still alive people become complacent and forget themselves. They don't really make an effort with the study and the practice. As in lay life, while the mother and father are still alive, the children just leave everything up to them. They lean on their parents and don't know how to look after themselves. When the parents die they become paupers. In the monkhood it's the same. If the Ajahn goes away or dies, the monks tend to socialize, break up into groups and drift into decline, almost every time.

Why is this? It's because they forget themselves. Living off the merits of the teacher everything runs smoothly. When the teacher passes away, the disciples tend to split up. Their views clash. Those who think wrongly live in one place, those who think rightly live in another. Those who feel uncomfortable leave their old associates and set up new places and start new lineages with their own groups of disciples. This is how it goes. In the present it's the same. This is because we are at fault. While the teacher is still alive we are at fault, we live heedlessly. We don't take up the standards of practice taught by the Ajahn and establish them within our own hearts. We don't really follow in his footsteps.

Even in the Buddha's time it was the same. Remember the scriptures? That old monk, what was his name ...? Subhadda Bhikkhu! When Venerable Mahā Kassapa was returning from Pāvā he asked an ascetic on the way: 'Is

the Lord Buddha faring well?’ The ascetic answered: ‘The Lord Buddha entered *Parinibbāna* seven days ago.’

Those monks who were still unenlightened were grief-stricken, crying and wailing. Those who had attained the Dhamma reflected to themselves, ‘Ah, the Buddha has passed away. He has journeyed on.’ But those who were still thick with defilements, such as Venerable Subhadda, said:

‘What are you all crying for? The Buddha has passed away. That’s good! Now we can live at ease. When the Buddha was still alive he was always bothering us with some rule or other, we couldn’t do this or say that. Now the Buddha has passed away, that’s fine! We can do whatever we want, say what we want. Why should you cry?’

It’s been so from way back then till the present day.

However that may be, even though it’s impossible to preserve entirely; suppose we had a glass and we took care to preserve it. Each time we used it we cleaned it and put it away in a safe place. Being very careful with that glass we can use it for a long time, and then when we’ve finished with it others can also use it. Now, using glasses carelessly and breaking them every day or using one glass for ten years before it breaks - which is better?

Our practice is like this. For instance, if out of all of us living here, practising steadily, only ten practise well, then Wat Pah Pong will prosper. Just as in the villages: in a village of one hundred houses, even if there are only fifty good people that village will prosper. Actually to find even ten would be difficult. Or take a monastery like this one here: it is hard to find even five or six monks who have real commitment, who really do the practice.

In any case, we don’t have any responsibilities now, other than to practise well. Think about it, what do we own here? We don’t have wealth, possessions, and families anymore. Even food we take only once a day. We’ve given up many things already, even better things than these. As monks and novices we give up everything. We own nothing. All those things people really enjoy have been discarded by us. Going forth as a Buddhist monk is in order to practise. Why then should we hanker for other

things, indulging in greed, aversion or delusion? To occupy our hearts with other things is no longer appropriate.

Consider: why have we gone forth? Why are we practising? We have gone forth to practise. If we don't practise then we just lie around. If we don't practise, then we are worse off than laypeople, we don't have any function. If we don't perform any function or accept our responsibilities, it's a waste of the *samana*'s life. It contradicts the aims of a *samana*.

If this is the case then we are heedless. Being heedless is like being dead. Ask yourself, will you have time to practise when you die? Constantly ask yourself, 'When will I die?' If we contemplate in this way our mind will be alert every second; heedfulness will always be present. When there is no heedlessness, sati - recollection of what is what - will automatically follow. Wisdom will be clear, seeing all things clearly as they are. Recollection guards the mind, knowing the arising of sensations at all times, day and night. That is to have sati. To have sati is to be composed. To be composed is to be heedful. If one is heedful then one is practising rightly. This is our specific responsibility.

So today I would like to present this to you all. If in the future you leave here for one of the branch monasteries or anywhere else, don't forget yourselves. The fact is you are still not perfect, still not completed. You still have a lot of work to do, many responsibilities to shoulder, namely, the practices of cultivation and relinquishment. Be concerned about this, every one of you. Whether you live at this monastery or a branch monastery, preserve the standards of practice. Nowadays there are many of us, many branch temples. All the branch monasteries owe their origination to Wat Pah Pong. We could say that Wat Pah Pong was the 'parent', the teacher, the example for all branch monasteries. So, especially the teachers, monks and novices of Wat Pah Pong should try to set the example, to be the guide for all the other branch monasteries, continuing to be diligent in the practices and responsibilities of a *samana*.

1: Many monks undertake written examinations of their scriptural knowledge, sometimes, as Ajahn Chah points out, to the detriment of their application of the teachings in daily life.

2: Indulgence in sense pleasures, indulgence in comfort.

The Flood of Sensuality

Kāmogha, the flood of sensuality: sunk in sights, in sounds, in smells, in tastes, in bodily sensations. Sunk because we only look at externals, we don't look inwardly. People don't look at themselves, they only look at others. They can see everybody else but they can't see themselves. It's not such a difficult thing to do, but it's just that people don't really try.

For example, look at a beautiful woman. What does that do to you? As soon as you see the face you see everything else. Do you see it? Just look within your mind. What is it like to see a woman? As soon as the eyes see just a little bit the mind sees all the rest. Why is it so fast?

It's because you are sunk in the 'water'. You are sunk, you think about it, fantasize about it, are stuck in it. It's just like being a slave, somebody else has control over you. When they tell you to sit you've got to sit, when they tell you to walk you've got to walk; you can't disobey them because you're their slave. Being enslaved by the senses is the same. No matter how hard you try you can't seem to shake it off. And if you expect others to do it for you, you really get into trouble. You must shake it off for yourself.

Therefore, the Buddha left the practice of Dhamma, the transcendence of suffering, up to us. Take Nibbāna for example. The Buddha was thoroughly enlightened, so why didn't he describe Nibbāna in detail? Why did he only say that we should practise and find out for ourselves? Why is that? Shouldn't he have explained what Nibbāna is like?

'The Buddha practised, developing the perfections over countless world ages for the sake of all sentient beings, so why didn't he point out Nibbāna so that they all could see it and go there too?' Some people think like this. 'If the Buddha really knew he would tell us. Why should he keep anything hidden?'

Actually this sort of thinking is wrong. We can't see the truth in that way. We must practise, we must cultivate, in order to see. The Buddha only

pointed out the way to develop wisdom, that's all. He said that we ourselves must practise. Whoever practises will reach the goal.

But that path which the Buddha taught goes against our habits. We don't really like to be frugal, to be restrained so we say, 'Show us the way, show us the way to Nibbāna, so that those who like it easy like us can go there too.' It's the same with wisdom. The Buddha can't show you wisdom, it's not something that can be simply handed around. The Buddha can show the way to develop wisdom, but whether one develops much or only a little depends on the individual. Merit and accumulated virtues of people naturally differ.

Just look at a material object, such as the wooden lions in front of the hall here. People come and look at them and can't seem to agree: one person says, 'Oh, how beautiful,' while another says, 'How revolting!' It's the one lion, both beautiful and ugly. Just this is enough to know how things are.

Therefore the realization of Dhamma is sometimes slow, sometimes fast. The Buddha and his disciples were all alike in that they had to practise for themselves, but even so they still relied on teachers to advise them and give them techniques in the practice.

Now, when we listen to Dhamma we may want to listen until all our doubts are cleared up, but they'll never be cleared up simply by listening. Doubt is not overcome simply by listening or thinking, we must first clean out the mind. To clean out the mind means to revise our practice. No matter how long we were to listen to the teacher talk about the truth we couldn't know or see that truth just from listening. If we did, it would be only through guesswork or conjecture.

However, even though simply listening to the Dhamma may not lead to realization, it is beneficial. There were, in the Buddha's time, those who realized the Dhamma, even realizing the highest realization - arahantship - while listening to a discourse. But those people were already highly developed, their minds already understood to some extent. It's like a football. When a football is pumped up with air it expands. Now the air in that football is all pushing to get out, but there's no hole for it to do so. As soon as a needle punctures the football the air comes bursting out.

This is the same. The minds of those disciples who were enlightened while listening to the Dhamma were like this. As long as there was no catalyst to cause the reaction this 'pressure' was within them, like the football. The mind was not yet free because of this very small thing concealing the truth. As soon as they heard the Dhamma and it hit the right spot, wisdom arose. They immediately understood, immediately let go and realized the true Dhamma. That's how it was. It was easy. The mind uprighted itself. It changed, or turned, from one view to another. You could say it was far, or you could say it was very near.

This is something we must do for ourselves. The Buddha was only able to give techniques on how to develop wisdom, and so with the teachers these days. They give Dhamma talks, they talk about the truth, but still we can't make that truth our own. Why not? There's a 'film' obscuring it. You could say that we are sunk, sunk in the water. *Kāmogha* - the 'flood' of sensuality. *Bhavogha* - the 'flood' of becoming.

'Becoming' (*bhava*) means 'the sphere of birth'. Sensual desire is born at the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, feelings and thoughts, with which we identify. The mind holds fast and is stuck to sensuality.

Some cultivators get bored, fed up, tired of the practice and are lazy. You don't have to look very far, just look at how people can't seem to keep the Dhamma in mind, and yet if they get scolded they'll hold on to it for ages. They may get scolded at the beginning of the Rains, and even after the Rains Retreat has ended they still haven't forgotten it. They won't forget it their whole lives if it goes down deep enough.

But when it comes to the Buddha's teaching, telling us to be moderate, to be restrained, to practise conscientiously - why don't people take these things to their hearts? Why do they keep forgetting these things? You don't have to look very far, just look at our practice here. For example, establishing standards, such as, after the meal not chattering while washing your bowls! Even this much seems to be beyond people. Even though we know that chattering is not particularly useful and binds us to sensuality, people still like talking. Pretty soon they start to disagree and eventually get into arguments and squabbles. There's nothing more to it than this.

Now this isn't anything subtle or refined, it's pretty basic, and yet people don't seem to really make much effort with it. They say they want to see the Dhamma, but they want to see it on their own terms, they don't want to follow the path of practice. That's as far as they go. All these standards of practice are skilful means for penetrating and seeing the Dhamma, but people don't practise accordingly.

To say 'real practice' or 'ardent practice' doesn't necessarily mean you have to expend a whole lot of energy - just put some effort into the mind, making some effort with all the feelings that arise, especially those which are steeped in sensuality. These are our enemies.

But people can't seem to do it. Every year, as the end of the Rains Retreat approaches, it gets worse and worse. Some of the monks have reached the limit of their endurance, the 'end of their tether'. The closer we get to the end of the Rains the worse they get, they have no consistency in their practice. I speak about this every year and yet people can't seem to remember it. We establish a certain standard and in not even a year it's fallen apart. It starts when the retreat is almost finished - the chatter, the socializing and everything else. The practice all goes to pieces. This is how it tends to be.

Those who are really interested in the practice should consider why this is so: it's because people don't see the adverse results of these things.

When we are accepted into the Buddhist monkhood we live simply. And yet some disrobe to go to the front, where the bullets fly past them every day - they prefer it like that. They really want to go. Danger surrounds them on all sides and yet they're prepared to go. Why don't they see the danger? They're prepared to die by the gun but nobody wants to die developing virtue. Just seeing this is enough. It's because they're slaves, nothing else. See this much and you know what it's all about. People don't see the danger.

This is really amazing, isn't it? You'd think they could see it but they can't. If they can't see it even then, then there's no way they can get out. They're determined to whirl around in samsāra. This is how things are. Just talking about simple things like this we can begin to understand.

If you were to ask them, ‘Why were you born?’ they’d probably have a lot of trouble answering, because they can’t see it. They’re sunk in the world of the senses and sunk in becoming (*bhava*).¹*Bhava* is the sphere of birth, our birthplace. To put it simply, beings are born from *bhava* - it is the preliminary condition for birth. Wherever birth takes place, that’s *bhava*.

For example, suppose we had an orchard of apple trees that we were particularly fond of. That’s a *bhava* for us if we don’t reflect with wisdom. How so? Suppose our orchard contained a hundred or a thousand apple trees - it doesn’t really matter what kind of trees they are, just so long as we consider them to be ‘our own’ trees. Then we are going to be ‘born’ as a ‘worm’ in every single one of those trees. We bore into every one, even though our human body is still back there in the house, we send out ‘tentacles’ into every one of those trees.

Now, how do we know that it’s a *bhava*? It’s a *bhava* (sphere of existence) because of our clinging to the idea that those trees are our own, that that orchard is our own. If someone were to take an axe and cut one of the trees down, the owner over there in the house ‘dies’ along with the tree. He gets furious, and has to go and set things right, to fight and maybe even kill over it. That quarrelling is the ‘birth’. The ‘sphere of birth’ is the orchard of trees that we cling to as our own. We are ‘born’ right at the point where we consider them to be our own, born from that *bhava*. Even if we had a thousand apple trees, if someone were to cut down just one it would be like cutting the owner down.

Whatever we cling to, we are born right there, we exist right there. We are born as soon as we ‘know’. This is knowing through not-knowing: we know that someone has cut down one of our trees. But we don’t know that those trees are not really ours. This is called ‘knowing through not-knowing’. We are bound to be born into that *bhava*.

Vatta, the wheel of conditioned existence, operates like this. People cling to *bhava*, they depend on *bhava*. If they cherish *bhava*, this is birth. And if they fall into suffering over that same thing, this is also a birth. As long as we can’t let go we are stuck in the rut of *samsāra*, spinning around like a wheel. Look into this, contemplate it. Whatever we cling to as being us or ours, that is a place for birth.

There must be a *bhava*, a sphere of birth, before birth can take place. Therefore, the Buddha said, whatever you have, don't 'have' it. Let it be there but don't make it yours. You must understand this 'having' and 'not having', know the truth of them, don't flounder in suffering.

The place that we were born from; you want to go back there and be born again, don't you? All of you monks and novices, do you know where you were born from? You want to go back there, don't you? Right there, look into this. All of you getting ready. The nearer we get to the end of the retreat, the more you start preparing to go back and be born there.

Really, you'd think that people could appreciate what it would be like, living in a person's belly. How uncomfortable would that be? Just look, merely staying in your *kutī* for one day is enough. Shut all the doors and windows and you're suffocating already. How would it be to lie in a person's belly for nine or ten months? Think about it.

People don't see the liability of things. Ask them why they are living, or why they are born, and they have no idea. Do you still want to get back in there? Why? It should be obvious but you don't see it. Why can't you see it? What are you stuck on, what are you holding on to? Think it out for yourself.

It's because there is a cause for becoming and birth. Just take a look at the preserved baby in the main hall, have you seen it? Isn't anybody alarmed by it? No, no one's alarmed by it. A baby lying in its mother's belly is just like that preserved baby. And yet you want to make more of those things, and even want to get back and soak in there yourself. Why don't you see the danger of it and the benefit of the practice?

You see? That's *bhava*. The root is right there, it revolves around that. The Buddha taught to contemplate this point. People think about it but still don't see. They're all getting ready to go back there again. They know that it wouldn't be very comfortable in there, to put their necks in the noose is really uncomfortable, yet they still want to lay their heads in there. Why don't they understand this? This is where wisdom comes in, where we must contemplate.

When I talk like this people say, ‘If that’s the case then everybody would have to become monks, and then how would the world be able to function?’ You’ll never get everybody to become monks, so don’t worry. The world is here because of deluded beings, so this is no trifling matter.

I first became a novice at the age of nine. I started practising from way back then. But in those days I didn’t really know what it was all about. I found out when I became a monk. Once I became a monk I became so wary. The sensual pleasures people indulged in didn’t seem like so much fun to me. I saw the suffering in them. It was like seeing a delicious banana which I knew was very sweet but which I also knew to be poisoned. No matter how sweet or tempting it was, if I ate it I would die. I considered in this way every time; every time I wanted to ‘eat a banana’ I would see the ‘poison’ steeped inside, and so eventually I could withdraw my interest from those things. Now at this age, such things are not at all tempting.

Some people don’t see the ‘poison’; some see it but still want to try their luck. ‘If your hand is wounded don’t touch poison, it may seep into the wound.’

I used to consider trying it out as well. When I had lived as a monk for five or six years, I thought of the Buddha. He practised for five or six years and was finished, but I was still interested in the worldly life, so I thought of going back to it: ‘Maybe I should go and ‘build the world’ for a while, I would gain some experience and learning. Even the Buddha had his son, Rāhula. Maybe I’m being too strict?’

I sat and considered this for some time, until I realized: ‘Yes, well, that’s all very fine, but I’m just afraid that this “Buddha” won’t be like the last one.’ A voice in me said, ‘I’m afraid this “Buddha” will just sink into the mud, not like the last one.’ And so I resisted those worldly thoughts.

From my sixth or seventh Rains Retreat up until the twentieth, I really had to put up a fight. These days I seem to have run out of bullets, because I’ve been shooting for a long time. I’m just afraid that you younger monks and novices have still got so much ammunition, you may just want to go and try out your guns. Before you do, consider carefully first.

It's hard to give up sensual desire. It's really difficult to see it as it is. We must use skilful means. Consider sensual pleasures as like eating meat which gets stuck in your teeth. Before you finish the meal you have to find a toothpick to pry it out. When the meat comes out you feel some relief for a while, maybe you even think that you won't eat anymore meat. But when you see it again you can't resist it. You eat some more and then it gets stuck again. When it gets stuck you have to pick it out again, which gives some relief once more, until you eat some more meat. That's all there is to it. Sensual pleasures are just like this, no better than this. When the meat gets stuck in your teeth there's discomfort. You take a toothpick and pick it out and experience some relief. There's nothing more to it than this sensual desire. The pressure builds up and up until you let a little bit out. Oh! That's all there is to it. I don't know what all the fuss is about.

I didn't learn these things from anybody else, they occurred to me in the course of my practice. I would sit in meditation and reflect on sensual pleasure as being like a red ants' nest.² Someone takes a piece of wood and pokes the nest until the ants come running out, crawling down the wood and into their faces, biting their eyes and ears. And yet they still don't see the difficulty they are in.

However, it's not beyond our ability. In the teaching of the Buddha it is said that if we've seen the harm of something, no matter how good it may seem to be, we know that it's harmful. Whatever we haven't yet seen the harm of, we just think it's good. If we haven't yet seen the harm of anything we can't get out of it.

Have you noticed? No matter how dirty it may be people like it. This kind of 'work' isn't clean but you don't even have to pay people to do it, they'll gladly volunteer. With other kinds of dirty work, even if you pay a good wage people won't do it, but this kind of work they submit themselves to gladly, you don't even have to pay them. It's not that it's clean work, either, it's dirty work. Yet why do people like it? How can you say that people are intelligent when they behave like this? Think about it.

Have you ever noticed the dogs in the monastery grounds here? There are packs of them. They run around biting each other, some of them even getting maimed. In another month or so they'll be at it. As soon as one of

the smaller ones gets into the pack the bigger ones are at him - out he comes yelping, dragging his leg behind him. But when the pack runs on he hobbles on after it. He's only a little one, but he thinks he'll get his chance one day. They bite his leg for him and that's all he gets for his trouble. For the whole of the mating season he may not even get one chance. You can see this for yourself in the monastery here.

When these dogs run around howling in packs, I figure if they were humans they'd be singing songs! They think it's such great fun they're singing songs, but they don't have a clue what it is that makes them do it, they just blindly follow their instincts.

Think about this carefully. If you really want to practise you should understand your feelings. For example, among the monks, novices or laypeople, who should you socialize with? If you associate with people who talk a lot they induce you to talk a lot also. Your own share is already enough, theirs is even more; put them together and they explode!

People like to socialize with those who chatter a lot and talk of frivolous things. They can sit and listen to that for hours. When it comes to listening to Dhamma, talking about practice, there isn't much of it to be heard. Like when giving a Dhamma talk: as soon as I start off '*Namo Tassa Bhagavato*³ they're all sleepy already. They don't take in the talk at all. When I reach the '*Evam*' they all open their eyes and wake up. Every time there's a Dhamma talk people fall asleep. How are they going to get any benefit from it?

Real Dhamma cultivators will come away from a talk feeling inspired and uplifted, they learn something. Every six or seven days the teacher gives another talk, constantly boosting the practice.

This is your chance, now that you are ordained. There's only this one chance, so take a close look. Look at things and consider which path you will choose. You are independent now. Where are you going to go from here? You are standing at the crossroads between the worldly way and the Dhamma way. Which way will you choose? You can take either way, this is the time to decide. The choice is yours to make. If you are to be liberated it is at this point.

1: The Thai word for *bhava*, ‘*pop*’, would have been a familiar term to Ajahn Chah’s audience. It is generally understood to mean ‘sphere of rebirth’. Ajahn Chah’s usage of the word here is somewhat unconventional, emphasizing a more practical application of the term.

2: Both the red ants and their eggs are used for food in North-East Thailand, so such raids on their nests were not so unusual.

3: The first line of the traditional *Pāli* words of homage to the Buddha, recited before giving a formal Dhamma talk. *Evam* is the traditional *Pāli* word for ending a talk.

In The Dead Of Night ...

Take a look at your fear. One day, as it was nearing nightfall, there was nothing else for it. If I tried to reason with myself I'd never go, so I grabbed a *pah-kow* and just went.

'If it's time for it to die then let it die. If my mind is going to be so stubborn and stupid then let it die.' That's how I thought to myself. Actually in my heart I didn't really want to go but I forced myself to. When it comes to things like this, if you wait till everything's just right you'll end up never going. When would you ever train yourself? So I just went.

I'd never stayed in a charnel ground before. When I got there, words can't describe the way I felt. The *pa-kow* wanted to camp right next to me but I wouldn't have it. I made him stay far away. Really I wanted him to stay close to keep me company but I wouldn't have it. I made him move away, otherwise I'd have counted on him for support.

'If it's going to be so afraid then let it die tonight.'

I was afraid, but I dared. It's not that I wasn't afraid, but I had courage. In the end you have to die anyway.

Well, just as it was getting dark I had my chance, in they came carrying a corpse. Just my luck! I couldn't even feel my feet touch the ground, I wanted to get out of there so badly. They wanted me to do some funeral chants but I wouldn't get involved, I just walked away. In a few minutes, after they'd gone, I just walked back and found that they had buried the corpse right next to my spot, making the bamboo used for carrying it into a bed for me to stay on.

So now what was I to do? It's not that the village was nearby, it was a good two or three kilometres away.

'Well, if I'm going to die, I'm going to die.' If you've never dared to do it you'll never know what it's like. It's really an experience.

As it got darker and darker I wondered where there was to run to in the middle of that charnel ground.

‘Oh, let it die. One is born to this life only to die, anyway.’

As soon as the sun sank the night told me to get inside my *glot*. I didn’t want to do any walking meditation, I only wanted to get into my net. Whenever I tried to walk towards the grave it was as if something was pulling me back from behind, to stop me from walking. It was as if my feelings of fear and courage were having a tug-of-war with me. But I did it. This is the way you must train yourself.

When it was dark I got into my mosquito net. It felt as if I had a seven-tiered wall all around me. Seeing my trusty alms bowl there beside me was like seeing an old friend. Even a bowl can be a friend sometimes! Its presence beside me was comforting. I had a bowl for a friend at least.

I sat in my net watching over the body all night. I didn’t lie down or even doze off, I just sat quietly. I couldn’t be sleepy even if I wanted to, I was so scared. Yes, I was scared, and yet I did it. I sat through the night.

Now who would have the guts to practise like this? Try it and see. When it comes to experiences like this who would dare to go and stay in a charnel ground? If you don’t actually do it you don’t get the results, you don’t really practise. This time I really practised.

When day broke I felt, ‘Oh! I’ve survived!’ I was so glad, I just wanted to have daytime, no night time at all. I wanted to kill off the night and leave only daylight. I felt so good, I had survived. I thought, ‘Oh, there’s nothing to it, it’s just my own fear, that’s all.’

After almsround and eating the meal I felt good, the sunshine came out, making me feel warm and cosy. I had a rest and walked a while. I thought, ‘This evening I should have some good, quiet meditation, because I’ve already been through it all last night. There’s probably nothing more to it.’

Then, later in the afternoon, wouldn’t you know it? In comes another one, a big one this time.¹ They brought the corpse in and cremated it right beside

my spot, right in front of my *glot*. This was even worse than last night!

‘Well, that’s good,’ I thought, ‘bringing in this corpse to burn here is going to help my practice.’

But still I wouldn’t go and do any rites for them, I waited for them to leave first before taking a look.

Burning that body for me to sit and watch over all night, I can’t tell you how it was. Words can’t describe it. Nothing I could say could convey the fear I felt. In the dead of night, remember. The fire from the burning corpse flickered red and green and the flames pattered softly. I wanted to do walking meditation in front of the body but could hardly bring myself to do it. Eventually I got into my net. The stench from the burning flesh lingered all through the night.

And this was before things really started to happen. As the flames flickered softly I turned my back on the fire.

I forgot about sleep, I couldn’t even think of it, my eyes were fixed rigid with fear. And there was nobody to turn to, there was only me. I had to rely on myself. I could think of nowhere to go, there was nowhere to run to in that pitch-black night.

‘Well, I’ll sit and die here. I’m not moving from this spot.’

Here, talking of the ordinary mind, would it want to do this? Would it take you to such a situation? If you tried to reason it out you’d never go. Who would want to do such a thing? If you didn’t have strong faith in the teaching of the Buddha you’d never do it.

Now, about 10 p.m., I was sitting with my back to the fire. I don’t know what it was, but there came a sound of shuffling from the fire behind me. Had the coffin just collapsed? Or maybe a dog was getting the corpse? But no, it sounded more like a buffalo walking steadily around.

‘Oh, never mind.’

But then it started walking towards me, just like a person!

It walked up behind me, the footsteps heavy, like a buffalo's, and yet not. The leaves crunched under the footsteps as it made its way round to the front. Well, I could only prepare for the worst, where else was there to go? But it didn't really come up to me, it just circled around in front and then went off in the direction of the *pa-kow*. Then all was quiet. I don't know what it was, but my fear made me think of many possibilities.

It must have been about half an hour later, I think, when the footsteps started coming back from the direction of the *pa-kow*. Just like a person! It came right up to me, this time, heading for me as if to run me over! I closed my eyes and refused to open them.

'I'll die with my eyes closed.'

It got closer and closer until it stopped dead in front of me and just stood stock still. I felt as if it were waving burnt hands back and forth in front of my closed eyes. Oh! This was really it! I threw out everything, forgot all about Buddho, Dhammo and Sangho. I forgot everything else, there was only the fear in me, stacked in full to the brim. My thoughts couldn't go anywhere else, there was only fear. From the day I was born I had never experienced such fear. Buddho and Dhammo had disappeared, I don't know where. There was only fear welling up inside my chest until it felt like a tightly stretched drum skin.

'Well, I'll just leave it as it is, there's nothing else to do.'

I sat as if I wasn't even touching the ground and simply noted what was going on. The fear was so great that it filled me, like a jar completely filled with water. If you pour water until the jar is completely full, and then pour some more, the jar will overflow. Likewise, the fear built up so much within me that it reached its peak and began to overflow.

'What am I so afraid of anyway?' a voice inside me asked.

'I'm afraid of death,' another voice answered.

‘Well, then, where is this thing “death?” Why all the panic? Look where death abides. Where is death?’

‘Why, death is within me!’

‘If death is within you, then where are you going to run to escape it? If you run away you die, if you stay here you die. Wherever you go it goes with you because death lies within you, there’s nowhere you can run to. Whether you are afraid or not you die just the same, there’s nowhere to escape death.’

As soon as I had thought this, my perception seemed to change right around. All the fear completely disappeared as easily as turning over one’s own hand. It was truly amazing. So much fear and yet it could disappear just like that! Non-fear arose in its place. Now my mind rose higher and higher until I felt as if I was in the clouds.

As soon as I had conquered the fear, rain began to fall. I don’t know what sort of rain it was, the wind was so strong. But I wasn’t afraid of dying now. I wasn’t afraid that the branches of the trees might come crashing down on me. I paid it no mind. The rain thundered down like a hot season torrent, really heavy. By the time the rain had stopped everything was soaking wet.

I sat unmoving.

So what did I do next, soaking wet as I was? I cried! The tears flowed down my cheeks. I cried as I thought to myself, ‘Why am I sitting here like some sort of orphan or abandoned child, sitting, soaking in the rain like a man who owns nothing, like an exile?’

And then I thought further, ‘All those people sitting comfortably in their homes right now probably don’t even suspect that there is a monk sitting, soaking in the rain all night like this. What’s the point of it all?’ Thinking like this I began to feel so thoroughly sorry for myself that the tears came gushing out.

‘They’re not good things anyway, these tears, let them flow right on out until they’re all gone.’

This was how I practised.

Now I don't know how I can describe the things that followed. I sat and listened. After conquering my feelings I just sat and watched as all manner of things arose in me, so many things that were possible to know but impossible to describe. And I thought of the Buddha's words, *paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*: 'The wise will know for themselves.'

I had endured such suffering and sat through the rain like this. Who was there to experience it with me? Only I could know what it was like. There was so much fear and yet the fear disappeared. Who else could witness this? The people in their homes in the town couldn't know what it was like, only I could see it. It was a personal experience. Even if I were to tell others they wouldn't really know, it was something for each individual to experience for himself. The more I contemplated this the clearer it became. I became stronger and stronger, my conviction become firmer and firmer, until daybreak.

When I opened my eyes at dawn, everything was yellow. I had been wanting to urinate during the night but the feeling had eventually stopped. When I got up from my sitting in the morning everywhere I looked was yellow, just like the early morning sunlight on some days. When I went to urinate there was blood in the urine!

'Eh? Is my gut torn or something?' I got a bit of fright. 'Maybe it's really torn inside there.'

'Well, so what? If it's torn it's torn, who is there to blame?' a voice told me straight away. 'If it's torn it's torn, if I die I die. I was only sitting here, I wasn't doing any harm. If it's going to burst, let it burst,' the voice said.

My mind was as if arguing or fighting with itself. One voice would come from one side, saying, 'Hey, this is dangerous!' Another voice would counter it, challenge it and over-rule it.

My urine was stained with blood.

'Hmm. Where am I going to find medicine?'

‘I’m not going to bother with that stuff. A monk can’t cut plants for medicine anyway. If I die, I die, so what? What else is there to do? If I die while practising like this then I’m ready. If I were to die doing something bad that’s no good, but to die practising like this I’m prepared.’

Don’t follow your moods. Train yourself. The practice involves putting your very life at stake. You must have cried at least two or three times. That’s right, that’s the practice. If you’re sleepy and want to lie down then don’t let it sleep. Make the sleepiness go away before you lie down. But look at you all, you don’t know how to practise.

Sometimes, when you come back from almsround and you’re contemplating the food before eating, you can’t settle down, your mind is like a mad dog. The saliva flows, you’re so hungry. Sometimes you may not even bother to contemplate, you just dig in. That’s a disaster. If the mind won’t calm down and be patient then just push your bowl away and don’t eat. Train yourself, drill yourself, that’s practice. Don’t just keep on following your mind. Push your bowl away, get up and leave, don’t allow yourself to eat. If it really wants to eat so much and acts so stubborn then don’t let it eat. The saliva will stop flowing. If the defilements know that they won’t get anything to eat they’ll get scared. They won’t dare bother you next day, they’ll be afraid they won’t get anything to eat. Try it out if you don’t believe me.

People don’t trust the practice, they don’t dare to really do it. They’re afraid they’ll go hungry, afraid they’ll die. If you don’t try it out you won’t know what it’s about. Most of us don’t dare to do it, don’t dare to try it out; we’re afraid.

I’ve suffered for a long time over eating and the like, so I know what they’re about. And that’s only a minor thing as well. So this practice is not something one can study easily.

Consider: what is the most important thing of all? There’s nothing else, just death. Death is the most important thing in the world. Consider, practice, inquire. If you don’t have clothing you won’t die. If you don’t have betel nut to chew or cigarettes to smoke you still won’t die. But if you don’t have rice or water, then you will die. I see only these two things as being

essential in this world. You need rice and water to nourish the body. So I wasn't interested in anything else, I just contented myself with whatever was offered. As long as I had rice and water it was enough to practise with, I was content.

Is that enough for you? All those other things are extras. Whether you get them or not doesn't matter, the only really important things are rice and water.

'If I live like this can I survive?' I asked myself. 'There's enough to get by on all right. I can probably get at least rice on almsround in just about any village, a mouthful from each house. Water is usually available. Just these two are enough.' I didn't aim to be particularly rich.

In regards to the practice, right and wrong are usually coexistent. You must dare to do it, dare to practise. If you've never been to a charnel ground you should train yourself to go. If you can't go at night then go during the day. Then train yourself to go later and later until you can go at dusk and stay there. Then you will see the effects of the practice, then you will understand.

This mind has been deluded now for who knows how many lifetimes. Whatever we don't like or love we want to avoid; we just indulge in our fears. And then we say we're practising. This can't be called 'practice'. If it's real practice you'll even risk your life. If you've really made up your mind to practise why would you take an interest in petty concerns? 'I only got a little, you got a lot.' 'You quarrelled with me so I'm quarrelling with you.' I had none of these thoughts because I wasn't looking for such things. Whatever others did was their business. When I went to other monasteries I didn't get involved in such things. However high or low others practised I wouldn't take any interest, I just looked after my own business. And so I dared to practise, and the practice gave rise to wisdom and insight.

If your practice has really hit the spot then you really practise. Day or night you practise. At night, when it's quiet, I'd sit in meditation, then come down to walk, alternating back and forth like this at least two or three times a night. Walk, then sit, then walk some more. I wasn't bored, I enjoyed it.

Sometimes it'd be raining softly and I'd think of the times I used to work the rice paddies. My pants would still be wet from the day before but I'd have to get up before dawn and put them on again. Then I'd have to go down to below the house to get the buffalo out of its pen. All I could see of the buffalo would be covered in buffalo shit. Then the buffalo's tail would swish around and spatter me with shit on top of that. My feet would be sore with athlete's foot and I'd walk along thinking, 'Why is life so miserable?' And now here I was walking meditation. What was a little bit of rain to me? Thinking like this I encouraged myself in the practice.

If the practice has entered the stream then there's nothing to compare with it. There's no suffering like the suffering of a Dhamma cultivator and there's no happiness like the happiness of one either. There's no zeal to compare with the zeal of the cultivator and there's no laziness to compare with them either. Practitioners of the Dhamma are tops. That's why I say if you really practise it's a sight to see.

But most of us just talk about practice without having done it or reached it. Our practice is like the man whose roof is leaking on one side so he sleeps on the other side of the house. When the sunshine comes in on that side he rolls over to the other side, all the time thinking, 'When will I ever get a decent house like everyone else?' If the whole roof leaks then he just gets up and leaves. This is not the way to do things, but that's how most people are.

This mind of ours, these defilements - if you follow them they'll cause trouble. The more you follow them the more the practice degenerates. With the real practice sometimes you even amaze yourself with your zeal. Whether other people practise or not, don't take any interest, simply do your own practice consistently. Whoever comes or goes it doesn't matter, just do the practice. You must look at yourself before it can be called 'practice'. When you really practise there are no conflicts in your mind, there is only Dhamma.

Wherever you are still inept, wherever you are still lacking, that's where you must apply yourself. If you haven't yet cracked it don't give up. Having finished with one thing you get stuck on another, so persist with it until you crack it, don't let up. Don't be content until it's finished. Put all your

attention on that point. While sitting, lying down or walking, watch right there.

It's just like a farmer who hasn't yet finished his fields. Every year he plants rice but this year he still hasn't managed to get it all finished, so his mind is stuck on that, he can't rest contented. His work is still unfinished. Even when he's with friends he can't relax, he's all the time nagged by his unfinished business. Or like a mother who leaves her baby upstairs in the house while she goes to feed the animals below; she's always got her baby in mind, lest it should fall from the house. Even though she may do other things, her baby is never far from her thoughts.

It's just the same for us and our practice - we never forget it. Even though we may do other things our practice is never far from our thoughts, it's constantly with us, day and night. It has to be like this if you are really going to make progress.

In the beginning you must rely on a teacher to instruct and advise you. When you understand, then practice. When the teacher has instructed you, follow the instructions. If you understand the practice it's no longer necessary for the teacher to teach you, just do the work yourselves.

Whenever heedlessness or unwholesome qualities arise know for yourself, teach yourself. Do the practice yourself. The mind is the one who knows, the witness. The mind knows for itself if you are still very deluded or only a little deluded. Wherever you are still faulty try to practise right at that point, apply yourself to it.

Practice is like that. It's almost like being crazy, or you could even say you are crazy. When you really practice you are crazy, you 'flip'. You have distorted perception and then you adjust your perception. If you don't adjust it, it's going to be just as troublesome and just as wretched as before.

So there's a lot of suffering in the practice, but if you don't know your own suffering you won't understand the Noble Truth of suffering. To understand suffering, to kill it off, you first have to encounter it. If you want to shoot a bird but don't go out and find it, how will you ever shoot it? Suffering, suffering - the Buddha taught about suffering: the suffering of birth, the

suffering of old age. If you don't want to experience suffering, you won't see suffering. If you don't see suffering, you won't understand suffering. If you don't understand suffering, you won't be able to get rid of suffering.

Now people don't want to see suffering, they don't want to experience it. If they suffer here, they run over there. You see? They're simply dragging their suffering around with them, they never kill it. They don't contemplate or investigate it. If they feel suffering here, they run over there; if it arises there they run back here. They try to run away from suffering physically. As long as you are still ignorant, wherever you go you'll find suffering. Even if you boarded an aeroplane to get away from it, it would board the plane with you. If you dived under the water it would dive in with you, because suffering lies within us. But we don't know that. If it lies within us, where can we run to escape it?

People have suffering in one place so they go somewhere else. When suffering arises there they run off again. They think they're running away from suffering but they're not, suffering goes with them. They carry suffering around without knowing it. If we don't know the cause of suffering then we can't know the cessation of suffering, there's no way we can escape it.

You must look into this intently until you're beyond doubt. You must dare to practise. Don't shirk it, either in a group or alone. If others are lazy it doesn't matter. Whoever does a lot of walking meditation, a lot of practice, I guarantee results. If you really practise consistently, whether others come or go or whatever, one Rains Retreat is enough. Do it like I've been telling you here. Listen to the teacher's words, don't quibble, don't be stubborn. Whatever he tells you to do, go right ahead and do it. You needn't be timid about the practice, knowledge will surely arise from it.

Practice is also *patipadā*. What is *patipadā*? Practice evenly, consistently. Don't practice like Old Reverend Peh. One Rains Retreat he determined to stop talking. He stopped talking all right but then he started writing notes. 'Tomorrow please toast me some rice.' He wanted to eat toasted rice! He stopped talking but ended up writing so many notes that he was even more scattered than before. One minute he'd write one thing, the next another,

what a farce! I don't know why he bothered determining not to talk. He didn't know what practice was.

Actually our practice is to be content with little, to just be natural. Don't worry whether you feel lazy or diligent. Don't even say 'I'm diligent' or 'I'm lazy.' Most people practise only when they feel diligent, if they feel lazy they don't bother. This is how people usually are. But monks shouldn't think like that. If you are diligent you practise, when you are lazy you still practise. Don't bother with other things, cut them off, throw them out, train yourself. Practise consistently, whether day or night, this year, next year, whatever the time, don't pay attention to thoughts of diligence or laziness, don't worry whether it's hot or cold, just do it. This is called *sammā patipadā* - right practice.

Some people really apply themselves to the practice for six or seven days. Then, when they don't get the results they wanted, give it up and revert completely, indulging in chatter, socializing and whatever. Then they remember the practice and go at it for another six or seven days, then give it up again. It's like the way some people work. At first they throw themselves into it, then, when they stop, they don't even bother picking up their tools, they just walk off and leave them there. Later on, when the soil has all caked up, they remember their work and do a bit more, only to leave it again.

