

100th anniversary edition

AJAHN CHAH

Living Dhamma

Living Dhamma
by Ajahn Chah

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Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti
The gift of the Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.

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100th anniversary edition, 2018

The picture on the cover of this book, 'Living Dhamma', depicts Ajahn Chah as a young monk, when he was training with Luang Pu Kinaree, at Wat Pah Mettāviveka. The young Ajahn Chah had been so intent on sewing a robe in a hurry, with the attitude, 'I just wanted to get it finished so that I could devote myself to meditation...' that he had not noticed the shadow of the tree he was sitting under had moved and that he was now in the hot sun. Lung Pu Kinaree saw this and asked him, 'What's the hurry? Don't you realize that it's just this sewing that is your meditation?'

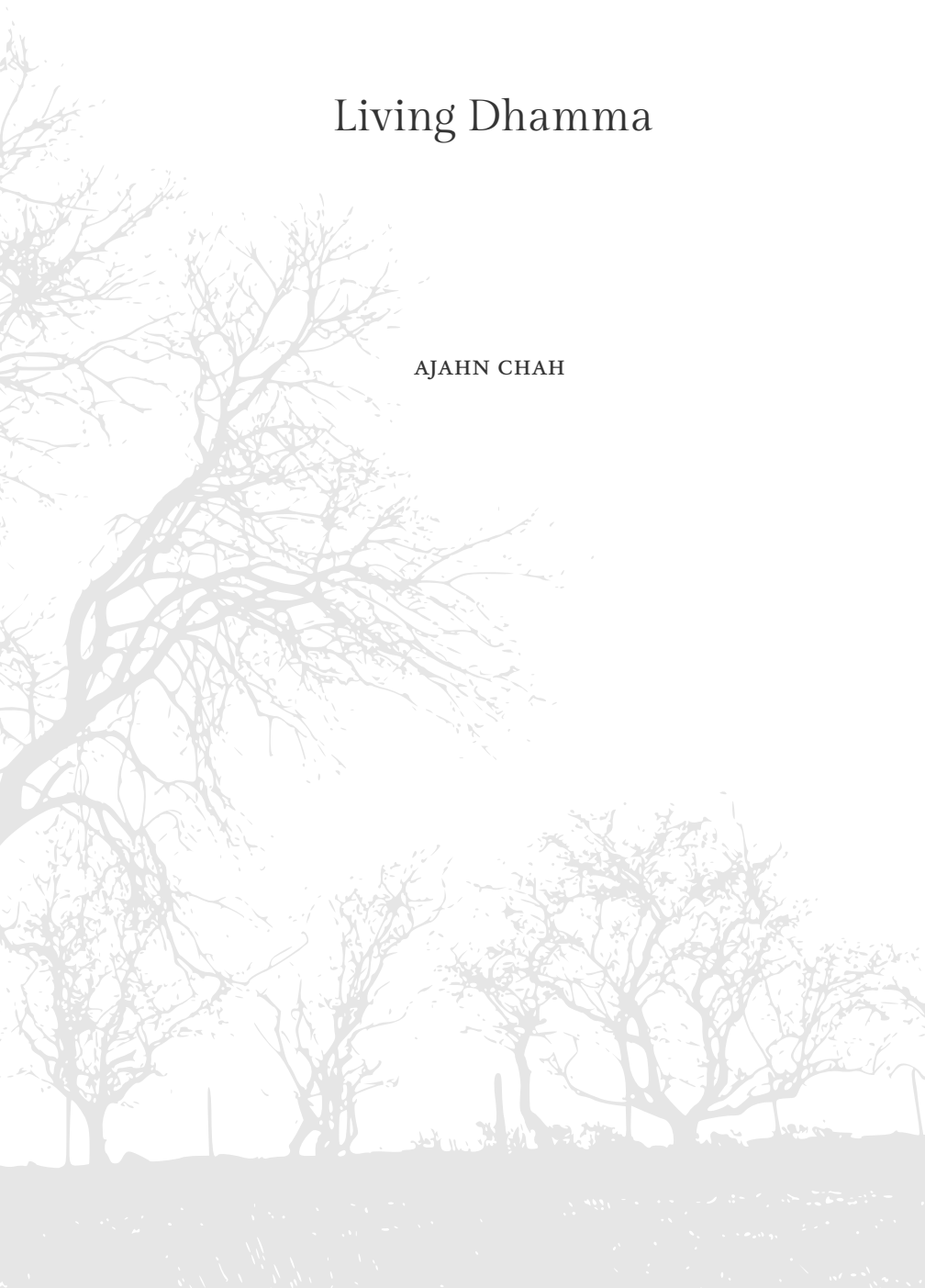
This carving was installed at the memorial stone pillar in the place of Ajahn Chah's birth, in Bahn Kor, North-East Thailand, in January 2018, the centenary year of Ajahn Chah's birth.

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Living Dhamma

AJAHN CHAH



Making the Heart Good

These days people are going all over the place looking for merit,^{*} and they always seem to stop over in Wat Pah Pong. If they don't stop over on the way, they stop over on the return journey. Wat Pah Pong has become a stop-over point. Some people are in such a hurry I don't even get a chance to see or speak to them. Most of them are looking for merit. I don't see many looking for a way out of wrongdoing. They're so intent on getting merit they don't know where they're going to put it. It's like trying to dye a dirty, unwashed cloth.

Monks talk straight like this, but it's hard for most people to put this sort of teaching into practice. It's hard because they don't understand. If they understood it would be much easier. Suppose there was a hole, and there was something at the bottom of it. Now anyone who put their hand into the hole and didn't reach the bottom would say the hole was too deep. Out of a hundred or a thousand people putting their hands down that hole, they'd all say the hole was too deep. Not one would say their arm was too short!

^{*}'Looking for merit' is a commonly-used Thai phrase. It refers to the custom in Thailand of going to monasteries, or 'wats', paying respect to venerated teachers and making offerings.

There are so many people looking for merit. Sooner or later they'll have to start looking for a way out of wrongdoing. But not many people are interested in this. The teaching of the Buddha is so brief, but most people just pass it by, just like they pass through Wat Pah Pong. For most people that's what the Dhamma is, a stop-over point.

Only three words, hardly anything to it: *Sabba-pāpassa akaraṇaṃ*: refraining from all wrongdoing. That's the teaching of all Buddhas. This is the heart of Buddhism. But people keep jumping over it, they don't want this one. The renunciation of all wrongdoing, great and small, from bodily, verbal and mental actions – this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

If we were to dye a piece of cloth we'd have to wash it first. But most people don't do that. Without looking at the cloth, they dip it into the dye straight away. If the cloth is dirty, dying it makes it come out even worse than before. Think about it. Dying a dirty old rag, would that look good?

You see? This is how Buddhism teaches, but most people just pass it by. They just want to perform good works, but they don't want to give up wrongdoing. It's just like saying 'the hole is too deep.' Everybody says the hole is too deep, nobody says their arm is too short. We have to come back to ourselves. With this teaching you have to take a step back and look at yourself.

Sometimes they go looking for merit by the bus load. Maybe they even argue on the bus, or they're drunk. Ask them where they're going and they say they're looking for merit. They want merit but they don't give up vice. They'll never find merit that way.

This is how people are. You have to look closely, look at yourselves. The Buddha taught about having recollection and

self-awareness in all situations. Wrongdoing arises in bodily, verbal and mental actions. The source of all good, evil, well-being and harm lies with actions, speech and thoughts. Did you bring your actions, speech and thoughts with you today? Or have you left them at home? This is where you must look, right here. You don't have to look very far away. Look at your actions, speech and thoughts. Look to see if your conduct is faulty or not.

People don't really look at these things. Like the housewife washing the dishes with a scowl on her face. She's so intent on cleaning the dishes, she doesn't realize her own mind's dirty! Have you ever seen this? She only sees the dishes. She's looking too far away, isn't she? Some of you have probably experienced this, I'd say. This is where you have to look. People concentrate on cleaning the dishes but they let their minds go dirty. This is not good, they're forgetting themselves.

Because they don't see themselves, people can commit all sorts of bad deeds. They don't look at their own minds. When people are going to do something bad they have to look around first to see if anyone is looking. 'Will my mother see me?' 'Will my husband see me?' 'Will my children see me?' 'Will my wife see me?' If there's no-one watching then they go right ahead and do it. This is insulting themselves. They say no-one is watching, so they quickly finish the job before anyone will see. And what about themselves? Aren't they a 'somebody'?