Doing things this way you'll never get a decent garden or paddy. Our practice is the same. If you think this *patipadā* is unimportant you won't get anywhere with the practice. *Sammā patipadā* is unquestionably important. Do it constantly. Don't listen to your moods. So what if your mood is good or not. The Buddha didn't bother with those things. He had experienced all the good things and bad things, the right things and wrong things. That was his practice. Taking only what you like and discarding whatever you don't like isn't practice, it's disaster. Wherever you go you will never be satisfied, wherever you stay there will be suffering.

Practising like this is like the Brāhmins making their sacrifices. Why do they do it? Because they want something in exchange. Some of us practise like this. Why do we practise? Because we seek rebirth, another state of being, we want to attain something. If we don't get what we want then we

don't want to practise, just like the Brahmans making their sacrifices. They do so because of desire.

The Buddha didn't teach like that. The cultivation of the practice is for giving up, for letting go, for stopping, for uprooting. You don't do it for re-birth into any particular state.

There was once a Thera who had gone forth into the *Mahānikaya*² sect initially. But he found it not strict enough so he took *Dhammayuttika* ordination. Then he started practising. Sometimes he would fast for fifteen days, then when he ate he'd eat only leaves and grass. He thought that eating animals was bad kamma, that it would be better to eat leaves and grass.

After a while he thought 'Hmm. Being a monk is not so good, it's inconvenient. It's hard to maintain my vegetarian practice as a monk. Maybe I'll disrobe and become a *pa-kow*.' So he disrobed and became a *pa-kow* so that he could gather the leaves and grass for himself and dig for roots and yams. He carried on like that for a while till in the end he didn't know what he should be doing. He gave it all up. He gave up being a monk, gave up being a *pa-kow*, gave up everything. These days I don't know what he's doing. Maybe he's dead, I don't know. This is because he couldn't find anything to suit his mind. He didn't realize that he was simply following defilements. The defilements were leading him on but he didn't know it.

Did the Buddha disrobe and become a *pa-kow*? How did the Buddha practice? What did he do? He didn't consider this. Did the Buddha go and eat leaves and grass like a cow? Sure, if you want to eat like that go ahead, if that's all you can manage, but don't go round criticizing others. Whatever standard of practice you find suitable then persevere with that. Don't gouge or carve too much or you won't have a decent handle.³ You'll be left with nothing and in the end just give up.

Some people are like this. When it comes to walking meditation they really go at it for fifteen days or so. They don't even bother eating, just walk. Then when they finish that they just lie around and sleep. They don't bother considering carefully before they start to practise. In the end nothing suits

them. Being a monk doesn't suit them, being a *pa-kow* doesn't suit them, so they end up with nothing.

People like this don't know practice, they don't look into the reasons for practising. Think about what you're practising for. This teaching is taught for the sake of letting go, for giving up. The mind wants to love this person and hate that person. These things may arise but don't take them to be real. So what are we practising for? Simply so that we can give up these very things. Even if you attain peace, throw out the peace. If knowledge arises, throw out the knowledge. If you know then you know, but if you take that knowing to be your own then you think you know something. Then you think you are better than others. After a while you can't live anywhere, wherever you live problems arise. If you practise wrongly it's just as if you didn't practise at all.

Practise according to your capacity. Do you sleep a lot? Then try going against the grain. Do you eat a lot? Then try eating less. Take as much practice as you need, using *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* as your basis. Then throw in the *dhutanga* practices also. These *dhutanga* practices are for digging into the defilements. You may find the basic practices still not enough to really uproot the defilements, so you have to incorporate the *dhutanga* practices as well.

These *dhutanga* practices are really useful. Some people can't kill off the defilements with basic *sīla* and *samādhi*, they have to bring in the *dhutanga* practices to help out. The *dhutanga* practices cut off many things. Living at the foot of a tree isn't against the precepts. But if you determine the *dhutanga* practice of living in a charnel ground and then don't do it, that's wrong. Try it out. What's it like to live in a charnel ground? Is it the same as living in a group?

Dhutanga: this translates as 'the practices which are hard to do'. These are the practices of the Noble Ones. Whoever wants to be a Noble One must use the *dhutanga* practices to cut the defilements. It's difficult to observe them and it's hard to find people with the commitment to practise them, because they go against the grain.

For instance they say to limit your robes to the basic three robes; to maintain yourself on almsfood; to eat only from the bowl; to eat only what you get on almsround - if anyone brings food to offer afterwards you don't accept it.

Keeping this last practice in central Thailand is easy. The food is quite adequate, because there they put a lot of food in your bowl. But when you come to the north-east here, this *dhutanga* takes on subtle nuances - here you get plain rice! In these parts the tradition is to put only plain rice in the almsbowl. In central Thailand they give rice and other foods also, but around these parts you get only plain rice. This *dhutanga* practice becomes really ascetic. You eat only plain rice, whatever is offered afterwards you don't accept. Then there is eating once a day, at one sitting, from only one bowl - when you've finished eating you get up from your seat and don't eat again that day.

These are called *dhutanga* practices. Now who will practise them? It's hard these days to find people with enough commitment to practise them because they are demanding; but that is why they are so beneficial.

What people call practice these days is not really practice. If you really practise it's no easy matter. Most people don't dare to really practise, don't dare to really go against the grain. They don't want to do anything which runs contrary to their feelings. People don't want to resist the defilements, they don't want to dig at them or get rid of them.

In our practice they say not to follow your own moods. Consider: for countless lifetimes already we have been fooled into believing that the mind is our own. Actually it isn't, it's just an imposter. It drags us into greed, drags us into aversion, drags us into delusion, drags us into theft, plunder, desire and hatred. These things aren't ours. Just ask yourself right now: do you want to be good? Everybody wants to be good. Now doing all these things, is that good? There! People commit malicious acts and yet they want to be good. That's why I say these things are tricksters, that's all they are.

The Buddha didn't want us to follow this mind, he wanted us to train it. If it goes one way, then take cover another way. When it goes over there take cover back here. To put it simply: whatever the mind wants, don't let it have

it. It's as if we've been friends for years but we finally reach a point where our ideas are no longer the same. We split up and go our separate ways. We no longer understand each other; in fact we even argue, so we break up. That's right, don't follow your own mind. Whoever follows his own mind, follows its likes and desires and everything else. That person hasn't yet practised at all.

This is why I say that what people call practice is not really practice it's disaster. If you don't stop and take a look, don't try the practice, you won't see, you won't attain the Dhamma. To put it straight, in our practice you have to commit your very life. It's not that it isn't difficult, this practice has to entail some suffering. Especially in the first year or two, there's a lot of suffering. The young monks and novices really have a hard time.

I've had a lot of difficulties in the past, especially with food. What can you expect? Becoming a monk at twenty when you are just getting into your food and sleep, some days I would sit alone and just dream of food. I'd want to eat bananas in syrup, or papaya salad, and my saliva would start to run. This is part of the training. All these things are not easy. This business of food and eating can lead one into a lot of bad kamma. Take someone who's just growing up, just getting into his food and sleep, and constrain him in these robes and his feelings run amok. It's like damming a flowing torrent, sometimes the dam just breaks. If it survives that's fine, but if not it just collapses.

My meditation in the first year was nothing else, just food. I was so restless. Sometimes I would sit there and it was almost as if I was actually popping bananas into my mouth. I could almost feel myself breaking the bananas into pieces and putting them in my mouth. And this is all part of the practice.

So don't be afraid of it. We've all been deluded for countless lifetimes now so coming to train ourselves, to correct ourselves, is no easy matter. But if it's difficult it's worth doing. Why should we bother with easy things? Anybody can do the easy things. We should train ourselves to do that which is difficult.

It must have been the same for Buddha. If he had just worried about his family and relatives, his wealth and his past sensual pleasures, he'd never have become the Buddha. These aren't trifling matters, either, they're just what most people are looking for. So going forth at an early age and giving up these things is just like dying. And yet some people come up and say, 'Oh, it's easy for you, Luang Por. You never had a wife and children to worry about, so it's easier for you!' I say, 'Don't get too close to me when you say that or you'll get a clout over the head!' ... As if I didn't have a heart or something!

When it comes to people it's no trifling matter. It's what life is all about. So we Dhamma practitioners should earnestly get into the practice, really dare to do it. Don't believe others, just listen to the Buddha's teaching. Establish peace in your hearts. In time you will understand. Practise, reflect, contemplate, and the fruits of the practice will be there. The cause and the result are proportional.

Don't give in to your moods. In the beginning even finding the right amount of sleep is difficult. You may determine to sleep a certain time but can't manage it. You must train yourself. Whatever time you decide to get up, then get up as soon as it comes round. Sometimes you can do it, but sometimes as soon as you awake you say to yourself 'get up!' and the body won't budge! You may have to say to yourself, 'One, two, if I reach the count three and still don't get up may I fall into hell!' You have to teach yourself like this. When you get to three you'll get up immediately, you'll be afraid of falling into hell.

You must train yourself, you can't dispense with the training. You must train yourself from all angles. Don't just lean on your teacher, your friends or the group all the time or you'll never become wise. It's not necessary to hear so much instruction, just hear the teaching once or twice and then do it.

The well-trained mind won't dare cause trouble, even in private. In the mind of the adept there is no such thing as 'private' or 'public'. All Noble Ones have confidence in their own hearts. We should be like this.

Some people become monks simply to find an easy life. Where does ease come from? What is its cause? All ease has to be preceded by suffering. In

all things it's the same: you must work before you get rice. In all things you must first experience difficulty. Some people become monks in order to rest and take it easy, they say they just want to sit around and rest a while. If you don't study the books do you expect to be able to read and write? It can't be done.

This is why most people who have studied a lot and become monks never get anywhere. Their knowledge is of a different kind, on a different path. They don't train themselves, they don't look at their minds. They only stir up their minds with confusion, seeking things which are not conducive to calm and restraint. The knowledge of the Buddha is not worldly knowledge, it is supramundane knowledge, a different knowledge altogether.

This is why whoever goes forth into the Buddhist monkhood must give up whatever level or status or position they have held previously. Even when a king goes forth he must relinquish his previous status, he doesn't bring that worldly stuff into the monkhood with him to throw his weight around with. He doesn't bring his wealth, status, knowledge or power into the monkhood with him. The practice concerns giving up, letting go, uprooting, stopping. You must understand this in order to make the practice work.

If you are sick and don't treat the illness with medicine do you think the illness will cure itself? Wherever you are afraid you should go. Wherever there is a cemetery or charnel ground which is particularly fearsome, go there. Put on your robes, go there and contemplate, '*Aniccā vata sankhārā*'⁴ do standing and walking meditation there, look inward and see where your fear lies. It will be all too obvious. Understand the truth of all conditioned things. Stay there and watch until dusk falls and it gets darker and darker, until you are even able to stay there all night.

The Buddha said, 'Whoever sees the Dhamma sees the *Tathāgata*. Whoever sees the *Tathāgata* sees Nibbāna.' If we don't follow his example, how will we see the Dhamma? If we don't see the Dhamma, how will we know the Buddha? If we don't see the Buddha, how will we know the qualities of the Buddha? Only if we practise in the footsteps of the Buddha will we know that what the Buddha taught is utterly certain, that the Buddha's teaching is the supreme truth.

1: The body on the first night had been that of a child.

2: *Mahānikaya* and *Dhammayuttika* are the two sects of the Theravāda Sangha in Thailand.

3: A translated Thai expression meaning, ‘Don’t overdo it’.

4: ‘Truly, conditioned things cannot last’

The Fountain of Wisdom

All of us have made up our minds to become bhikkhus and sāmaneras in the Buddhist Dispensation in order to find peace. Now what is true peace? True peace, the Buddha said, is not very far away, it lies right here within us, but we tend to continually overlook it. People have their ideas about finding peace but still tend to experience confusion and agitation, they still tend to be unsure and haven't yet found fulfilment in their practice. They haven't yet reached the goal. It's as if we have left our home to travel to many different places. Whether we get into a car or board a boat, no matter where we go, we still haven't reached our home. As long as we still haven't reached home we don't feel content, we still have some unfinished business to take care of. This is because our journey is not yet finished, we haven't reached our destination. We travel all over the place in search of liberation.

All of you bhikkhus and sāmaneras here want peace, every one of you. Even myself, when I was younger, searched all over for peace. Wherever I went I couldn't be satisfied. Going into forests or visiting various teachers, listening to Dhamma talks, I could find no satisfaction. Why is this?

We look for peace in peaceful places, where there won't be sights, or sounds, or odours, or flavours, thinking that living quietly like this is the way to find contentment, that herein lies peace.

But actually, if we live very quietly in places where nothing arises, can wisdom arise? Would we be aware of anything? Think about it. If our eyes didn't see sights, what would that be like? If the nose didn't experience smells, what would that be like? If the tongue didn't experience flavours, what would that be like? If the body didn't experience feelings at all, what would that be like? To be like that would be like being a blind and deaf man, one whose nose and tongue had fallen off and who was completely numb with paralysis. Would there be anything there? And yet people tend to think that if they went somewhere where nothing happened they would find peace. Well, I've thought like that myself, I once thought that way.

When I was a young monk just starting to practise, I'd sit in meditation and sounds would disturb me. I'd think to myself, 'What can I do to make my mind peaceful?' So I took some beeswax and stuffed my ears with it so that I couldn't hear anything. All that remained was a humming sound. I thought that would be peaceful, but no, all that thinking and confusion didn't arise at the ears after all. It arose in the mind. That is the place to search for peace.

To put it another way, no matter where you go to stay, you don't want to do anything because it interferes with your practice. You don't want to sweep the grounds or do any work, you just want to be still and find peace that way. The teacher asks you to help out with the chores or any of the daily duties, but you don't put your heart into it because you feel it is only an external concern.

I've often brought up the example of one of my disciples who was really eager to 'let go' and find peace. I taught about 'letting go' and he accordingly understood that to let go of everything would indeed be peaceful. Actually right from the day he had come to stay here he didn't want to do anything. Even when the wind blew half the roof off his *kutī* he wasn't interested. He said that that was just an external thing. So he didn't bother fixing it up. When the sunlight and rain streamed in from one side he'd move over to the other side. That wasn't any business of his. His business was to make his mind peaceful. That other stuff was a distraction, he wouldn't get involved. That was how he saw it.

One day I was walking past and saw the collapsed roof.

'Eh? Whose *kutī* is this?'

Someone told me whose it was, and I thought, 'Hmm. Strange' So I had a talk with him, explaining many things, such as the duties in regard to our dwellings, the *senāsana-vatta*. 'We must have a dwelling place, and we must look after it. "Letting go" isn't like this, it doesn't mean shirking our responsibilities. That's the action of a fool. The rain comes in on one side so you move over to the other side. Then the sunshine comes out and you move back to that side. Why is that? Why don't you bother to let go there?' I gave him a long discourse on this; then when I'd finished, he said,

‘Oh, Luang Por, sometimes you teach me to cling and sometimes you teach me to let go. I don’t know what you want me to do. Even when my roof collapses and I let go to this extent, still you say it’s not right. And yet you teach me to let go! I don’t know what more you can expect of me.’

You see? People are like this. They can be as stupid as this.

Are there visual objects within the eye? If there are no external visual objects would our eyes see anything? Are there sounds within our ears if external sounds don’t make contact? If there are no smells outside would we experience them? Where are the causes? Think about what the Buddha said: All dhammas¹ arise because of causes. If we didn’t have ears would we experience sounds? If we had no eyes would we be able to see sights? Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind - these are the causes. It is said that all dhammas arise because of conditions; when they cease it’s because the causal conditions have ceased. For resulting conditions to arise, the causal conditions must first arise.

If we think that peace lies where there are no sensations, would wisdom arise? Would there be causal and resultant conditions? Would we have anything to practise with? If we blame the sounds, then where there are sounds we can’t be peaceful. We think that place is no good. Wherever there are sights we say that’s not peaceful. If that’s the case then to find peace we’d have to be one whose senses have all died, blind, and deaf. I thought about this.

‘Hmm. This is strange. Suffering arises because of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. So should we be blind? If we didn’t see anything at all maybe that would be better. One would have no defilements arising if one were blind, or deaf. Is this the way it is?’

But, thinking about it, it was all wrong. If that was the case then blind and deaf people would be enlightened. They would all be accomplished if defilements arose at the eyes and ears. There are the causal conditions. Where things arise, at the cause, that’s where we must stop them. Where the cause arises, that’s where we must contemplate.

Actually, the sense bases of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are all things which can facilitate the arising of wisdom, if we know them as they are. If we don't really know them we must deny them, saying we don't want to see sights, hear sounds, and so on, because they disturb us. If we cut off the causal conditions, what are we going to contemplate? Think about it. Where would there be any cause and effect? This is wrong thinking on our part.

This is why we are taught to be restrained. Restraint is *sīla*. There is the *sīla* of sense restraint; eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind: these are our *sīla*, and they are our *samādhi*. Reflect on the story of Sāriputta. At the time before he became a bhikkhu he saw Assaji Thera going on almsround. Seeing him, Sāriputta thought,

'This monk is most unusual. He walks neither too fast nor too slow, his robes are neatly worn, his bearing is restrained.' Sāriputta was inspired by him and so approached Venerable Assaji, paid his respects and asked him,

'Excuse me, sir, who are you?'

'I am a *samana*.'

'Who is your teacher?'

'Venerable Gotama is my teacher.'

'What does Venerable Gotama teach?'

'He teaches that all things arise because of conditions.

When they cease it's because the causal conditions have ceased.'

When asked about the Dhamma by Sāriputta, Assaji explained only in brief, he talked about cause and effect.

'Dhammas arise because of causes. The cause arises first and then the result. When the result is to cease the cause must first cease.'

That's all he said, but it was enough for Sāriputta.²

Now this was a cause for the arising of Dhamma. At that time Sāriputta had eyes, he had ears, he had a nose, a tongue, a body and a mind. All his faculties were intact. If he didn't have his faculties would there have been sufficient causes for wisdom to arise for him? Would he have been aware of anything? But most of us are afraid of contact. Either that or we like to have contact but we develop no wisdom from it; instead, we repeatedly indulge through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, delighting in and getting lost in sense objects. This is how it is. These sense bases can entice us into delight and indulgence or they can lead to knowledge and wisdom. They have both harm and benefit, depending on our wisdom.

Now let us understand that, having gone forth and having come here to practise, we should take everything as practice. Even the bad things. We should know them all. Why? So that we may know the truth. When we talk of practice we don't simply mean those things that are good and pleasing to us. That's not how it is. In this world some things are to our liking, some are not. These things all exist in this world, nowhere else. Usually, whatever we like we want, even regarding fellow monks and novices. Whatever monk or novice we don't like we don't want to associate with, we only want to be with those we like. You see? This is choosing according to our likes. Whatever we don't like we don't want to see or know about.

Actually the Buddha wanted us to experience these things. *Lokavidū* - look at this world and know it clearly. If we don't know the truth of the world clearly, then we can't go anywhere. Living in the world we must understand the world. The Noble Ones of the past, including the Buddha, all lived with these things; they lived in this world, among deluded people. They attained the truth right in this very world, nowhere else. They didn't run off to some other world to find the truth. They had wisdom. They restrained their senses, but the practice is to look into all these things and know them as they are.

Therefore, the Buddha taught us to know the sense bases, our points of contact. The eye contacts forms and sends them 'in' to become sights. The ears make contact with sounds, the nose makes contact with odours, the tongue makes contact with tastes, the body makes contact with tactile sensations, and so awareness arises. Where awareness arises is where we

should look and see things as they are. If we don't know these things as they really are we will either fall in love with them or hate them. Where these sensations arise is where we can become enlightened, where wisdom can arise.

But sometimes we don't want things to be like that. The Buddha taught restraint, but restraint doesn't mean we don't see anything, hear anything, smell, taste, feel or think anything. That's not what it means. If practitioners don't understand this then as soon as they see or hear anything they cower and run away. They don't deal with things. They run away, thinking that by so doing those things will eventually lose their power over them, that they will eventually transcend them. But they won't. They won't transcend anything like that. If they run away not knowing the truth of them, later on the same stuff will pop up to be dealt with again.

For example, those practitioners who are never content, be they in monasteries, forests, or mountains, wander on '*dhutanga* pilgrimage' looking at this, that and the other, thinking they'll find contentment that way. They go, and then they come back. They didn't see anything. They try going to a mountain top. 'Ah! This is the spot, now I'm right.' They feel at peace for a few days and then get tired of it. 'Oh, well, off to the seaside.' 'Ah, here it's nice and cool. This'll do me fine.' After a while they get tired of the seaside as well. Tired of the forests, tired of the mountains, tired of the seaside, tired of everything. This is not being tired of things in the right sense,³ this is not right view. It's simply boredom, a kind of wrong view. Their view is not in accordance with the way things are.

When they get back to the monastery, 'Now, what will I do? I've been all over and came back with nothing.' So they throw away their bowls and disrobe. Why do they disrobe? Because they haven't got any grip on the practice, they don't see anything; they go to the north and don't see anything; they go to the seaside, to the mountains, into the forests and still don't see anything. So it's all finished - they 'die'. This is how it goes. It's because they're continually running away from things. Wisdom doesn't arise.

Now take another example. Suppose there is one monk who determines to stay with things, and not run away. He looks after himself. He knows

himself and also knows those who come to stay with him. He's continually dealing with problems. Take the abbot for example. If one is an abbot of a monastery there are constant problems to deal with, there's a constant stream of things that demand attention. Why so? Because people are always asking questions. The questions never end, so you must be constantly on the alert. You are constantly solving problems, your own as well as other people's. You must be constantly awake. Before you can doze off they wake you up again with another problem. So this causes you to contemplate and understand things. You become skilful: skilful in regard to yourself and skilful in regard to others. Skilful in many, many ways.

This skill arises from contact, from confronting and dealing with things, from not running away. We don't run away physically but we 'run away' in mind, using our wisdom. We understand with wisdom right here, we don't run away from anything.

This is a source of wisdom. One must work, must associate with other things. For instance, living in a big monastery like this we must all help out to look after the things here. Looking at it in one way you could say that it's all defilement. Living with lots of monks and novices, with many laypeople coming and going, many defilements may arise. Yes, I admit, but we must live like this for the development of wisdom and the abandonment of foolishness. Which way are we to go? Are we going to live in order to get rid of foolishness or to increase our foolishness?

We must contemplate. Whenever our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind make contact we should be collected and circumspect. When suffering arises, we should ask, 'Who is suffering? Why did this suffering arise?' The abbot of a monastery has to supervise many disciples. Now that may be suffering. We must know suffering when it arises. Know suffering. If we are afraid of suffering and don't want to face it, where are we going to do battle with it? If suffering arises and we don't know it, how are we going to deal with it? This is of utmost importance - we must know suffering.

Escaping from suffering means knowing the way out of suffering, it doesn't mean running away from wherever suffering arises. By doing that you just carry your suffering with you. When suffering arises again somewhere else

you'll have to run away again. This is not transcending suffering, it's not knowing suffering.

If you want to understand suffering you must look into the situation at hand. The teachings say that wherever a problem arises it must be settled right there. Where suffering lies is right where non-suffering will arise, it ceases at the place where it arises. If suffering arises you must contemplate it right there, you don't have to run away. You should settle the issue right there. One who runs away from suffering out of fear is the most foolish person of all. He will simply increase his stupidity endlessly.

We must understand: suffering is none other than the First Noble Truth, isn't that so? Are you going to look on it as something bad? *Dukkha sacca, samudaya sacca, nirodha sacca, magga sacca*. Running away from these things isn't practising according to the true Dhamma. When will you ever see the truth of suffering? If we keep running away from suffering we will never know it. Suffering is something we should recognize - if you don't observe it, when will you ever recognize it? Not being content here you run over there, when discontent arises there you run off again. You are always running. If that's the way you practice you'll be racing with the Devil all over the country!

The Buddha taught us to 'run away' using wisdom. For instance: suppose you had stepped on a thorn or splinter and it got embedded in your foot. As you walk it occasionally hurts, occasionally not. Sometimes you may step on a stone or a stump and it really hurts, so you feel around your foot. But not finding anything you shrug it off and walk on a bit more. Eventually you step on something else, and the pain arises again.

Now this happens many times. What is the cause of that pain? The cause is that splinter or thorn embedded in your foot. The pain is constantly near. Whenever the pain arises you may take a look and feel around a bit, but, not seeing the splinter, you let it go. After a while it hurts again so you take another look.

When suffering arises you must note it, don't just shrug it off. Whenever the pain arises, 'Hmm ... that splinter is still there.' Whenever the pain arises there arises also the thought that that splinter has got to go. If you don't take

it out there will only be more pain later on. The pain keeps recurring again and again, until the desire to take out that thorn is constantly with you. In the end it reaches a point where you make up your mind once and for all to get that thorn out - because it hurts!

Now our effort in the practice must be like this. Wherever it hurts, wherever there's friction, we must investigate. Confront the problem, head on. Take that thorn out of your foot, just pull it out. Wherever your mind gets stuck you must take note. As you look into it you will know it, see it and experience it as it is.

Our practice must be unwavering and persistent. They call it *viriyārambha* - putting forth constant effort. Whenever an unpleasant feeling arises in your foot, for example, you must remind yourself to get that thorn out, and not to give up your resolve. Likewise, when suffering arises in our hearts we must have the unwavering resolve to try to uproot the defilements, to give them up. This resolve is constantly there, unremitting. Eventually the defilements will fall into our hands where we can finish them off.

So in regard to happiness and suffering, what are we to do? If we didn't have these things what could we use as a cause to precipitate wisdom? If there is no cause how will the effect arise? All dhammas arise because of causes. When the result ceases it's because the cause has ceased. This is how it is, but most of us don't really understand. People only want to run away from suffering. This sort of knowledge is short of the mark. Actually we need to know this very world that we are living in, we don't have to run away anywhere. You should have the attitude that to stay is fine, and to go is fine. Think about this carefully.

Where do happiness and suffering lie? If we don't hold fast to, cling to or fix on to anything, as if it weren't there - suffering doesn't arise. Suffering arises from existence (*bhava*). If there is existence, then there is birth. *Upādāna* - clinging or attachment - this is the pre-requisite which creates suffering. Wherever suffering arises look into it. Don't look too far away, look right into the present moment. Look at your own mind and body. When suffering arises ask, why is there suffering? Look right now. When happiness arises ask, what is the cause of that happiness? Look right there.

Wherever these things arise be aware. Both happiness and suffering arise from clinging.

The cultivators of old saw their minds in this way. There is only arising and ceasing. There is no abiding entity. They contemplated from all angles and saw that there was nothing much to this mind, they saw nothing is stable. There is only arising and ceasing, ceasing and arising, nothing is of any lasting substance. While walking or sitting they saw things in this way. Wherever they looked there was only suffering, that's all. It's just like a big iron ball which has just been blasted in a furnace. It's hot all over. If you touch the top it's hot, touch the sides and they're hot - it's hot all over. There isn't any place on it which is cool.

Now if we don't consider these things we won't know anything about them. We must see clearly. Don't get 'born' into things, don't fall into birth. Know the workings of birth. Such thoughts as, 'Oh, I can't stand that person, he does everything wrong,' will no longer arise. Or, 'I really like so and so.' These things don't arise. There remains merely the conventional worldly standards of like and dislike, but one's speech is one way, one's mind another. They are separate things. We must use the conventions of the world to communicate with each other, but inwardly we must be empty.

The mind is above those things. We must bring the mind to transcendence like this. This is the abiding of the Noble Ones. We must all aim for this and practise accordingly. Don't get caught up in doubts.

Before I started to practise, I thought to myself, 'The Buddhist religion is here, available for all, and yet why do only some people practise while others don't? Or if they do practise, they do so only for a short while and then give up. Or again those who don't give it up still don't knuckle down and do the practice. Why is this?' So I resolved to myself, 'Okay, I'll give up this body and mind for this lifetime and try to follow the teaching of the Buddha down to the last detail. I'll reach understanding in this very lifetime, because if I don't I'll still be sunk in suffering. I'll let go of everything else and make a determined effort, no matter how much difficulty or suffering I have to endure, I'll persevere. If I don't do it I'll just keep on doubting.'

Thinking like this I got down to practice. No matter how much happiness, suffering or difficulty I had to endure I would do it. I looked on my whole life as if it was only one day and a night. I gave it up. 'I'll follow the teaching of the Buddha, I'll follow the Dhamma to understanding - why is this world of delusion so wretched?' I wanted to know, I wanted to master the teaching, so I turned to the practice of Dhamma.

How much of the worldly life do we monastics renounce? If we have gone forth for good then it means we renounce it all, there's nothing we don't renounce. All the things of the world that people enjoy are cast off: sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings - we throw them all away. And yet we experience them. So Dhamma practitioners must be content with little and remain detached. Whether in regard to speech, eating or whatever, we must be easily satisfied: eat simply, sleep simply, live simply. Just like they say, 'an ordinary person' is one who lives simply. The more you practise the more you will be able to take satisfaction in your practice. You will see into your own heart.

The Dhamma is *paccattam*, you must know it for yourself. To know for yourself means to practise for yourself. You can depend on a teacher only fifty percent of the way. Even the teaching I have given you today is completely useless in itself, even if it is worth hearing. But if you were to believe it all just because I said so, you wouldn't be using the teaching properly.

If you believed me completely you'd be foolish. To hear the teaching, see its benefit, put it into practice for yourself, see it within yourself, do it yourself - this is much more useful. You will then know the taste of Dhamma for yourself.

This is why the Buddha didn't talk about the fruits of the practice in much detail, because it's something one can't convey in words. It would be like trying to describe different colours to a person blind from birth, 'Oh, it's so white,' or 'It's bright yellow,' for instance. You couldn't convey those colours to them. You could try but it wouldn't serve much purpose.

The Buddha brings it back down to the individual - see clearly for yourself. If you see clearly for yourself you will have clear proof within yourself.

Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining you will be free of doubt. Even if someone were to say, 'Your practice isn't right, it's all wrong,' still you would be unmoved, because you have your own proof.

A practitioner of the Dhamma must be like this wherever he goes. Others can't tell you, you must know for yourself. *Sammā-ditthi* must be there. The practice must be like this for every one of us. To do the real practice like this for even one month out of five or ten Rains Retreats would be rare.

Our sense organs must be constantly working. Know content and discontent, be aware of like and dislike. Know appearance and know transcendence. The apparent and the transcendent must be realized simultaneously. Good and evil must be seen as coexistent, arising together. This is the fruit of the Dhamma practice.

So whatever is useful to yourself and to others, whatever practice benefits both yourself and others, is called 'following the Buddha'. I've talked about this often. The things which should be done, people seem to neglect. For example, the work in the monastery, the standards of practice and so on. I've talked about them often and yet people don't seem to put their hearts into it. Some don't know, some are lazy and can't be bothered, some are simply scattered and confused.

But that's a cause for wisdom to arise. If we go to places where none of these things arise, what would we see? Take food, for instance. If food doesn't have any taste, is it delicious? If a person is deaf, will he hear anything? If you don't perceive anything, will you have anything to contemplate? If there are no problems, will there be anything to solve? Think of the practice in this way.

Once I went to live up north. At that time I was living with many monks, all of them elderly but newly ordained, with only two or three Rains Retreats. At the time I had ten Rains. Living with those old monks I decided to perform the various duties - receiving their bowls, washing their robes, emptying their spittoons and so on. I didn't think in terms of doing it for any particular individual, I simply maintained my practice. If others didn't do the duties I'd do them myself. I saw it as a good opportunity for me to gain merit. It made me feel good and gave me a sense of satisfaction.

On the *uposatha* days I knew the required duties. I'd go and clean out the *uposatha* hall and set out water for washing and drinking. The others didn't know anything about the duties, they just watched. I didn't criticize them, because they didn't know. I did the duties myself, and having done them I felt pleased with myself, I had inspiration and a lot of energy in my practice.

Whenever I could do something in the monastery, whether in my own *kuṭī* or in others', if it was dirty, I'd clean up. I didn't do it for anyone in particular, I didn't do it to impress anyone, I simply did it to maintain a good practice. Cleaning a *kuṭī* or dwelling place is just like cleaning rubbish out of your own mind.

Now this is something all of you should bear in mind. You don't have to worry about harmony, it will automatically be there. Live together with Dhamma, with peace and restraint, train your mind to be like this and no problems will arise. If there is heavy work to be done, everybody helps out and in no time the work is done, it gets taken care of quite easily. That's the best way.

I have come across some other types, though - I used it as an opportunity to grow. For instance, living in a big monastery, the monks and novices may agree among themselves to wash robes on a certain day. I'd go and boil up the jackfruit wood.⁴ Now there'd be some monks who'd wait for someone else to boil up the jackfruit wood and then come along and wash their robes, take them back to their *kuṭīs*, hang them out and then take a nap. They didn't have to set up the fire, didn't have to clean up afterwards. They thought they were on a good thing, that they were being clever. This is the height of stupidity. These people are just increasing their own stupidity because they don't do anything, they leave all the work up to others. They wait till everything is ready then come along and make use of it, it's easy for them. This is just adding to one's foolishness. Those actions serve no useful purpose whatsoever to them.

Some people think foolishly like this. They shirk the required duties and think that this is being clever, but it is actually very foolish. If we have that sort of attitude we won't last.

Therefore, whether speaking, eating or doing anything whatsoever, reflect on yourself. You may want to live comfortably, eat comfortably, sleep comfortably and so on, but you can't. What have we come here for? If we regularly reflect on this we will be heedful, we won't forget, we will be constantly alert. Being alert like this you will put forth effort in all postures. If you don't put forth effort, things go quite differently. Sitting, you sit like you're in the town, walking, you walk like you're in the town. You just want to go and play around in the town with the laypeople.

If there is no effort in the practice the mind will tend in that direction. You don't oppose and resist your mind, you just allow it to waft along the wind of your moods. This is called following one's moods. Like a child, if he indulges all his wants will he be a good child? If the parents indulge all their child's wishes is that good? Even if they do indulge him somewhat at first, by the time he can speak they may start to occasionally spank him because they're afraid he'll end up stupid. The training of our mind must be like this. You have to know yourself and know how to train yourself. If you don't know how to train your own mind, waiting around expecting someone else to train it for you, you'll end up in trouble.

So don't think that you can't practise in this place. Practice has no limits. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, you can always practise. Even while sweeping the monastery grounds or seeing a beam of sunlight, you can realize the Dhamma. But you must have sati at hand. Why so? Because you can realize the Dhamma at any time at all, in any place, if you ardently meditate.

Don't be heedless. Be watchful, be alert. While walking on almsround all sorts of feelings arise, and it's all good Dhamma. When you get back to the monastery and are eating your food there's plenty of good Dhamma for you to look into. If you have constant effort, all these things will be objects for contemplation. There will be wisdom, you will see the Dhamma. This is called *dhamma-vicaya*, reflecting on Dhamma. It's one of the enlightenment factors. If there is sati, recollection, there will be *dhamma-vicaya* as a result. These are factors of enlightenment. If we have recollection then we won't simply take it easy, there will also be inquiry into Dhamma. These things become factors for realizing the Dhamma.

If we have reached this stage, our practice will know neither day or night, it will continue on regardless of the time of day. There will be nothing to taint the practice, or if there is we will immediately know it. Let there be *dhamma-vicaya* within our minds constantly, looking into Dhamma. If our practice has entered the flow, the mind will tend to be like this. It won't go off after other things. 'I think I'll go for a trip over there, or perhaps this other place, over in that province should be interesting.' That's the way of the world. Not long and the practice will die.

So resolve yourselves. It's not just by sitting with your eyes closed that you develop wisdom. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are constantly with us, so be constantly alert. Study constantly. Seeing trees or animals can all be occasions for study. Bring it all inwards. See clearly within your own heart. If some sensation makes an impact on the heart, witness it clearly for yourself, don't simply disregard it.

Take a simple comparison: baking bricks. Have you ever seen a brick-baking oven? They build the fire up about two or three feet in front of the oven, then the smoke all gets drawn into it. Looking at this illustration you can more clearly understand the practice. To make a brick kiln work the right way you have to make the fire so that all the smoke gets drawn inside, none is left over. All the heat goes into the oven, and the job gets done quickly.

We Dhamma practitioners should experience things in this way. All our feelings should be drawn inwards to be turned into right view. The sights we see, the sounds we hear, the odours we smell, the flavours we taste, and so on, the mind draws them all inward to be converted into right view. Those feelings thus become experiences which give rise to wisdom.

1: The word dhamma can be used in different ways. In this talk, the Venerable Ajahn refers to Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha; to dhammas, 'things'; and to Dhamma, the experience of transcendent 'Truth'.

2: At that time Sāriputta had his first insight into the Dhamma, attaining *sotāpatti*, or 'stream-entry'.

3: That is, *nibbidā*, disinterest in the lures of the sensual world.

4: The heartwood from the jackfruit tree is boiled down and the resulting colour used both to dye and to wash the robes of the forest monks.

Not Sure

There was once a Western monk, a student of mine. Whenever he saw Thai monks and novices disrobing he would say, 'Oh, what a shame! Why do they do that? Why do so many of the Thai monks and novices disrobe?' He was shocked. He would get saddened at the disrobing of the Thai monks and novices, because he had only just come into contact with Buddhism. He was inspired, he was resolute. Going forth as a monk was the only thing to do, he thought he'd never disrobe. Whoever disrobed was a fool. He'd see the Thais taking on the robes at the beginning of the Rains Retreat as monks and novices and then disrobing at the end of it. He would say 'Oh, how sad! I feel so sorry for those Thai monks and novices. How could they do such a thing?'

Well, as time went by some of the Western monks began to disrobe, so he came to see it as something not so important after all. At first, when he had just begun to practise, he was excited about it. He thought that it was a really important thing, to become a monk. He thought it would be easy.

When people are inspired it all seems to be so right and good. There's nothing there to gauge their feelings by, so they go ahead and decide for themselves. But they don't really know what practice is. Those who do know will have a thoroughly firm foundation within their hearts - but even so they don't need to advertise it.

As for myself, when I was first ordained I didn't actually do much practice, but I had a lot of faith. I don't know why, maybe it was there from birth. The monks and novices who went forth together with me, all disrobed at the end of the Rains. I thought to myself, 'Eh? What is it with these people?' However, I didn't dare say anything to them because I wasn't yet sure of my own feelings, I was too stirred up. But within me I felt that they were all foolish. 'It's difficult to go forth, easy to disrobe. These guys don't have much merit, they think that the way of the world is more useful than the way of Dhamma.' I thought like this but I didn't say anything, I just watched my own mind.

I'd see the monks who'd gone forth with me disrobing one after the other. Sometimes they'd dress up and come back to the monastery to show off. I'd see them and think they were crazy, but they thought they looked snappy. When you disrobe you have to do this and that. I'd think to myself that that way of thinking was wrong. I wouldn't say it, though, because I myself was still an uncertain quantity. I still wasn't sure how long my faith would last.

When my friends had all disrobed I dropped all concern, there was nobody left to concern myself with. I picked up the *Pātimokkha* and got stuck into learning that. There was nobody left to distract me and waste my time, so I put my heart into the practice. Still I didn't say anything because I felt that to practise all one's life, maybe seventy, eighty or even ninety years, and to keep up a persistent effort, without slackening up or losing one's resolve, seemed like an extremely difficult thing to do.

Those who went forth would go forth, those who disrobed would disrobe. I'd just watch it all. I didn't concern myself whether they stayed or went. I'd watch my friends leave, but the feeling I had within me was that these people didn't see clearly. That Western monk probably thought like that. He'd see people become monks for only one Rains Retreat, and get upset.

Later on he reached a stage we call bored; bored with the Holy Life. He let go of the practice and eventually disrobed.

'Why are you disrobing? Before, when you saw the Thai monks disrobing you'd say, "Oh, what a shame! How sad, how pitiful." Now, when you yourself want to disrobe, why don't you feel sorry?'

He didn't answer. He just grinned sheepishly.

When it comes to the training of the mind it isn't easy to find a good standard if you haven't yet developed a 'witness' within yourself. In most external matters we can rely on others for feedback, there are standards and precedents. But when it comes to using the Dhamma as a standard, do we have the Dhamma yet? Are we thinking rightly or not? And even if it's right, do we know how to let go of rightness or are we still clinging to it?

You must contemplate until you reach the point where you let go, this is the important thing, until you reach the point where there isn't anything left, where there is neither good nor bad. You throw it off. This means you throw out everything. If it's all gone, then there's no remainder; if there's some remainder, then it's not all gone.

So in regard to this training of the mind, sometimes we may say it's easy. It's easy to say, but it's hard to do, very hard. It's hard in that it doesn't conform to our desires. Sometimes it seems almost as if the angels are helping us out. Everything goes right, whatever we think or say seems to be just right. Then we go and attach to that rightness and before long we go wrong and it all turns bad. This is where it's difficult. We don't have a standard to gauge things by.

People who have a lot of faith, who are endowed with confidence and belief but are lacking in wisdom, may be very good at samādhi but they may not have much insight. They see only one side of everything, and simply follow that. They don't reflect. This is blind faith. In Buddhism we call this *saddhā-adhimokkha*, blind faith. They have faith all right but it's not born of wisdom. But they don't see this at the time; they believe they have wisdom, so they don't see where they are wrong.

Therefore, they teach about the five powers (*balā*): *saddhā*, *virīya*, *sati*, *samādhi*, *paññā*. *Saddhā* is conviction; *virīya* is diligent effort; *sati* is recollection; *samādhi* is fixedness of mind; *paññā* is all-embracing knowledge. Don't say that *paññā* is simply knowledge - *paññā* is all-embracing, consummate knowledge.

The wise have given these five steps to us so that we can link them, firstly as an object of study, then as a gauge to use for measuring the state of our practice as it is. For example, *saddhā*, conviction. Do we have conviction, have we developed it yet? *Virīya*: do we have diligent effort or not? Is our effort right or is it wrong? We must consider this. Everybody has some sort of effort, but does our effort contain wisdom or not?

Sati is the same. Even a cat has *sati*. When it sees a mouse, *sati* is there. The cat's eyes stare fixedly at the mouse. This is the *sati* of a cat. Everybody has *sati*, animals have it, delinquents have it, sages have it.

Samādhi, fixedness of mind - everybody has this as well. A cat has it when its mind is fixed on grabbing the mouse and eating it. It has fixed intent. That sati of the cat's is sati of a sort; samādhi, fixed intent on what it is doing, is also there. Paññā, knowledge, like that of human beings. It knows as an animal knows, it has enough knowledge to catch mice for food.

These five things are called powers. Have these five powers arisen from *sammā-ditthi*, or not? *Saddhā*, *virīya*, sati, samādhi, paññā - have these arisen from right view? What is right view? What is our standard for gauging right view? We must clearly understand this.

Right view is the understanding that all these things are uncertain. Therefore, the Buddha and all the Noble Ones don't hold fast to them. They hold, but not fast. They don't let that holding become an identity. The holding which doesn't lead to becoming is that which isn't tainted with desire. Without seeking to become this or that there is simply the practice itself. When you hold on to a particular thing, is there enjoyment, or is there displeasure? If there is pleasure, do you hold on to that pleasure? If there is dislike, do you hold on to that dislike?

Some views can be used as principles for gauging our practice more accurately: for instance knowing views such as one is better than others, or equal to others, or more foolish than others - knowing them all as wrong views. We may feel these things but we also know them with wisdom, that they simply arise and cease. Seeing that we are better than others is not right; seeing that we are equal to others is not right; seeing that we are inferior to others is not right.

The right view is the one that cuts through all of this. So where do we go to? If we think we are better than others, pride arises. It's there but we don't see it. If we think we are equal to others, we fail to show respect and humility at the proper times. If we think we are inferior to others we get depressed, thinking we are inferior, born under a bad sign and so on. We are still clinging to the five khandhas, it's all simply becoming and birth.

This is one standard for gauging ourselves by. Another one is: if we encounter a pleasant experience we feel happy, if we encounter a bad experience we are unhappy. Are we able to look at both the things we like

and the things we dislike as having equal value? Measure yourself against this standard. In our everyday lives, in the various experiences we encounter, if we hear something which we like, does our mood change? If we encounter an experience which isn't to our liking, does our mood change? Or is the mind unmoved? Looking right here we have our gauge.

Just know yourself, this is your witness. Don't make decisions on the strength of your desires. Desires can puff us up into thinking we are something which we're not. We must be very circumspect.

There are so many angles and aspects to consider, but the right way is not to follow your desires, but the Truth. We should know both the good and the bad, and when we know them to let go of them. If we don't let go we are still there, we still 'exist', we still 'have'. If we still 'are' then there is a remainder, becoming and birth are in store.

Therefore the Buddha said to judge only yourself; don't judge others, no matter how good or evil they may be. The Buddha merely points out the way, saying 'The truth is like this.' Now, is our mind like that or not?

For instance, suppose a monk took some things belonging to another monk. Then that other monk accused him, 'You stole my things.' 'I didn't steal them, I only took them.' So we ask a third monk to adjudicate. How should he decide? He would have to ask the offending monk to appear before the convened Sangha. 'Yes, I took it, but I didn't steal it.' Or in regard to other rules, such as *pārājika* or *sanghādisesa* offences: 'Yes, I did it, but I didn't have intention.' How can you believe that? It's tricky. If you can't believe it, all you can do is leave the onus with the doer, it rests on him.

But you should know that we can't hide the things that arise in our minds. You can't cover them up, either the wrongs or the good actions. Whether actions are good or evil, you can't dismiss them simply by ignoring them, because these things tend to reveal themselves. They conceal themselves, they reveal themselves, they exist in and of themselves. They are all automatic. This is how things work.

Don't try to guess at or speculate about these things. As long as there is still *avijjā* they are not finished with. The Chief Privy Councillor once asked

me, ‘Luang Por, is the mind of an *anāgāmī* pure yet?’

‘It’s partly pure.’

‘Eh? An *anāgāmī* has given up sensual desire, how is his mind not yet pure?’

‘He may have let go of sensual desire, but there is still something remaining, isn’t there? There is still *avijjā*. If there is still something left then there is still something left. It’s like the bhikkhus’ alms bowls. There are, a large-sized large bowl, a medium-sized large bowl, a small-sized large bowl; then a large-sized medium bowl, a medium-sized medium bowl, a small-sized medium bowl; then there are a large-sized small bowl, a medium-sized small bowl and a small-sized small bowl. No matter how small it is there is still a bowl there, right? That’s how it is with this - *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmī*, *anāgāmī*. They have all given up certain defilements, but only to their respective levels. Whatever still remains, those Noble Ones don’t see. If they could they would all be arahants. They still can’t see all. *Avijjā* is that which doesn’t see. If the mind of the *anāgāmī* was completely straightened out he wouldn’t be an *anāgāmī*, he would be fully accomplished. But there is still something remaining.’

‘Is his mind purified?’

‘Well, it is somewhat, but not 100 percent.’

How else could I answer? He said that later on he would come and question me about it further. He can look into it, the standard is there.

Don’t be careless. Be alert. The Lord Buddha exhorted us to be alert. In regards to this training of the heart, I’ve had my moments of temptation too, you know. I’ve often been tempted to try many things but they’ve always seemed like they’re going astray of the path. It’s really just a sort of swaggering in one’s mind, a sort of conceit. *Ditthi* (views) and *māna* (pride) are there. It’s hard enough just to be aware of these two things.

There was once a man who wanted to become a monk here. He carried in his robes, determined to become a monk in memory of his late mother. He

came into the monastery, laid down his robes, and without so much as paying respects to the monks, started walking meditation right in front of the main hall back and forth, back and forth, like he was really going to show his stuff.

I thought, ‘Oh, so there are people around like this, too!’ This is called *saddhāadhimokkha* - blind faith. He must have determined to get enlightened before sundown or something, he thought it would be so easy. He didn’t look at anybody else, he just put his head down and walked as if his life depended on it. I just let him carry on, but I thought, ‘Oh, man, you think it’s that easy or something?’ In the end I don’t know how long he stayed, I don’t even think he ordained.

As soon as the mind thinks of something we send it out, send it out every time. We don’t realize that it’s simply the habitual proliferation of the mind. It disguises itself as wisdom and waffles off into minute detail. This mental proliferation seems very clever; if we didn’t know, we would mistake it for wisdom. But when it comes to the crunch it’s not the real thing. When suffering arises where is that so-called wisdom then? Is it of any use? It’s only proliferation after all.

So stay with the Buddha. As I’ve said before many times, in our practice we must turn inwards and find the Buddha. Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is still alive to this very day, go in and find him. Where is he? At *aniccam*, go in and find him there, go and bow to him: *aniccam*, uncertainty. You can stop right there for starters.

If the mind tries to tell you, ‘I’m a *sotāpanna* now,’ go and bow to the *sotāpanna*. He’ll tell you himself, ‘It’s all uncertain.’ If you meet a *sakadāgāmī* go and pay respects to him. When he sees you he’ll simply say, ‘Not a sure thing!’ If there is an *anāgāmī* go and bow to him. He’ll tell you only one thing - ‘Uncertain.’ If you even meet an arahant, go and bow to him, he’ll tell you even more firmly, ‘It’s all even more uncertain!’ You’ll hear the words of the Noble Ones: ‘everything is uncertain, don’t cling to anything.’

Don’t just look at the Buddha like a simpleton. Don’t cling to things, holding fast to them without letting go. Look at things as functions of the

apparent and then send them on to transcendence. That's how you must be. There must be appearance and there must be transcendence.

So I say, 'Go to the Buddha.' Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is the Dhamma. All the teachings in this world can be contained in this one teaching: *aniccam*. Think about it. I've searched for over forty years as a monk and this is all I could find. That and patient endurance. This is how to approach the Buddha's teaching - *aniccam*: it's all uncertain.

No matter how sure the mind wants to be, just tell it, 'Not sure!' Whenever the mind wants to grab on to something as a sure thing, just say, 'It's not sure, it's transient.' Just ram it down with this. Using the Dhamma of the Buddha it all comes down to this. It's not that it's merely a momentary phenomenon. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, you see everything in that way. Whether liking arises or dislike arises you see it all in the same way. This is getting close to the Buddha, close to the Dhamma.

Now I feel that this is a more valuable way to practise. All my practice from the early days up to the present time has been like this. I didn't actually rely on the scriptures, but then I didn't disregard them either. I didn't rely on a teacher but then I didn't exactly 'go it alone'. My practice was all 'neither this nor that'.

Frankly it's a matter of 'finishing off'; that is, practising to the finish by taking up the practice and then seeing it to completion, seeing the apparent and also the transcendent.

I've already spoken of this, but some of you may be interested to hear it again: if you practise consistently and consider things thoroughly, you will eventually reach this point. At first you hurry to go forward, hurry to come back, and hurry to stop. You continue to practise like this until you reach the point where it seems that going forward is not it, coming back is not it, and stopping is not it either! It's finished. This is the finish. Don't expect anything more than this, it finishes right here. *Khīnāsavo* - one who is completed. He doesn't go forward, doesn't retreat and doesn't stop. There's no stopping, no going forward and no coming back. It's finished. Consider this, realize it clearly in your own mind. Right there you will find that there is really nothing at all.

Whether this is old or new to you depends on you, on your wisdom and discernment. One who has no wisdom or discernment won't be able to figure it out. Just take a look at trees, like mango or jackfruit trees. If they grow up in a clump, one tree may get bigger first and then the others will bend away, growing outwards from that bigger one. Why does this happen? Who tells them to do that? This is nature. Nature contains both the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. It can either incline to the right or incline to the wrong. If we plant any kind of trees at all close together, the trees which mature later will branch away from the bigger tree. How does this happen? Who determines it thus? This is nature, or Dhamma.

Likewise, *tanhā* leads us to suffering. Now, if we contemplate it, it will lead us out of desire, we will outgrow *tanhā*. By investigating *tanhā* we will shake it up, making it gradually lighter and lighter until it's all gone. The same as the trees: does anybody order them to grow the way they do? They can't talk or move around and yet they know how to grow away from obstacles. Wherever it's cramped and crowded and growing is difficult, they bend outwards.

Right here is Dhamma, we don't have to look at a whole lot. One who is astute will see the Dhamma in this. Trees by nature don't know anything, they act on natural laws, yet they do know enough to grow away from danger, to incline towards a suitable place.

Reflective people are like this. We go forth into the homeless life because we want to transcend suffering. What is it that makes us suffer? If we follow the trail inwards we will find out. That which we like and that which we don't like are suffering. If they are suffering then don't go so close to them. Do you want to fall in love with conditions or hate them? They're all uncertain. When we incline towards the Buddha all this comes to an end. Don't forget this. And patient endurance. Just these two are enough. If you have this sort of understanding this is very good.

Actually in my own practice I didn't have a teacher to give as much teachings as all of you get from me. I didn't have many teachers. I ordained in an ordinary village temple and lived in village temples for quite a few years. In my mind I conceived the desire to practise. I wanted to be proficient, I wanted to train. There wasn't anybody giving any teaching in

those monasteries but the inspiration to practise arose. I travelled and I looked around. I had ears so I listened, I had eyes so I looked. Whatever I heard people say, I'd tell myself, 'not sure.' Whatever I saw, I told myself, 'not sure,' or when the tongue contacted sweet, sour, salty, pleasant or unpleasant flavours, or feelings of comfort or pain arose in the body, I'd tell myself, 'This is not a sure thing!' And so I lived with Dhamma.

In truth it's all uncertain, but our desires want things to be certain. What can we do? We must be patient. The most important thing is *khanti*, patient endurance. Don't throw out the Buddha, what I call 'uncertainty' - don't throw that away.

Sometimes I'd go to see old religious sites with ancient monastic buildings, designed by architects, built by craftsmen. In some places they would be cracked. Maybe one of my friends would remark, 'Such a shame, isn't it? It's cracked.' I'd answer, 'If that weren't the case then there'd be no such thing as the Buddha, there'd be no Dhamma. It's cracked like this because it's perfectly in line with the Buddha's teaching.' Really down inside I was also sad to see those buildings cracked but I'd throw off my sentimentality and try to say something which would be of use to my friends, and to myself. Even though I also felt that it was a pity, still I tended towards the Dhamma.

'If it wasn't cracked like that there wouldn't be any Buddha!'

I'd say it really heavy for the benefit of my friends, perhaps they weren't listening, but still I was listening.

This is a way of considering things which is very, very useful. For instance, say someone were to rush in and say, 'Luang Por! Do you know what so and so just said about you?' or, 'He said such and such about you.' Maybe you even start to rage. As soon as you hear words of criticism you start getting these moods every step of the way. As soon as we hear words like this we may start getting ready to retaliate, but on looking into the truth of the matter we may find that no, they had said something else after all.

And so it's another case of 'uncertainty'. So why should we rush in and believe things? Why should we put our trust so much in what others say?

Whatever we hear we should take note of, be patient, look into the matter carefully and stay straight.

It's not that we write whatever pops into our heads as some sort of truth. Any speech which ignores uncertainty is not the speech of a sage. Remember this. Whatever we see or hear, be it pleasant or sorrowful, just say 'this is not sure!' Say it heavy to yourself, hold it all down with this. Don't build those things up into major issues, just keep them all down to this one. This point is the important one. This is the point where defilements die. Practitioners shouldn't dismiss it.

If you disregard this point you can expect only suffering, expect only mistakes. If you don't make this a foundation for your practice you are going to go wrong; but then you will come right again later on, because this principle is a really good one.

Actually the real Dhamma, the gist of what I have been saying today, isn't so mysterious. Whatever you experience is simply form, simply feeling, simply perception, simply volition, and simply consciousness. There are only these basic qualities; where is there any certainty within them?

If we come to understand the true nature of things like this, lust, infatuation and attachment fade away. Why do they fade away? Because we understand, we know. We shift from ignorance to understanding. Understanding is born from ignorance, knowing is born from unknowing, purity is born from defilement. It works like this.

Not discarding *aniccam*, the Buddha - this is what it means to say that the Buddha is still alive. To say that the Buddha has passed into Nibbāna is not necessarily true. In a more profound sense the Buddha is still alive. It's much like how we define the word 'bhikkhu'. If we define it as 'one who asks',¹ the meaning is very broad. We can define it this way, but to use this definition too much is not so good - we don't know when to stop asking! If we were to define this word in a more profound way we would say: 'Bhikkhu - one who sees the danger of samsāra.'

Isn't this more profound? It doesn't go in the same direction as the previous definition, it runs much deeper. The practice of Dhamma is like this. If you

don't fully understand it, it becomes something else again. When it is fully understood, then it becomes priceless, it becomes a source of peace.

When we have sati, we are close to the Dhamma. If we have sati we will see *aniccam*, the transience of all things. We will see the Buddha and transcend the suffering of samsāra, if not now, then sometime in the future.

If we throw away the attribute of the Noble Ones, the Buddha or the Dhamma, our practice will become barren and fruitless. We must maintain our practice constantly, whether we are working or sitting or simply lying down. When the eye sees form, the ear hears sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour or the body experiences sensation - in all things, don't throw away the Buddha, don't stray from the Buddha.

This is how to be one who has come close to the Buddha, to be one who reveres the Buddha constantly. We have ceremonies for revering the Buddha, such as chanting in the morning, *Araham Sammā Sambuddho Bhagavā* This is one way of revering the Buddha but it's not revering the Buddha in such a profound way as I've described here. It's the same with the word 'bhikkhu'. If we define it as 'one who asks' then they keep on asking because it's defined like that. To define it in the best way we should say 'Bhikkhu - one who sees the danger of samsāra.'

Revering the Buddha is the same. Revering the Buddha by merely reciting Pāli phrases as a ceremony in the mornings and evenings is comparable to defining the word 'bhikkhu' as 'one who asks'. If we incline towards *annicam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*² whenever the eye sees form, the ear hears sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour, the body experiences sensation or the mind cognizes mental impressions; at all times, this is comparable to defining the word 'bhikkhu' as 'one who sees the danger of samsāra.' It's so much more profound, cuts through so many things. If we understand this teaching we will grow in wisdom and understanding.

This is called *patipadā*. Develop this attitude in the practice and you will be on the right path. If you think and reflect in this way, even though you may be far from your teacher you will still be close to him. If you live close to the teacher physically but your mind has not yet met him you will spend

your time either looking for his faults or adulating him. If he does something which suits you, you say he's so good - and that's as far as your practice goes. You won't achieve anything by wasting your time looking at someone else. But if you understand this teaching you can become a Noble One in the present moment.

That's why this year³ I've distanced myself from my disciples, both old and new, and not given much teaching: so that you can all look into things for yourselves as much as possible. For the newer monks I've already laid down the schedule and rules of the monastery, such as: 'Don't talk too much.' Don't transgress the existing standards, the path to realization, fruition and Nibbāna. Anyone who transgresses these standards is not a real practitioner, not one who has a pure intention to practise. What can such a person ever hope to see? Even if he slept near me every day he wouldn't see me. Even if he slept near the Buddha he wouldn't see the Buddha, if he didn't practise.

So knowing the Dhamma or seeing the Dhamma depends on practice. Have confidence, purify your own heart. If all the monks in this monastery put awareness into their respective minds we wouldn't have to reprimand or praise anybody. We wouldn't have to be suspicious of or favour anybody. If anger or dislike arise just leave them at the mind, but see them clearly!

Keep on looking at those things. As long as there is still something there it means we still have to dig and grind away right there. Some say, 'I can't cut it, I can't do it' - if we start saying things like this there will only be a bunch of thugs here, because nobody cuts at their own defilements.

You must try. If you can't yet cut it, dig in deeper. Dig at the defilements, uproot them. Dig them out even if they seem hard and fast. The Dhamma is not something to be reached by following your desires. Your mind may be one way, the truth another. You must watch up front and keep a lookout behind as well. That's why I say, 'It's all uncertain, all transient.'

This truth of uncertainty, this short and simple truth, is at the same time so profound and faultless that people tend to ignore it. They tend to see things differently. Don't cling to goodness, don't cling to badness. These are attributes of the world. We are practising to be free of the world, so bring

these things to an end. The Buddha taught to lay them down, to give them up, because they only cause suffering.

1: That is, one who lives dependent on the generosity of others.

2: Transience, imperfection, and ownerlessness.

3: 2522 of the Buddhist Era, or 1979 CE.

Wholehearted Training

In every home and in every community, whether we live in the city, the countryside, the forests or the mountains, we are the same in experiencing happiness and suffering. So many of us lack a place of refuge, a field or garden where we can cultivate positive qualities of heart. We experience this spiritual poverty because we don't really have commitment; we don't have clear understanding of what this life is all about and what we ought to be doing. From childhood and youth until adulthood, we only learn to seek enjoyment and take delight in the things of the senses. We never think that danger will threaten us as we go about our lives, making a family and so on.

If we don't have land to till and a home to live in, we are without an external refuge and our lives are filled with difficulty and distress. Beyond that, there is the inner lack of not having *sīla* and Dhamma in our lives, of not going to hear teachings and practise Dhamma. As a result there is little wisdom in our lives and everything regresses and degenerates. The Buddha, our supreme teacher, had *mettā* for beings. He led sons and daughters of good families to be ordained; to practise and realize the truth, to establish and spread the Dhamma to show people how to live in happiness in their daily lives. He taught the proper ways to earn a livelihood, to be moderate and thrifty in managing finances, to act without carelessness in all affairs.

But when we are lacking in both ways, externally in the material supports for life and internally in spiritual supports as well, then as time goes by and the number of people grows, the delusion and poverty and difficulty become causes for us to grow further and further estranged from Dhamma. We aren't interested in seeking the Dhamma because of our difficult circumstances. Even if there is a monastery nearby, we don't feel much like going to listen to teachings because we are obsessed with our poverty and troubles and the difficulty of merely supporting our lives. But the Lord Buddha taught that no matter how poor we may be, we should not let it impoverish our hearts and starve our wisdom. Even if there are floods inundating our fields, our villages and our homes to the point where it is beyond our capability to do anything, the Buddha taught us not to let it

flood and overcome the heart. Flooding the heart means that we lose sight of and have no knowledge of the Dhamma.

There is the *ogha* of sensuality, the flood of becoming, the flood of views and the flood of ignorance. These four obscure and envelop the hearts of beings. They are worse than water that floods our fields, our villages or our towns. Even if water floods our fields again and again over the years, or fire burns down our homes, we still have our minds. If our minds have *sīla* and Dhamma we can use our wisdom and find ways to earn a living and support ourselves. We can acquire land again and make a new start.

Now, when we have our means of livelihood, our homes and possessions, our minds can be comfortable and upright, and we can have energy of spirit to help and assist each other. If someone is able to share food and clothing and provide shelter to those in need, that is an act of loving-kindness. The way I see it, giving things in a spirit of loving-kindness is far better than selling them to make a profit. Those who have *mettā* aren't wishing for anything for themselves. They only wish for others to live in happiness.

If we really make up our minds and commit ourselves to the right way, I think there shouldn't be any serious difficulty. We won't experience extreme poverty - we won't be like earthworms. We still have a skeleton, eyes and ears, arms and legs. We can eat things like fruit; we don't have to eat dirt like an earthworm. If you complain about poverty, if you become mired in feeling how unfortunate you are, the earthworm will say, 'Don't feel too sorry for yourself. Don't you still have arms and legs and bones? I don't have those things, yet I don't feel poor.' The earthworm will shame us like this.

One day a pig farmer came to see me. He was complaining, 'Oh man, this year it's really too much! The price of feed is up. The price of pork is down. I'm losing my shirt!' I listened to his laments, then I said, 'Don't feel too sorry for yourself, Sir. If you were a pig, then you'd have good reason to feel sorry for yourself. When the price of pork is high, the pigs are slaughtered. When the price of pork is low, the pigs are still slaughtered. The pigs really have something to complain about. The people shouldn't be complaining. Think about this seriously, please.'

He was only worried about the prices he was getting. The pigs have a lot more to worry about, but we don't consider that. We're not being killed, so we can still try to find a way to get by.

I really believe that if you listen to the Dhamma, contemplating it and understanding it, you can make an end of your suffering. You know what is right to do, what you need to do, what you need to use and spend. You can live your life according to sīla and Dhamma, applying wisdom to worldly matters. But most of us are far from that. We don't have morality or Dhamma in our lives, so our lives are filled with discord and friction. There is discord between husbands and wives, discord between children and parents. Children don't listen to their parents, just because of lack of Dhamma in the family. People aren't interested in hearing the Dhamma and learning anything, so instead of developing good sense and skilfulness, they remain mired in ignorance, and the result is lives of suffering.

The Buddha taught Dhamma and set out the way of practice. He wasn't trying to make our lives difficult. He wanted us to improve, to become better and more skilful. It's just that we don't listen. This is pretty bad. It's like a little child who doesn't want to take a bath in the middle of winter, because it's too cold. The child starts to stink so much that the parents can't even sleep at night, so they grab hold of the child and give him a bath. That makes the child mad, and he cries and curses the father and mother.

The parents and the child see the situation differently. For the child it's too uncomfortable to take a bath in the winter. For the parents the child's smell is unbearable. The two views can't be reconciled. The Buddha didn't simply want to leave us as we are. He wanted us to be diligent and work hard in ways that are good and beneficial, and to be enthusiastic about the right path. Instead of being lazy, we have to make efforts. His teaching is not something that will make us foolish or useless. He teaches us how to develop and apply wisdom to whatever we are doing - working, farming, raising a family, managing our finances, being aware of all aspects of these things. If we live in the world, we have to pay attention and know the ways of the world. Otherwise we end up in dire straits.

We live in a place where the Buddha and his Dhamma are familiar to us. But then we get the idea that all we need to do is go hear teachings and then

take it easy, living our lives as before. This is badly mistaken. How would the Buddha have attained any knowledge like that? There would never have been a Buddha.

He taught about the various kinds of wealth: the wealth of human life, the wealth of the heaven realm, the wealth of Nibbāna. Those with Dhamma, even though they are living in the world, are not poor. Even though they may be poor, they don't suffer over it. When we live according to Dhamma, we feel no distress when looking back on what we have done. We are only creating good kamma. If we are creating bad kamma, then the result later on will be misery. If we haven't created bad kamma, we won't suffer such results in the future. But if we don't try to change our habits and put a stop to wrong actions, our difficulties go on and on, both the mental distress and the material troubles. So we need to listen and contemplate, and then we can figure out where the difficulties come from. Haven't you ever carried things to the fields on a pole over your shoulders? When the load is too heavy in front, isn't that uncomfortable to carry? When it's too heavy at the back, isn't that uncomfortable to carry? Which way is balanced and which way is imbalanced? When you're doing it, you can see. Dhamma is like that. There is cause and effect, there is common sense. When the load is balanced, it's easier to carry. We can manage our lives in a balanced way, with an attitude of moderation. Our family relations and our work can be smoother. Even if you aren't rich, you can still have ease of mind; you don't need to suffer over that.

If a family is not hard working, they fall on difficulty and when they see others with more than they have, they start to feel covetousness, jealousy and resentment, and it may lead to stealing. Then the village becomes an unhappy place. It's better to work at benefiting yourselves and your families, for this life and also for future lives. If your material needs are met through your efforts, then your mind is happy and at ease, and that is conducive to listening to Dhamma teachings, to learn about right and wrong, virtue and demerit, and to keep on changing your lives for the better. You can learn to recognize how doing wrong deeds only creates hardship, and you will give up such actions and keep improving. Your way of working will change and your mind will change too. From being someone ignorant you will become someone with knowledge. From being someone

with bad habits you will become someone with a good heart. You can teach what you know to your children and grandchildren. This is creating benefit for the future by doing what is right in the present. But those without wisdom don't do anything of benefit in the present, and they only end up bringing hardship upon themselves. If they become poor, they just think about gambling. Then that finally leads them to becoming thieves.

We haven't died yet, so now is the time to talk about these things. If you don't hear the Dhamma when you are a human being, there won't be any other chance. Do you think animals can be taught the Dhamma? Animal life is a lot harder than our life. Being born as a toad or a frog, a pig or a dog, a cobra or a viper, a squirrel or a rabbit. When people see them, they only think about killing or beating them, catching them or raising them for food.

We have this opportunity as humans. It's much better! We're still alive, so now is the time to look into this and mend our ways. If things are difficult, try to bear with the difficulty for the time being and live in the right way until one day you can do it. Practising the Dhamma is like that.

I'd like to remind you all of the need for having a good mind and living your lives in an ethical way. However you may have been doing things up to now, you should take a close look and see whether that is good or not. If you've been following wrong ways, give them up. Give up wrong livelihood. Earn your living in a good and decent way that doesn't harm others and doesn't harm yourself or society. When you practise right livelihood, then you can live with a comfortable mind.

We monks and nuns rely on the laypeople for all our material needs. And we rely on contemplation so that we are able to explain the Dhamma to the laypeople for their own understanding and benefit, enabling them to improve their lives. You can learn to recognize and remove whatever causes misery and conflict. Make efforts to get along with each other, to have harmony in your relations rather than exploiting or harming each other.

These days things are pretty bad. It's hard for folks to get along. Even when a few people get together for a little meeting, it doesn't work out. They just look at each other's faces three times and they're ready to start killing each

other. Why is it like this? It's only because people have no sīla or Dhamma in their lives.

In the time of our parents it was a lot different. Just the way people looked at each other showed that they felt love and friendship. It's not anything like that now. If a stranger shows up in the village as evening comes everyone will be suspicious: 'What's he doing coming here at night?' Why should we be afraid of a person coming into the village? If a strange dog comes into the village, nobody will give it a second thought. So is a person worse than a dog? 'It's an outsider, a strange person!' How can anyone be an outsider? When someone comes to the village, we ought to be glad: they are in need of shelter, so they can stay with us and we can take care of them and help them out. We will have some company.

But nowadays there's no tradition of hospitality and goodwill anymore. There is only fear and suspicion. In some villages I'd say there aren't any people left - there are only animals. There's suspicion about everything, possessiveness over every bush and every inch of ground, just because there is no morality, no spirituality. When there is no sīla and no Dhamma, then we live lives of unease and paranoia. People go to sleep at night and soon they wake up, worrying about what's going on or about some sound they heard. People in the villages don't get along or trust each other. Parents and children don't trust each other. Husband and wife don't trust each other. What's going on?

All of this is the result of being far from the Dhamma and living lives bereft of Dhamma. So everywhere you look it's like this, and life is hard. If a few people show up in the village and request shelter for the night now, they're told to go and find a hotel.

Everything is business now. In the past no one would think of sending them away like that. The whole village would join in showing hospitality. People would go and invite their neighbours and everyone would bring food and drink to share with the guests. Now that can't be done. After people eat their dinner, they lock the doors.

Wherever we look in the world now, this is the way things are going. It means that the non-spiritual is proliferating and taking over. We are

generally not very happy and we don't trust anyone very much. Some people even kill their parents now. Husbands and wives may cut each other's throats. There is a lot of pain in society and it's simply because of this lack of sīla and Dhamma. So please try to understand this and don't discard the principles of virtue. With virtue and spirituality, human life can be happy. Without them we become like animals.

The Buddha was born in the forest. Born in the forest, he studied Dhamma in the forest. He taught Dhamma in the forest, beginning with the Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma. He entered Nibbāna in the forest.

It's important for those of us who live in the forest to understand the forest. Living in the forest doesn't mean that our minds become wild, like those of forest animals. Our minds can become elevated and spiritually noble. This is what the Buddha said. Living in the city we live among distraction and disturbance. In the forest, there is quiet and tranquillity. We can contemplate things clearly and develop wisdom. So we take this quiet and tranquillity as our friend and helper. because such an environment is conducive to Dhamma practice, we take it as our dwelling place; we take the mountains and caves for our refuge. Observing natural phenomena, wisdom comes about in such places. We learn from and understand trees and everything else, and it brings about a state of joy. The sounds of nature we hear don't disturb us. We hear the birds calling, as they will, and it is actually a great enjoyment. We don't react with any aversion and we aren't thinking harmful thoughts. We aren't speaking harshly or acting aggressively towards anyone or anything. Hearing the sounds of the forest gives delight to the mind; even as we are hearing sounds, the mind is tranquil.

The sounds of people on the other hand are not peaceful. Even when people speak nicely it doesn't bring any deep tranquillity to the mind. The sounds that people like, such as music, are not peaceful. They cause excitement and enjoyment, but there is no peace in them. When people are together and seeking pleasure in this way, it will usually lead to mindless, aggressive and contentious speech; and the condition of disturbance keeps increasing.

The sounds of humans are like this. They do not bring real comfort or happiness, unless words of Dhamma are being spoken. Generally, when people live together in society, they are speaking out of their own interests,

upsetting each other, taking offence and accusing each other, and the only result is confusion and upset. Without Dhamma people naturally tend to be like that. The sounds of humans lead us into delusion. The sounds of music, and the words of songs agitate and confuse the mind. Take a look at this. Consider the pleasurable sensations that come from listening to music. People feel it's really something great, that it's so much fun. They can stand out in the hot sun when they're listening to a music and dance show. They can stand there until they're baked to a crisp, but still they feel they're having fun. But then if someone speaks harshly, criticizing or cursing them, they are unhappy again. This is how it is with the ordinary sounds of humans. But if the sounds of humans become the sounds of Dhamma, if the mind is Dhamma and we are speaking Dhamma, that is something worth listening to, something to think about, something to study and contemplate.

That kind of sound is good, not in any excessive, unbalanced way, but in a way that brings happiness and tranquillity. The ordinary sounds of humans generally only bring confusion, upset and torment. They lead to the arising of lust, anger and confusion, and they incite people to be covetous and greedy, to want to harm and destroy others. But the sounds of the forest aren't like that. If we hear the cry of a bird, it doesn't cause us to have lust or anger.

We should be using our time to create benefit right now, in the present. This was the Buddha's intention: benefit in this life, benefit in future lives. In this life, from childhood we need to apply ourselves to study, to learn at least enough to be able to earn a living so that we can support ourselves and eventually establish a family and not live in poverty. But we generally don't have such a responsible attitude. We only want to seek enjoyment instead. Wherever there's a festival, a play or a concert, we're on our way there, even when it's getting near harvest time. The old folks will drag the grandchildren along to hear the famous singer.

'Where are you off to, Grandmother?'

'I'm taking the kids to hear the concert!'

I don't know if Grandma is taking the kids, or the kids are taking her. It doesn't matter how long or difficult a trip it might be. And they go again

and again. They say they're taking the grandchildren to listen, but the truth is they just want to go themselves. To them, that's what a good time is. If you invite them to come to the monastery to listen to Dhamma and learn about right and wrong, they'll say, 'You go ahead. I want to stay home and rest,' or, 'I've got a bad headache, my back hurts, my knees are sore, I really don't feel well.' But if it's a popular singer or an exciting play, they'll rush to round up the kids and nothing bothers them then.

That's how folks are. They make such efforts yet all they're doing is bringing suffering and difficulty on themselves. They're seeking out darkness, confusion and intoxication on this path of delusion. The Buddha is teaching us to create benefit for ourselves in this life - ultimate benefit, spiritual welfare. We should do it now, in this life. We should be seeking out the knowledge that will help us do that, so that we can live our lives well, making good use of our resources, working with diligence in ways of right livelihood.

After I was ordained, I started practising - studying and then practising - and faith came about. When I first started practising I would think about the lives of beings in the world. It all seemed very heart-rending and pitiful. What was so pitiful about it? All the rich people would soon die and have to leave their big houses behind, leaving the children and grandchildren to fight over the estate. When I saw such things happening, I thought, hm ... this got to me. It made me feel pity towards rich and poor alike, towards the wise and the foolish - everyone living in this world was in the same boat.

Reflecting on our bodies, about the condition of the world and the lives of sentient beings, brings about weariness and dispassion. Thinking about the ordained life, that we have taken up this way of life to dwell and practise in the forest, and developing a constant attitude of disenchantment and dispassion, our practice will progress. Thinking constantly about the factors of practice, rapture comes about. The hairs of the body stand on end. There is a feeling of joy in reflecting on the way we live, in comparing our lives previously with our lives now.

The Dhamma caused such feelings to fill my heart. I didn't know who to talk to about it. I was awake and whatever situations I met, I was awake and alert. It means I had some knowledge of Dhamma. My mind was illumined

and I realized many things. I experienced bliss, a real satisfaction and delight in my way of life.

To put it simply, I felt I was different from others. I was a fully grown, normal man, but I could live in the forest like this. I didn't have any regrets or see any loss in it. When I saw others having families, I thought that was truly regrettable. I looked around and thought, how many people can live like this? I came to have real faith and trust in the path of practice I had chosen and this faith has supported me right up to the present.

In the early days of Wat Pah Pong, I had four or five monks living here with me. We experienced a lot of difficulties. From what I can see now, most of us Buddhists are pretty deficient in our practice. These days, when you walk into a monastery you only see the *kutīs*, the temple hall, the monastery grounds and the monks. But as to what is really the heart of the Buddha's way (*Buddhasāsanā*), you won't find that. I've spoken about this often; it's a cause for sadness.

In the past I had one Dhamma companion who became more interested in study than in practice. He pursued the Pāli and *Abhidhamma* studies, going to live in Bangkok after a while, and last year he finally completed his studies and received a certificate and titles commensurate with his learning. So now he has a brand name. Here, I don't have any brand name. I studied outside the models, contemplating things and practising, thinking and practising. So I didn't get the brand label like the others. In this monastery we had ordinary monks, people who didn't have a lot of learning but who were determined to practise.

I originally came to this place at the invitation of my mother. She was the one who had cared for me and supported me since my birth, but I hadn't repaid her kindness, so I thought this would be the way to do that, coming here to Wat Pah Pong. I had some connection with this place. When I was a child, I remember hearing my father say that Ajahn Sao¹ came to stay here. My father went to hear the Dhamma from him. I was a child, but the memory stayed with me; it stuck in my mind always.

My father was never ordained, but he told me how he went to pay respects to this meditation monk. It was the first time he saw a monk eating out of

his bowl, putting everything together in the one alms bowl - rice, curry, sweet, fish, everything. He'd never seen such a thing, and it made him wonder what kind of monk this might be. He told me about this when I was a little child; that was a meditation monk.

Then he told me about getting Dhamma teachings from Ajahn Sao. It wasn't the ordinary way of teaching; he just spoke what was on his mind. That was the practice monk who came to stay here once. So when I went off to practise myself, I always retained some special feeling about this. When I would think back to my home village, I always thought about this forest. Then, when the time came to return to this area, I came to stay here.

I invited one high-ranking monk from Piboon district to come and stay here too. But he said he couldn't. He came for a while and said, 'This is not my place.' He told this to the local people. Another Ajahn came to stay here for a while and left. But I remained.

In those days this forest was really remote. It was far from everything and living here was very hard. There were mango trees the villagers had planted here and the fruit often ripened and went bad. Yams were growing here too and they would just rot on the ground. But I wouldn't dare to take any of it. The forest was really dense. When you arrived here with your bowl, there wouldn't be any place to put it down. I had to ask the villagers to clear some spaces in the forest. It was a forest that people didn't dare enter - they were very afraid of this place.

Nobody really knew what I was doing here. People didn't understand the life of a meditation monk. I stayed here like this for a couple of years and then the first few monk disciples followed me here.

We lived very simply and quietly in those days. We used to get sick with malaria, all of us nearly dying. But we never went to a hospital. We already had our safe refuge, relying on the spiritual power of the Lord Buddha and his teachings. At night it would be completely silent. Nobody ever came in here. The only sound you heard was the sound of the insects. The kutīs were far apart in the forest.

One night, about nine o'clock, I heard someone walking out of the forest. One monk was extremely ill with fever and was afraid he would die. He didn't want to die alone in the forest. I said, 'That's good. Let's try to find someone who isn't ill to watch the one who is; how can one sick person take care of another?' That was about it. We didn't have medicine.

We had *borapet* (an extremely bitter medicinal vine). We boiled it to drink. When we talked about 'preparing a hot drink' in the afternoon, we didn't have to think much about it; it only meant *borapet*. Everyone had fever and everyone drank *borapet*. We didn't have anything else and we didn't request anything of anyone. If any monks got really sick, I told them, 'Don't be afraid. Don't worry. If you die, I'll cremate you myself. I'll cremate you right here in the monastery. You won't need to go anywhere else.' This is how I dealt with it. Speaking like this gave them strength of mind. There was a lot of fear to deal with.