You see? Because they overlook themselves like this, people never find what is of real value, they don't find the Dhamma. If you look at yourselves, you will see yourselves. Whenever you are about to do something bad, if you see yourself in time you can stop. If you want to do something worthwhile, look at your mind. If you know how to look at yourself then you'll know

about right and wrong, harm and benefit, vice and virtue. These are the things we should know about.

If I don't talk of these things you won't know about them. You have greed and delusion in the mind but don't know it. You won't know anything if you are always looking outside. This is the trouble with people not looking at themselves. Looking inwards you will see good and evil. Seeing goodness, we can take it to heart and practise accordingly.

Giving up the bad, practising the good; this is the heart of Buddhism. *Sabba-pāpassa akaraṇaṃ* – not committing any wrongdoing, either through body, speech or mind. That's the right practice, the teaching of the Buddhas. Now 'our cloth' is clean.

Then we have *kusalassūpasampadā* – making the mind virtuous and skilful. If the mind is virtuous and skilful we don't have to take a bus all over the countryside looking for merit. Even sitting at home we can attain to merit. But most people just go looking for merit all over the countryside without giving up their vices. When they return home it's empty-handed they go, back to their old sour faces. There they are washing the dishes with a sour face, so intent on cleaning the dishes. This is where people don't look, they're far away from merit.

We may know of these things, but we don't really know if we don't know within our own minds. Buddhism doesn't enter our heart. If our mind is good and virtuous, it is happy. There's a smile in our heart. But most of us can hardly find time to smile, can we? We can only manage to smile when things go our way. Most people's happiness depends on having things go to their liking. They have to have everybody in the world say only pleasant things. Is that how you find happiness? Is it possible to

have everybody in the world say only pleasant things? If that's how it is, when will you ever find happiness?

We must use Dhamma to find happiness. Whatever it may be, whether right or wrong, don't blindly cling to it. Just notice it then lay it down. When the mind is at ease then you can smile. The minute you become averse to something, the mind goes bad. Then nothing is good at all.

Sacittapariyodapanam: Having cleared away impurities the mind is free of worries; it is peaceful, kind and virtuous. When the mind is radiant and has given up evil, there is ease at all times. The serene and peaceful mind is the true epitome of human achievement.

When others say things to our liking, we smile. If they say things that displease us, we frown. How can we ever get others to say things only to our liking every single day? Is it possible? Even your own children, have they ever said things that displease you? Have you ever upset your parents? Not only other people, but even our own minds can upset us. Sometimes the things we ourselves think of are not pleasant. What can you do? You might be walking along and suddenly kick a tree stump ... *thud!* ... 'Ouch!' ... Where's the problem? Who kicked who anyway? Who are you going to blame? It's your own fault. Even our own mind can be displeasing to us. If you think about it, you'll see that this is true. Sometimes we do things that even we don't like. All you can say is 'Damn!' There's no-one else to blame.

Gaining merit, or boon, in Buddhism is giving up that which is wrong. When we abandon wrongness, then we are no longer wrong. When there is no stress there is calm. The calm mind is a clean mind, one which harbours no angry thoughts, one which is clear.

How can you make the mind clear? Just by knowing it. For example, you might think, 'Today I'm in a really bad mood, everything I look at offends me, even the plates in the cupboard.' You might feel like smashing them up, every single one of them. Whatever you look at looks bad, the chickens – the ducks, the cats and dogs ... you hate them all. Everything your husband says is offensive. Even looking into your own mind you aren't satisfied. What can you do in such a situation? Where does this suffering come from? This is called 'having no merit'. These days in Thailand they have a saying that when someone dies his merit is finished. But that's not the case. There are plenty of people still alive who've finished their merit already; those people who don't know merit. The bad mind just collects more and more badness.

Going on these merit-making tours is like building a beautiful house without preparing the area beforehand. In no long time the house will collapse, won't it? The design was no good. Now you have to try again, try a different way. You have to look into yourself, looking at the faults in your actions, speech and thoughts. Where else are you going to practise, other than at your actions, speech and thoughts? People get lost. They want to go and practise Dhamma where it's really peaceful, in the forest or at Wat Pah Pong. Is Wat Pah Pong peaceful? No, it's not really peaceful. Where it's really peaceful is in your own home.

If you have wisdom wherever you go you will be carefree. The whole world is already just fine as it is. All the trees in the forest are already just fine as they are: there are tall ones, short ones, hollow ones ... all kinds. They are simply the way they are. Through ignorance of their true nature we go and force

our opinions onto them. 'Oh, this tree is too short! This tree is hollow!' Those trees are simply trees, they're better off than we are.