Conditions were pretty rough. The laypeople didn't know much. They would bring us *plah rah* (fermented fish, a staple of the local diet), but it was made with raw fish, so we didn't eat it; I would stir it and take a good look at it to see what it was made from and just leave it sitting there.

Things were very hard then and we don't have those kinds of conditions these days - nobody knows about them. But there is some legacy remaining in the practice we have now, in the monks from those days who are still here. After the Rains Retreat, we could go 'tudong' right here within the monastery. We went and sat deep in the quiet of the forest. From time to time we would gather, I would give some teaching and then everyone went back into the forest to continue meditating, walking and sitting. We practised like this in the dry season; we didn't need to go wandering in search of forests to practise in because we had the right conditions here. We maintained the '*tudong*' practices right here.

Now, after the rains everyone wants to take off somewhere. The result is usually that their practice gets interrupted. It's important to keep at it steadily and sincerely so that you come to know your defilements. This way of practice is something good and authentic. In the past it was much harder. It's like the saying that we practise to no longer be a person: the person should die in order to become a monk. We adhered to the Vinaya strictly

and everyone had a real sense of shame about their actions. When doing chores, hauling water or sweeping the grounds, you didn't hear monks talking. During bowl washing, it was completely silent. Now, some days I have to send someone to tell them to stop talking and find out what all the commotion is about. I wonder if they're boxing out there; the noise is so loud I can't imagine what's going on. So, again and again I have to forbid them to chat.

I don't know what they need to talk about. When they've eaten their fill they become heedless because of the pleasure they feel. I keep on saying, 'When you come back from almsround, don't talk!' If someone asks why you don't want to talk, tell them, 'My hearing is bad.' Otherwise it becomes like a pack of barking dogs. Chattering brings about emotions, and you can even end up in a fistfight, especially at that time of day when everyone is hungry - the dogs are hungry and defilements are active.

This is what I've noticed. People don't enter the practice wholeheartedly. I've seen it changing over the years. Those who trained in the past got some results and can take care of themselves, but now hearing about the difficulties would scare people away. It's too hard to conceive of. If you make things easy, then everyone is interested, but what's the point? The reason we were able to realize some benefit in the past is that everyone trained together wholeheartedly.

The monks who lived here then really practised endurance to the utmost. We saw things through together, from the beginning to the end. They have some understanding about the practice. After several years of practising together, I thought it would be appropriate to send them out to their home villages to establish monasteries.

Those of you who came later can't really imagine what it was like for us then. I don't know who to talk to about it. The practice was extremely strict. Patience and endurance were the most important things we lived by. No one complained about the conditions. If we only had plain rice to eat, no one complained. We ate in complete silence, never discussing whether or not the food was tasty. *Borapet* was what we had for our hot drink.

One of the monks went to central Thailand and drank coffee there. Someone offered him some to bring back here. So we had coffee once. But there was no sugar to put in it. No one complained about that. Where would we get sugar? So we could say we really drank coffee, without any sugar to sweeten the taste. We depended on others to support us and we wanted to be people who were easy to support, so of course we didn't make requests of anyone. Like that, we were continually doing without things and enduring whatever conditions we found ourselves in.

One year the lay supporters, Mr Puang and Mrs Daeng came to be ordained here. They were from the city and had never lived like this, doing without things, enduring hardship, eating as we do, practising under the guidance of an Ajahn and performing the duties outlined in the rules of training. But they heard about their nephew living here so they decided to come and be ordained. As soon as they were ordained, a friend was bringing them coffee and sugar. They were living in the forest to practise meditation, but they had the habit of getting up early in the morning and making milk coffee to drink before doing anything else. So they stocked their kutīs full of sugar and coffee. But here, we would have our morning chanting and meditation, then immediately the monks would prepare to go for alms, so they didn't have a chance to make coffee. After a while it started to sink in. Mr Puang would pace back and forth, thinking what to do. He didn't have anywhere to make his coffee and no one was coming to make it and offer it to him, so he ended up bringing it all to the monastery kitchen and leaving it there.

Coming to stay here, actually seeing the conditions in the monastery and the way of life of meditation monks, really got him down. He was an elderly man, an important relative to me. That same year he disrobed; it was appropriate for him, since his affairs were not yet settled.

After that we first got ice here. We saw some sugar once in a while too. Mrs Daeng had gone to Bangkok. When she talked about the way we lived, she would start crying. People who hadn't seen the life of meditation monks had no idea what it was like. Eating once a day, was that making progress or falling behind? I don't know what to call it.

On almsround, people would make little packages of chilli sauce to put in our bowls in addition to the rice. Whatever we got we would bring it back,

share it out and eat. Whether we had different items that people liked or whether the food was tasty or not was never something we discussed; we just ate to be full and that was it. It was really simple. There were no plates or bowls - everything went into the almsbowl.

Nobody came here to visit. At night everyone went to their kutīs to practise. Even dogs couldn't bear to stay here. The kutīs were far apart and far from the meeting place. After everything was done at the end of the day, we separated and entered the forest to go to our kutīs. That made the dogs afraid they wouldn't have any safe place to stay. So they would follow the monks into the forest, but when they went up into their kutīs, the dogs would be left alone and felt afraid, so they would try to follow another monk, but that monk would also disappear into his kutī.

So even dogs couldn't live here - this was our life of practising meditation. I thought about this sometimes: even the dogs can't bear it, but still we live here! Pretty extreme. It made me a little melancholy too.

All kinds of obstacles ... we lived with fever, but we faced death and we all survived. Beyond facing death we had to live with difficult conditions such as poor food. But it was never a concern. When I look back to the conditions at that time compared to the conditions we have now, they are so far apart.

Before, we never had bowls or plates. Everything was put together in the almsbowl. Now that can't be done. So if one hundred monks are eating, we need five people to wash dishes afterwards. Sometimes they are still washing up when it's time for the Dhamma talk. This kind of thing makes for complications. I don't know what to do about it; I'll just leave it to you to use your own wisdom to consider.

It doesn't have an end. Those who like to complain will always find something else to complain about, no matter how good the conditions become. So the result is that the monks have become extremely attached to flavours and aromas. Sometimes I overhear them talking about their ascetic wandering. 'Oh boy, the food is really great there! I went 'tudong' to the south, by the coast, and I ate lots of shrimp! I ate big ocean fish!' This is what they talk about. When the mind is taken up with such concerns, it's

easy to get attached and immersed in desire for food. Uncontrolled minds are roaming about and getting stuck in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations and ideas, and practising Dhamma becomes difficult. It becomes difficult for an Ajahn to teach people to follow the right way, when they are attached to tastes. It's like raising a dog. If you just feed it plain rice, it will grow strong and healthy. But give it some tasty curry on top of its rice for a couple of days and after that it won't look at the plain rice anymore.

Sights, sounds, smells and tastes are the undoing of Dhamma practice. They can cause a lot of harm. If each one of us does not contemplate the use of our four requisites - robes, almsfood, dwelling and medicines - the Buddha's way can not flourish. You can look and see that however much material progress and development there is in the world, the confusion and suffering of humans increase right along with it. And after it goes on for some time, it's almost impossible to find a solution. Thus I say that when you go to a monastery you see the monks, the temple and the *kutīs*, but you don't see the *Buddhasāsana*. The *sāsana* is in decline like this. It's easy to observe.

The *sāsana*, meaning the genuine and direct teaching that instructs people to be honest and upright, to have loving-kindness towards each other, has been lost and turmoil and distress are taking its place. Those who went through the years of practice with me in the past have still maintained their diligence, but after twenty-five years here, I see how the practice has become slack. Now people don't dare to push themselves and practise too much. They are afraid. They fear it will be the extreme of self-mortification. In the past we just went for it. Sometimes monks fasted for several days or a week. They wanted to see their minds, to train their minds: if it's stubborn, you whip it. Mind and body work together. When we are not yet skilled in practice, if the body is too fat and comfortable, the mind gets out of control. When a fire starts and the wind blows, it spreads the fire and burns the house down. It's like that. Before, when I talked about eating little, sleeping little and speaking little, the monks understood and took it to heart. But now such talk is likely to be disagreeable to the minds of practitioners. 'We can find our way. Why should we suffer and practise so austere? It's the extreme of self-mortification; it's not the Buddha's path.'

As soon as anyone talks like this, everyone agrees. They are hungry. So what can I say to them? I keep on trying to correct this attitude, but this is the way it seems to be now.

So all of you, please make your minds strong and firm. Today you have gathered from the different branch monasteries to pay your respects to me as your teacher, to gather as friends in Dhamma, so I am offering some teaching about the path of practice. The practice of respect is a supreme Dhamma. When there is true respect, there will be no disharmony, people will not fight and kill each other. Paying respects to a spiritual master, to our preceptors and teachers, causes us to flourish; the Buddha spoke of it as something auspicious.

People from the city may like to eat mushrooms. They ask, 'Where do the mushrooms come from?' Someone tells them, 'They grow in the earth.' So they pick up a basket and go walking out into the countryside, expecting the mushrooms will be lined up along the side of the road for them to pick. But they walk and walk, climbing hills and trekking through fields, without seeing any mushrooms. A village person has gone picking mushrooms before and knows where to look for them; he knows which part of which forest to go to. But the city folk only have the experience of seeing mushrooms on their plate. They hear they grow in the earth and get the idea that they would be easy to find, but it doesn't work out that way.

Training the mind in samādhi is like this. We get the idea it will be easy. But when we sit, our legs hurt, our back hurts, we feel tired, we get hot and itchy. Then we start to feel discouraged, thinking that samādhi is as far away from us as the sky from the earth. We don't know what to do and become overwhelmed by the difficulties. But if we can receive some training, it will get easier little by little.

So you who come here to practise samādhi and experience it as being difficult. I had my troubles with it, too. I trained with an Ajahn, and when we were sitting I'd open my eyes to look: 'Oh! Is Ajahn ready to stop yet?' I'd close my eyes again and try to bear a little longer. I felt like it was going to kill me and I kept opening my eyes, but he looked so comfortable sitting there. One hour, two hours, I would be in agony but the Ajahn didn't move.

So after a while I got to fear the sittings. When it was time to practise samādhi, I'd feel afraid.

When we are new to it, training in samādhi is difficult. Anything is difficult when we don't know how to do it. This is our obstacle. But training at it, this can change. That which is good can eventually overcome and surpass that which is not good. We tend to become faint-hearted as we struggle - this is a normal reaction and we all go through it. So it's important to train for some time. It's like making a path through the forest. At first it's rough going, with a lot of obstructions, but returning to it again and again, we clear the way. After some time we have removed the branches and stumps, and the ground becomes firm and smooth from being walked on repeatedly. Then we have a good path for walking through the forest.

This is what it's like when we train the mind. Keeping at it, the mind becomes illumined. For example, we country people grow up eating rice and fish. Then when we come to learn Dhamma we are told to refrain from harming: we should not kill living creatures. What can we do then? We feel we are really in a bind. Our market is in the fields. If the teachers are telling us not to kill, we won't eat. Just this much and we are at our wits' ends. How will we feed ourselves? There doesn't seem to be any way for us rural people. Our marketplace is the field and the forest. We have to catch animals and kill them in order to eat.

I've been trying to teach people ways to deal with this issue for many years. It's like this: farmers eat rice. For the most part, people who work in the fields grow and eat rice. So what about a tailor in town? Does he eat sewing machines? Does he eat cloth? Let's just consider this first. You are a farmer so you eat rice. If someone offers you another job, will you refuse, saying, 'I can't do it - I won't have rice to eat?'

Matches that you use in your home - are you able to make them? You can't; so how do you come to have matches? Is it only the case that those who can make matches have matches to use? What about the bowls you eat from? Here in the villages, does anyone know how to make them? Do people have them in their houses? So where do you get them from?

There are plenty of things we don't know how to make, but still we can earn money to buy them. This is using our intelligence to find a way. In meditation we also need to do this. We find ways to avoid wrongdoing and practise what is right. Look at the Buddha and his disciples. Once they were ordinary beings, but they developed themselves to progress through the stages of stream entry on up to arahant. They did this through training. Gradually wisdom grows. A sense of shame towards wrongdoing comes about.

I once taught a sage. He was a lay patron who came to practise and keep precepts on the observance days, but he would still go fishing. I tried to teach him further but couldn't solve this problem. He said he didn't kill fish; they simply came to swallow his hook.

I kept at it, teaching him until he felt some contrition over this. He was ashamed of it, but he kept doing it. Then his rationalization changed. He would put the hook in the water and announce, 'Whichever fish has reached the end of its kamma to be alive, come and eat my hook. If your time has not yet come, do not eat my hook.' He had changed his excuse, but still the fish came to eat. Finally he started looking at them, their mouths caught on the hook, and he felt some pity. But he still couldn't resolve his mind. 'Well, I told them not to eat the hook if it wasn't time; what can I do if they still come?' And then he'd think, 'But they are dying because of me.' He went back and forth on this until finally he could stop.

But then there were the frogs. He couldn't bear to stop catching frogs to eat. 'Don't do this!' I told him. 'Take a good look at them ... okay, if you can't stop killing them, I won't forbid you, but please just look at them before you do that.' So he picked up a frog and looked at it. He looked at its face, its eyes, its legs. 'Oh man, it looks like my child: it has arms and legs. Its eyes are open, it's looking at me.' He felt hurt. But still he killed them. He looked at each one like this and then killed it, feeling he was doing something bad. His wife was pushing him, saying they wouldn't have anything to eat if he didn't kill frogs.

Finally he couldn't bear it anymore. He would catch them but wouldn't break their legs like before; previously he would break their legs so they couldn't hop away. Still, he couldn't make himself let them go. 'Well, I'm

just taking care of them, feeding them here. I'm only raising them; whatever someone else might do, I don't know about that.' But of course he knew. The others were still killing them for food. After a while he could admit this to himself. 'Well, I've cut my bad kamma by 50 percent anyhow. Someone else does the killing.'

This was starting to drive him crazy, but he couldn't yet let go. He still kept the frogs at home. He wouldn't break their legs anymore, but his wife would. 'It's my fault. Even if I don't do it, they do it because of me.' Finally he gave it up altogether. But then his wife was complaining. 'What are we going to do? What should we eat?'

He was really caught now. When he went to the monastery, the Ajahn lectured him on what he should do. When he returned home, his wife lectured him on what he should do. The Ajahn was telling him to stop doing that and his wife was egging him on to continue doing it. What to do? What a lot of suffering. Born into this world, we have to suffer like this.

In the end, his wife had to let go too. So they stopped killing frogs. He worked in his field, tending his buffaloes. Then he developed the habit of releasing fish and frogs. When he saw fish caught in nets he would set them free. Once he went to a friend's house and saw some frogs in a pot and he set them free. Then his friend's wife came to prepare dinner. She opened the lid of the pot and saw the frogs were gone. They figured out what had happened. 'It's that guy with the heart of merit.'

She did manage to catch one frog and made a chilli paste with it. They sat down to eat and as he went to dip his ball of rice in the chilli, she said, 'Hey, heart of merit! You shouldn't eat that! It's frog chilli paste.'

This was too much. What a lot of grief, just being alive and trying to feed oneself! Thinking about it, he couldn't see any way out. He was already an old man, so he decided to ordain.

He prepared the ordination gear, shaved his head and went inside the house. As soon as his wife saw his shaved head, she started crying. He pleaded with her: 'Since I was born, I haven't had the chance to be ordained. Please

give me your blessing to do this. I want to be ordained, but I will disrobe and return home again.’ So his wife relented.

He was ordained in the local monastery and after the ceremony he asked the preceptor what he should do. The preceptor told him, ‘If you’re really doing this seriously, you ought to just go to practise meditation. Follow a meditation master; don’t stay here near the houses.’ He understood and decided to do that. He slept one night in the temple and in the morning took his leave, asking where he could find Ajahn Tongrat.²

He shouldered his bowl and wandered off, a new monk who couldn’t yet put on his robes very neatly. But he found his way to Ajahn Tongrat.

‘Venerable Ajahn, I have no other aim in life. I want to offer my body and my life to you.’

Ajahn Tongrat replied, ‘Very good! Lots of merit! You almost missed me. I was just about to go on my way. So do your prostrations and take a seat there.’

The new monk asked, ‘Now that I’m ordained, what should I do?’

It happened that they were sitting by an old tree stump. Ajahn Tongrat pointed to it and said, ‘Make yourself like this tree stump. Don’t do anything else, just make yourself like this tree stump.’ He taught him meditation in this way.

So Ajahn Tongrat went on his way and the monk stayed there to contemplate his words. ‘Ajahn taught to make myself like a tree stump. What am I supposed to do?’ He pondered this continuously, whether walking, sitting or lying down to sleep. He thought about the stump first being a seed, how it grew into a tree, got bigger and aged and was finally cut down, just leaving this stump. Now that it is a stump, it won’t be growing anymore and nothing will bloom from it. He kept on pondering this in his mind, considering it over and over, until it became his meditation object. He expanded it to apply to all phenomena and was able to turn it inwards and apply it to himself. ‘After a while, I am probably going to be like this stump, a useless thing.’

Realizing this gave him the determination not to disrobe.

His mind was made up at this point; he had the conditions which came together to get him to this stage. When the mind is like this, there won't be anything that can stop it. All of us are in the same boat. Please think about this and try to apply it to your practice. Being born as humans is full of difficulties. And it's not just that it's been difficult for us so far - in the future there will also be difficulty. Young people will grow up, grown-ups will age, aged ones will fall ill, ill people will die. It keeps on going like this, the cycle of ceaseless transformation that never comes to an end.

So the Buddha taught us to meditate. In meditation, first we have to practise samādhi, which means making the mind still and peaceful, like water in a basin. If we keep putting things in it and stirring it up, it will always be murky. If the mind is always allowed to be thinking and worrying over things, we can never see anything clearly. If we let the water in the basin settle and become still, we can see all sorts of things reflected in it. When the mind is settled and still, wisdom will be able to see things. The illuminating light of wisdom surpasses any other kind of light.

What was the Buddha's advice on how to practise? He taught to practise like the earth; practise like water; practise like fire; practise like wind.

Practise like the 'old things', the things we are already made of: the solid element of earth, the liquid element of water, the warming element of fire, the moving element of wind.

If someone digs the earth, the earth is not bothered. It can be shovelled, tilled, or watered. Rotten things can be buried in it. But the earth will remain indifferent. Water can be boiled or frozen or used to wash something dirty; it is not affected. Fire can burn beautiful and fragrant things or ugly and foul things - it doesn't matter to the fire. When wind blows, it blows on all sorts of things; fresh and rotten, beautiful and ugly, without concern.

The Buddha used this analogy. The aggregation that is us is merely a coming together of the elements of earth, water, fire and wind. If you try to find an actual person there, you can't. There are only these collections of elements. But for all our lives, we never thought to separate them like this

to see what is really there; we have only thought, 'This is me, that is mine.' We have always seen everything in terms of a self, never seeing that there is merely earth, water, fire and wind. But the Buddha teaches in this way. He talks about the four elements and urges us to see that this is what we are. There are earth, water, fire and wind; there is no person here. Contemplate these elements to see that there is no being or individual, but only earth, water, fire and wind.

It's deep, isn't it? It's hidden deep - people will look but they can't see this. We are used to contemplating things in terms of self and other all the time. So our meditation is still not very deep. It doesn't reach the truth and we don't get beyond the way these things appear to be. We remain stuck in the conventions of the world and being stuck in the world means remaining in the cycle of transformation: getting things and losing them, dying and being born, being born and dying, suffering in the realm of confusion. Whatever we wish for and aspire to doesn't really work out the way we want, because we are seeing things wrongly.

Our grasping attachments are like this. We are still far, very far from the real path of Dhamma. So please get to work right now. Don't say, 'After I'm older, I will start going to the monastery.' What is ageing? Young people have aged as well as old people. From birth, they have been ageing. We like to say, 'When I'm older, when I'm older' Hey! Young folks are older, older than they were. This is what 'ageing' means. All of you, please take a look at this. We all have this burden; this is a task for all of us to work on. Think about your parents or grandparents. They were born, then they aged and in the end they passed away. Now we don't know where they've gone.

So the Buddha wanted us to seek the Dhamma. This kind of knowledge is what's most important. Any form of knowledge or study that does not agree with the Buddhist way is learning that involves *dukkha*. Our practice of Dhamma should be getting us beyond suffering; if we can't fully transcend suffering, then we should at least be able to transcend it a little, now, in the present. For example, when someone speaks harshly to us, if we don't get angry with them we have transcended suffering. If we get angry, we have not transcended *dukkha*.

When someone speaks harshly to us, if we reflect on Dhamma, we will see it is just heaps of earth. Okay, he is criticizing me - he's just criticizing a heap of earth. One heap of earth is criticizing another heap of earth. Water is criticizing water. Wind is criticizing wind. Fire is criticizing fire.

But if we really see things in this way, others will probably call us mad. 'He doesn't care about anything. He has no feelings.' When someone dies we won't get upset and cry, and they will call us crazy again. Where can we stay?

It really has to come down to this. We have to practise to realize for ourselves. Getting beyond suffering does not depend on others' opinions of us, but on our own individual state of mind. Never mind what they will say - we experience the truth for ourselves. Then we can dwell at ease.

But generally we don't take it this far. Youngsters will go to the monastery once or twice, then when they go home their friends make fun of them: 'Hey, Dhamma Dhammo!' They feel embarrassed and don't feel like coming back here. Some of them have told me that they came here to listen to teachings and gained some understanding, so they stopped drinking and hanging out with the crowd. But their friends belittled them: 'You go to the monastery and now you don't want to go out drinking with us anymore. What's wrong with you?' So they get embarrassed and eventually end up doing the same old things again. It's hard for people to stick to it.

So rather than aspiring too high, let's practise patience and endurance. Exercising patience and restraint in our families is already pretty good. Don't quarrel and fight - if you can get along, you've already transcended suffering for the moment and that's good. When things happen, recollect Dhamma. Think of what your spiritual guides have taught you. They teach you to let go, to give up, to refrain, to put things down; they teach you to strive and fight in this way to solve your problems. The Dhamma that you come to listen to is just for solving your problems.

What kind of problems are we talking about? How about your families? Do you have any problems with your children, your spouses, your friends, your work and other matters? All these things give you a lot of headaches, don't

they? These are the problems we are talking about; the teachings are telling you that you can resolve the problems of daily life with Dhamma.

We have been born as human beings. It should be possible to live with happy minds. We do our work according to our responsibilities. If things get difficult we practise endurance. Earning a livelihood in the right way is one sort of Dhamma practice, the practice of ethical living. Living happily and harmoniously like this is already pretty good.

But we are usually taking a loss. Don't take a loss! If you come here on the observance day to take precepts and then go home and fight, that's a loss. Do you hear what I am saying, folks? It's just a loss to do this. It means you don't see the Dhamma even a tiny little bit - there's no profit at all. Please understand this. Now you have listened to the Dhamma for an appropriate length of time today.

[1](#): A highly respected monk of the forest tradition, considered to be an arahant and a teacher of Ajahn Mun.

[2](#): Ajahn Tongrat was a well-known meditation teacher during Ajahn Chah's early years.

Right Restraint

Exercise restraint and caution about the six sense faculties of the eye seeing forms, the ear hearing sounds, and so forth. This is what we are constantly teaching about in so many different ways. It always comes back to this. But to be truthful with ourselves, are we really aware of what goes on? When the eye sees something, does delight come about? Do we really investigate? If we investigate, we will know that it is just this delight that is the cause for suffering to be born. Aversion is the cause for suffering to be born. These two reactions actually have the same value. When they occur, we can see the fault of them. If there is delight, it is merely delight. If there is aversion, it is merely aversion. This is the way to quell them.

For example, we attach special importance to the head. From the time we are born, in this society, we learn that the head is something of the utmost significance. If anyone touches it or hits it, we are ready to die. If we are slapped on other parts of our body, it's no big deal; but we give this special importance to the head, and we get really angry if anyone slaps it.

It's the same with the senses. Sexual intercourse excites the minds of people, but it really isn't different from sticking a finger in your nostril. Would that mean anything special to you? But worldly beings have this attachment to the other entrance; whether it is animals or humans, it has special importance to them. If it were a finger picking a nostril, they wouldn't get excited over that. But the sight of this one inflames us. Why is this? This is where becoming is. If we don't attach special importance to it, then it's just the same as putting a finger in your nostril. Whatever happened inside, you wouldn't get excited; you'd just pull out some snot and be done with it.

But how far is your thinking from such a perception? The ordinary, natural truth of the matter is just like this. Seeing in this way, we aren't creating any becoming, and without becoming there won't be a birth; there won't be happiness or suffering over it, there won't be delight coming about. There is no grasping attachment when we realize this place for what it is. But worldly beings want to put something there. That's what they like. They

want to work in the dirty place. Working in a clean place is not interesting, but they rush to work in this place. And they don't even have to be paid to do it!

Please look at this. It's just a conventional reality that people are stuck in. This is an important point of practice for us. If we contemplate the holes and entrances of our nose and ears and the rest, we can see that they are all the same, just orifices filled with unclean substances. Or are any of them clean? So we should contemplate this in the way of Dhamma. The truly fearful is here, nowhere else. This is where we humans lose our minds.

Just this is a cause, a basic point of practice. I don't feel that it's necessary to ask a lot of questions of anyone or interview a lot. But we don't investigate this point carefully. Sometimes I see monks heading off carrying the big glot, walking here and there under the hot sun, wandering through many provinces. When I watch them, I think, 'That must be tiring.'

'Where are you going?' 'I'm seeking peace.'

I don't have any answer for that. I don't know where they can seek peace. I'm not disparaging them; I was like that too. I sought peace, always thinking it must be in some other place. Well, it was true, in a way. When I would get to some of those places, I was a little bit at ease. It seems people have to be like this. We always think some other place is comfortable and peaceful. When I was travelling I saw the dog in Pabhākarō's house.¹ They had this big dog. They really loved it. They kept it outside most of the time. They fed it outside, and it slept out there too, but sometimes it wanted to come inside, so it would go and paw at the door and bark. That bothered the owner, so he would let it in, then close the door behind it. The dog would walk around inside the house for a while, and then it would get bored and want to go out again: back to the door, pawing and barking. So the owner would get up and go to let it out. It would be happy outside for a little while, and then want to come back in, barking at the door again.

When it was outside, it seemed like being inside would be better. Being inside was fun for a spell, then it was bored and had to go out again. The minds of people are like that - like a dog. They are always in and out, here

and there, not really understanding where the place is that they will be happy.

If we have some awareness of this, then whatever thoughts and feelings arise in our minds, we will make efforts to quell them, recognizing that they are merely thoughts and feelings. The grasping attachment to them is really important.

So even though we are living in the monastery, we are still far away from correct practice - very far away. When I went abroad I saw a lot of things. The first time, I gained some wisdom from it to a certain extent, and the second time to another extent. On my first trip, I made notes of what I experienced in a journal. But this time, I put down the pen. I thought, if I write these things down, will the people at home be able to bear it?

It's like us living in our own country and not being very comfortable. When Thai people go abroad, they think they must have some very good kamma to be able to get there. But you have to consider, when you go to a place that is strange to you, will you be able to compete with those who have lived their whole lives there? Still, we go there for a little while and we feel it is so great, and that we are some special kind of people who have such good kamma. The foreign monks were born there, so does that mean they have better kamma than we do? These are the kind of ideas people get from their attachment and grasping. What it means is that when people contact things, they get excited. They like being excited. But when the mind is excited it is not in a normal state. We see things we haven't seen and experience things we haven't experienced, and the abnormality occurs.

When it comes to scientific knowledge, I concede to them. As far as Buddhist knowledge goes, I still have something to tell them. But in science and material development, we can't compete with them.

In practice, some people have a lot of suffering and difficulty, but they keep on in the same rut that has been making them suffer. That's someone who hasn't made up his mind to practise and get to the end of suffering; it's someone who doesn't see clearly. Their practice isn't steady or continuous. When feelings of good and bad come, the person isn't aware of what is happening. 'Whatever is disagreeable, I reject' - this is the conceited view

of the Brahmin. 'Whatever is pleasing to me, I accept.' For example, some people are very easy to get along with if you speak pleasingly to them. But if you say things they disagree with, then there's no getting along with them. That's extreme conceit (*ditthi*). They have strong attachment, but they feel that's a really good standard to live by.

So the ones who will walk this path are few indeed. It's not different with us who live here; there are very few who have right view. When we contemplate the Dhamma, we feel it's not right. We don't agree. If we agreed and felt it were right, we would give up and let go of things. Sometimes we don't agree with the teachings. We see things differently; we want to change the Dhamma to be different from what it is. We want to correct the Dhamma, and we keep working at that.

This trip made me think about many things. I met some people who practise yoga. It was certainly interesting to see the kinds of postures they could get into - I'd break my leg if I tried. Anyhow, they feel their joints and muscles aren't right, so they have to stretch them out. They need to do it every day, then they feel good. I thought they were actually giving themselves some affliction through this. If they don't do it, they don't feel good, so they have to do it every day. It seems to me that they are making some burden for themselves this way and are not really being aware.

That's the way people are - they get into the habit of doing something. I met one Chinese man. He didn't lie down to sleep for four or five years. He only sat, and he was comfortable that way. He bathed once a year. But his body was strong and healthy. He didn't need to run or do other such exercises; if he did, he probably wouldn't feel good. It's because he trained himself that way.

So it's just our manner of training that makes us comfortable with certain things. We can increase or decrease illness through training. This is how it is for us. Thus the Buddha taught to be fully aware of ourselves - don't let this slip. All of you, don't have grasping attachment. Don't let yourselves be excited by things.

For example, living here in our native country, in the company of spiritual friends and teachers, we feel comfortable. Actually, there isn't really

anything so comfortable about it. It's like small fish living in a large pond. They swim around comfortably. If a large fish is put in a small pond, it would feel cramped. When we are here in our own country, we are comfortable with the food and dwellings we have, and many other things. If we go somewhere everything is different, then we are like the big fish in the small pond.

Here in Thailand we have our distinct culture, and we are satisfied when everyone acts properly according to our customs. If someone comes here and violates our customs, we aren't happy about that. Now we are small fish in the large pond. If large fish have to live in a small pond, how will it be for them?

It's the same for natives of other countries. When they are in their home land and everything is familiar, they are comfortable with those conditions - small fish in a big pond. If they come to Thailand and have to adapt to different conditions and customs, it can be oppressive for them - like the big fish in the small pond. Eating, getting around, everything is different. The big fish is in a small pond now, and it can't swim freely anymore.

The habits and attachments of beings differ like this. One person may be stuck on the left side, another is stuck on the right side. So the best thing for us to do is to be aware. Be aware of customs in the different places we go. If we have Dhamma custom, then we can smoothly adapt to society's customs, abroad or at home. If we don't understand Dhamma custom, then there's no way to get along. Dhamma custom is the meeting point for all cultures and traditions.

I've heard the words of the Buddha that say, 'When you don't understand someone's language, when you don't understand their way of speaking, when you don't understand their ways of doing things in their land, you shouldn't be proud or put on airs.' I can attest to these words - they are a true standard in all times and places. These words came back to me when I travelled abroad, and I put them into practice these last two years when I was outside our country. They're useful.

Before I held tightly; now I hold, but not tightly. I pick something up to look at it, then I let it go. Before, I would pick things up and hold on. That

was holding tightly. Now it's holding but not tightly. So you can allow me to speak harshly to all of you or get angry at you, but it's in the way of 'holding but not tightly', picking up and letting go. Please don't lose this point.

We can be truly happy and comfortable if we understand the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha. So I am always praising the Buddha's teachings and practising to unite the two customs, that of the world and that of the Dhamma.

I gained some understanding on this trip that I'd like to share with you. I felt that I was going to create benefit, benefit for myself, for others, and for the *sāsanā*; benefit of the populace in general and of our Sangha, every one of you. I didn't just go for sightseeing, to visit various countries out of curiosity. I went for good purpose, for myself and others, for this life and the next - for the ultimate purpose. When you come down to it, everyone is equal. Someone with wisdom will see in this way.

Someone with wisdom is always travelling good paths, finding meaning in their comings and goings. I'll give an analogy. You may go to some place and encounter some bad people there. When that happens, some folks will have aversion to them. But a person with Dhamma will come across bad people and think, 'I have found my teacher.' Through that one comes to know what a good person is. Encountering a good person, one also finds a teacher, because it shows what a bad person is.

Seeing a beautiful house is good; we can then understand what an ugly house is. Seeing an ugly house is good; we can then understand what a beautiful house is. With Dhamma, we don't discard any experience, not even the slightest. Thus the Buddha said, 'O Bhikkhus, view this world as an ornamented and bejewelled royal chariot, by which fools are entranced, but which is meaningless to the wise.'

When I was studying Nak Tham Ehk,² I often contemplated this saying. It seemed really meaningful. But it was when I started practising that the meaning became clear. 'O Bhikkhus:' this means all of us sitting here. 'View this world:' the world of humans, the *ākāsaloka*, the worlds of all sentient beings, all existing worlds. If one knows the world clearly, it isn't

necessary to do any special sort of meditation. If one knows, 'the world is thus' according to reality, there will be nothing lacking at all. The Buddha knew the world clearly. He knew the world for what it actually was. Knowing the world clearly is knowing the subtle Dhamma. One is not concerned with or anxious about the world. If one knows the world clearly, then there are no worldly dhammas. We are no longer influenced by the worldly dhammas.

Worldly beings are ruled by worldly dhammas, and they are always in a state of conflict. So whatever we see and encounter, we should contemplate carefully. We delight in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. So please contemplate. You all know what these things are. Forms the eye sees, for example, the forms of men and women. You certainly know what sounds are, as well as smells, tastes, and physical contacts. Then there are the mental impressions and ideas. When we have these contacts through the physical senses, mental activity arises. All things gather here.

We may be walking along together with the Dhamma a whole year or a whole lifetime without recognizing it; we live with it our whole lives without knowing it. Our thinking goes too far. Our aims are too great; we desire too much. For example, a man sees a woman, or a woman sees a man. Everyone is extremely interested here. It's because we overestimate it. When we see an attractive member of the opposite sex, all our senses become engaged. We want to see, to hear, to touch, to observe their movements, all sorts of things. But if we get married, then it is no longer such a big deal. After a while we may even want to get some distance between us - maybe even go and ordain! But then we can't.

It's like a hunter tracking a deer. When he first spots the deer, he is excited. Everything about the deer interests him, the ears, the tail, everything. The hunter becomes very happy. His body is light and alert. He is only afraid the deer will get away.

It's the same here. When a man sees a woman he likes, or a woman sees a man, everything is so intriguing, the sight, the voice - we fixate on them, can't tear ourselves away, looking and thinking as much as we can, to the point where it takes control of our heart. Just like the hunter. When he sees the deer, he is excited. He becomes anxious that it will see him. All his

senses are heightened, and he takes extreme enjoyment from it. Now his only concern is that the deer might get away. What the deer really is, he doesn't know. He hunts it down and finally shoots and kills it. Then his work is done. Arriving at the place where the deer has fallen, he looks at it: 'Oh, it's dead.' He's not very excited anymore - it's just some dead meat. He can cook some of the meat and eat it, then he will be full, and there's not much more to it. Now he sees the parts of the deer, and they don't excite him so much anymore. The ear is only an ear. He can pull the tail, and it's only a tail. But when it was alive, oh boy! He wasn't indifferent then. Seeing the deer, watching its every movement, was totally engrossing and exciting, and he couldn't bear the thought of it getting away.

We are like this, aren't we? The form of an attractive person of the opposite sex is like this. When we haven't yet captured it, we feel it is unbearably beautiful. But if we end up living together with that person, we get tired of them. Like the hunter who has killed the deer and can now freely touch the ear or take hold of the tail. There's not much to it anymore, no excitement once the animal is dead. When we are married, we can fulfil our desires, but it is no longer such a big thing, and we end up looking for a way out.

So we don't really consider things thoroughly. I feel that if we do contemplate, we will see that there isn't really much there, not anything more than what I just described. It's only that we make more out of things than they really are. When we see a body, we feel we will be able to consume every piece of it, the ears, the eyes, the nose. The way our thinking runs wild, we might even get the idea that the person we are attracted to will have no shit. I don't know, maybe they think that way in the West. We get the idea there won't even be shit, or maybe just a little. We want to eat the whole thing. We over-estimate; it's not really like that. It's like a cat stalking a mouse. Before it catches the mouse, the cat is alert and focused. When it pounces and kills the mouse, it's not so keen anymore. The mouse is just lying there dead, and the cat loses interest and goes on its way.

It's only this much. The imagination makes it out to be more than it is. This is where we perish, because of our imagination. Ordained persons have to forbear more than others here, in the realm of sensuality. *Kāma* means

lusting. Desiring evil things and desiring good are a kind of lusting, but here it refers to desiring those things that attract us, meaning sensuality. It is difficult to get free of.

When Ānanda asked the Buddha, ‘After the Tathāgata has entered Nibbāna, how should we practise mindfulness? How should we conduct ourselves in relation to women? This is an extremely difficult matter; how would the Lord advise us to practise mindfulness here?’

The Buddha replied, ‘Ānanda! It is better that you not see women at all.’

Ānanda was puzzled by this; how can people not see other people? He thought it over, and asked the Buddha further, ‘If there are situations that make it unavoidable that we see, how will the Lord advise us to practise?’

‘In such a situation, Ānanda, do not speak. Do not speak!’

Ānanda considered further. He thought, sometimes we might be travelling in a forest and lose our way. In that case we would have to speak to whomever we met. So he asked, ‘If there is a need for us to speak, then how will the Lord have us act?’

‘Ānanda! Speak with mindfulness!’

At all times and in all situations, mindfulness is the supremely important virtue. The Buddha instructed Ānanda what to do when it was necessary. We should contemplate to see what is really necessary for us. In speaking, for example, or in asking questions of others, we should only say what is necessary. When the mind is in an unclean state, thinking lewd thoughts, don’t let yourself speak at all. But that’s not the way we operate. The more unclean the mind is, the more we want to talk. The more lewdness we have in our minds, the more we want to ask, to see, to speak. These are two very different paths.

So I am afraid. I really fear this a lot. You are not afraid, but it’s just possible you might be worse than me. ‘I don’t have any fear about this. There’s no problem!’ But I have to remain fearful. Does it ever happen that an old person can have lust? So in my monastery, I keep the sexes as far

apart as possible. If there's no real necessity, there shouldn't be any contact at all.

When I practised alone in the forest, sometimes I'd see monkeys in the trees and I'd feel desire. I'd sit there and look and think, and I'd have lust: 'Wouldn't be bad to go and be a monkey with them!' This is what sexual desire can do - even a monkey could get me aroused.

In those days, women lay-followers couldn't come to hear Dhamma from me. I was too afraid of what might happen. It's not that I had anything against them; I was simply too foolish. Now if I speak to women, I speak to the older ones. I always have to guard myself. I've experienced this danger to my practice. I didn't open my eyes wide and speak excitedly to entertain them. I was too afraid to act like that.

Be careful! Every *samana* has to face this and exercise restraint. This is an important issue.

Really, the teachings of the Buddha all make sense. Things you wouldn't imagine really are so. It's strange. At first I didn't have any faith in sitting in meditation. I thought, what value could that possibly have? Then there was walking meditation - I walked from one tree to another, back and forth, back and forth, and I got tired of it and thought, 'What am I walking for? Just walking back and forth doesn't have any purpose.' That's how I thought. But in fact walking meditation has a lot of value. Sitting to practise *samādhi* has a lot of value. But the temperaments of some people make them confused about walking or sitting meditation.

We can't meditate in only one posture. There are four postures for humans: standing, walking, sitting and lying down. The teachings speak about making the postures consistent and equal. You might get the idea from this that it means you should stand, walk, sit and lie down for the same number of hours in each posture. When you hear such a teaching, you can't figure out what it really means, because it's talking in the way of Dhamma, not in the ordinary sense. 'OK, I'll sit for two hours, stand for two hours and then lie down for two hours' You probably think like this. That's what I did. I tried to practise in this way, but it didn't work out.

It's because of not listening in the right way, merely listening to the words. 'Making the postures even' refers to the mind, nothing else. It means making the mind bright and clear so that wisdom arises, so that there is knowledge of whatever is happening in all postures and situations.

Whatever the posture, you know phenomena and states of mind for what they are, meaning that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not your self. The mind remains established in this awareness at all times and in all postures. When the mind feels attraction or when it feels aversion, you don't lose the path; you know these conditions for what they are. Your awareness is steady and continuous, and you are letting go steadily and continuously. You are not fooled by good conditions. You aren't fooled by bad conditions. You remain on the straight path. This can be called 'making the postures even'. It refers to the internal, not the external; it is talking about mind.

If we do make the postures even with the mind, then when we are praised, it is just so much. If we are slandered, it is just so much. We don't go up or down with these words but remain steady. Why is this? Because we see the danger in these things. We see equal danger in praise and in criticism; this is called making the postures even. We have this inner awareness, whether we are looking at internal or external phenomena.

In the ordinary way of experiencing things, when something good appears, we have a positive reaction, and when something bad appears, we have a negative reaction. In this way, the postures are not even. If they are even, we always have awareness. We will know when we are grasping at good and grasping at bad - this is better. Even though we can't yet let go, we are aware of these states continuously. Being continuously aware of ourselves and our attachments, we will come to see that such grasping is not the path. Knowing is fifty percent even if we are unable to let go. Though we can't let go, we do understand that letting go of these things will bring peace. We see the danger in the things we like and dislike. We see the danger in praise and blame. This awareness is continuous.

So whether we are being praised or criticized, we are continuously aware. When worldly people are criticized and slandered, they can't bear it; it hurts their hearts. When they are praised, they are pleased and excited. This is

what is natural in the world. But for those who are practising, when there is praise, they know there is danger. When there is blame, they know the danger. They know that being attached to either of these brings ill results. They are all harmful if we grasp at them and give them meaning.

When we have this kind of awareness, we know phenomena as they occur. We know that if we form attachments to phenomena, there really will be suffering. If we are not aware, then grasping at what we conceive of as good or bad gives rise to suffering. When we pay attention, we see this grasping; we see how we catch hold of the good and the bad and how this causes suffering. So at first we grasp hold of things and with awareness see the fault in that. How is that? It's because we grasp tightly and experience suffering. We will then start to seek a way to let go and be free. We ponder, 'What should I do to be free?'

Buddhist teaching says not to have grasping attachment, not to hold tightly to things. We don't understand this fully. The point is to hold, but not tightly. For example, I see this object in front of me. I am curious to know what it is, so I pick it up and look; it's a flashlight. Now I can put it down. That's holding but not tightly. If we are told not to hold to anything at all, what can we do? We will think we shouldn't practise sitting or walking meditation. So at first we have to hold without tight attachment. You can say this is *tanhā*, but it will become *pāramī*. For instance, you came here to Wat Pah Pong; before you did that, you had to have the desire to come. With no desire, you wouldn't have come. We can say you came with desire; it's like holding. Then you will return; that's like not grasping. Just like having some uncertainty about what this object is; then picking it up, seeing it's a flashlight and putting it down. This is holding but not grasping, or to speak more simply, knowing and letting go. Picking up to look, knowing and letting go - knowing and putting down. Things may be said to be good or bad, but you merely know them and let them go. You are aware of all good and bad phenomena and you are letting go of them. You don't grasp them with ignorance. You grasp them with wisdom and put them down.

In this way the postures can be even and consistent. It means the mind is able. The mind has awareness and wisdom is born. When the mind has wisdom, then what could there be beyond that? It picks things up but there

is no harm. It is not grasping tightly, but knowing and letting go. Hearing a sound, we will know, 'The world says this is good,' and we let go of it. The world may say, 'This is bad,' but we let go. We know good and evil. Someone who doesn't know good and evil attaches to good and evil and suffers as a result. Someone with knowledge doesn't have this attachment.

Let's consider: for what purpose are we living? What do we want from our work? We are living in this world; for what purpose are we living? We do our work; what do we want to get from our work? In the worldly way, people do their work because they want certain things and this is what they consider logical. But the Buddha's teaching goes a step beyond this. It says, do your work without desiring anything. In the world, you do this to get that; you do that to get this; you are always doing something in order to get something as a result. That's the way of worldly folk. The Buddha says, work for the sake of work without wanting anything. Whenever we work with the desire for something, we suffer. Check this out.

1: Ajahn Chah is referring to his trip to England, France and the USA in 1979.

2: Nak Tham Ekh: The third and highest level of examinations in Dhamma and Vinaya in Thailand.

Suffering on the Road

At the time of the Buddha, there lived a monk who yearned to find the true way to enlightenment. He wanted to know for certain what was the correct way and what was the incorrect way to train his mind in meditation. Having decided that living in a monastery with a large group of monks was confusing and distracting, he went off wandering looking for quiet places to meditate on his own. Living alone, he practised continuously, sometimes experiencing periods of calm when his mind gathered itself in concentration (samādhi), at other times not finding much calm at all. There was still no real certainty in his meditation. Sometimes he was very diligent and put forth great effort, sometimes he was lazy. In the end, he became caught up in doubt and scepticism due to his lack of success in trying to find the right way to practise.

During that time in India there were many different meditation teachers, and the monk happened to hear about one famous teacher, 'Ajahn A', who was very popular and had a reputation for being skilled in meditation instruction. The monk sat down and thought it through, and decided that just in case this famous teacher really knew the correct way to enlightenment, he would find him and train under his guidance. Having received teachings, the monk returned to meditate on his own again and found that while some of the new teachings were in line with his own views, some were different. He found that he was still constantly getting caught into doubt and uncertainty. After a while he heard of another famous monk, 'Ajahn B', who also was reputed to be fully enlightened and skilled in teaching meditation; this news simply fuelled further doubts and questions in his mind. Eventually his speculation drove him to go off in search of the new teacher. Having received fresh teachings, the monk went away to practise in solitude once more. He compared all the teachings he had absorbed from this latest teacher with those from the first teacher, and found that they weren't the same. He compared the different styles and characters of each teacher, and found that they were also quite different. He compared everything he had learnt with his own views about meditation

and found that nothing seemed to fit together at all! The more he compared, the more he doubted.

Not long after that, the monk heard excited rumours that 'Ajahn C' was a really wise teacher. People were talking about the new teacher so much that he felt compelled to seek him out. The monk was willing to listen and to try out whatever the new teacher suggested. Some things he taught were the same as other teachers, some things not; the monk kept thinking and comparing, trying to work out why one teacher did things a certain way and another teacher did it differently. In his mind, he was churning over all the information he had accumulated on the diverse views and styles of each teacher and when he put it together with his own views, which were completely different, he ended up with no samādhi at all. The more he tried to work out where each teacher was at, the more he became restless and agitated, burning up all his energy until he became both mentally and physically drained, utterly defeated by his endless doubting and speculation.

Later the monk heard the fast spreading news that a fully enlightened teacher named Gotama had arisen in the world. Immediately his mind was completely overwhelmed, racing twice as fast, speculating about the teacher. Just as before, he could not resist the urge to see the new teacher for himself, so he went to pay respects and listen to him. Gotama the Buddha expounded the Dhamma, explaining that ultimately, it's impossible to gain true understanding and transcend doubt simply through seeking out and receiving teaching from other people. The more you hear, the more you doubt; the more you hear, the more mixed up you become. The Buddha emphasized that other people's wisdom can't cut through your doubts for you. Other people can not let go of doubt for you. All that a teacher can do is explain the way doubts arise in the mind and how to reflect on them, but you have to take his or her words and put them into practice until you gain insight and know for yourself. The Buddha taught that the place of practice lies within the body. Form, feeling, memories, thoughts and sense consciousness (the five khandhas) are your teachers; they already provide you with the basis for insight. What you still lack is a basis in mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) and wise reflection.

The Buddha taught that the only way to truly end doubt is through contemplation of your own body and mind - 'just that much.' Abandon the past; abandon the future - practise knowing, and letting go. Sustain the knowing. Once you have established the knowing, let go - but don't try to let go without the knowing. It is the presence of this knowing that allows you to let go. Let go of everything you did in the past: both the good and the bad. Whatever you did before, let go of it, because there is no benefit in clinging to the past. The good you did was good at that time, the bad you did was bad at that time. What was right was right. So now you can cast it all aside, let go of it. Events in the future are still waiting to happen. All the arising and cessation that will occur in the future hasn't actually taken place yet, so don't attach too firmly to ideas about what may or may not happen in the future. Be aware of yourself and let go. Let go of the past. Whatever took place in the past has ceased. Why spend a lot of time proliferating about it? If you think about something that happened in the past let that thought go. It was a dhamma (phenomenon) that arose in the past. Having arisen, it then ceased *in the past*. There's no reason to mentally proliferate about the present either. Once you have established awareness of what you are thinking, let it go. Practise knowing and letting go.

It's not that you shouldn't experience any thoughts or hold views at all: experience thoughts and views and then let go of them - because they are already completed. The future is still ahead of you: whatever is going to arise in the future will end in the future also. Be aware of your thoughts about the future and then let go. Your thoughts and views about the past are uncertain, in just the same way. The future is totally uncertain. Be aware and then let go, because it's uncertain. Be aware of the present moment, investigate what you are doing right here and now. There is no need to look at anything outside of yourself.

The Buddha didn't praise those who still invest all their faith and belief in what other people say; neither did he praise those who still get caught up in good and bad moods as a result of the things other people say and do. What other people say and do has to be their own concern; you can be aware of it, but then let go. Even if they do the right thing, see that it's right for them; but if you don't bring your own mind in line with right view, you can never really experience that which is good and right for yourself, it remains

something external. All those teachers are doing their own practice - whether correctly or incorrectly - somewhere else, separate from you. Any good practice they do doesn't actually change you; if it's correct practice, it's correct for them, not you. What this means is that the Buddha taught that those who fail to cultivate their minds and gain insight into the truth for themselves are not worthy of praise.

I emphasize the teaching that the Dhamma is *opanayiko* - to be brought inside oneself - so that the mind knows, understands and experiences the results of the training within itself. If people say you are meditating correctly, don't be too quick to believe them, and similarly, if they say you're doing it wrong, don't just accept what they say until you've really practised and found out for yourself. Even if they instruct you in the correct way that leads to enlightenment, this is still just other people's words; you have to take their teachings and apply them until you experience results for yourself right here in the present. That means you must become your own witness, able to confirm the results from within your own mind. It's like the example of the sour fruit. Imagine I told you that a certain fruit tasted sour and invited you to try some of it. You would have to take a bite from it to taste the sourness. Some people would willingly take my word for it if I told them the fruit was sour, but if they simply believed that it was sour without ever tasting it, that belief would be useless (*mogha*), it wouldn't have any real value or meaning. If you described the fruit as sour, it would be merely going by my perception of it. Only that. The Buddha didn't praise such belief. But then you shouldn't just dismiss it either: investigate it. You must taste the fruit for yourself, by actually experiencing the sour taste, you become your own internal witness. If somebody says it's sour, find out if it really is sour or not by eating it. It's like you're making doubly sure - relying on your own experience as well as what other people say. This way you can really have confidence in the authenticity of its sour taste; you have a witness who attests to the truth.

Venerable Ajahn Mun referred to this internal witness that exists within the mind as *sakkhibhūto*. The authenticity of any knowledge acquired merely from what other people say remains unsubstantiated, it is only a truth proven to someone else - you only have someone else's word to go on that the fruit is sour. You could say that it's a half-truth, or fifty percent. But if

you taste the fruit and find it sour, that is the one hundred percent, whole truth: you have evidence from what other people say and also from your own direct experience. This is a fully one hundred percent substantiated truth. This is *sakkebhūto*; the internal witness has risen within you.

The way to train is thus *opanayiko*. You direct your attention inwards, until your insight and understanding become *paccattam*. Understanding gained from listening to and watching other people is superficial in comparison with the deep understanding that is *paccattam*; it remains on the outside of *paccattam*. Such knowledge doesn't arise from self-examination; it's not your own insight - it's other people's insight. That doesn't mean you should be heedless and dismissive of any teachings you receive from other sources; they should also become the subject for study and investigation. When you first come across and begin to understand some aspect of the teaching from the books, it's fine to believe it on one level, but at the same time to recognize that you haven't yet trained the mind and developed that knowledge through your own experience. For that reason you still haven't experienced the full benefit of the teaching. It's as if the true value of your understanding is still only half complete. So then you must cultivate the mind and let your insight mature, until you completely penetrate the truth. In that way your knowledge becomes fully complete. It is then that you go beyond doubt. If you have profound insight into the truth from within your own mind, all uncertainty about the way to enlightenment disappears completely.

When we speak of practising with the *paccuppanna dhamma* it means that whatever phenomenon is immediately arising into the mind, you must investigate and deal with it at once. Your awareness must be right there. Because *paccuppanna dhamma* refers to the experience of the present moment - it encompasses both cause and effect. The present moment is firmly rooted within the process of cause and effect; the way you are in the present reflects the causes that lay in the past - your present experience is the result. Every single experience you've had right up until the present has arisen out of past causes. For instance, you could say that walking out from your meditation hut was a cause, and that you sitting down here is the result. This is the truth of the way things are, there is a constant succession of causes and effects. So what you did in the past was the cause, the present

experience is the result. Similarly, present actions are the cause for what you will experience in the future. Sitting here right now, you are already initiating causes! Past causes are coming to fruition in the present, and these results are actually forming causes that will produce results in the future.

What the Buddha saw was that you must abandon both the past and the future. When we say 'abandon', it doesn't mean you literally get rid of them. Abandoning means the focus of your mindfulness and insight is right here at this one point - the present moment. The past and the future link together right here. The present is both the result of the past and the cause of what lies ahead in the future. So you must completely abandon both cause and result, and simply abide with the present moment. We say abandon them, but these are just words used to describe the way of training the mind. Even though you let go of your attachment and abandon the past and future, the natural process of cause and effect remains in place. In fact, you could call this the halfway point; it's already part of the process of cause and result. The Buddha taught to watch the present moment where you will see a continuous process of arising and passing away, followed by more arising and passing away.

Whatever arises in the present moment is impermanent. I say this often, but most people don't pay much attention. They're reluctant to make use of this simple little teaching. All that is subject to arising is impermanent. It's uncertain. This really is the easiest, least complicated way to reflect on the truth. If you don't meditate on this teaching, when things actually do start to show themselves as uncertain and changeable, you don't know how to respond wisely and tend to get agitated and stirred up. Investigation of this very impermanence brings you insight and understanding of that which is permanent. By contemplating that which is uncertain, you see that which is certain. This is the way you have to explain it to make people understand the truth - but they tend not to understand and spend the whole time lost, rushing here and there. Really, if you want to experience true peace, you must bring the mind to that point where it is fully mindful in the present moment. Whatever happiness or suffering arises there, teach yourself that it's transient. The part of the mind that recollects that happiness and suffering are impermanent is the wisdom of the Buddha within each of you.

The one who recognizes the uncertainty of phenomena is the Dhamma within you.

That which is the Dhamma is the Buddha, but most people don't realize this. They see the Dhamma as something external, out there somewhere, and the Buddha as something else over here. If the mind's eye sees all conditioned things as uncertain, then all of your problems that arise out of attaching and giving undue importance to things will disappear. Whatever way you look at it, this intrinsic truth is the only thing that is really certain. When you see this, rather than clinging and attaching, the mind lets go. The cause of the problem, the attachment, disappears, resulting in the mind penetrating the truth and merging with the Dhamma. There is nothing higher or more profound to seek other than the realization of this truth. In that way the Dhamma is equal to the Buddha, the Buddha is equal to the Dhamma.

This teaching that all conditioned things are uncertain and subject to change is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the essence of the Buddha; it isn't anything else. The purpose of cultivating awareness through continuous recitation of '*Buddho*', '*Buddho*'-that which knows - is to see this truth. When the mind becomes one-pointed through the recitation of '*Buddho*', this supports the development of insight into the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anattā*); the clarity of awareness brings you to view things as uncertain and changeable. If you see this clearly and directly the mind lets go. So when you experience any kind of happiness, you know it's uncertain; when you experience any kind of suffering, you know it's uncertain just the same. If you go to live somewhere else, hoping it will be better than where you are already, remember that it's not a sure thing whether you will really find what you are looking for. If you think it's best to stay here, again, it's not sure. That's just the point! With insight, you see that everything is uncertain, so wherever you go to practise you don't have to suffer. When you want to stay here, you stay. When you want to go elsewhere, you go and you don't make any problems for yourself. All that doubting and vacillation about what is the right thing to do ends. It is the way of training in fixing mindfulness solely on the present moment that brings the doubts to an end.

So don't worry about the past or the future. The past has already ceased. Whatever occurred in the past has already taken place and is over and done with; it's finished. Whatever is going to arise in the future is also going to end in the future - let go of that too. Why get worried about it? Observe the phenomena (dhamma) arising in the present moment and notice how they are changing and unreliable. As '*Buddho*' (the knowing) matures and penetrates deeper, you gain a more profound awareness of the essential truth that all conditioned phenomena are of an impermanent nature. This is where insight deepens and allows the stability and tranquillity of samādhi to strengthen and become more refined.

Samādhi means the mind that is firm and stable, or the mind that is calm. There are two kinds. One kind of calm comes from practising in a quiet place, where there are no sights, sounds or other sensual impingement to disturb you. The mind with such calm is still not free from the defilements (*kilesa*). The defilements still cover over the mind, but during the time when it is calm in samādhi they remain in abatement. It's like pond water that is temporarily clear after all the dirt and dust particles have settled on the bottom; as long as the sediment hasn't been stirred up the water remains clear, but as soon as something does disturb it, the dirt rises up and the water becomes cloudy again. You are just the same. When you hear a sound, see a form or the mind is affected by a mental state, any reaction of disliking clouds over the mind. If no aversion is stimulated you feel comfortable; but that feeling of comfort comes from the presence of attachment and defilement rather than wisdom.

For example, suppose you wanted this tape recorder. As long as this desire was unfulfilled you would feel dissatisfaction. However, once you had gone out looking and found one for yourself, you would feel content and satisfied, wouldn't you? However, if you attached to the feeling of contentment that arose because you managed to get your own tape recorder, you would actually be creating the conditions for future suffering. You would be creating the conditions for future suffering, without being aware of it. This is because your sense of satisfaction would be dependent on you gaining a tape recorder, so as long as you still didn't possess one, you would experience suffering. Once you acquired a tape recorder you would feel content and satisfied. But then if, perhaps, a thief were to steal it, that

sense of satisfaction would disappear with it and you would fall back into a state of suffering again. This is the way it is. Without a tape recorder you suffer; with one you're happy, but when for some reason you lose it, you become miserable again. It goes on like this the whole time. This is what is meant by samādhi that is dependent on peaceful conditions. It's uncertain, like the happiness you experience when you get what you want. When you finally get the tape recorder you have been looking for, you feel great. But what's the true cause of that pleasant feeling? It arises because your desire has been satisfied. That's all. That's as deep as that kind of happiness can reach. It's happiness conditioned by the defilements that control your mind. You aren't even aware of this. At any time somebody could come along and steal that tape recorder causing you to fall right back into suffering again.

So that kind of samādhi only provides a temporary experience of calm. You have to contemplate the nature of the calm that arises out of serenity (samatha) meditation to see the whole truth of the matter. That tape recorder you obtain, or anything else you possess is bound to deteriorate, break up and disappear in the end. You have something to lose because you gained a tape recorder. If you don't own a tape recorder you don't have one to lose. Birth and death are the same. Because there has been a birth, there has to be the experience of death. If nothing gets born, there is nothing to die. All those people who die had to be born at some time; those who don't get born don't have to die. This is the way things are. Being able to reflect in this way means that as soon as you acquire that tape recorder, you are mindful of its impermanence - that one day it will break down or get stolen, and that in the end it must inevitably fall apart and completely disintegrate. You see the truth with wisdom, and understand that the tape recorder's very nature is impermanent. Whether the tape recorder actually breaks or gets stolen, these are all just manifestations of impermanence. If you can view things in the correct way, you will be able to use the tape recorder without suffering.

You can compare this with setting up some kind of business in the lay life. If at first you needed to get a loan from the bank to set up the business operation, immediately you would begin to experience stress. You suffered because you wanted somebody else's money. Looking for money is both difficult and tiring, and as long as you were unsuccessful in trying to raise some, it would cause you suffering. Of course, the day you successfully

managed to get a loan from the bank you would feel over the moon, but that elation wouldn't last more than a few hours, because in no time at all the interest payments on the loan would start to eat up all your profits. You wouldn't have to do so much as raise one finger and already your money would be draining away to the bank in interest payments. Can you believe it! You would be sitting there suffering again. Can you see this? Why is it like this? When you didn't have any money you would suffer; when you finally receive some you think your problems are over, but before long the interest payments would start eating away at your funds, just leading you to more suffering. This is the way it is.

The Buddha taught that the way to practise with this is to observe the present moment, and develop insight into the transient nature of the body and mind; to see the truth of the Dhamma - that conditioned things simply arise and pass away, and nothing more. It's the nature of the body and mind to be that way, so don't attach or cling firmly on to them. If you have insight into this, it gives rise to peace as the result. This is peace that comes from letting go of defilements; it arises in conjunction with the arising of wisdom.

What causes wisdom to arise? It comes from contemplating the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self, which brings you insight into the truth of the way things are. You have to see the truth clearly and unmistakably in your own mind. That is the only way to really gain wisdom. There has to be continuous clear insight. You see for yourself that all mental objects and moods (*ārammana*) that arise into consciousness pass away and after that cessation there is more arising. After more arising there is further cessation. If you still have attachment and clinging, suffering must arise from moment to moment; but if you are letting go, you won't create any suffering. When the mind clearly sees the impermanence of phenomena, this is what is meant by *sakkebhūto* - the internal witness. The mind is so firmly absorbed in its contemplation that the insight is self-sustaining. So in the end, you can only accept as partial truths all the teachings and wisdom that you receive from others.

On one occasion the Buddha gave a discourse to a group of monks, and afterwards asked Venerable Sāriputta, who had been listening:

‘Sāriputta, do you believe what I have been teaching you?’

‘I still don’t believe it, Bhante,’ Sāriputta replied. The Buddha was pleased with this response and continued,

‘That is good Sāriputta. You shouldn’t believe any teaching people give you too easily. A sage must contemplate thoroughly everything he hears before accepting it fully. You should take this teaching away with you and contemplate it first.’

Even though he had received a teaching from the Buddha himself, Venerable Sāriputta didn’t immediately believe every single word of it. He was heedful of the right way to train his mind, and took the teaching away with him to investigate it further. He would only accept the teaching if, after reflecting upon the Buddha’s explanation of the truth, he found that it stimulated the arising of wisdom in his own mind and this insight made his mind peaceful and unified with the Dhamma (Truth). The understanding that arose must lead to the Dhamma becoming fixed within his own mind. It had to be in accordance with the truth of the way things are. The Buddha taught his disciples to accept a point of Dhamma only if, beyond all doubt, they found it to be in line with the way things are in reality - as seen both from one’s own and other people’s experience and understanding.

In the end, the important thing is simply to investigate the truth. You don’t have to look very far away, just observe what’s happening in the present moment. Watch what is happening in your own mind. Let go of the past. Let go of the future. Just be mindful of the present moment, and wisdom will arise from investigating and seeing clearly the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. If you are walking see that it’s impermanent, if sitting see that it’s impermanent, if lying down see that it’s impermanent - whatever you are doing, these characteristics will be manifesting the whole time, because this is the way things are. That which is permanent is this truth of the way things are. That never changes. If you cultivate insight to the point where the way you view things is completely and unwaveringly in line with this truth, you will be at ease with the world.

Will it really be that peaceful going to live alone up in the mountains somewhere? It’s only a temporary kind of peace. Once you start to feel

hungry on a regular basis and the body lacks the nourishment that it's used to, you'll become weary of the whole experience again. The body will be crying out for its vitamins, but the hill-tribe people who provide your almsfood don't know much about the level of vitamins needed for a balanced diet. In the end you'll probably come back down and return here to the monastery. If you stay in Bangkok you'll probably complain that the people offer too much food and that it's just a burden and lots of hassle, so perhaps you will decide it is better to go and live way out in seclusion in the forest somewhere. In truth, you must be pretty foolish if you find living on your own causes you suffering. If you find living in a community with lots of people is a lot of suffering, you are equally foolish. It's like chicken shit. If you are walking on your own somewhere carrying chicken shit, it stinks. If there is a whole group of people walking around carrying chicken shit, it stinks just the same. It can become habitual to keep lugging around that which is rotten and putrid. This is because you still have wrong view; but for someone with right view, although they might be quite correct to think that living in a large community isn't very peaceful, they would still be able to gain much wisdom from the experience.

For myself, teaching large numbers of monks, nuns and laypeople has been a great source of wisdom for me. In the past I had fewer monks living with me, but then as more laypeople came to visit me and the resident community of monks and nuns grew in size, I was exposed to much more because everybody has different thoughts, views and experiences. My patience, endurance and tolerance matured and strengthened as it was stretched to its very limits. When you keep reflecting, all such experience can be of benefit to you, but if you don't understand the truth of the way things are, at first you might think that living alone is best; then after a while you might get bored with it, so then you might think that living in a large community is better. Or perhaps you might feel that being in a place where there is only a little food offered is the ideal. You might decide that a plentiful supply of food is actually the best and that little food is no good at all, or you might change again and conclude that too much food is a bad thing. In the end, most people just remain forever caught up in views and opinions, because they don't have enough wisdom to decide for themselves.

So try to see the uncertainty of things. If you are in a large community, it's uncertain. If you are living with just a small group, it's also not a sure thing. Don't attach or cling to views about the way things are. Put effort into being mindful of the present moment; investigate the body, penetrating deeper and deeper inside. The Buddha taught monks and nuns to find a place to live and train where they are at ease, where the food is suitable, the company of fellow practitioners (*kalyānamitta*) is suitable and the lodgings are comfortable. But actually finding a place where all these things are just right and suited to your needs is difficult; so at the same time, he also taught that wherever you go to live you might have to encounter discomfort and put up with things that you don't like. For instance, how comfortable is this monastery? If the laypeople made it really comfortable for you, what would it be like? Every day they would be at your service to bring you hot and cold drinks as you wished and all the sweets and treats that you could eat. They would be polite and praise you, saying all the right things. That's what having good lay support is like, isn't it? Some monks and nuns like it that way: 'The lay supporters here are really great, it's really comfortable and convenient.' In no time at all the whole training in mindfulness and insight just dies. That's how it happens.

What is really comfortable and suitable for meditation can mean different things to different people, but once you know how to make your own mind content with what you have, then wherever you go you will feel at ease. If you have to stay somewhere that would perhaps not be your first choice, you still know how to remain content while you train there. If it's time to go elsewhere then you are content to go. You don't have any worries about these external things. If you don't know very much, things can be difficult; if you know too much it can also bring you a lot of suffering - everything can be a source of discomfort and suffering. As long as you don't have any insight you will constantly be caught in moods of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, stimulated by the conditions around you, and potentially every little thing can cause you to suffer. Wherever you go, the meaning of the Buddha's teaching remains correct, but it is the Dhamma in your own mind that is still not correct. Where will you go to find the right conditions for practice? Maybe such and such a monk has got it right and is really practising hard with the meditation - as soon as the meal is finished he hurries away to meditate. All he does is practise developing his samādhi.

He's really dedicated and serious about it. Or maybe he isn't so dedicated, because you can't really know. If you really practise wholeheartedly for yourself, you are certain to reach peace of mind. If others are really dedicated and genuinely training themselves, why are they not yet peaceful? This is the truth of the matter. In the end, if they aren't peaceful, it shows that they can't be really that serious about the practice after all.

When reflecting on the training in samādhi, it's important to understand that virtue (sīla), concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā) are each essential roots that support the whole. They are mutually supporting, each having its own indispensable role to play. Each provides a necessary tool to be used in developing meditation, but it's up to each individual to discover skilful ways to make use of them. Someone with a lot of wisdom can gain insight easily; someone with little wisdom gains insight with difficulty; someone without any wisdom won't gain any insight. Two different people might be following the same way of cultivating the mind, but whether they actually gain insight into the Dhamma will depend on the amount of wisdom each has. If you go to observe and train with different teachers you must use wisdom to put what you see in perspective. How does this Ajahn do it? What's that Ajahn's style like? You watch them closely but that's as far as it goes. It's all just watching and judging on the external level. It's just looking at their behaviour and way of doing things on the surface. If you simply observe things on this level you will never stop doubting. Why does that teacher do it this way? Why does this teacher do it another way? In that monastery the teacher gives lots of talks, why does the teacher in this monastery give so few talks? In that other monastery the teacher doesn't even give any talks at all! It's just crazy when the mind proliferates endlessly, comparing and speculating about all the different teachers. In the end you simply wind yourself up into a mess. You must turn your attention inward and cultivate for yourself. The correct thing to do is focus internally on your own training, as this is how right practice (*sammā-patipadā*) develops. You simply observe different teachers and learn from their example, but then you have to do it yourself. If you contemplate at this more subtle level, all that doubting will stop.

There was one senior monk who didn't spend a lot of time thinking and reflecting about things. He didn't give much importance to thoughts about

the past or the future, because he wouldn't let his attention move away from the mind itself. He watched intently what was arising in his awareness in the present moment. Observing the mind's changing behaviour and different reactions as it experienced things, he wouldn't attach importance to any of it, repeating the teaching to himself: 'Its uncertain.' 'Its not a sure thing.' If you can teach yourself to see impermanence in this way, it won't be long before you gain insight into the Dhamma.

In fact, you don't have to run after the proliferating mind. Really, it just moves around its own enclosed circuit; it spins around in circles. This is the way your mind works. It's *samsāra vatta* - the endless cycle of birth and death. This completely encircles the mind. If you tried pursuing the mind as it spins around would you be able to catch it? It moves so fast, would you even be able to keep up with it? Try chasing after it and see what happens. What you need to do is stand still at one point, and let the mind spin around the circuit by itself. Imagine the mind was a mechanical doll, which was able to run around. If it began running faster and faster until it was running at full speed, you wouldn't be able to run fast enough to keep up with it. But actually, you wouldn't need to run anywhere. You could just stand still in one place and let the doll do the running. If you were to stand still in the middle of the circuit, without chasing after it, you would be able to see the doll every time it ran past you and completed a lap. In fact, if you did try running after it, the more you tried to chase after and catch it, the more it would be able to elude you.

As far as going on *tudong* is concerned, I both encourage it and discourage it at the same time. If the practitioner already has some wisdom in the way of training, there should be no problem. However, there was one monk I knew who didn't see it as necessary to go on *tudong* into the forest; he didn't see *tudong* as a matter of travelling anywhere. Having thought about it, he decided to stay and train in the monastery, vowing to undertake three of the *dhutanga* practices and to keep them strictly, without going anywhere. He felt it wasn't necessary to make himself tired walking long distances with the heavy weight of his monk's almsbowl, robes and other requisites slung over his shoulder. His way was quite a valid one too; but if you really had a strong desire to go out wandering about the forests and hills on *tudong*, you wouldn't find his style very satisfying. In the end, if

you have clear insight into the truth of things, you only need to hear one word of the teaching and that will bring you deep and penetrating insight.

Another example I could mention is that a young novice I once encountered wanted to practise living in a cemetery completely alone. As he was still more or less a child, hardly into his teens, I was quite concerned for his well-being, and kept an eye on him to see how he was doing. In the morning he would go on almsround in the village, and afterwards bring his food back to the cremation ground where he would eat his meal alone, surrounded by the pits where the corpses of those who hadn't been burned were buried. Every night he would sleep quite alone next to the remains of the dead. After I had been staying nearby for about a week I went along to check and see how he was. On the outside he seemed at ease with himself, so I asked him:

‘So you’re not afraid staying here then?’

‘No I’m not afraid,’ he replied.

‘How come you’re not frightened?’

‘It seems to me unlikely that there’s anything much to be afraid of.’

All it needed was this one simple reflection for the mind to stop proliferating. That novice didn’t need to think about all sorts of different things that would merely complicate the matter. He was ‘cured’ straight away. His fear vanished. You should try meditating in this way.

I say that whatever you are doing - whether standing, walking, coming or going - if you sustain mindfulness without giving up, your samādhi won’t deteriorate. It won’t decline. If there’s too much food you say that it’s suffering and just trouble. What’s all the fuss about? If there is a lot, just take a small amount and leave the rest for everybody else. Why make so much trouble for yourself over this? It’s not peaceful. What’s not peaceful? Just take a small portion and give the rest away. But if you are attached to the food and feel bad about giving it up to others, then of course you will find things difficult. If you are fussy and want to have a taste of this and a taste of that, but not so much of something else, you’ll find that in the end

you've chosen so much food that you've filled the bowl to the point where none of it tastes very delicious anyway. So you end up attaching to the view that being offered lots of food is just distracting and a load of trouble. Why get so distracted and upset? It's you who are letting yourself get stirred up by the food. Does the food itself ever get distracted and upset? It's ridiculous. You are getting all worked up over nothing.

When there are a lot of people coming to the monastery, you say it's disturbing. Where is the disturbance? Actually, following the daily routine and the ways of training is fairly straightforward. You don't have to make a big deal out of this: you go on almsround, come back and eat the meal, you do any necessary business and chores training yourself with mindfulness, and just get on with things. You make sure you don't miss out on the various parts of the monastic routine. When you do the evening chanting, does your cultivation of mindfulness really collapse? If simply doing the morning and evening chanting causes your meditation to fall apart, it surely shows that you haven't really learnt to meditate anyway. In the daily meetings, the bowing, chanting praise to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha and everything else you do are extremely wholesome activities; so can they really be the cause for your samādhi to degenerate? If you think that it's distracting going to meetings, look again. It's not the meetings that are distracting and unpleasant, it's you. If you let unskilful thinking stir you up, then everything becomes distracting and unpleasant - even if you don't go to the meetings, you end up just as distracted and stirred up.

You have to learn how to reflect wisely and keep your mind in a wholesome state. Everybody gets caught into such states of confusion and agitation, particularly those who are new to the training. What actually happens is that you allow your mind to go out and interfere with all these things and stir itself up. When you come to train with a monastic community, determine for yourself to just stay there and keep practising. Whether other people are training in the correct way or wrong way is their business. Keep putting effort into the training, following the monastic guidelines and helping each other with any useful advice you can offer. Anyone who isn't happy training here is free to go elsewhere. If you want to stay then go ahead and get on with the practice.

It has an extremely beneficial effect on the community if there is one of the group who is self-contained and solidly training himself. The other monks around will start to notice and take example from the good aspects of that monk's behaviour. They will observe him and ask themselves how it is that he manages to maintain a sense of ease and calm while training himself in mindfulness. The good example provided by that monk is one of the most beneficial things he can do for his fellow beings. If you are a junior member of a monastic community, training with a daily routine and keeping to rules about the way things are done, you have to follow the lead of the senior monks and keep putting effort into the routine. Whatever the activity is you do it, and when it's time to finish you stop. You say those things that are appropriate and useful, and train yourself to refrain from speech that is inappropriate and harmful. Don't allow that kind of speech to slip out. There's no need to take lots of food at the mealtime - just take a few things and leave the rest. When you see that there's a lot of food, the tendency is to indulge and start picking a little of this and trying a little of that and that way you end up eating everything that's been offered. When you hear the invitation, 'Please take some of this, Ajahn,' 'Please take some of that, Venerable,' if you're not careful it will just stir up the mind. The thing to do is let go. Why get involved with it? You think that it's the food stirring you up, but the real root of the problem is that you let the mind go out and meddle with the food. If you can reflect and see this, it should make life a lot easier. The problem is you don't have enough wisdom. You don't have enough insight to see how the process of cause and effect works.

Actually, when I was on the road in the past, when it was necessary I was even prepared to stay in one of the village or city monasteries.¹ In the course of your travels when you are alone and have to pass through different monastic communities that have varying standards of training and discipline, recite the verse to yourself: '*suddhi asuddhi paccattam*' (the purity or impurity of one's virtue is something one knows for oneself), both as a protection and as a guideline for reflection. You might end up having to rely on your own integrity in this way.

When you are moving through an area you haven't been to before you might have to make a choice over the place you are going to stay for the night. The Buddha taught that monks and nuns should live in peaceful

places. So, depending on what's available, you should try and find a peaceful place to stay and meditate. If you can't find a really quiet place, you can, as second best, at least find a place where you are able to be at peace internally. So, if for some reason it's necessary to stay in a certain place, you must learn how to live there peacefully - without letting craving (*tanhā*) overcome the mind. If you then decide to leave that monastery or forest, don't leave because of craving. Similarly, if you are staying somewhere, don't stay there because of craving. Understand what is motivating your thinking and actions. It's true that the Buddha advised monastics to lead a lifestyle and find living conditions that are conducive to peace and suitable for meditation. But how will you cope on those occasions when you can't find a peaceful place? In the end the whole thing could just drive you crazy. Where will you go next? Stay right where you are; stay put and learn to live in peace. Train yourself until you are able to stay and meditate in the place you are in. The Buddha taught that you should know and understand proper time and place according to conditions; he didn't encourage monks and nuns to roam around all over the place without any real purpose. Certainly he recommended that we find a suitable quiet place, but if that's not possible, it might be necessary to spend a few weeks or a few months in a place that isn't so quiet or suitable. What would you do then? You would probably just die from the shock of it!

So learn to know your own mind and know your intentions. In the end, travelling around from place to place is only that much. When you move on to somewhere else, you tend to find more of the same of what you left behind, and you're always doubting about what might lie ahead at the next place. Then, before you know it, you could find yourself with malaria or some other unpleasant illness, and you'd have to find a doctor to treat you, give you drugs and injections. In no time at all, your mind would be more agitated and distracted than ever!

Actually, the secret to successful meditation is to bring your way of viewing things in line with the Dhamma; the important thing is to establish right view (*sammā-ditthi*) in the mind. It isn't anything more complicated than that. But you have to keep putting forth effort to investigate and seek out the correct way for yourself. Naturally, this involves some difficulty, because you still lack maturity of wisdom and understanding.

So, what do you think you'll do? Try giving *tudong* a go and see what happens ... you might get fed up with wandering about again; it's never a sure thing. Or maybe you're thinking that if you really get into the meditation, you won't want to go on *tudong*, because the whole proposition will seem uninteresting; but that perception is uncertain. You might feel totally bored with the idea of going on *tudong*, but that can always change and it might not be long before you start wanting to go off moving about again. Or you might just stay out on *tudong* indefinitely and continue to wander from place to place with no time limits or any fixed destination in mind - again, it's uncertain. This is what you have to reflect upon as you meditate. Go against the flow of your desires. You might attach to the view that you'll go on *tudong* for certain, or you might attach to the view that you will stay put in the monastery for certain, but either way you are getting caught in delusion. You are attaching to fixed views in the wrong way. Go and investigate this for yourself. I have already contemplated this from my own experience, and I'm explaining the way it is as simply and directly as I can. So listen to what I am saying, and then observe and contemplate for yourself. This really is the way things are. In the end you will be able to see the truth of this whole matter for yourself. Then, once you do have insight into the truth, whatever decision you make will be accompanied by right view and in accordance with the Dhamma.

Whatever you decide to do, whether to go on *tudong* or stay on in the monastery, you must wisely reflect first. It isn't that you are forbidden from going off wandering in the forest, or going to find quiet places to meditate. If you do go off walking, really make a go of it and walk until you are worn out and ready to drop - test yourself to the limits of your physical and mental endurance. In the old days, as soon as I caught sight of the mountains, I'd feel elated and be inspired to take off. Nowadays when I see them, the body starts moaning just at the sight of them and all I want to do is turn around and go back to the monastery. There's not much enthusiasm for all that anymore. Before, I'd be really happy to live up in the mountains - I even thought I'd spend my whole life living up there!