That's why I've had these little poems written up in the trees here. Let the trees teach you. Have you learned anything from them yet? You should try to learn at least one thing from them. There are so many trees, all with something to teach you. Dhamma is everywhere, it is in everything in nature. You should understand this point. Don't go blaming the hole for being too deep; turn around and look at your own arm! If you can see this you will be happy.

If you make merit or virtue, preserve it in your mind. That's the best place to keep it. Making merit as you have done today is good, but it's not the best way. Constructing buildings is good, but it's not the best thing. Building your own mind into something good is the best way. This way you will find goodness whether you come here or stay at home. Find this excellence within your mind. Outer structures like this hall here are just like the 'bark' of the 'tree', they're not the 'heartwood'.

If you have wisdom, wherever you look there will be Dhamma. If you lack wisdom, then even the good things turn bad. Where does this badness come from? Just from our own minds, that's where. Look how this mind changes. Everything changes. Husband and wife used to get on all right together, they could talk to each other quite happily. But there comes a day when their mood goes bad, everything the spouse says seems offensive. The mind has gone bad, it's changed again. This is how it is.

So in order to give up evil and cultivate the good you don't have to go looking anywhere else. If your mind has gone bad,

don't go looking over at this person and that person. Just look at your own mind and find out where these thoughts have come from. Why does the mind think such things? Understand that all things are transient. Love is transient, hate is transient. Have you ever loved your children? Of course you have. Have you ever hated them? I'll answer that for you, too. Sometimes you do, don't you? Can you throw them away? No, you can't throw them away. Why not? Children aren't like bullets, are they?*

Bullets are fired outwards, but children are fired right back to the parents. If they're bad it comes back to the parents. You could say children are your kamma. There are good ones and bad ones. Both good and bad are right there in your children. But even the bad ones are precious. One may be born with polio, crippled and deformed, and be even more precious than the others. Whenever you leave home for a while you have to leave a message, 'Look after the little one, he's not so strong.' You love him even more than the others.

You should, then, set your minds well – half love, half hate. Don't take only one or the other, always have both sides in mind. Your children are your kamma, they are appropriate to their owners. They are your kamma, so you must take responsibility for them. If they really give you suffering, just remind yourself, 'It's my kamma.' If they please you, just remind yourself, 'It's my kamma.' Sometimes it gets so frustrating at home you must just want to run away. It gets so bad some people even contemplate hanging themselves! It's kamma. We have to accept the fact.

*There is a play on words here between the Thai words 'look', meaning children, and 'look bpeun', meaning literally 'gun children' ... that is, bullets.

Avoid bad actions, then you will be able to see yourself more clearly.

This is why contemplating things is so important. Usually when people practise meditation they use a meditation object, such as *Bud-dho*, *Dham-mo* or *Saiṅ-gho*. But you can make it even shorter than this. Whenever you feel annoyed, whenever your mind goes bad, just say 'so!' When you feel better just say 'so! It's not a sure thing.' If you love someone, just say 'so!' When you feel you're getting angry, just say 'so!' Do you understand? You don't have to go looking into the *Tipiṭaka*. Just 'so!' This means 'it's transient'. Love is transient, hate is transient, good is transient, evil is transient. How could they be permanent? Where is there any permanence in them?

You could say that they are permanent insofar as they are invariably impermanent. They are certain in this respect, they never become otherwise. One minute there's love, the next hate. That's how things are. In this sense they are permanent. That's why I say whenever love arises, just tell it 'so!' It saves a lot of time. You don't have to say *aniccaṃ, dukkhaṃ, anattā*.' If you don't want a long meditation theme, just take this simple word. If love arises, before you get really lost in it, just tell yourself 'so!' This is enough.

Everything is transient, and it's permanent in that it's invariably that way. Just to see this much is to see the heart of the Dhamma, the true Dhamma.

Now if everybody said 'so!' more often, and applied themselves to training like this, clinging would become less and less. People would not be so stuck on love and hate. They would not cling to things. They would put their trust in the truth, not with other things. Just to know this much is enough, what else do you need to know?