The Buddha taught to be mindful of what's arising in the present moment. Know the truth of the way things are in the present moment. These are the teachings he left you and they are correct, but your own thoughts and views

are still not correctly in line with the Dhamma, and that's why you continue to suffer. So try out *tudong* if it seems like the right thing to do. See what it's like moving around from place to place and how that affects your mind.

I don't want to forbid you from going on *tudong*, but I don't want to give you permission either. Do you understand my meaning? I neither want to prevent you, nor allow you to go, but I will share with you some of my experience. If you do go on *tudong*, use the time to benefit your meditation. Don't just go like a tourist, having fun travelling around. These days it looks like more and more monks and nuns go on *tudong* to indulge in a bit of sensual enjoyment and adventure rather than to really benefit their own spiritual training. If you do go, then really make a sincere effort to use the *dhutanga* practices to wear away the defilements. Even if you stay in the monastery, you can take up these *dhutanga* practices. These days, what they call '*tudong*' tends to be more a time for seeking excitement and stimulation than training with the thirteen *dhutanga* practices. If you go off like that you are just lying to yourself when you call it '*tudong*'. It's an imaginary *tudong*. *Tudong* can actually be something that supports and enhances your meditation. When you go you should really do it. Contemplate what is the true purpose and meaning of going on *tudong*. If you do go, I encourage you to use the experience as an opportunity to learn and further your meditation, not just waste time. I won't let monks go off if they are not yet ready for it, but if someone is sincere and seriously interested in the practice, I won't stop them.

When you are planning to go off, it's worth asking yourself these questions and reflecting on them first. Staying up in the mountains can be a useful experience; I used to do it myself. In those days I would have to get up really early in the morning because the houses where I went on almsround were such a long way away. I might have to go up and down an entire mountain and sometimes the walk was so long and arduous that I wouldn't be able to get there and back in time to eat the meal at my camp before midday. If you compare it with the way things are these days, you can see that maybe it's not actually necessary to go to such lengths and put yourself through so much hardship. It might actually be more beneficial to go on almsround to one of the villages near to the monastery here, return to eat the meal and have lots of energy left in reserve to put forth effort in the formal

practice. That's if you're training yourself sincerely, but if you're just into taking it easy and like to go straight back to your hut for a sleep after the meal, that isn't the correct way to go it. In the days when I was on *tudong*, I might have to leave my camp at the crack of dawn and use up much of my energy just in the walk across the mountains - even then I might be so pushed for time I'd have to eat my meal in the middle of the forest somewhere before getting back. Reflecting on it now, I wonder if it's worth putting oneself to all that bother. It might be better to find a place to practise where the alms route to the local village is not too long or difficult, which would allow you to save your energy for formal meditation. By the time you have cleaned up and are back at your hut ready to continue meditating, that monk up in the mountains would still be stuck out in the forest without even having begun to eat his meal.

Views on the best way of practice can differ. Sometimes, you actually have to experience some suffering before you can have insight into suffering and know it for what it is. *Tudong* can have its advantages, and I neither criticize those who stay in the monastery nor those who go off on *tudong* - if their aim is to progress in training themselves. I don't praise monks just because they stay in the monastery, nor do I praise monks simply because they go off on *tudong* either. Those who really deserve praise are the ones with right view. If you stay in the monastery, it should be for cultivating the mind. If you go off, it should be for cultivating the mind. The meditation and training goes wrong when you go off with the group of friends you are attached to, only interested in having a good time together and getting involved in foolish pursuits.

Questions and Answers

What do you have to say about the way of training? What do you think about what I have been saying? What do you think you'll decide to do in the future then?

A bhikkhu: I'd like to ask for some teaching about the suitability of different meditation objects for different temperaments. For a long time now I've tried calming the mind by focusing attention on the breathing in conjunction with reciting the meditation word *Buddho*, but I have never become very peaceful. I've tried contemplating death, but that hasn't helped calm the mind down. Reflecting on the five aggregates (*khandha*) hasn't worked either. So I've finally exhausted all my wisdom.

Ajahn Chah: Just let go! If you've exhausted all your wisdom, you must let go.

A bhikkhu: As soon as I begin to experience a little bit of calm during sitting meditation, a multitude of memories and thoughts immediately spring up and disturb the mind.

Ajahn Chah: That's just the point. It's uncertain. Teach yourself that it's not certain. Sustain this reflection on impermanence as you meditate. Every single sense object and mental state you experience is impermanent without exception. Keep this reflection present in the mind constantly. In the course of meditation, reflect that the distracted mind is uncertain. When the mind does become calm with *samādhi*, it's uncertain just the same. The reflection on impermanence is the thing you should really hold on to. You don't need to give too much importance to anything else. Don't get involved with the things that arise in the mind. Let go. Even if you are peaceful, you don't need to think too much about it. Don't take it too seriously. Don't take it too seriously if you're not peaceful either. *Viññānam aniccam* - have you ever read that anywhere? It means sense consciousness is impermanent. Have you ever heard that before? How should you train yourself in relation to this truth? How should you contemplate when you find that both peaceful and agitated mind states are transient? The important thing is to sustain awareness of the way things are. In other words, know that both the calm

mind and the distracted mind are uncertain. Once you know this, how will you view things? Once this understanding is implanted in the mind, whenever you experience peaceful states you know that they are transient and when you experience agitated states you know that they are transient also. Do you know how to meditate with this kind of awareness and insight?

A bhikkhu: I don't know.

Ajahn Chah: Investigate impermanence. How many days can those tranquil mental states really last? Sitting meditation with a distracted mind is uncertain. When the meditation brings good results and the mind enters a state of calm, that's also uncertain. This is where insight comes. What is there left for you to attach to? Keep following up on what's happening in the mind. As you investigate, keep questioning and prodding, probing deeper and deeper into the nature of impermanence. Sustain your mindfulness right at this point - you don't have to go anywhere else. In no time at all, the mind will calm down just as you want it to.

The reason practising with the meditation word '*Buddho*' doesn't make the mind peaceful, or practising mindfulness of breathing doesn't make the mind peaceful, is because you are attaching to the distracted mind. When reciting '*Buddho*' or concentrating on the breath and the mind still hasn't calmed down, reflect on uncertainty and don't get too involved with whether the state of mind is peaceful or not. Even if you enter a state of calm, don't get too involved with it, because it can delude you and cause you to attach too much meaning and importance to that state. You have to use some wisdom when dealing with the deluded mind. When it is calm you simply acknowledge the fact and take it as a sign that the meditation is going in the right direction. If the mind isn't calm you simply acknowledge the reality that the mind is confused and distracted, but there's nothing to be gained from refusing to accept the truth and trying to struggle against it. When the mind is peaceful you can be aware that it is peaceful, but remind yourself that any peaceful state is uncertain. When the mind is distracted, you observe the lack of peace and know that it is just that - the distracted state of mind is equally as prone to change as a peaceful one.

If you have established this kind of insight, the attachment to the sense of self collapses as soon as you begin to confront it and investigate. When the mind is agitated, the moment you begin to reflect on the uncertainty of that state, the sense of self, blown up out of attachment, begins to deflate. It tilts to one side like an inflatable boat that has been punctured. As the air rushes out of the boat, it starts to capsize and similarly the sense of self collapses. Try it out for yourself. The trouble is that usually you fail to catch your deluded thinking fast enough. As it arises, the sense of self immediately forms around the mental agitation, but as soon as you reflect on its changing nature the attachment collapses.

Try looking at this for yourself. Keep questioning and examining deeper and deeper into the nature of attachment. Normally, you fail to stop and question the agitation in the mind. But you must be patient and feel your way. Let the agitated proliferation run its course, and then slowly continue to feel your way. You are more used to not examining it, so you must be determined to focus attention on it; be firm and don't give it any space to stay in the mind. But when I give talks, you usually burst out complaining in frustration: 'All this old Ajahn ever talks about is impermanence and the changing nature of things.' From the first moment you can't stand hearing it and just want to flee somewhere else. 'Luang Por only has one teaching. that everything is uncertain.' If you are truly fed up with this teaching, you should go off and pursue your meditation until you develop enough insight to bring some real confidence and certainty to your mind. Go ahead and give it a go. In no time at all you will probably be back here again! So try to commit these teachings to memory and store them in your heart. Then go ahead and try out wandering about on *tudong*. If you don't come to understand and see the truth in the way I've explained, you'll find little peace. Wherever you are, you won't be at ease within yourself. You won't be able to find anywhere that you can really meditate at all.

I agree that doing a lot of formal meditation to develop samādhi is a good thing. Are you familiar with the terms *ceto-vimutti* and *paññā-vimutti*? Do you understand the meaning of them? *Vimutti* means liberation from the mental taints (*āsava*). There are two ways the mind can gain liberation: *ceto-vimutti* refers to liberation that comes after samādhi has been developed and perfected to its most powerful and refined level. The

practitioner first develops the ability to suppress the defilements completely through the power of samādhi and then turns to the development of insight to finally gain liberation. *Paññā-vimutti* means release from the outflows where the practitioner develops samādhi to a level where the mind is completely one-pointed and firm enough to support and sustain insight, which then takes the lead in cutting through the defilements.

These two kinds of liberation are comparable to different kinds of trees. Some species of trees grow and flourish with frequent watering, but others can die if you give them too much water. With those trees you only need to give them small amounts of water, just enough to keep them going. Some species of pine are like that: if you over-water them they just die. You only need to give them a little water once in a while. Strange, isn't it? Look at this pine tree. It appears so dry and parched that you wonder how it manages to grow. Think about it. Where does it get the water it needs to survive and produce those big, lush branches? Other kinds of trees would need much more water to grow to a similar size. Then there are those kinds of plants that they put in pots and hang up in different places with the roots dangling in mid-air. You'd think they would just die, but very quickly the leaves grow longer and longer with hardly any water at all. If they were just the ordinary kind of plants that grow on the ground, they would probably just shrivel up. It's the same with these two kinds of release. Do you see it? It is just that they naturally differ in this way.

Vimutti means liberation. *Ceto-vimutti* is liberation that comes from the strength of mind that has been trained in samādhi to the maximum level. It's like those trees that need lots of water to flourish. The other kinds of trees only need a small amount of water. With too much water they just die. It's their nature to grow and thrive requiring only small amounts of water. So the Buddha taught that there are two kinds of liberation from the defilements, *ceto-vimutti* and *paññā-vimutti*. To gain liberation, it requires both wisdom and the power of samādhi. Is there any difference between samādhi and wisdom?

A bhikkhu: No.

Ajahn Chah: Why do they give them different names? Why is there this split between *ceto-vimutti* and *paññā-vimutti*?

A bhikkhu: It's just a verbal distinction.

Ajahn Chah: That's right. Do you see it? If you don't see this, you can very easily go running around labelling and making such distinctions and even get so carried away that you start to lose your grip on reality. Actually though, each of these two kinds of liberation does have a slightly different emphasis. It wouldn't be correct to say that they were exactly the same, but they aren't two different things either. Am I correct if I answer in this way? I will say that these two things are neither exactly the same, nor different. This is the way I answer the question. You must take what I have said away with you and reflect on it.

Talking about the speed and fluency of mindfulness makes me think of the time I was wandering alone and having come across an old abandoned monastery in the course of my travels, set up my umbrella and mosquito net to camp there and practise meditation for a few days. In the grounds of the monastery there were many fruit trees, the branches of which were laden with ripe fruit. I really wanted to eat some but I didn't dare to because I was afraid that the trees were the property of the monastery and I hadn't received permission to take any. Later on a villager came by with a basket and seeing that I was staying there, asked me for permission to pick the fruit. Perhaps they asked me because they thought I was the owner of the trees. Reflecting on it, I saw that I had no real authority to give them permission to take the fruit, but that if I forbade them they would criticize me as being possessive and stingy with the monastery's fruit trees - either way there would be some harmful results. So I replied to the layperson: 'Even though I'm staying in this monastery, I'm not the owner of the trees. I understand you want some of the fruit. I won't forbid you from taking any, but I won't give you permission either. So it's up to you.' That's all it needed: they didn't take any! Speaking in this way was actually quite useful; I didn't forbid them, but I didn't give them permission either, so there was no sense of being burdened by the matter. This was the wise way to deal with such a situation - I was able to keep one step ahead of them. Speaking that way produced good results then and it's still a useful way of speaking to this day. Sometimes if you speak to people in this unusual manner it's enough to make them wary of doing something wrong.

What do they mean by temperament (*carita*)?

A bhikkhu: Temperament? I'm not sure how to answer that.

Ajahn Chah: The mind is one thing, temperament is another and the wisdom faculty another. So how do you train with this? Contemplate them. How do they talk about them? There is the person of lustful temperament, hateful temperament, deluded temperament, intelligent temperament and so on. Temperament is determined by those mental states within which the mind attaches and conceals itself most often. For some people it's lust, for others it's aversion. Actually, these are all just verbal descriptions of the characteristics of the mind, but they can be clearly distinguished from each other.

So you've been a monk for six years already. You've probably been running after your thoughts and moods long enough - you've already been chasing them for many years. There are quite a few monks who want to go and live alone and I've got nothing against it. If you want to live alone then give it a go. If you're living in a community, stick with it. Neither is wrong - if you don't reflect in the wrong way. If you are living alone and caught into wrong thinking, that will prevent you benefiting from the experience. The most appropriate kind of place for practising meditation is somewhere quiet and peaceful. But when a suitably peaceful place is not available, if you are not careful your meditation practice will just die. You'll find yourself in trouble. So be careful not to scatter your energy and awareness by seeking out too many different teachers, different techniques or places to meditate. Gather together your thoughts and focus your energy. Turn attention inwards and sustain awareness on the mind itself. Use these teachings to observe and investigate the mind over a long period of time. Don't discard them; keep them with you as a subject for reflection. Look at what I've been saying about all conditioned things being subject to change. Impermanence is something to investigate over time. It won't take long before you gain clear insight into it. One teaching a senior monk gave me when I was new to meditation that has stuck with me is simply to go ahead and train the mind. The important thing is not to get caught up in doubting. That's enough for now.

1: Generally the monks living in the village and city monasteries in Thailand will spend more time studying the Pāli language and the Buddhist scriptures than training in the rules of discipline or meditation, which is more emphasized in the forest tradition.

Opening the Dhamma Eye

Some of us start to practise, and even after a year or two, still don't know what's what. We are still unsure of the practice. When we're still unsure, we don't see that everything around us is purely Dhamma, and so we turn to teachings from the Ajahns. But actually, when we know our own mind, when there is sati to look closely at the mind, there is wisdom. All times and all places become occasions for us to hear the Dhamma.

We can learn Dhamma from nature, from trees for example. A tree is born due to causes and it grows following the course of nature. Right here the tree is teaching us Dhamma, but we don't understand this. In due course, it grows and grows until it buds, flowers and fruit appear. All we see is the appearance of the flowers and fruit; we're unable to bring this within and contemplate it. Thus we don't know that the tree is teaching us Dhamma. The fruit appears and we merely eat it without investigating: sweet, sour or salty, it's the nature of the fruit. And this is Dhamma, the teaching of the fruit. The leaves then grow old. They wither, die and then fall from the tree. All we see is that the leaves have fallen down. We step on them, we sweep them up, that's all. We don't investigate thoroughly, so we don't know that nature is teaching us. Later on the new leaves sprout, and we merely see that, without taking it further. We don't bring these things into our minds to contemplate.

If we can bring all this inwards and investigate it, we will see that the birth of a tree and our own birth are no different. This body of ours is born and exists dependent on conditions, on the elements of earth, water, wind and fire. It has its food, it grows and grows. Every part of the body changes and flows according to its nature. It's no different from the tree; hair, nails, teeth and skin all change. If we know the things of nature, then we will know ourselves.

People are born. In the end they die. Having died they are born again. Nails, teeth and skin are constantly dying and regrowing. If we understand the practice then we can see that a tree is no different from ourselves. If we understand the teaching of the Ajahns, then we realize that the outside and

the inside are comparable. Things which have consciousness and those without consciousness do not differ. They are the same. And if we understand this sameness, then when we see the nature of a tree, for example, we will know that it's no different from our own five *khandhā* - body, feeling, memory, thinking and consciousness. If we have this understanding then we understand Dhamma. If we understand Dhamma we understand the five *khandhā*, how they constantly shift and change, never stopping.

So whether standing, walking, sitting or lying we should have sati to watch over and look after the mind. When we see external things it's like seeing internal ones. When we see internals it's the same as seeing externals. If we understand this we can hear the teaching of the Buddha. If we understand this, we can say that 'Buddha-nature', the 'one who knows', has been established. It knows the external. It knows the internal. It understands all things which arise.

When we understand like this, then sitting at the foot of a tree, we hear the Buddha's teaching. Standing, walking, sitting or lying, we hear the Buddha's teaching. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking, we hear the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha is just this 'one who knows' within this very mind. It knows the Dhamma, it investigates the Dhamma. It's not that the Buddha who lived so long ago comes to talk to us, but this Buddha-nature, the 'one who knows' arises. The mind becomes illuminated.

If we establish the Buddha within our mind then we see everything, we contemplate everything, as no different from ourselves. We see the different animals, trees, mountains and vines as no different from ourselves. We see poor people and rich people - they're no different from us. Black people and white people - no different! They all have the same characteristics. One who understands like this is content wherever he is. He listens to the Buddha's teaching at all times. If we don't understand this, then even if we spend all our time listening to teachings from the Ajahns, we still won't understand their meaning.

The Buddha said that enlightenment of the Dhamma is just knowing nature,¹ the reality which is all around us, the nature which is right here. If

we don't understand this nature we experience disappointment and joy, we get lost in moods, giving rise to sorrow and regret. Getting lost in mental objects is getting lost in nature. When we get lost in nature then we don't know Dhamma. The Enlightened One merely pointed out this nature.

Having arisen, all things change and die. Things we make, such as plates, bowls and dishes, all have the same characteristic. A bowl is moulded into being due to a cause, man's impulse to create, and as we use it, it gets old, breaks up and disappears. Trees, mountains and vines are the same, right up to animals and people.

When Aññā Kondañña, the first disciple, heard the Buddha's teaching for the first time, the realization he had was nothing very complicated. He simply saw that whatever thing is born, that thing must change and grow old as a natural condition and eventually it must die. Aññā Kondañña had never thought of this before, or if he had it wasn't thoroughly clear, so he hadn't yet let go, he still clung to the *khandhā*. As he sat mindfully listening to the Buddha's discourse, Buddha-nature arose in him. He received a sort of Dhamma 'transmission' which was the knowledge that all conditioned things are impermanent. Anything which is born must have ageing and death as a natural result.

This feeling was different from anything he'd ever known before. He truly realized his mind, and so 'Buddha' arose within him. At that time the Buddha declared that Aññā Kondañña had received the 'Eye of Dhamma'.

What is it that this Eye of Dhamma sees? This Eye sees that whatever is born has ageing and death as a natural result. 'Whatever is born' means everything! Whether material or immaterial, it all comes under this 'whatever is born'. It refers to all of nature. Like this body for instance - it's born and then proceeds to extinction. When it's small it 'dies' from smallness to youth. After a while it 'dies' from youth and becomes middle-aged. Then it goes on to 'die' from middle-age and reaches old-age, then finally reaches the end. Trees, mountains and vines all have this characteristic.

So the vision or understanding of the 'one who knows' clearly entered the mind of Aññā Kondañña as he sat there. This knowledge of 'whatever is

born' became deeply embedded in his mind, enabling him to uproot attachment to the body. This attachment was *sakkāya-ditthi*. This means that he didn't take the body to be a self or a being, he didn't see it in terms of 'he' or 'me'. He didn't cling to it. He saw it clearly, thus uprooting *sakkāya-ditthi*.

And then *vicikicchā* (doubt) was destroyed. Having uprooted attachment to the body he didn't doubt his realization. *Sīlabbata parāmāsa*² was also uprooted. His practice became firm and straight. Even if his body was in pain or fever he didn't grasp it, he didn't doubt. He didn't doubt, because he had uprooted clinging. This grasping of the body is called *sīlabbata parāmāsa*. When one uproots the view of the body being 'the self', grasping and doubt are finished with. When this view of the body as 'the self' arises within the mind, grasping and doubt begin right there.

So as the Buddha expounded the Dhamma, Añña Kondañña opened the Eye of Dhamma. This Eye is just the 'one who knows clearly'. It sees things differently. It sees this very nature. Seeing nature clearly, clinging is uprooted and the 'one who knows' is born. Previously he knew but he still had clinging. You could say that he knew the Dhamma but he still hadn't seen it, or he had seen the Dhamma but still wasn't one with it.

At this time the Buddha said, 'Kondañña knows.' What did he know? He knew nature. Usually we get lost in nature, as with this body of ours. Earth, water, fire and wind come together to make this body. It's an aspect of nature, a material object we can see with the eye. It exists depending on food, growing and changing until finally it reaches extinction.

Coming inwards, that which watches over the body is consciousness - just this 'one who knows', this single awareness. If it receives through the eye it's called seeing. If it receives through the ear it's called hearing; through the nose it's called smelling; through the tongue, tasting; through the body, touching; and through the mind, thinking. This consciousness is just one but when it functions at different places we call it different things. Through the eye we call it one thing, through the ear we call it another. But whether it functions at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind it's just one awareness. Following the scriptures we call it the six consciousnesses, but in reality

there is only one consciousness arising at these six different bases. There are six 'doors' but a single awareness, which is this very mind.

This mind is capable of knowing the truth of nature. If the mind still has obstructions, then we say it knows through ignorance. It knows wrongly and it sees wrongly. Knowing wrongly and seeing wrongly, or knowing and seeing rightly, is just a single awareness. We call it wrong view and right view but it's just one thing. Right and wrong both arise from this one place. When there is wrong knowledge we say that ignorance conceals the truth. When there is wrong knowledge then there is wrong view, wrong intention, wrong action, wrong livelihood - everything is wrong! And on the other hand the path of right practice is born in this same place. When there is right then the wrong disappears.

The Buddha practised enduring many hardships and torturing himself with fasting and so on, but he investigated deeply into his mind until finally he uprooted ignorance. All the Buddhas were enlightened in mind, because the body knows nothing. You can let it eat or not, it doesn't matter, it can die at any time. The Buddhas all practised with the mind. They were enlightened in mind.

The Buddha, having contemplated his mind, gave up the two extremes of practice - indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain - and in his first discourse expounded the Middle Way between these two. But we hear his teaching and it grates against our desires. We're infatuated with pleasure and comfort, infatuated with happiness, thinking we are good, we are fine - this is indulgence in pleasure. It's not the right path. Dissatisfaction, displeasure, dislike and anger - this is indulgence in pain. These are the extreme ways which one on the path of practice should avoid.

These 'ways' are simply the happiness and unhappiness which arise. The 'one on the path' is this very mind, the 'one who knows'. If a good mood arises we cling to it as good, this is indulgence in pleasure. If an unpleasant mood arises we cling to it through dislike - this is indulgence in pain. These are the wrong paths, they aren't the ways of a meditator. They're the ways of the worldly, those who look for fun and happiness and shun unpleasantness and suffering.

The wise know the wrong paths but they relinquish them, they give them up. They are unmoved by pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering. These things arise but those who know don't cling to them, they let them go according to their nature. This is right view. When one knows this fully there is liberation. Happiness and unhappiness have no meaning for an Enlightened One.

The Buddha said that the Enlightened Ones were far from defilements. This doesn't mean that they ran away from defilements, they didn't run away anywhere. Defilements were there. He compared it to a lotus leaf in a pond of water. The leaf and the water exist together, they are in contact, but the leaf doesn't become damp. The water is like defilements and the lotus leaf is the enlightened mind.

The mind of one who practises is the same; it doesn't run away anywhere, it stays right there. Good, evil, happiness and unhappiness, right and wrong arise, and he knows them all. The meditator simply knows them, they don't enter his mind. That is, he has no clinging. He is simply the experiencer. To say he simply experiences is our common language. In the language of Dhamma we say he lets his mind follow the Middle Way.

These activities of happiness, unhappiness and so on are constantly arising because they are characteristics of the world. The Buddha was enlightened in the world, he contemplated the world. If he hadn't contemplated the world, if he hadn't seen the world, he couldn't have risen above it. The Buddha's enlightenment was simply enlightenment of this very world. The world was still there: gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness were all still there. If there weren't these things there would be nothing to become enlightened to! What he knew was just the world, that which surrounds the hearts of people. If people follow these things, seeking praise and fame, gain and happiness, and trying to avoid their opposites, they sink under the weight of the world.

Gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness - this is the world. The person who is lost in the world has no path of escape, the world overwhelms him. This world follows the Law of Dhamma so we call it worldly dhamma. He who lives within the worldly dhamma is called a worldly being. He lives surrounded by confusion.

Therefore the Buddha taught us to develop the path. We can divide it up into morality, concentration and wisdom. One should develop them to completion. This is the path of practice which destroys the world. Where is this world? It is just in the minds of beings infatuated with it! The action of clinging to praise, gain, fame, happiness and unhappiness is called 'the world'. When these things are there in the mind, then the world arises, the worldly being is born. The world is born because of desire. Desire is the birthplace of all worlds. To put an end to desire is to put an end to the world.

Our practice of morality, concentration and wisdom is otherwise called the eightfold path. This eightfold path and the eight worldly dhammas are a pair. How is it that they are a pair? If we speak according to the scriptures, we say that gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness are the eight worldly dhammas. Right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration: this is the eightfold path. These two eightfold ways exist in the same place. The eight worldly dhammas are right here in this very mind, with the 'one who knows'; but this 'one who knows' has obstructions, so it knows wrongly and thus becomes the world. It's just this one 'one who knows', no other. The Buddha-nature has not yet arisen in this mind, it has not yet extracted itself from the world. The mind like this is the world.

When we practise the path, when we train our body and speech, it's all done in that very same mind. It's in the same place so they see each other; the path sees the world. If we practise with this mind of ours we encounter this clinging to praise, fame, pleasure and happiness, we see the attachment to the world.

The Buddha said, 'You should know the world. It dazzles like a king's royal carriage. Fools are entranced, but the wise are not deceived.' It's not that he wanted us to go all over the world looking at everything, studying everything about it. He simply wanted us to watch this mind which attaches to the world. When the Buddha told us to look at the world he didn't want us to get stuck in it, he wanted us to investigate it, because the world is born just in this mind. Sitting in the shade of a tree you can look at the world.

When there is desire the world comes into being right there. Wanting is the birth place of the world. To extinguish wanting is to extinguish the world.

When we sit in meditation we want the mind to become peaceful, but it's not peaceful. Why is this? We don't want to think but we think. It's like a person who goes to sit on an ants' nest: the ants just keep on biting him. When the mind is the world then even sitting still with our eyes closed, all we see is the world. Pleasure, sorrow, anxiety, confusion - it all arises. Why is this? It's because we still haven't realized Dhamma. If the mind is like this the meditator can't endure the worldly dhammas, he doesn't investigate. It's just the same as if he were sitting on an ants' nest. The ants are going to bite because he's right on their home! So what should he do? He should look for some poison or use fire to drive them out.

But most Dhamma practitioners don't see it like that. If they feel content they just follow contentment, feeling discontent they just follow that. Following the worldly dhammas the mind becomes the world. Sometimes we may think, 'Oh, I can't do it, it's beyond me,' so we don't even try. This is because the mind is full of defilements; the worldly dhammas prevent the path from arising. We can't endure in the development of morality, concentration and wisdom. It's just like that man sitting on the ants' nest. He can't do anything, the ants are biting and crawling all over him, he's immersed in confusion and agitation. He can't rid his sitting place of the danger, so he just sits there, suffering.

So it is with our practice. The worldly dhammas exist in the minds of worldly beings. When those beings wish to find peace the worldly dhammas arise right there. When the mind is ignorant there is only darkness. When knowledge arises the mind is illumined, because ignorance and knowledge are born in the same place. When ignorance has arisen, knowledge can't enter, because the mind has accepted ignorance. When knowledge has arisen, ignorance can not stay.

So the Buddha exhorted his disciples to practise with the mind, because the world is born in this mind, the eight worldly dhammas are there. The eightfold path, that is, investigation through calm and insight meditation, our diligent effort and the wisdom we develop, all these things loosen the grip of the world. Attachment, aversion and delusion become lighter, and

being lighter, we know them as such. If we experience fame, material gain, praise, happiness or suffering we're aware of it. We must know these things before we can transcend the world, because the world is within us.

When we're free of these things it's just like leaving a house. When we enter a house what sort of feeling do we have? We feel that we've come through the door and entered the house. When we leave the house we feel that we've left it, we come into the bright sunlight, it's not dark like it was inside. The action of the mind entering the worldly dhammas is like entering the house. The mind which has destroyed the worldly dhammas is like one who has left the house.

So the Dhamma practitioner must become one who witnesses the Dhamma for himself. He knows for himself whether the worldly dhammas have left or not, whether or not the path has been developed. When the path has been well developed it purges the worldly dhammas. It becomes stronger and stronger. Right view grows as wrong view decreases, until finally the path destroys defilements - either that or defilements will destroy the path!

Right view and wrong view, there are only these two ways. Wrong view has its tricks as well, you know. It has its wisdom - but it's wisdom that's misguided. The meditator who begins to develop the path experiences a separation. Eventually it's as if he is two people: one in the world and the other on the path. They divide, they pull apart. Whenever he's investigating there's this separation, and it continues on and on until the mind reaches insight, *vipassanā*.

Or maybe it's *vipassanū*! Having tried to establish wholesome results in our practice, seeing them, we attach to them. This type of clinging comes from our wanting to get something from the practice. This is *vipassanū*, the wisdom of defilements (i.e. 'defiled wisdom'). Some people develop goodness and cling to it, they develop purity and cling to that, or they develop knowledge and cling to that. The action of clinging to that goodness or knowledge is *vipassanū*, infiltrating our practice.

So when you develop *vipassanā*, be careful! Watch out for *vipassanū*, because they're so close that sometimes you can't tell them apart. But with right view we can see them both clearly. If it's *vipassanū* there will be

suffering arising at times as a result. If it's really vipassanā there's no suffering. There is peace. Both happiness and unhappiness are silenced. This you can see for yourself.

This practice requires endurance. Some people, when they come to practise, don't want to be bothered by anything, they don't want friction. But there's friction the same as before. We must try to find an end to friction through friction itself.

So, if there's friction in your practice, then it's right. If there's no friction it's not right, you just eat and sleep as much as you want. When you want to go anywhere or say anything, you just follow your desires. The teaching of the Buddha grates. The supramundane goes against the worldly. Right view opposes wrong view, purity opposes impurity. The teaching grates against our desires.

There's a story in the scriptures about the Buddha, before he was enlightened. At that time, having received a plate of rice, he floated that plate on a stream of water, determining in his mind, 'If I am to be enlightened, may this plate float against the current of the water.' The plate floated upstream! That plate was the Buddha's right view, or the Buddha-nature that he became awakened to. It didn't follow the desires of ordinary beings. It floated against the flow of his mind, it was contrary in every way.

These days, in the same way, the Buddha's teaching is contrary to our hearts. People want to indulge in greed and hatred but the Buddha won't let them. They want to be deluded but the Buddha destroys delusion. So the mind of the Buddha is contrary to that of worldly beings. The world calls the body beautiful, he says it's not beautiful. They say the body belongs to us, he says not so. They say it's substantial, he says it's not. Right view is above the world. Worldly beings merely follow the flow of the stream.

Continuing on, when the Buddha rose from that spot, he received eight handfuls of grass from a Brahmin. The real meaning of this is that the eight handfuls of grass were the eight worldly dhammas - gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness. The Buddha, having received this grass, determined to sit on it and enter samādhi. The

action of sitting on the grass was itself samādhi, that is, his mind was above the worldly dhammas, subduing the world until it realized the transcendent.

The worldly dhammas became like refuse for him, they lost all meaning. He sat over them but they didn't obstruct his mind in any way. Demons came to try to overcome him, but he just sat there in samādhi, subduing the world, until finally he became enlightened to the Dhamma and completely defeated Māra. That is, he defeated the world. So the practice of developing the path is that which kills defilements.

People these days have little faith. Having practised a year or two they want to get there, and they want to go fast. They don't consider that the Buddha, our teacher, had left home a full six years before he became enlightened. This is why we have 'freedom from dependence'.³ According to the scriptures, a monk must have at least five Rains⁴ before he is considered able to live on his own. By this time he has studied and practised sufficiently, he has adequate knowledge, he has faith, his conduct is good. I say someone who practises for five years is competent. But he must really practise, not just 'hanging out' in the robes for five years. He must really look after the practice, really do it.

Until you reach five Rains you may wonder, 'What is this "freedom from dependence" that the Buddha talked about?' You must really try to practise for five years and then you'll know for yourself the qualities he was referring to. After that time you should be competent, competent in mind, one who is certain. At the very least, after five Rains, one should be at the first stage of enlightenment. This is not just five Rains in body but five Rains in mind as well. That monk has fear of blame, a sense of shame and modesty. He doesn't dare to do wrong either in front of people or behind their backs, in the light or in the dark. Why not? Because he has reached the Buddha, 'the one who knows'. He takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

To depend truly on the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha we must see the Buddha. What use would it be to take refuge without knowing the Buddha? If we don't yet know the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, our taking refuge in them is just an act of body and speech, the mind still hasn't reached them. Once the mind reaches them we know what the

Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha are like. Then we can really take refuge in them, because these things arise in our minds. Wherever we are we will have the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha within us.

One who is like this doesn't dare to commit evil acts. This is why we say that one who has reached the first stage of enlightenment will no longer be born in the woeful states. His mind is certain, he has entered the Stream, there is no doubt for him. If he doesn't reach full enlightenment today it will certainly be some time in the future. He may do wrong but not enough to send him to Hell, that is, he doesn't regress to evil bodily and verbal actions, he is incapable of it. So we say that person has entered the Noble Birth. He can not return. This is something you should see and know for yourselves in this very life.

These days, those of us who still have doubts about the practice hear these things and say, 'Oh, how can I do that?' Sometimes we feel happy, sometimes troubled, pleased or displeased. For what reason? Because we don't know Dhamma. What Dhamma? Just the Dhamma of nature, the reality around us, the body and the mind.

The Buddha said, 'Don't cling to the five *khandhā*, let them go, give them up!' Why can't we let them go? Because we don't see them or know them fully. We see them as ourselves, we see ourselves in the *khandhā*. We see happiness and suffering as ourselves, we see ourselves in happiness and suffering. We can't separate ourselves from them. That means we can't see Dhamma, we can't see nature.

Happiness, unhappiness, pleasure and sadness - none of them is us but we take them to be so. These things come into contact with us and we see a lump of *attā*, or self. Wherever there is self, there you will find happiness, unhappiness and everything else. So the Buddha said to destroy this 'lump' of self, that is to destroy *sakkāya-ditthi*. When *attā* (self) is destroyed, *anattā* (non-self) naturally arises.

We take nature to be us and ourselves to be nature, so we don't know nature truly. If it's good we laugh with it, if it's bad we cry over it. But nature is simply *sankhārā*. As we say in the chanting, '*Tesam vūpasamo sukho*' -

pacifying the *sankhārā* is real happiness. How do we pacify them? We simply remove clinging and see them as they really are.

So there is truth in this world. Trees, mountains and vines all live according to their own truth, they are born and die following their nature. It's just we people who aren't true. We see it and make a fuss over it, but nature is impassive, it just is as it is. We laugh, we cry, we kill, but nature remains in truth, it is truth. No matter how happy or sad we are, this body just follows its own nature. It's born, it grows up and ages, changing and getting older all the time. It follows nature in this way. Whoever takes the body to be himself and carries it around with him will suffer.

So Aññā Kondañña recognized this 'whatever is born' in everything, be it material or immaterial. His view of the world changed. He saw the truth. Having got up from his sitting place he took that truth with him. The activity of birth and death continued but he simply looked on. Happiness and unhappiness were arising and passing away but he merely noted them. His mind was constant. He no longer fell into the woeful states. He didn't get over-pleased or unduly upset about these things. His mind was firmly established in the activity of contemplation.

There! Aññā Kondañña had received the Eye of Dhamma. He saw nature, which we call *sankhārā*, according to truth. Wisdom is that which knows the truth of *sankhārā*. This is the mind which knows and sees Dhamma, the mind which has surrendered.

Until we have seen the Dhamma we must have patience and restraint. We must endure, we must renounce! We must cultivate diligence and endurance. Why must we cultivate diligence? Because we're lazy! Why must we develop endurance? Because we don't endure! That's the way it is. But when we are already established in our practice, have finished with laziness, then we don't need to use diligence. If we already know the truth of all mental states, if we don't get happy or unhappy over them, we don't need to exercise endurance, because the mind is already Dhamma. The 'one who knows' has seen the Dhamma, he is the Dhamma.

When the mind is Dhamma, it stops. It has attained peace. There's no longer a need to do anything special, because the mind is Dhamma already.

The outside is Dhamma, the inside is Dhamma. The ‘one who knows’ is Dhamma. The state is Dhamma and that which knows the state is Dhamma. It is one. It is free.

This nature is not born, it does not age nor sicken. This nature does not die. This nature is neither happy nor sad, neither big nor small, heavy nor light; neither short nor long, black nor white. There’s nothing you can compare it to. No convention can reach it. This is why we say Nibbāna has no colour. All colours are merely conventions. The state which is beyond the world is beyond the reach of worldly conventions.

So the Dhamma is that which is beyond the world. It is that which each person should see for himself. It is beyond language. You can’t put it into words, you can only talk about ways and means of realizing it. The person who has seen it for himself has finished his work.

[1:](#) Nature here refers to all things, mental and physical, not just trees, animals etc.

[2:](#) *Sīlabbata parāmāsa* is traditionally translated as attachment to rites and rituals. Here the Venerable Ajahn relates it, along with doubt, specifically to the body. These three things, *sakkāya-ditthi*, *vicikicchā*, and *sīlabbata parāmāsa*, are the first three of ten ‘fetters’ which are given up on the first glimpse of Enlightenment, known as ‘Stream Entry’. At full Enlightenment all ten ‘fetters’ are transcended.

[3:](#) ‘Rains’ refers to the yearly three-month Rains Retreat by which monks count their age; thus, a monk of five Rains has been ordained for five years.

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The Path to Peace

Today I will give a teaching particularly for you as monks and novices, so please determine your hearts and minds to listen. There is nothing else for us to talk about other than the practice of the Dhamma-Vinaya.

Every one of you should clearly understand that now you have been ordained as Buddhist monks and novices and should be conducting yourselves appropriately. We have all experienced the lay life, which is characterized by confusion and a lack of formal Dhamma practice; now, having taken up the form of a Buddhist '*samana*', some fundamental changes have to take place in our minds so that we differ from laypeople in the way we think. We must try to make all of our speech and actions - eating and drinking, moving around, coming and going - befitting for one who has been ordained as a spiritual seeker, who the Buddha referred to as a '*samana*'. What he meant was someone who is calm and restrained. Formerly, as laypeople, we didn't understand what it meant to be a *samana*, to have a sense of peacefulness and restraint. We gave full licence to our bodies and minds to have fun and games under the influence of craving and defilement. When we experienced pleasant *ārammana*, these would put us into a good mood, unpleasant mind-objects would put us into a bad one - this is the way it is when we are caught in the power of mind-objects. The Buddha said that those who are still under the sway of mind-objects aren't looking after themselves. They are without a refuge, a true abiding place, and so they let their minds follow moods of sensual indulgence and pleasure-seeking and get caught into suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. They don't know how or when to stop and reflect upon their experience.