Having heard the teaching, you should try to remember it also. What should you remember? Meditate ... Do you understand? If you understand, the Dhamma clicks with you, the mind will stop. If there is anger in the mind, just 'so!' That's enough, it stops straight away. If you don't yet understand, look deeply into the matter. If there is understanding, when anger arises in the mind you can just shut it off with 'so! It's impermanent!'

Today you have had a chance to record the Dhamma both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly, the sound enters through the ears to be recorded in the mind. If you can't do this much it's not so good, your time at Wat Pah Pong will be wasted. Record it outwardly, and record it inwardly. This tape recorder here is not so important. The really important thing is the 'recorder' in the mind. The tape recorder is perishable, but if the Dhamma really reaches the mind it's imperishable, it's there for good. And you don't have to waste money on batteries.

* * *

Given on the occasion of a large group of laypeople coming to Wat Pah Pong to make offerings to support the monastery.

Why Are We Here?*

This Rains Retreat I don't have much strength, I'm not well, so I've come up to this mountain here to get some fresh air. People come to visit but I can't really receive them like I used to because my voice has just about had it, my breath is just about gone. You can count it a blessing that there is still this body sitting here for you all to see now. This is a blessing in itself. Soon you won't see it. The breath will be finished, the voice will be gone. They will fare in accordance with supporting factors, like all compounded things. The Lord Buddha called it *khaya-vayaṃ*, the decline and dissolution of all conditioned phenomena.

How do they decline? Consider a lump of ice. Originally it was simply water; people freeze it and it becomes ice. But it doesn't take long before it's melted. Take a big lump of ice, say as big as this tape recorder here, and leave it out in the sun. You can see how it declines, much the same as the body. It will gradually disintegrate. After not many hours or minutes all that's left is a puddle of water. This is called *khaya-vayaṃ*, the decline and dissolution of all compounded things. It's been

*Note: This talk was given at Wat Tham Saeng Phet (The Monastery of the Diamond Light Cave) to a group of visiting laypeople, during the Vassa of 1981, shortly before Ajahn Chah's health deteriorated.

this way for a long time now, ever since the beginning of time. When we are born we bring this inherent nature into the world with us, we can't avoid it. At birth we bring old age, sickness and death along with us.

So this is why the Buddha said *khaya-vayaṃ*, the decline and dissolution of all compounded things. All of us sitting here in this hall now, monks, novices, laymen and laywomen, are without exception 'lumps of deterioration'. Right now the lump is hard, just like the lump of ice. It starts out as water, becomes ice for a while and then melts again. Can you see this decline in yourself? Look at this body. It's ageing every day – hair is ageing, nails are ageing – everything is ageing!

You weren't like this before, were you? You were probably much smaller than this. Now you've grown up and matured. From now on you will decline, following the way of nature. The body declines just like the lump of ice. Soon, just like the lump of ice, it's all gone. All bodies are composed of the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. A body is the confluence of earth, water, wind, and fire, which we proceed to call a person. Originally it's hard to say what you could call it, but now we call it a 'person'. We get infatuated with it, saying it's a male, a female, giving it names, Mr, Mrs, and so on, so that we can identify each other more easily. But actually there isn't anybody there. There's earth, water, wind and fire. When they come together in this known form we call the result a 'person'. Now don't get excited over it. If you really look into it there isn't anyone there.

That which is solid in the body, the flesh, skin, bones and so on, are called the earth element. Those aspects of the body which are liquid are the water element. The faculty of

warmth in the body is the fire element, while the winds coursing through the body are the wind element.

At Wat Pah Pong we have a body which is neither male or female: it's the skeleton hanging in the main hall. Looking at it you don't get the feeling that it's a man or a woman. People ask each other whether it's a man or a woman and all they can do is look blankly at each other. It's only a skeleton, all the skin and flesh are gone.

People are ignorant of these things. Some go to Wat Pah Pong, into the main hall, see the skeletons and then come running right out again! They can't bear to look. They're afraid, afraid of the skeletons. I figure these people have never seen themselves before. Because they are afraid of the skeletons, they don't reflect on the great value of a skeleton. To get to the monastery they had to ride in a car or walk; if they didn't have bones how would they be? Would they be able to walk about like that? But they ride their cars to Wat Pah Pong, go into the main hall, see the skeleton and run straight back out again! They've never seen such a thing before. They're born with it and yet they've never seen it. It's very fortunate that they have a chance to see it now. Even older people see the skeleton and get scared. What's all the fuss about? This shows that they're not at all in touch with themselves, they don't really know themselves. Maybe they go home and still can't sleep for three or four days, and yet they're sleeping with a skeleton! They get dressed with it, eat food with it, do everything with it, and yet they're scared of it.