In Buddhism, once we have received ordination and taken up the life of the *samana*, we have to adjust our physical appearance in accordance with the external form of the *samana*: we shave our heads, trim our nails and don the brown bhikkhus' robes - the banner of the Noble Ones: the Buddha and the Arahants. We are indebted to the Buddha for the wholesome foundations he established and handed down to us, which allow us to live as monks and

find adequate support. Our lodgings were built and offered as a result of the wholesome actions of those with faith in the Buddha and his teachings. We do not have to prepare our food because we are benefiting from the roots laid down by the Buddha. Similarly, we have inherited the medicines, robes and all the other requisites that we use from the Buddha. Once ordained as Buddhist monastics, on the conventional level we are called monks and given the title 'Venerable';¹ but simply having taken on the external appearance of monks does not make us truly venerable. Being monks on the conventional level means we are monks as far as our physical appearance goes. Simply by shaving our heads and putting on brown robes we are called 'Venerable', but that which is truly worthy of veneration has not yet arisen within us - we are still only 'Venerable' in name. It's the same as when they mould cement or cast brass into a Buddha image. They call it a Buddha, but it isn't really that. It's just metal, wood, wax or stone. That's the way conventional reality is.

It's the same for us. Once we have been ordained, we are given the title Venerable Bhikkhu, but that alone doesn't make us venerable. On the level of ultimate reality - in other words, in the mind - the term still doesn't apply. Our minds and hearts have still not been fully perfected through the practice with such qualities as *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. We haven't reached full purity within. Greed, hatred and delusion are still barring the way, not allowing that which is worthy of veneration to arise.

Our practice is to begin destroying greed, hatred and delusion - defilements which for the most part can be found within each and every one of us. These are what hold us in the round of becoming and birth and prevent us from achieving peace of mind. Greed, hatred and delusion prevent the *samana* - peacefulness - from arising within us. As long as this peace does not arise, we are still not *samana*; in other words, our hearts have not experienced the peace that is free from the influence of greed, hatred and delusion. This is why we practise - with the intention of expunging greed, hatred and delusion from our hearts. It is only when these defilements have been removed that we can reach purity, that which is truly venerable.

Internalising that which is venerable within your heart doesn't involve working only with the mind, but your body and speech as well. They have

to work together. Before you can practise with your body and speech, you must be practising with your mind. However, if you simply practise with the mind, neglecting body and speech, that won't work either. They are inseparable. Practising with the mind until it's smooth, refined and beautiful is similar to producing a finished wooden pillar or plank: before you can obtain a pillar that is smooth, varnished and attractive, you must first go and cut a tree down. Then you must cut off the rough parts - the roots and branches - before you split it, saw it and work it. Practising with the mind is the same as working with the tree; you have to work with the coarse things first. You have to destroy the rough parts. You have to destroy the roots, destroy the bark and everything which is unattractive, in order to obtain that which is attractive and pleasing to the eye. You have to work through the rough to reach the smooth. Dhamma practice is just the same. You aim to pacify and purify the mind, but it's difficult to do. You have to begin practising with externals - body and speech - working your way inwards until you reach that which is smooth, shining and beautiful. You can compare it with a finished piece of furniture, such as these tables and chairs. They may be attractive now, but once they were just rough bits of wood with branches and leaves, which had to be planed and worked with. This is the way you obtain furniture that is beautiful or a mind that is perfect and pure.

Therefore the right path to peace, the path the Buddha laid down, which leads to peace of mind and the pacification of the defilements, is *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. This is the path of practice. It is the path that leads you to purity and leads you to realize and embody the qualities of the *samana*. It is the way to the complete abandonment of greed, hatred and delusion. The practice does not differ from this whether you view it internally or externally.

This way of training and maturing the mind - which involves chanting, meditation, Dhamma talks and all the other parts of the practice - forces you to go against the grain of the defilements. You have to go against the tendencies of the mind, because normally we like to take things easy, to be lazy and to avoid anything which causes us friction or involves suffering and difficulty. The mind simply doesn't want to make the effort or get involved. This is why you have to be ready to endure hardship and bring

forth effort in the practice. You have to use the Dhamma of endurance and really struggle. Previously your bodies were simply vehicles for having fun, and having built up all sorts of unskilful habits it's difficult for you to start practising with them. Before, you didn't restrain your speech, so now it's hard to start restraining it. But as with that wood, it doesn't matter how troublesome or hard it seems. Before you can make it into tables and chairs, you have to encounter some difficulty. That's not the important thing; it's just something you have to experience along the way. You have to work through the rough wood to produce the finished pieces of furniture.

The Buddha taught that this is the way the practice is for all of us. All of his disciples who had finished their work and become fully enlightened, had, (when they first came to take ordination and practise with him) previously been *puthujjana*. They had all been ordinary unenlightened beings like ourselves, with arms and legs, eyes and ears, greed and anger - just the same as us. They didn't have any special characteristics that made them particularly different from us. This was how both the Buddha and his disciples had been in the beginning. They practised and brought forth enlightenment from the unenlightened, beauty from ugliness and great benefit from that which was virtually useless. This work has continued through successive generations right up to the present day. It is the children of ordinary people - farmers, traders and businessmen - who, having previously been entangled in the sensual pleasures of the world, go forth to take ordination. Those monks at the time of the Buddha were able to practise and train themselves, and you must understand that you have the same potential. You are made up of the five *khandhā*, just the same. You also have a body, pleasant and unpleasant feelings, memory and perception, thought formations and consciousness - as well as a wandering and proliferating mind. You can be aware of good and evil. Everything's just the same. In the end, that combination of physical and mental phenomena present in each of you, as separate individuals, differs little from that found in those monastics who practised and became enlightened under the Buddha. They had all started out as ordinary, unenlightened beings. Some had even been gangsters and delinquents, while others were from good backgrounds. They were no different from us. The Buddha inspired them to go forth and practise for the attainment of *magga* (the Noble Path) and

phala (fruition), and these days, in similar fashion, people like yourselves are inspired to take up the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

Sīla, *samādhi* and *paññā* are the names given to the different aspects of the practice. When you practise *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, it means you practise with yourselves. Right practice takes place here within you. Right *sīla* exists here, right *samādhi* exists here. Why? Because your body is right here. The practice of *sīla* involves every part of the body. The Buddha taught us to be careful of all our physical actions. Your body exists here! You have hands, you have legs right here. This is where you practise *sīla*. Whether your actions will be in accordance with *sīla* and Dhamma depends on how you train your body. Practising with your speech means being aware of the things you say. It includes avoiding wrong kinds of speech, namely divisive speech, coarse speech and unnecessary or frivolous speech. Wrong bodily actions include killing living beings, stealing and sexual misconduct.

It's easy to reel off the list of wrong kinds of behaviour as found in the books, but the important thing to understand is that the potential for them all lies within us. Your body and speech are with you right here and now. You practise moral restraint, which means taking care to avoid the unskilful actions of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The Buddha taught us to take care with our actions from the very coarsest level. In lay life you might not have had very refined moral conduct and frequently transgressed the precepts. For instance, in the past you may have killed animals or insects by smashing them with an axe or a fist, or perhaps you didn't take much care with your speech: false speech means lying or exaggerating the truth; coarse speech means you are constantly being abusive or rude to others - 'you scum,' 'you idiot,' and so on; frivolous speech means aimless chatter, foolishly rambling on without purpose or substance. We've indulged in it all. No restraint! In short, keeping *sīla* means watching over yourself, watching over your actions and speech.

So who will do the watching over? Who will take responsibility for your actions? When you kill an animal, who is the one who knows? Is your hand the one who knows, or is it someone else? When you steal someone else's property, who is aware of the act? Is your hand the one who knows? This is where you have to develop awareness. Before you commit some act of

sexual misconduct, where is your awareness? Is your body the one who knows? Who is the one who knows before you lie, swear or say something frivolous? Is your mouth aware of what it says, or is the one who knows in the words themselves? Contemplate this: whoever it is who knows is the one who has to take responsibility for your sīla. Bring that awareness to watch over your actions and speech. That knowing, that awareness is what you use to watch over your practice. To keep sīla, you use that part of the mind which directs your actions and which leads you to do good and bad. You catch the villain and transform him into a sheriff or a mayor. Take hold of the wayward mind and bring it to serve and take responsibility for all your actions and speech. Look at this and contemplate it. The Buddha taught us to take care with our actions. Who is it who does the taking care? The body doesn't know anything; it just stands, walks around and so on. The hands are the same; they don't know anything. Before they touch or take hold of anything, there has to be someone who gives them orders. As they pick things up and put them down there has to be someone telling them what to do. The hands themselves aren't aware of anything; there has to be someone giving them orders. The mouth is the same - whatever it says, whether it tells the truth or lies, is rude or divisive, there must be someone telling it what to say.

The practice involves establishing sati, mindfulness, within this 'one who knows'. The 'one who knows' is that intention of mind, which previously motivated us to kill living beings, steal other people's property, indulge in illicit sex, lie, slander, say foolish and frivolous things and engage in all kinds of unrestrained behaviour. The 'one who knows' led us to speak. It exists within the mind. Focus your mindfulness or sati - that constant recollectedness - on this 'one who knows'. Let the knowing look after your practice.

In practice, the most basic guidelines for moral conduct stipulated by the Buddha were: to kill is evil, a transgression of sīla; stealing is a transgression; sexual misconduct is a transgression; lying is a transgression; vulgar and frivolous speech are all transgressions of sīla. Commit all this to memory. It's the code of moral discipline, as laid down by the Buddha, which encourages you to be careful of that one inside of you who was responsible for previous transgressions of the moral precepts. That one,

who was responsible for giving the orders to kill or hurt others, to steal, to have illicit sex, to say untrue or unskilful things and to be unrestrained in all sorts of ways - singing and dancing, partying and fooling around. The one who was giving the orders to indulge in all these sorts of behaviour is the one you bring to look after the mind. Use sati or awareness to keep the mind recollecting in the present moment and maintain mental composure in this way. Make the mind look after itself. Do it well.

If the mind is really able to look after itself, it is not so difficult to guard speech and actions, since they are all supervised by the mind. Keeping sīla - in other words taking care of your actions and speech - is not such a difficult thing. You sustain awareness at every moment and in every posture, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down. Before you perform any action, speak or engage in conversation, establish awareness first - don't act or speak first, establish mindfulness first and then act or speak. You must have sati, be recollecting, before you do anything. It doesn't matter what you are going to say, you must first be recollecting in the mind. Practise like this until you are fluent. Practise so that you can keep abreast of what's going on in the mind to the point where mindfulness becomes effortless and you are mindful before you act, mindful before you speak. This is the way you establish mindfulness in the heart. It is with the 'one who knows' that you look after yourself, because all your actions spring from here.

This is where the intentions for all your actions originate and this is why the practice won't work if you try to bring in someone else to do the job. The mind has to look after itself; if it can't take care of itself, nothing else can. This is why the Buddha taught that keeping sīla is not that difficult, because it simply means looking after your own mind. If mindfulness is fully established, whenever you say or do something harmful to yourself or others, you will know straight away. You know that which is right and that which is wrong. This is the way you keep sīla. You practise with your body and speech from the most basic level.

By guarding your speech and actions they become graceful and pleasing to the eye and ear, while you yourself remain comfortable and at ease within the restraint. All your behaviour, manners, movements and speech become

beautiful, because you are taking care to reflect upon, adjust and correct your behaviour. You can compare this with your dwelling place or the meditation hall. If you are regularly cleaning and looking after your dwelling place, then both the interior and the area around it will be pleasant to look at, rather than a messy eyesore. This is because there is someone looking after it. Your actions and speech are similar. If you are taking care with them, they become beautiful, and that which is evil or dirty will be prevented from arising.

Ādikalyāna, majjhekalyāna, pariyosānakalyāna: beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end; or harmonious in the beginning, harmonious in the middle and harmonious in the end. What does that mean? Precisely that the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* is beautiful. The practice is beautiful in the beginning. If the beginning is beautiful, it follows that the middle will be beautiful. If you practise mindfulness and restraint until it becomes comfortable and natural to you - so that there is a constant vigilance - the mind will become firm and resolute in the practice of *sīla* and restraint. It will be consistently paying attention to the practice and thus become concentrated. That characteristic of being firm and unshakeable in the monastic form and discipline, and unwavering in the practice of mindfulness and restraint can be referred to as *samādhi*.

That aspect of the practice characterized by a continuous restraint, where you are consistently taking care with your actions and speech and taking responsibility for all your external behaviour, is referred to as *sīla*. The characteristic of being unwavering in the practice of mindfulness and restraint is called *samādhi*. The mind is firmly concentrated in this practice of *sīla* and restraint. Being firmly concentrated in the practice of *sīla* means that there is an evenness and consistency to the practice of mindfulness and restraint. These are the external characteristics of *samādhi* used in the practice for keeping *sīla*. However, it also has an inner, deeper side to it. It is essential that you develop and maintain *sīla* and *samādhi* from the beginning - you have to do this before anything else.

Once the mind is determined in the practice and *sīla* and *samādhi* are firmly established, you will be able to investigate and reflect on that which is

wholesome and unwholesome - asking yourself 'Is this right?' 'Is that wrong?' - as you experience different mind-objects. When the mind makes contact with different sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations or ideas, the 'one who knows' will arise and establish awareness of liking and disliking, happiness and suffering and the different kinds of mind-objects that you experience. You will come to see clearly, and see many different things.

If you are mindful, you will see the different objects which pass into the mind and the reaction which takes place upon experiencing them. The 'one who knows' will automatically take them up as objects for contemplation. Once the mind is vigilant and mindfulness is firmly established, you will note all the reactions displayed through either body, speech or mind, as mind-objects are experienced. That aspect of the mind which identifies and selects the good from the bad, the right from the wrong, from amongst all the mind-objects within your field of awareness, is paññā. This is paññā in its initial stages and it matures as a result of the practice. All these different aspects of the practice arise from within the mind. The Buddha referred to these characteristics as sīla, samādhi and paññā. This is the way they are, as practised in the beginning.

As you continue the practice, fresh attachments and new kinds of delusion begin to arise in the mind. This means you start clinging to that which is good or wholesome. You become fearful of any blemishes or faults in the mind, anxious that your samādhi will be harmed by them. At the same time you begin to be diligent and hard working, and to love and nurture the practice. Whenever the mind makes contact with mind-objects, you become fearful and tense. You become aware of other people's faults as well, even the slightest things they do wrong. It's because you are concerned for your practice. This is practising sīla, samādhi and paññā on one level - on the outside - based on the fact that you have established your views in accordance with the form and foundations of practice laid down by the Buddha. Indeed, these are the roots of the practice and it is essential to have them established in the mind.

You continue to practise like this as much as possible, until you might even reach the point where you are constantly judging and picking fault with

everyone you meet, wherever you go. You are constantly reacting with attraction and aversion to the world around you, becoming full of all kinds of uncertainty and continually attaching to views of the right and wrong way to practise. It's as if you have become obsessed with the practice. But you don't have to worry about this yet - at that point it's better to practise too much than too little. Practise a lot and dedicate yourself to looking after body, speech and mind. You can never really do too much of this. This is said to be practising *sīla* on one level; in fact, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are all in there together.

If you were to describe the practice of *sīla* at this stage, in terms of *pāramī*, it would be *dāna pāramī*, or *sīla pāramī* (the spiritual perfection of moral restraint). This is the practice on one level. Having developed this much, you can go deeper in the practice to the more profound level of *dāna upapāramī*² and *sīla upapāramī*. These arise out of the same spiritual qualities, but the mind is practising on a more refined level. You simply concentrate and focus your efforts to obtain the refined from the coarse.

Once you have gained this foundation in your practice, there will be a strong sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing established in the heart. Whatever the time or place - in public or in private - this fear of wrongdoing will always be in the mind. You become really afraid of any wrongdoing. This is a quality of mind that you maintain throughout every aspect of the practice. The practice of mindfulness and restraint with body, speech and mind, and the consistent distinguishing between right and wrong is what you hold as the object of mind. You become concentrated in this way and by firmly and unshakeably attaching to this way of practice, the mind actually becomes *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* - the characteristics of the practice as described in the conventional teachings.

As you continue to develop and maintain the practice, these different characteristics and qualities are perfected together in the mind. However, practising *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* at this level is still not enough to produce the factors of *jhāna* - the practice is still too coarse. Still, the mind is already quite refined - on the refined side of coarse! For an ordinary unenlightened person who has not been looking after the mind or practised much meditation and mindfulness, just this much is already something quite

refined. It's like to a poor person - owning two or three pounds can mean a lot, though for a millionaire it's almost nothing. This is the way it is. A few quid is a lot when you're down and out and hard up for cash, and in the same way, even though in the early stages of the practice you might still only be able to let go of the coarser defilements, this can still seem quite profound to one who is unenlightened and has never practised or let go of defilements before. At this level, you can feel a sense of satisfaction with being able to practise to the full extent of your ability. This is something you will see for yourself; it's something that has to be experienced within the mind of the practitioner.

If this is so, it means that you are already on the path, i.e. practising *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. These must be practised together; for if any are lacking, the practice will not develop correctly. The more your *sīla* improves, the firmer the mind becomes. The firmer the mind is, the bolder *paññā* becomes and so on, each part of the practice supporting and enhancing all the others. In the end, because the three aspects of the practice are so closely related to each other, these terms virtually become synonymous. When you are practising like this continuously, without relaxing your effort, this is *sammā patipadā* (right practice).

If you are practising in this way, it means that you have entered upon the correct path of practice. You are travelling along the very first stages of the path - the coarsest level - which is something quite difficult to sustain. As you deepen and refine the practice, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* will mature together from the same place - they are refined down from the same raw material. It's the same as our coconut palms. The coconut palm absorbs the water from the earth and pulls it up through the trunk. By the time the water reaches the coconut itself, it has become clean and sweet, even though it is derived from that plain water in the ground. The coconut palm is nourished by what are essentially the coarse earth and water elements, which it absorbs and purifies, and these are transformed into something far sweeter and purer than before. In the same way, the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* - in other words *magga* - has coarse beginnings, but, as a result of training and refining the mind through meditation and reflection, it becomes increasingly subtle.

As the mind gradually becomes more refined, the practice of mindfulness becomes more focused, being concentrated on a more and more narrow area. The practice actually becomes easier as the mind turns more and more inwards to focus on itself. You no longer make big mistakes or go wildly wrong. Now, whenever the mind is affected by a particular matter, doubts will arise - such as whether acting or speaking in a certain way is right or wrong. Simply keep halting the mental proliferation and, through intensifying effort in the practice, continue turning your attention deeper and deeper inside. The practice of samādhi will become progressively firmer and more concentrated. The practice of paññā is then enhanced so that you can see things more clearly and with increasing ease.

The end result is that you are clearly able to see the mind and its objects, without having to make any distinction between the mind, body or speech. You no longer have to separate anything at all - whether you are talking about the mind and the body or the mind and its objects. You see that it is the mind which gives orders to the body. The body has to depend on the mind before it can function. However, the mind itself is constantly subject to different objects contacting and conditioning it before it can have any effect on the body. As you continue to turn attention inwards and reflect on the Dhamma, the wisdom faculty gradually matures, and eventually you are left contemplating the mind and mind-objects - which means that you start to experience the body, *rūpadhamma* (material), as *arūpadhamma* (immaterial). Through your insight, you are no longer groping at or uncertain in your understanding of the body and the way it is. The mind experiences the body's physical characteristics as *arūpadhamma* - formless objects - which come into contact with the mind. Ultimately, you are contemplating just the mind and mind-objects - those objects which come into your consciousness.

Now, examining the true nature of the mind, you can observe that in its natural state, it has no preoccupations or issues prevailing upon it. It's like a piece of cloth or a flag that has been tied to the end of a pole. As long as it's on its own and undisturbed, nothing will happen to it. A leaf on a tree is another example - ordinarily it remains quiet and unperturbed. If it moves or flutters this must be due to the wind, an external force. Normally, nothing much happens to leaves; they remain still. They don't go looking to get

involved with anything or anybody. When they start to move, it must be due to the influence of something external, such as the wind, which makes them swing back and forth. In its natural state, the mind is the same; in it there exists no loving or hating, nor does it seek to blame other people. It is independent, existing in a state of purity that is truly clear, radiant and untarnished. In its pure state, the mind is peaceful, without happiness or suffering; indeed it is not experiencing any *vedanā* (feeling) at all. This is the true state of the mind.

The purpose of the practice, then, is to seek inwardly, searching and investigating until you reach the original mind. The original mind is also known as the pure mind. The pure mind is the mind without attachment. It doesn't get affected by mind-objects. In other words, it doesn't chase after the different kinds of pleasant and unpleasant mind-objects. Rather, the mind is in a state of continuous knowing and wakefulness - thoroughly mindful of all it is experiencing.

When the mind is like this, no pleasant or unpleasant mind-objects it experiences will be able to disturb it. The mind doesn't 'become' anything. In other words, nothing can shake it. Why? Because there is awareness. The mind knows itself as pure. It has evolved its own, true independence; it has reached its original state. How is it able to bring this original state into existence? Through the faculty of mindfulness, wisely reflecting and seeing that all things are merely conditions arising out of the influence of elements, without any individual being controlling them.

This is how it is with the happiness and suffering we experience. When these mental states arise, they are just 'happiness' and 'suffering'. There is no owner of the happiness. The mind is not the owner of the suffering - mental states do not belong to the mind. Look at it for yourself. In reality these are not affairs of the mind, they are separate and distinct. Happiness is just the state of happiness; suffering is just the state of suffering. You are merely the knower of these. In the past, because the roots of greed, hatred and delusion already existed in the mind, whenever you caught sight of the slightest pleasant or unpleasant mind-object, the mind would react immediately - you would take hold of it and have to experience either happiness or suffering. You would be continuously indulging in states of

happiness and suffering. That's the way it is as long as the mind doesn't know itself - as long as it's not bright and illuminated. The mind is not free. It is influenced by whatever mind-objects it experiences. In other words, it is without a refuge, unable to truly depend on itself. You receive a pleasant mental impression and get into a good mood. The mind forgets itself.

In contrast, the original mind is beyond good and bad. This is the original nature of the mind. If you feel happy over experiencing a pleasant mind-object, that is delusion. If you feel unhappy over experiencing an unpleasant mind-object, that is delusion. Unpleasant mind-objects make you suffer and pleasant ones make you happy - this is the world. Mind-objects come with the world. They are the world. They give rise to happiness and suffering, good and evil, and everything that is subject to impermanence and uncertainty. When you separate from the original mind, everything becomes uncertain - there is just unending birth and death, uncertainty and apprehensiveness, suffering and hardship, without any way of halting it or bringing it to cessation. This is *vatta*.

Through wise reflection, you can see that you are subject to old habits and conditioning. The mind itself is actually free, but you have to suffer because of your attachments. Take, for example, praise and criticism. Suppose other people say you are stupid; why does that cause you to suffer? It's because you feel that you are being criticized. You 'pick up' this bit of information and fill the mind with it. The act of 'picking up', accumulating and receiving that knowledge without full mindfulness, gives rise to an experience that is like stabbing yourself. This is *upādāna*. Once you have been stabbed, there is *bhava*. *Bhava* is the cause for *jāti* (birth). If you train yourself not to take any notice of or attach importance to some of the things other people say, merely treating them as sounds contacting your ears, there won't be any strong reaction and you won't have to suffer, as nothing is created in the mind. It would be like listening to a Cambodian scolding you - you would hear the sound of his speech, but it would be just sound because you wouldn't understand the meaning of the words. You wouldn't be aware that you were being told off. The mind wouldn't receive that information, it would merely hear the sound and remain at ease. If anybody criticized you in a language that you didn't understand, you would just hear the sound of their voice and remain unperturbed. You wouldn't absorb the

meaning of the words and be hurt over them. Once you have practised with the mind to this point, it becomes easier to know the arising and passing away of consciousness from moment to moment. As you reflect like this, penetrating deeper and deeper inwards, the mind becomes progressively more refined, going beyond the coarser defilements.

Samādhi means the mind that is firmly concentrated, and the more you practise the firmer the mind becomes. The more firmly the mind is concentrated, the more resolute in the practice it becomes. The more you contemplate, the more confident you become. The mind becomes truly stable - to the point where it can't be swayed by anything at all. You are absolutely confident that no single mind-object has the power to shake it. Mind-objects are mind-objects; the mind is the mind. The mind experiences good and bad mental states, happiness and suffering, because it is deluded by mind-objects. If it isn't deluded by mind-objects, there's no suffering. The undeluded mind can't be shaken. This phenomenon is a state of awareness, where all things and phenomena are viewed entirely as *dhātu* arising and passing away - just that much. It might be possible to have this experience and yet still be unable to fully let go. Whether you can or can't let go, don't let this bother you. Before anything else, you must at least develop and sustain this level of awareness or fixed determination in the mind. You have to keep applying the pressure and destroying defilements through determined effort, penetrating deeper and deeper into the practice.

Having discerned the Dhamma in this way, the mind will withdraw to a less intense level of practice, which the Buddha and subsequent Buddhist scriptures describe as the *Gotrabhū citta*. The *Gotrabhū citta* refers to the mind which has experienced going beyond the boundaries of the ordinary human mind. It is the mind of the *puthujjana* (ordinary unenlightened individual) breaking through into the realm of the ariyan (Noble One) - however, this phenomena still takes place within the mind of the ordinary unenlightened individual like ourselves. The *Gotrabhū puggala* is someone, who, having progressed in their practice until they gain temporary experience of Nibbāna, withdraws from it and continues practising on another level, because they have not yet completely cut off all defilements. It's like someone who is in the middle of stepping across a stream, with one foot on the near bank, and the other on the far side. They know for sure that

there are two sides to the stream, but are unable to cross over it completely and so step back. The understanding that two sides to the stream exist is similar to that of the *gotrabhū puggala* or the *Gotrabhū citta*. It means that you know the way to go beyond the defilements, but are still unable to go there, and so step back. Once you know for yourself that this state truly exists, this knowledge remains with you constantly as you continue to practise meditation and develop your *pāramī*. You are certain both of the goal and the most direct way to reach it.

Simply speaking, this state that has arisen is the mind itself. If you contemplate according to the truth of the way things are, you can see that there exists just one path and it is your duty to follow it. It means that you know from the very beginning that mental states of happiness and suffering are not the path to follow. This is something that you have to know for yourself - it is the truth of the way things are. If you attach to happiness, you are off the path because attaching to happiness will cause suffering to arise. If you attach to sadness, it can be a cause for suffering to arise. You understand this - you are already mindful with right view, but at the same time, are not yet able to fully let go of your attachments.

So what is the correct way to practise? You must walk the middle path, which means keeping track of the various mental states of happiness and suffering, while at the same time keeping them at a distance, off to either side of you. This is the correct way to practise; you maintain mindfulness and awareness even though you are still unable to let go. It's the correct way, because whenever the mind attaches to states of happiness and suffering, awareness of the attachment is always there. This means that whenever the mind attaches to states of happiness, you don't praise it or give value to it, and whenever it attaches to states of suffering, you don't criticize it. This way you can actually observe the mind as it is. Happiness is not right, suffering is not right. There is the understanding that neither of these is the right path. You are aware, awareness of them is sustained, but still you can't fully abandon them. You are unable to drop them, but you can be mindful of them. With mindfulness established, you don't give undue value to happiness or suffering. You don't give importance to either of those two directions which the mind can take, and you hold no doubts about this; you know that following either of those ways is not the right

path of practise, so at all times you take this middle way of equanimity as the object of mind. When you practise to the point where the mind goes beyond happiness and suffering, equanimity will necessarily arise as the path to follow, and you have to gradually move down it, little by little. The heart knows the way to go to be beyond defilements, but, not yet being ready finally to transcend them, it withdraws and continues practising.

Whenever happiness arises and the mind attaches, you have to take that happiness up for contemplation, and whenever it attaches to suffering, you have to take that up for contemplation. Eventually, the mind reaches a stage when it is fully mindful of both happiness and suffering. That's when it will be able to lay aside the happiness and the suffering, the pleasure and the sadness, and lay aside all that is the world and so become *lokavidū*. Once the mind - 'the one who knows' - can let go it will settle down at that point. Why does it settle down? Because you have done the practice and followed the path right down to that very spot. You know what you have to do to reach the end of the path, but are still unable to accomplish it. When the mind attaches to either happiness or suffering, you are not deluded by them and strive to dislodge the attachment and dig it out.

This is practising on the level of the *yogāvacara* - one who is travelling along the path of practice - striving to cut through the defilements, yet not having reached the goal. You focus upon these conditions and the way it is from moment to moment in your own mind. It's not necessary to be personally interviewed about the state of your mind or do anything special. When there is attachment to either happiness or suffering, there must be the clear and certain understanding that any attachment to either of these states is deluded. It is attachment to the world. It is being stuck in the world. Happiness means attachment to the world, suffering means attachment to the world. This is the way worldly attachment is. What is it that creates or gives rise to the world? The world is created and established through ignorance. It's because we are not mindful that the mind attaches importance to things, fashioning and creating *sankhārā* (formations) the whole time.

It is here that the practice becomes really interesting. Wherever there is attachment in the mind, you keep hitting at that point, without letting up. If

there is attachment to happiness, you keep pounding at it, not letting the mind get carried away with the mood. If the mind attaches to suffering, you grab hold of that, really getting to grips with it and contemplating it straight away. You are in the process of finishing the job off; the mind doesn't let a single mind-object slip by without reflecting on it. Nothing can resist the power of your mindfulness and wisdom. Even if the mind is caught in an unwholesome mental state, you know it as unwholesome and the mind is not heedless. It's like stepping on thorns; of course, you don't seek to step on thorns, you try to avoid them, but nevertheless sometimes you step on one. When you do step on one, do you feel good about it? You feel aversion when you step on a thorn. Once you know the path of practice, it means you know that which is the world, that which is suffering and that which binds us to the endless cycle of birth and death. Even though you know this, you are unable to stop stepping on those thorns. The mind still follows various states of happiness and sadness, but doesn't completely indulge in them. You sustain a continuous effort to destroy any attachment in the mind - to destroy and clear from the mind all that which is the world.

You must practise right in the present moment. Meditate right there; build your *pāramī* right there. This is the heart of practice, the heart of your effort. You carry on an internal dialogue, discussing and reflecting on the Dhamma within yourself. It's something that takes place right inside the mind. As worldly attachment is uprooted, mindfulness and wisdom untiringly penetrate inwards, and the 'one who knows' sustains awareness with equanimity, mindfulness and clarity, without getting involved with or becoming enslaved to anybody or anything. Not getting involved with things means knowing without clinging - knowing while laying things aside and letting go. You still experience happiness; you still experience suffering; you still experience mind-objects and mental states, but you don't cling to them.

Once you are seeing things as they are you know the mind as it is and you know mind-objects as they are. You know the mind as separate from mind-objects and mind-objects as separate from the mind. The mind is the mind, mind-objects are mind-objects. Once you know these two phenomena as they are, whenever they come together you will be mindful of them. When the mind experiences mind-objects, mindfulness will be there. Our teacher,

the Buddha, described the practice of the *yogāvacara*, who is able to sustain such awareness, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, as being a continuous cycle. It is *sammā patipadā* (right practice). You don't forget yourself or become heedless.

You don't simply observe the coarser parts of your practice, but also watch the mind internally, on a more refined level. That which is on the outside, you set aside. From here onwards you are just watching the body and the mind, just observing this mind and its objects arising and passing away, and understanding that having arisen they pass away. With passing away there is further arising - birth and death, death and birth; cessation followed by arising, arising followed by cessation. Ultimately, you are simply watching the act of cessation. *Khayavayam* means degeneration and cessation. Degeneration and cessation are the natural way of the mind and its objects - this is *khayavayam*. Once the mind is practising and experiencing this, it doesn't have to follow up on or search for anything else - it will be keeping abreast of things with mindfulness. Seeing is just seeing. Knowing is just knowing. The mind and mind-objects are just as they are. This is the way things are. The mind isn't proliferating about or creating anything in addition.

Don't be confused or vague about the practice. Don't get caught in doubting. This applies to the practice of *sīla* just the same. As I mentioned earlier, you have to look at it and contemplate whether it's right or wrong. Having contemplated it, then leave it there. Don't have doubts about it. Practising *samādhi* is the same. Keep practising, calming the mind little by little. If you start thinking, it doesn't matter; if you're not thinking, it doesn't matter. The important thing is to gain an understanding of the mind.

Some people want to make the mind peaceful, but don't know what true peace really is. They don't know the peaceful mind. There are two kinds of peacefulness - one is the peace that comes through *samādhi*, the other is the peace that comes through *paññā*. The mind that is peaceful through *samādhi* is still deluded. The peace that comes through the practice of *samādhi* alone is dependent on the mind being separated from mind-objects. When it's not experiencing any mind-objects, then there is calm, and consequently one attaches to the happiness that comes with that calm.

However, whenever there is impingement through the senses, the mind gives in straight away. It's afraid of mind-objects. It's afraid of happiness and suffering; afraid of praise and criticism; afraid of forms, sounds, smells and tastes. One who is peaceful through samādhi alone is afraid of everything and doesn't want to get involved with anybody or anything on the outside. People practising samādhi in this way just want to stay isolated in a cave somewhere, where they can experience the bliss of samādhi without having to come out. Wherever there is a peaceful place, they sneak off and hide themselves away. This kind of samādhi involves a lot of suffering - they find it difficult to come out of it and be with other people. They don't want to see forms or hear sounds. They don't want to experience anything at all! They have to live in some specially preserved quiet place, where no-one will come and disturb them with conversation. They have to have really peaceful surroundings.

This kind of peacefulness can't do the job. If you have reached the necessary level of calm, then withdraw from it. The Buddha didn't teach to practise samādhi with delusion. If you are practising like that, then stop. If the mind has achieved calm, then use it as a basis for contemplation. Contemplate the peace of concentration itself and use it to connect the mind with and reflect upon the different mind-objects which it experiences. Use the calm of samādhi to contemplate sights, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas. Use this calm to contemplate the different parts of the body, such as the hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin and so on. Contemplate the three characteristics of *aniccam* (impermanence), *dukkham* (suffering) and *anattā* (not-self). Reflect upon this entire world. When you have contemplated sufficiently, it is all right to re-establish the calm of samādhi. You can re-enter it through sitting meditation and afterwards, with calm re-established, continue with the contemplation. Use the state of calm to train and purify the mind. Use it to challenge the mind. As you gain knowledge, use it to fight the defilements, to train the mind. If you simply enter samādhi and stay there you don't gain any insight - you are simply making the mind calm and that's all. However, if you use the calm mind to reflect, beginning with your external experience, this calm will gradually penetrate deeper and deeper inwards, until the mind experiences the most profound peace of all.

The peace which arises through paññā is distinctive, because when the mind withdraws from the state of calm, the presence of paññā makes it unafraid of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas. It means that as soon as there is sense contact the mind is immediately aware of the mind-object. As soon as there is sense contact you lay it aside; as soon as there is sense contact mindfulness is sharp enough to let go right away. This is the peace that comes through paññā.

When you are practising with the mind in this way, the mind becomes considerably more refined than when you are developing samādhi alone. The mind becomes very powerful, and no longer tries to run away. With such energy you become fearless. In the past you were scared to experience anything, but now you know mind-objects as they are and are no longer afraid. You know your own strength of mind and are unafraid. When you see a form, you contemplate it. When you hear a sound, you contemplate it. You become proficient in the contemplation of mind-objects. You are established in the practice with a new boldness, which prevails whatever the conditions. Whether it be sights, sounds or smells, you see them and let go of them as they occur. Whatever it is, you can let go of it all. You clearly see happiness and let it go. You clearly see suffering and let it go. Wherever you see them, you let them go right there. That's the way! Keep letting them go and casting them aside right there. No mind-objects will be able to maintain a hold over the mind. You leave them there and stay secure in your place of abiding within the mind. As you experience, you cast aside. As you experience, you observe. Having observed, you let go. All mind-objects lose their value and are no longer able to sway you. This is the power of vipassanā. When these characteristics arise within the mind of the practitioner, it is appropriate to change the name of the practice to vipassanā: clear knowing in accordance with the truth. That's what it's all about - knowledge in accordance with the truth of the way things are. This is peace at the highest level, the peace of vipassanā. Developing peace through samādhi alone is very, very difficult; one is constantly petrified.

So when the mind is at its most calm, what should you do? Train it. Practise with it. Use it to contemplate. Don't be scared of things. Don't attach. Developing samādhi so that you can just sit there and attach to blissful mental states isn't the true purpose of the practice. You must withdraw from

it. The Buddha said that you must fight this war, not just hide out in a trench trying to avoid the enemy's bullets. When it's time to fight, you really have to come out with guns blazing. Eventually you have to come out of that trench. You can't stay sleeping there when it's time to fight. This is the way the practice is. You can't allow your mind to just hide, cringing in the shadows.

Sīla and samādhi form the foundation of practice and it is essential to develop them before anything else. You must train yourself and investigate according to the monastic form and ways of practice which have been passed down.

Be it as it may, I have described a rough outline of the practice. You as the practitioners must avoid getting caught in doubts. Don't doubt about the way of practice. When there is happiness, watch the happiness. When there is suffering, watch the suffering. Having established awareness, make the effort to destroy both of them. Let them go. Cast them aside. Know the object of mind and keep letting it go. Whether you want to do sitting or walking meditation it doesn't matter. If you keep thinking, never mind. The important thing is to sustain moment to moment awareness of the mind. If you are really caught in mental proliferation, then gather it all together, and contemplate it in terms of being one whole, cut it off right from the start, saying, 'all these thoughts, ideas and imaginings of mine are simply thought proliferation and nothing more. It's all *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. None of it is certain at all.' Discard it right there.

¹: Venerable: in Thai, 'Pra'.

²: *Upapāramī*: refers to the same ten spiritual perfections, but practised on a deeper, more intense and profound level (practised to the highest degree, they are called *paramattha pāramī*).

Toilets on the Path

Introduction by Ajahn Jayasāro

The following talk was originally given in the Lao language and translated into Central Thai for Luang Por Chah's biography, *Upalamani*. It's a very powerful talk and why I was particularly keen to include this in the Thai biography and a certain amount of it in the new English version is that nothing quite like it exists in English translation. Most of the work that has been done has focused on the meditation and wisdom teachings. In fact in daily life at Wat Pah Pong those types of Dhamma talks were really quite infrequent and very much treasured when they were given. But the daily kind of instruction and most of the talks were on what we call *korwat* - monastic regulations, emphasizing the *sīla* side of practice.

Part of that probably has to do with the fact that forest monasteries, particularly Ajahn Chah monasteries twenty years ago, were of a very different composition, a different nature from how they are these days because of the large number of novices then. Then teenage novices would tend to be very energetic and boisterous and would affect the atmosphere of the monastery quite significantly, as you can imagine. That's the reason why work projects were so predominant in monasteries in those days. Abbots had the problem of trying to administer a community in which as many as half of the members weren't that interested in being monastics. Monks of my generation have a lot of stories of naughty novices, difficult, obstreperous and obnoxious novices. Although at Wat Pah Pong the percentage of novices was somewhat less, they did have an influence, together with temporarily ordained monks, or monks who were hanging out not really knowing why they were there - ordaining as a gesture to show gratitude to their parents.

I was surprised when I first went to Wat Pah Pong, because I was expecting a boot camp - a really tough kind of monastery. Certainly there was that, but what surprised me was the number of monks and novices who didn't seem to appreciate what was going on, and weren't that committed to the training

Ajahn Chah was giving. This meant that many of the talks that were given stressed *korwat patipadā* rather than being refined talks on the nature of *samādhi* and *jhāna* etc. The kind of rhythm you would find in monasteries - whether it was Wat Pah Pong or a branch - was that you would have a storming 'desana' that would blow everyone over and leave people shaking. Then things would be really strict for a few days. Then it would gradually deteriorate until one or two things happened that were really gross and you knew there would be one of these rousing 'desanas'. So you would then brace yourself. Then the same pattern would start again.

Ajahn Chah gave the strongest and best of this particular genre of monastic discourse. This talk is particularly strong. What's remarkable about it is that this wasn't given in his so called early days, in his forties or fifties, when he was still very vigorous and strong, but actually towards the end of his teaching career - when the abiding image of Ajahn Chah among Western monks was of this grandfatherly figure; but that was very much a simplification. The kind of Ajahn Chah you see in photographs in books, smiling and kind, was certainly one Ajahn Chah, but it was not the whole story.

I think this talk gives quite a good impression of that. It's very difficult to render the tone of one of these talks. With Dhamma talks there is the content of what's being said, but there are also all sorts of non-verbal things going on, as well as the whole background of the relationship between a teacher and his students. This is something of course which doesn't appear in print. For someone who has never lived in a forest monastery with a Krooba Ajahn, when they listen to one of these talks it can seem to be a rather hectoring and bullying kind of talk, over the top and a bit too much. So you really have to try to put yourself in that position of living in a forest monastery where things are starting to go downhill a bit and it's time for the teacher to get people back on track.

Toilets on the Path

There isn't much work that needs to be done at the moment, apart from Ajahn Liam's project out at the dyeing shed. When it's finished, washing and dyeing robes will be more convenient. When he goes out to work, I'd like everyone to go and give him a hand. Once the new dying shed is

finished there won't be much else to do. It will be the time to get back to our practice of the observances, to the basic monastic regimen. Bring these observances up to scratch. If you don't, it's going to be a real disaster. These days the practice of the observances related to lodgings, the *senāsana-vatta* is particularly dreadful.

I'm beginning to doubt whether or not you know what these words '*senāsanavatta*' means. Don't just turn a blind eye to the state of the *kutīs* that you live in and the toilets that you use. Laypeople from Bangkok, Ayudhaya, all over the country, offer funds for our needs; some send money in the post for the monastery kitchen. We are monastics, think about that. Don't come to the monastery and become more selfish than you were in the world - that would be a disgrace. Reflect closely on the things that you make use of every day: the four requisites of robes, almsfood, dwelling place and medicines. If you don't pay attention to your use of these requisites, you won't make it as a monk.

The situation with regard to dwelling places is especially bad. The *kutīs* are in a dreadful state. It's hard to tell which ones have got monks living in them and which are empty. There are termites crawling up the concrete posts and nobody does anything about it. It's a real disgrace. Soon after I came back I went on an inspection tour and it was heartrending. I feel sorry for the laypeople who've built these *kutīs* for you to live in. All you want to do is to wander around with your bowls and glots over your shoulders looking for places to meditate; you don't have a clue how to look after the *kutīs* and Sangha property. It's shocking. Have some consideration for the feelings of the donors.

On my inspection tour I saw pieces of cloth that had been used in the *kutīs*, and then thrown away - still in good condition. There were spittoons that had been used and not properly stored. In some places people had pissed in them, and then not tipped the urine away. It was really disgusting; even laypeople don't do that. If you practitioners of Dhamma can't even manage to empty spittoons, then what hope is there for you in this life?

People bring brand-new toilet bowls to offer. I don't know whether you ever clean them or not but there are rats going in the toilets to shit, and geckos. Rats, geckoes and monks - all using the place together. The geckos

never sweep the place out and neither do the monks. You're on the same level as they are. Ignorance is no excuse with something like this. Everything you use in this life are supports for the practice. Ven. Sāriputta kept wherever he lived immaculately clean. If he found somewhere dirty he would sweep it with a broom. If it was during almsround, he'd use his foot. The living place of a true practice monk is different from that of an ordinary person. If your kutī is an utter mess then your mind will be the same.

This is a forest wat. In the rainy season, branches and leaves fall to the ground. In the afternoon, before sweeping, collect the dead branches in a pile or drag them well into the forest. Sweep the borders of the paths completely clean. If you're sloppy and just work and sweep in a perfunctory way, then the kutīs and paths will be completely ruined. At one time I made walking meditation paths to separate the paths leading to the kutīs. Each kutī had its own individual path. Everyone came out from their kutī alone, except for the people out at the back. You'd walk straight to and from your own kutī so that you could look after your own path. The kutīs were clean and neat. These days it's not like that. I invite you to take a walk up to the top end of the monastery and see the work I've been doing on the kutī and surrounding area, as an example.

As for repairing the kutīs: don't put a lot of work into repairing things that don't need to be repaired. These are dwellings of the Sangha which the Sangha has allotted to you. It's not right to make any changes to them that take your fancy. You should ask permission or consult with a senior monk first. Some people don't realize what is involved and overestimate themselves; they think they are going to make an improvement, but when they get down to it they make something ugly and awkward. Some people are just plain ignorant. They take hammers and start banging nails into hardwood walls, and before they know it they've destroyed the wall. I don't know who it is because as soon as they've done it the culprits run away. When someone else moves in it looks awful.

Carefully consider the link between a clean, orderly and pleasing dwelling place, and meditation practice. If there's lust or aversion in your mind, try to concentrate on that, hone in on it, meditate on it, wear away the defilements right where they occur. Do you know what looks pleasing and

what doesn't? If you're trying to make out that you don't, it's a disgrace and you're in for a hard time. Things will just get worse day by day. Spare a thought for the people who come from every province in the country to see this wat.

The dwelling of a Dhamma practitioner isn't large; it's small but clean. If a Noble One lives in a low-lying area, then it becomes a cool and pleasant land. If he goes to live in the uplands, then those uplands become cool and pleasant. Why should that be? Listen to this well. It's because his heart is pure. He doesn't follow his mind, he follows Dhamma. He is always aware of his state of mind.

But it's difficult to get to that stage. During sweeping periods, I tell you to sweep inwards towards the middle of the path and you don't do it. I have to stand there and shout 'Inwards! Inwards!' Or is it because you don't know what 'inwards' means that you don't do it? Perhaps you don't. Perhaps you've been like this since you were kids - I've come up with quite a few theories. When I was a child I'd walk past people's houses and often hear parents tell their kids to shit well away from the house. Nobody ever did. As soon as they were just a small distance from the house that would be it. Then when the stink got bad everyone would complain. It's the same kind of thing.

Some people just don't understand what they're doing; they don't follow things all the way through to their conclusion. Either that or else they know what needs to be done but they're too lazy to do it. It's the same with meditation. There are some people who don't know what to do and as soon as you explain to them they do it well; but there are others who even after it has been explained to them still don't do it - they've made up their minds not to.

Really consider what the training of the mind consists of for a monk. Distinguish yourselves from the monks and novices that don't practise; be different from laypeople. Go away and reflect on what that means. It's not as easy as you seem to think. You ask questions about meditation, the peaceful mind and the path all the way to Nibbāna; but you don't know how to keep clean the path to your kutī and toilet. It's really awful. If you carry on like this then things are going to steadily deteriorate.

The observances that the Buddha laid down regarding the dwelling place are concerned with keeping it clean. A toilet is included amongst the *senāsanā* - in fact it is considered to be a very small *kuṭī* - and shouldn't be left dirty and slovenly. Follow the Buddha's injunction and make it a pleasant place to use, so that whichever way you look there's nothing offensive to the eye.

Aow! That little novice over there. Why are you yawning already? It's still early in the evening. Are you usually asleep by this time or what? Nodding backwards and forwards there as if you're on the point of death. What's wrong with you? The moment you have to listen to a talk you get groggy. You're never like this at the meal time I notice. If you don't pay any attention then what benefit are you going to get from being here? How are you ever going to improve yourself?

Someone who doesn't practise is just a burden on the monastery. When he lives with the teacher he is just a burden on the teacher, creating difficulties and giving him a heavy heart. If you're going to stay here then make a go of it. Or do you think you can just play around at being a monk? Take things to their limit, dig down until you reach bedrock. If you don't practise, things won't just get better by themselves. People from all over the country send money for the kitchen, to see to your needs, and what do you do? You leave the toilets dirty and your *kuṭīs* unswept. What's this all about?

Put things away, look after them. You're pissing into the spittoons and leaving them right where you used them. If you have a mosquito net you don't like, don't just throw it away. If the laypeople were to see that, they would be disheartened: 'However poor we are, whatever the hardships might be, we still managed to buy some cloth to offer to the monks. But they're living like kings. Really good cloth without a single tear in it thrown away all over the place.' They would lose all their faith.

You don't have to give Dhamma talks to proclaim the teachings. When laypeople come and they see that the monastery is clean and beautiful, they know that the monks here are diligent and know their observances. You don't have to flatter or make a fuss of them. When they see the *kuṭīs* and the toilets, they know what kind of monks live in the wat. Keeping things clean is one part of proclaiming Buddhism.

While I was a young novice at Wat Ban Gor a *vihāra* was built and they bought over a hundred spittoons for it. On the annual *Pra Vessandara ngan* when there were lots of visiting monks, the spittoons were used as receptacles for betel juice. Remember this *ngan* is a festival of merit-making to commemorate the last life of the Bodhisatta himself, and yet when it was over the dirty spittoons would just be stashed away in odd corners of the hall. A hundred spittoons, every one of them full of betel juice, and none were emptied. I came across these spittoons and I thought 'if this is not evil then nothing is'. They filled them with betel juice and left them there until the next year; then they'd pull them out, scrape off enough of the dried crud to make them recognizable as spittoons and start spitting in them again. That's the kind of kamma that gets you reborn in hell! Absolutely unacceptable. Monks and novices who act like that lack any sense of good and bad, long and short, right and wrong. They are acting in a lazy and shiftless way, assuming that as monks and novices they can take things easy - and, without realizing it, they turn into dogs.

Have you seen them: the old people with grey hair who pay homage to you as they lift up their bamboo containers to put rice in your bowl? When they come here to offer food they bow and bow again. Take a look at yourself. That's what made me leave the village monastery - the old people coming to offer food and bowing over and over again. I sat thinking about it. What's so good about me that people should keep bowing to me so much? Wherever I go people raise their hands in *añjali*. Why is that? In what way am I worthy of it? As I thought about it I felt ashamed - ashamed to face my lay supporters. It wasn't right. If you don't think about this and do something about it right now, then when will you? You've got a good opportunity and you're not taking it. Look into this matter if you don't believe me. Really think it over.

I've mentioned Chao Khun Nor of Wat Tepsirin in discourses before. During the reign of King Vajiravudh he was a royal page. When the King died [in 1925] he became a monk. The only time he ever left his *kutī* was for formal meetings of the Sangha. He wouldn't even go downstairs to receive lay guests. He lived in his *kutī* together with a coffin. During his entire monastic life he never went on *tudong*. He didn't need to, he was unshakeable. You go on *tudong* until your skin blisters. You go up

mountains and then down to the sea and once you get there you don't know where to go next. You go blindly searching for Nibbāna with your mind in a muddle, sticking your nose in every place you can. And wherever you go, you leave dirty toilets behind you - too busy looking for Nibbāna to clean them. Are you blind or what? I find it amazing.

There's a lot more to enlightenment and Nibbāna than that. The first thing is to look after your dwelling place well. Is it necessary to compel everyone to do this, or what? If you're not really stubborn and recalcitrant then it shouldn't have to go that far. At the moment the people who do take care of things work themselves half dead; the ones who couldn't care less remain indifferent: they don't look, they don't pay any attention, they haven't a clue. What's to be done with people like that?

The problems that come up with the requisites of dwellings, almsfood, robes are like green-head flies; you can drive them off for a while, but after they've buzzed around for a bit they come back and land in the same place. These days a lot of you are leaving the equivalent of one or two plates of leftovers each. I don't know why you take such a huge amount of food. One lump of sticky rice is enough to fill your belly. Just take a sufficient amount. You take more than you can eat and then tip away what's left to go rotten in the pit. These days there's about a dozen big bowls of leftover food. I think it's shameful that you don't know the capacity of your own stomach. Only take as much as you can eat. What's the point of taking anymore than that? If your leftovers are enough to furnish three or four laypeople's breakfast and more, then it's too much.

How is someone who has no sense of moderation going to understand how to train his mind? When you're practising sitting meditation and your mind's in a turmoil, where are you going to find the wisdom to pacify it? If you don't even know basic things like how much food you need, what it means to take little, that's really dire. If you don't know your limitations, you'll be like the greedy fellow in the story who tried to carry such a big log of wood out of the forest that he fell down dead from its weight.

Bhojanemattaññutā means moderation in the consumption of food; *jāgariyānuyoga* means putting forth effort without indulging in the pleasure of rest; *indriyāsamvara* means restraining the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body

and mind in order to prevent thoughts of satisfaction and dissatisfaction from arising. These practices have all gone out the window. It's as if you've got no eyes, no ears and no mouth I don't know what kind of hungry ghost that makes you. You don't sweep your lodging. Chickens are the only animals I know of who eat and then make a mess where they're standing. When you don't understand what you're doing, the more you practise the more you decline.

You're looking more and more gluttonous all the time. Know your limits. Look at that time when we were building the bot and some coffee was brought over. I heard some people complaining, 'Ohhh! Enough! Enough! I've had so much I feel sick.' That's an utterly disgusting thing for a monk to say! Drinking so much you feel like vomiting. Seven or eight cups each. What were you thinking of? It's taking things too far. Do you think you became monastics in order to eat and drink? If it was some kind of competition it was an insane one. After you'd finished, the cups were left out in a long line and so were the kettles. Nobody did any washing up. Only dogs don't clean up after they've eaten. What I am saying is that if you were real monks and novices the kettles would all have been washed. This kind of behavior points to all kinds of unwholesome habits inside you. Wherever someone who acts like that goes, he takes his mediocrity with him.

I'm saying all this as food for thought. Really look at how you're living these days. Can you see anything that needs improving? If you carry on as you are now, the monks who are really dedicated to practice won't be able to endure it. They'll all leave or if they don't, the ones that stay won't want to speak to you, and the wat will suffer. When the Buddha entered Nibbāna he didn't take the ways of practice along with him you know. He left them here for all of us. There's no need to complicate matters by talking about anything too far away from us. Just concentrate on the things that can be seen here, the things we do everyday. Learn how to live together in harmony and help each other out. Know what's right and what's wrong.

*'Gāravo ca nivāto ca santutthi ca kataññutā'*¹ - This subject of respect needs to be understood. Nowadays things have gone far beyond what's acceptable. I'm the only one many of you show any deference to. It's not

good for you to be like that. And it's not good to be afraid of me. The best thing is to venerate the Buddha. If you only do good because you're afraid of the teacher, then that's hopeless. You must be fearful of error, revere the Dhamma that the Buddha taught and be in awe of the power of the Dhamma which is our refuge.

The Buddha taught us to be content and of few wishes, restrained and composed. Don't get ahead of yourself; look at what's near to hand. Laypeople think that the Sangha of Wat Nong Pah Pong practises well and they send money to the kitchen to buy food. You take it for granted. But sometimes when I sit and think about it - and I'm criticizing the bhikkhus and novices that aren't practising here, not those that do - I feel ashamed to consider that things aren't as they think. It's like two oxen pulling a cart. The clever one gets harnessed right in front of the yoke and leaves the other one to struggle up front. The ox near the yoke can go all day without getting tired. It can keep going or it can rest, it can do whatever it likes, because it's not taking any weight, its not expending any energy. With only one ox pulling it, the cart moves slowly. The ox at the back enjoys its unfair advantage.

Supatipanno: one who practises well.

Ujupatipanno: one who practises with integrity.

Ñāyapatipanno: one who practises to truly abandon defilements.

Sāmīcipatipanno: one who practises with great correctness.

Read those words frequently. They are the virtues of the Sangha: the virtues of monks, the virtues of novices, the virtues of pah-kows, the virtues of practitioners. In my opinion you do well to leave the world to practise in this way.

The villagers that come to pay their respects have so much faith in you, that at the start of the green rice season they don't let their family have any rice - the first of the crop is put aside for the Sangha. At the start of the mango season, the children don't get to eat the big mangoes: their parents ripen them up and keep them for the monks. When I was a child, I'd get angry at

my mother and father for that. I couldn't see why they had so much faith. They didn't know what went on in the monastery. But, I'd often see the novices sneaking an evening meal. (And if that's not bad kamma then what is?) Speaking and acting in various unwholesome ways and then having people offer you food. That's kamma that will take you deeper than the deepest hell realm. What good can come of it? Really think about this well. Right now, your practice is a mess.

Disseminating Buddhism isn't just a matter of expounding on Dhamma; it's a matter of reducing wants, being content, keeping your dwelling clean. So what's going on? Every time someone goes into the toilet he has to hold his nose up to the roof; it smells so bad nobody dares to take a full breath of air. What are you going to do about it? It's not difficult to see what your problem is. It's obvious as soon as you see the state of the toilet.

Try it out. Make this a good monastery. Making it good doesn't require so much. Do what needs to be done. Look after the kutīs and the central area of the monastery. If you do, laypeople who come in and see it may feel so inspired by religious emotion² that they realize the Dhamma there and then. Don't you have any sympathy for them? Think of how it is when you enter a mountain or a cave, how that feeling of religious emotion arises and the mind naturally inclines towards Dhamma. If people walk in and all they see are monks and novices with unkempt demeanor living in ill-kept kutīs and using ill-kept toilets, where is the religious emotion going to arise from?

When wise people listen to someone talking they know straightaway what's what; a single glance is enough for them. When someone starts speaking, the sages know right away whether he is a selfish person accumulating defilements, whether he has views in conflict with the Dhamma or the Discipline, or if he knows the Dhamma. If you've already practised and been through these things they're plain to see.

You don't have to do anything original. Just do the traditional things, revive the old practices that have declined. If you allow the degeneration to continue like this then everything will fall apart, and you'll be unable to restore the old standards. So make a firm determination with your practice, both the external and internal. Don't be deceitful. Monks and novices should be harmonious and do everything in unity.

Go over to that kutī and see what I've been doing. I've been working on it for many weeks now. There's a monk, a novice and a layman helping me. Go and see. Is it done properly? Does it look nice? That's the traditional way of looking after the lodgings. After using the toilet you scrub the floor down. In the old days there was no water toilet; the toilets we had then weren't as good as the ones we use today. But the monks and novices were good and there were only a few of us. Now the toilets are good but the people that use them are not. We never seem to get the two right at the same time. Really think about this.

The only problem is that lack of diligence in the practice leads to a complete disaster. No matter how good and noble a task is, it can't be accomplished if there's no grasp of the right method; it becomes a complete debacle.

Recollect the Buddha and incline your mind to his Dhamma. In it you will see the Buddha himself - where else could he be? Just look at his Dhamma. Read the teachings. Can you find anything faulty? Focus your attention on the Buddha's teaching and you will see him. Do you think that you can do what you like because the Buddha can't see you? How foolish! You're not examining yourself. If you're lazy all the time, how are you going to practise? There's nothing to compare with the slyness of defilement. It's not easy to see. Wherever insight arises, the defilements of insight follow. Don't think that if nobody objects, you can just hang out eating and sleeping.

How could the Dhamma elude you if you really devoted yourselves to practise? You're not deaf and dumb or mentally retarded; you've got all your faculties. And what can you expect if you're lazy and heedless? If you were still the same as when you arrived it wouldn't be so bad, I'm just afraid you're making yourself worse. Reflect on this deeply. Ask yourself the question, 'What have I come here for? What am I doing here?' You've shaved off your hair, put on the brown robe. What for? Go ahead, ask yourself. Do you think it's just to eat and sleep and be heedless? If that's what you want, you can do that in the world. Take out the oxen and buffalo, come back home, eat and sleep - anyone can do that. If you come and act in

that heedless indulgent way in the monastery, then you're not worthy of the name of monks and novices.

Raise up your spirits. Don't be sleepy or slothful or miserable. Get back into the practice without delay. Do you know when death will come? Little novices can die as well you know. It's not just Luang Por that's going to die. Pah-kows as well. Everyone is going to die. What will be left when death comes? Do you want to find out? You may have what you're going to do tomorrow all worked out, but what if you were to die tonight? You don't know your own limitations.

The chores are for putting forth effort. Don't neglect the duties of the Sangha. Don't miss the daily meetings. Keep up both your own practice and your duties towards the community. You can practise whether you're working, writing, watering the trees or whatever, because practice is what you're doing. Don't believe your defilements and cravings: they've led many people to ruin. If you believe defilements you cut yourself off from goodness. Think about it. In the world people who let themselves go can even end up addicted to drugs like heroin. It gets as bad as that. But people don't see the danger.

If you practise sincerely then Nibbāna is waiting for you. Don't just sit there waiting for it to come to you. Have you ever seen anyone successful in that way? Wherever you see you're in the wrong, quickly remedy it. If you've done something incorrectly, do it again properly. Investigate.

You have to listen if you want to find the good. If you nod off while you're listening to the Dhamma, the 'Infernal Guardians' will grab you by the arms and pitch you into hell! Right at the beginning of a talk, during the Pāli invocation, some of you are already starting to slump. Don't you feel any sense of shame? Don't you feel embarrassed to sit there like that in front of the laypeople? And where did you get those appetites from? Are you hungry ghosts or what? At least after they've eaten, dogs can still bark. All you can do is sit there in a stupor. Put some effort into it. You aren't conscripts in the army.³ As soon as the chaplain starts to instruct them, the soldiers' heads start slumping down onto their chests: 'When will he ever stop?' How do you think you will ever realize the Dhamma if you think like a conscript?

Folk singers can't sing properly without a reed pipe accompaniment. The same applies to a teacher. If his disciples put their hearts into following his teachings and instructions he feels energized. But when he puts down all kinds of fertilizer and the soil remains dry and lifeless, it's awful. He feels no joy, he loses his inspiration, he wonders why he should bother.

Be very circumspect before you eat. On *wan pra*⁴ or on any day when you tend to get very sleepy, don't let your body have any food, let someone else have it. You have to retaliate. Don't eat at all. 'If you're going to be so evil, then today you don't have to eat.' Tell it that. If you leave your stomach empty then the mind can be really peaceful. It's the path of practice. Sitting there as dull as a moron, not knowing south from north, you can be here until the day you die and not get anything from it; you can still be as ignorant as you are now. Consider this matter closely. What do you have to do to make your practice, 'good practice'. Look. People come from other places, other countries to see our way of practice here; they come to listen to Dhamma and to train themselves. Their practice is of benefit to them. Your own benefit and the benefit of others are interdependent. It's not just a matter of doing things in order to show off to others, but for your own benefit as well. When laypeople see the Sangha practising well they feel inspired. What would they think if they came and saw monks and novices like monkeys. In the future, who could the laypeople place their hopes on?

As for proclaiming the Dhamma, you don't have to do very much. Some of the Buddha's disciples, like Venerable Assaji, hardly spoke. They went on almsround in a calm and peaceful manner, walking neither quickly nor slowly, dressed in sober-coloured robes. Whether walking, moving, going forwards or back they were measured and composed. One morning, while Ven. Sāriputta was still the disciple of a brahmin teacher called Sanjaya, he caught sight of Venerable Assaji and was inspired by his demeanour. He approached him and requested some teaching. He asked who Venerable Assaji's teacher was and received the answer:

'The Revered Gotama.'

'What does he teach that enables you to practise like this?'

‘He doesn’t teach so much. He simply says that all dhammas arise from causes. If they are to cease their causes must cease first.’

Just that much. That was enough. He understood. That was all it took for Venerable Sāriputta to realize the Dhamma.

Whereas many of you go on almsround as if you were a bunch of boisterous fishermen going out to catch fish. The sounds of your laughing and joking can be heard from far away. Most of you just don’t know what’s what; you waste your time thinking of irrelevant and trivial things.

Every time you go on almsround you can bring back a lot of Dhamma with you. Sitting here eating the meal too. Many kinds of feelings arise; if you are composed and restrained you’ll be aware of them. You don’t have to sit cross-legged in meditation for these things to occur. You can realize enlightenment in ordinary everyday life. Or do you want to argue the point?

Once you’ve removed a piece of burning charcoal from the fire it doesn’t cool straightaway. Whenever you pick it up it’s hot. Mindfulness retains its wakefulness in the same way as charcoal does its heat; self-awareness is still present. That being so, how could the mind become deluded?

Maintain a concerted gaze on your mind. That doesn’t mean staring at it unblinkingly like a madman. It means constantly tracking your feelings. Do it a lot; concentrate a lot; develop it a lot: this is called progress. You don’t know what I mean by this gazing at the mind, this kind of effort and development. I’m talking about knowing the present state of your mind. If lust or ill-will or whatever arise in your mind, then you have to know all about it. In practice, the mind is like a child crawling about and the sense of knowing is like the parent. The child crawls around in the way that children do and the parent lets it wander, but, all the same, he keeps a constant eye on it. If the child looks like its going to fall in a pit, down a well or wander into danger in the jungle, the parent knows. This type of awareness is called ‘the one who knows, the one who is clearly aware, the radiant one’.

The untrained mind doesn’t understand what’s going on, its awareness is like that of a child. Knowing there’s craving in the mind and not doing anything about it, knowing that you’re taking advantage of someone else,

eating more than your share, knowing how to lift the light weight and let someone else take the heavy one, knowing that you've got more than the other person - that's an insane kind of knowing. Selfish people have that kind of knowing. It turns the clarity of awareness into darkness. A lot of you tend to have that kind of knowing. Whatever feels heavy - you push it away and go off looking for something light instead. That kind of knowing!

We train our minds as parents look after their children. You let the children go their way but if they're about to put a hand in the fire, fall down the well or get into danger, you're ready. Who could love a child like its parents? Because parents love their children they watch over them continually. They have a constant awareness in their minds, which they continually develop. The parent doesn't neglect the children but neither do they keep right on top of them all the time. Because children lack knowledge of the way things are the parent has to watch over them, keep track of their movements. When it looks like they are going to fall down the well, their mother picks them up and carries them somewhere far from danger. Then the parent goes back to work but continues to keep an eye on the children, and keeps consciously training this knowledge and awareness of their movements. When they run towards the well again, their mother picks them up and returns them to a safe place.

Raising up the mind is the same. If that wasn't the case then how could the Buddha look after you? *Buddho* means the one who knows, who is awakened and radiant. If your awareness is that of a small child how could you be awake and radiant? You'll just keep putting your hand in the fire. If you know your mind but you don't train it, how could that be intelligence? Worldly knowledge means cunning, knowing how to hide your mistakes, how to get away with things. That's what the world says is good. The Buddha disagreed.

What's the point of looking outside yourself? Look really close, right here. Look at your mind. This feeling arises and it's unwholesome, this thought arises and it's wholesome. You have to know when the mind is unwholesome and when it's not. Abandon the unwholesome and develop the wholesome. That's how it has to be if you want to know. It happens

through looking after the practice, including the observances regarding the dwelling place.

First thing in the morning, as soon as you hear the sound of the bell, get up quickly. Once you've closed the doors and windows of the *kutī*, go to morning chanting. Do the group duties. And these days? As soon as you get up you rush off, door and windows left open, pieces of cloth left on the line outside. You're completely unprepared for the rain. As soon as it starts or you hear a peal of thunder, you have to run all the way back. Whenever you leave your *kutī*, close the door and windows. If your robe is out on the line, bring it in and put it away neatly. I don't see many people doing this. Take your bathing cloth over to your *kutī* to dry. During the rainy season put it out underneath the *kutī*.

Don't have a lot of cloth. I've seen bhikkhus go to wash robes half-buried in cloth. Either that or they're off to make a bonfire of some sort. If you've got a lot it's a hassle. All you need is one *jiwon*, one *sanghati*, a *sabong* or two. I don't know what this big jumbled pile you're carrying around is. On robe washing day some of you come along after everyone else, when the water's all boiled, and just go straight ahead and wash your robes obliviously. When you've finished you rush off and don't help to clean up. The others are about to murder you, do you realize that? When everybody is helping cutting chips and boiling the water if there is someone who is nowhere to be seen, that's really ugly.

Washing one or two pieces of cloth each shouldn't be such a big deal. But from the 'dterng dterng' sound of cutting jackfruit wood chips it sounds like you're cutting down a huge tree to make a house post. Be frugal. If you only use the wood chips once or twice and then throw them away, where do you think we're going to keep getting the wood from? Then there's firing bowls. You just keep banking up the fire more and more and then when the bowl cracks you throw it away. Now there's a whole pile of discarded bowls piled up at the foot of the mango tree. Why do you do that? If you don't know how to fire a bowl then ask. Ask a senior monk. Confer with him. There have been bhikkhus who've just gone ahead and fired their bowls anyway, even though they didn't know the right method; then when

the bowl cracked they would come and ask for a new one. How can you have the gall? This is all wrong action and bad kamma.

Look after the trees in the monastery to the best of your ability. Don't, under any circumstances, build fires near them so that their branches and leaves are singed. Care for the trees. I don't even allow the laypeople to build fires for warming themselves on winter mornings. There was one time when some of them went ahead and did it anyway - they ended up with a head full of fleas. Worse still, ashes blew all over the place and made everywhere filthy. Only people on fishing trips do things like that.

When I went to have a look around the monastery I saw tin cans, packets of detergent and soap wrappers strewn around the forest floor. It looks more like the backyard of a slaughter-house than a monastery where people come to pay homage. It's not auspicious. If you're going to throw anything away then do it in the proper place, and then all the rubbish can be taken away and be incinerated. But what's going on now? As soon as you're out of the immediate area of your kutī you just sling your rubbish out into the forest. We're monks, practitioners of the Dhamma. Do things beautifully - beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end; beautiful in the way that the Buddha taught us. This practice is all about abandoning defilements. So if you're accumulating, then you're going on a different path to the Buddha. He removes defilements and you're taking them on. It's sheer madness.

The reason is not hard to find: it's simply that you don't reflect consistently enough to make things clear. For the reflection on birth, old age, sickness and death to have any real effect, it has to be taken to the extent that, on waking up in the morning - you shudder. Acknowledge the fact that death could occur at any time. You could die tomorrow. You could die today. And if that's the case, then you can't just carry on blithely. You've got to get up. Practise walking meditation. If you're afraid of death, then you must try to realize the Dhamma in the time you have. But if you don't meditate on death, you won't think like this.

If the bell wasn't rung so vigorously and for so long, I don't know if there'd be a single person at the morning meeting, or when you'd ever do any chanting. Some of you wake up at dawn, grab your bowl and then rush

straight off on one of the short almsrounds. Everyone just leaves the monastery when they feel like it. Talk over the question of who goes on what almsround; what time those on the Ban Glang route should leave; what time those on the Ban Gor route should leave; what time those on the Ban Bok route should leave. Take this clock as your standard. When the bell goes set off straightaway. These days those who leave first stand waiting at the edge of the village; the ones that leave later run to catch up. Sometimes one group has been right through the village and are already on their way out when a second group arrives. The villagers don't know what to put in the bowls of the second group. That's a dreadful way to carry on. Discuss it amongst yourselves once more. Decide who is going on which route. If anyone is unwell, or has some problem and wants to change their route, then say so. There is an agreed way of doing things. What do you think you're doing, just following your desires like that? It's an utter disgrace! It would serve you right if all you got on almsround was a chisel.⁵

If you need more sleep don't stay up so late. What's all this great activity you're involved in that makes you need so much sleep? Just putting forth effort, practising sitting and walking meditation doesn't cause you to miss that much sleep. Spending your time indulging in socializing does though. When you've done a sufficient amount of walking meditation and you're feeling tired then go to bed. Divide your time correctly between Sangha activities and your own private activities so that you get enough rest.

On some days in the hot season, for instance, when it's very humid, we may take a break from evening chanting. After water hauling, you can take your bath and then practise as you wish. If you want to do walking meditation then get right down to it. You can walk for as long as you like. Try it out. Even if you walk until seven o'clock you've still got the whole night ahead of you. You could walk until eight o'clock and go to sleep then if you really wanted to. There's no reason to miss out on sleep. The problem is that you don't know how to manage your time. It's up to you. Whether you get up late or early is up to you. How can you ever achieve anything without training and straightening yourself out? The training is indispensable. If you do it, this small thing will offer no difficulties. You can't just play at it. Make your practice of benefit to yourself and others.

Train yourselves well in the practice. If you develop your mind, wisdom is bound to arise. If you put your heart into walking *jongrom*⁶ then after three lengths of the path the Dhamma will be flowing strongly. But instead of that, you drag yourself up and down in a drowsy state with your head hung down. Those of you with broken necks: if you go in a forest or to a mountain they say the spirits will get you, you know.

If you're sleepy while you're sitting, get up! Do some walking meditation; don't keep sitting there. Standing, walking or sitting, you have to rid yourself of sleepiness. If something arises and you don't do anything to solve the problem or to improve yourself, then how will it ever get better?

Memorize the *Pātimokkha* while you're walking *jongrom*. It's really enjoyable, and peaceful too. Train yourself. Go on the almsround to Ban Gor, keep yourself to yourself, away from the ones that like to chat. Let them go ahead, they walk fast. Don't talk with the garrulous ones. Talk with your own heart a lot, meditate a lot. The kind of people who enjoy talking all day are like chattering birds. Don't stand any nonsense from them. Put your robes on neatly and then set off on almsround. As soon as you get into your stride you can start memorizing the *Pātimokkha*. It makes your mind orderly and radiant. It's a sort of handbook. The idea is not that you should get obsessed with it, simply that once you've memorized it, the *Pātimokkha* will illuminate your mind. As you walk you focus on it. Before long you've got it and it arises automatically. Train yourself like that.

Train yourself. You have to train. Don't just hang around. The moment that you do that you're like a dog. In fact a real dog is better: it barks when you walk past it late at night - you don't even do that. 'Why are you only interested in sleeping? Why won't you get up?' You have to teach yourself by asking those questions. In the cold season some of you wrap yourself up in your robes in the middle of the day and go to sleep. It won't do.

When you go out to the toilet bow first. Bow in the morning when the bell goes before leaving. After the meal, once you've washed your bowl and gathered your things, then bow first before going back to your *kutī*. Don't let those occasions pass. The bell goes for water hauling; bow first before leaving your *kutī*. If you forget and you've walked as far as the central area of the monastery before you realize, then go back again and bow. You have

to take the training to that level. Train your heart and mind. Don't just let it go. Whenever you forget and don't bow, then go back and bow. How will you forget if you're that diligent, when you have to keep walking back and forth. What's the attitude now? 'I forgot. It doesn't matter. Never mind.' That's why the monastery is in the state it is. I'm referring here to the old traditional methods. Now it looks as if they've disappeared; I don't know what you'd call how you do things these days.

Go back to the old ways, the ascetic practices. When you sit down at the foot of a tree, then bow. Even if there's no Buddha image, bow. Your mindfulness is there if you do that. When you're sitting, maintain an appropriate posture; don't sit there grasping your knees like a fool. Sitting like that is the beginning of the end.

Training yourself won't kill you; it's just laziness that is the problem. Don't let it into your head. If you're really drowsy, then lie down, but do it mindfully, reminding yourself to get up the moment you wake and be stern with yourself, 'if I don't, may I fall into hell!'

A full stomach makes you feel weary and weariness makes lying down seem a wonderful thing. Then if you're lying there comfortable and easy when you hear the sound of the bell you get very angry at having to get up - maybe you even feel like killing the bell-ringer. Count. Tell your mind, 'If I get as far as three and I don't get up may I fall into hell.' You have to really mean it. You have to get hold of the defilement and kill it. Don't just tease with your mind.

Read the biographies of the great teachers. They're singular people, aren't they? They're different. Think carefully about that difference. Train your mind in the correct way. You don't have to depend on anyone else; discover your own skilful means to train your mind. If it starts thinking of worldly things, quickly subdue it. Stop it. Get up. Change your posture. Tell yourself not to think about such things; there are better things to think about. It's essential that you don't just mildly yield to those thoughts. Once they've gone from your mind you'll feel better. Don't imagine that you can take it easy and your practice will take care of itself. Everything depends on training.

Some animals are able to find the food they need and keep themselves alive because they're so quick and dexterous. But then look at monitor lizards and tortoises. Tortoises are so slow that you may wonder how they can survive. Don't be fooled. Creatures have will, they have their methods. It's the same with sitting and walking meditation. The great teachers have their methods but they're difficult to communicate. It's like that old fellow who used to live in Piboon. Whenever someone drowned he was the one who would dive down looking for the corpse. He could keep diving for a long time - until the leaves of a broken branch were all withered by the sun - and he'd find the bodies every time. If there was a drowning, he was the man to see. When I asked him how he did it, he said he knew all right, but he couldn't put it into words. That's how it is: an individual matter. It's difficult to communicate; you have to learn to do it yourself. And it's the same with the training of the mind.

Hurry on with this training! I say this to you but I'm not telling you that the Dhamma is something that you can run after, or that you can realize it through physical effort alone, by going without sleep or by fasting. It's not about exhausting yourself, it's about making your mind 'just right' for the Dhamma.

1: 'To be reverent and humble, content and grateful': a line from the Mangala Sutta, Snp 2.4

2: *Salot sangwaet*: In other places in the text the more literal 'sober sadness' has been used.

3: forced to listen to Dhamma talks

4: Wan Pra: observance day with all-night meditation.

5: A chisel is commonly used as a weapon. A chisel put into a bhikkhu's almsbowl would be interpreted as a threat of violence.

6: Jongrom: walking meditation, usually back and forth on a straight path.

A Message From Thailand

I have come up to Wat Tham Saeng Pet for the rains retreat this year - mostly for a change of air as my health has not been so good. With me are a few Western monks: Santa, Pabhakaro, Pamutto, Michael and Sāmanera Guy; also some Thai monks and a small number of laypeople who are keen to practise. This is a pleasant and fortunate time for us. At the moment my sickness has subsided, so I feel well enough to record this message for you all.

Because of this ill-health I cannot visit England, so hearing news of you, from some of your supporters who are staying here, has made me very happy and relieved. The thing that pleases me most is that Sumedho is now able to ordain monks; this shows that your efforts to establish Buddhism in England have been quite successful.

It is also pleasing to see the names of the monks and nuns whom I know, who are living with Sumedho at Chithurst: Anando, Viradhammo, Sucitto, Uppanno, Kittisaro, and Amaro. Also Mae Chees Rocana and Candasiri. I hope you are all in good health and living harmoniously together, co-operating and proceeding well in Dhamma practice.

There are supporters, both in England and here in Thailand, who help keep me up to date with your developments. I gather from them that the building work at Chithurst is complete, and that it is now a much more comfortable place to live. I often enquire about this, as I remember my stay of seven days there was quite difficult! (Laughter). I hear that the shrine-room and the other main areas are now all finished. With less building work to be carried out, the community will be able to apply itself more fully to formal practice.

I understand also that some of the senior monks have been moved off to start branch monasteries. This is normal practice, but it can lead to a predominance of junior monks at the main monastery; this has been the case in the past at Wat Pah Pong. This can bring difficulties in the teaching

and training of monks, so it is very important in these situations that we help one another.

I trust that Sumedho is not allowing these sort of things to burden him! These are small matters, quite normal, they are not a problem at all. Certainly there are responsibilities - but it can also be seen that there are none.

To be the abbot of a monastery can be compared to being a rubbish bin: those who are disturbed by the presence of rubbish make a bin, in the hope that people will put their rubbish in there. In actual fact what happens is that the person who makes the bin ends up being the rubbish collector as well. This is how things are - it's the same at Wat Pah Pong; it was the same at the time of the Buddha. No-one else puts the rubbish into it so we have to do it ourselves, and everything gets chucked into the abbot's bin! One in such a position must therefore be far-sighted, have depth, and remain unshaken in the midst of all things; they must be consistent and able to persevere. Of all the qualities we develop in our lives, patient endurance is the most important.

It is true that the establishment of a suitable dwelling place at Chithurst has been completed; the construction of a building is not difficult, a couple of years and it is done. What has not been completed, though, is the work of upkeep and maintenance - the sweeping, washing and so forth have to go on forever. It is not difficult to build a monastery, but it is difficult to maintain it; likewise, it is not difficult to ordain someone, but to train them fully in the monastic life is hard. This should not be taken as a problem, though, for to do that which is hard is very beneficial; doing only that which is easy does not have much use. Therefore, in order to nurture and maintain the seed of Buddhism which has been planted at Chithurst, you must now all be prepared to put forth your energies and help.

I hope that what I have said today has conveyed feelings of warmth and support to you. Whenever I meet Thai people who have connections in England, I ask if they have been to visit Chithurst. It seems, from them, that there is a great deal of interest in a branch monastery being there. Also, foreigners who come here will frequently have visited Wat Nanachat and have news of you in England as well. It makes me very happy to see that

there is such a close and co-operative relationship between Wat Pah Pong, Wat Nanachat and Wat Chithurst.

That is all I have to say, except that my feelings of loving-kindness are with you all. May you be well and happy, abiding in harmony, co-operation and togetherness. May the blessings of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha always be firmly established in your hearts - may you be well.



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