This shows how out of touch people are with themselves. How pitiful! They're always looking outwards, at trees, at other people, at external objects, saying 'this one is big,' 'that's small,'

‘that’s short,’ ‘that’s long.’ They’re so busy looking at other things they never see themselves. To be honest, people are really pitiful; they have no refuge.

In the ordination ceremonies the ordinees must learn the five basic meditation themes: *kesā*, head hair; *lomā*, body hair; *nakhā*, nails; *dantā*, teeth; *taco*, skin. Some of the students and educated people snigger to themselves when they hear this part of the ordination ceremony. ‘What’s the Ajahn trying to teach us here? Teaching us about hair when we’ve had it for ages. He doesn’t have to teach us about this, we know it already. Why bother teaching us something we already know?’ Dim people are like this, they think they can see the hair already. I tell them that when I say to ‘see the hair’ I mean to see it *as it really is*. See body hair as it really is, see nails, teeth and skin as they really are. That’s what I call ‘seeing’ – not seeing in a superficial way, but seeing in accordance with the truth. We wouldn’t be so sunk up to the ears in things if we could see things as they really are. Hair, nails, teeth, skin – what are they really like? Are they pretty? Are they clean? Do they have any real substance? Are they stable? No, there’s nothing to them. They’re not pretty but we imagine them to be so. They’re not substantial but we imagine them to be so.

Hair, nails, teeth, skin – people are really hooked on these things. The Buddha established these things as the basic themes for meditation, he taught us to know these things. They are transient, imperfect and ownerless; they are not ‘me’ or ‘them’. We are born with and deluded by these things, but really they are foul. Suppose we didn’t bathe for a week, could we bear to be close to each other? We’d really smell bad. When people sweat a lot, such as when a lot of people are working hard together, the

smell is awful. We go back home and rub ourselves down with soap and water and the smell abates somewhat, the fragrance of the soap replaces it. Rubbing soap on the body may make it seem fragrant, but actually the bad smell of the body is still there, it is just temporarily suppressed. When the smell of the soap is gone the smell of the body comes back again.

Now we tend to think these bodies are pretty, delightful, long lasting and strong. We tend to think that we will never age, get sick or die. We are charmed and fooled by the body, and so we are ignorant of the true refuge within ourselves. The true place of refuge is the mind. The mind is our true refuge. This hall here may be pretty big but it can't be a true refuge. Pigeons take shelter here, geckos take shelter here, lizards take shelter here. We may think the hall belongs to us but it doesn't. We live here together with everything else. This is only a temporary shelter, soon we must leave it. People take these shelters for refuge.

So the Buddha said to find your refuge. That means to find your real heart. This heart is very important. People don't usually look at important things, they spend most of their time looking at unimportant things. For example, when they do the house cleaning they may be bent on cleaning up the house, washing the dishes and so on, but they fail to notice their own hearts. Their heart may be rotten, they may be feeling angry, washing the dishes with a sour expression on their face. They fail to see that their own hearts are not very clean. This is what I call 'taking a temporary shelter for a refuge'. They beautify house and home but they don't think of beautifying their own hearts. They don't examine suffering. The heart is the important thing. The Buddha taught to find a refuge within

your own heart: *Attā hi attano nātho* – ‘Make yourself a refuge unto yourself.’ Who else can be your refuge? The true refuge is the heart, nothing else. You may try to depend on other things, but they aren’t a sure thing. You can only really depend on other things if you already have a refuge within yourself. You must have your own refuge first before you can depend on anything else, be it a teacher, family, friends or relatives.

So all of you, both laypeople and homeless ones who have come to visit today, please consider this teaching. Ask yourselves, ‘Who am I? Why am I here?’ Ask yourselves, ‘Why was I born?’ Some people don’t know. They want to be happy but the suffering never stops. Rich or poor, young or old, they suffer just the same. It’s all suffering. And why? Because they have no wisdom. The poor are unhappy because they don’t have enough, and the rich are unhappy because they have too much to look after.

In the past, as a young novice, I gave a Dhamma discourse. I talked about the happiness of wealth and possessions, having servants and so on ... a hundred male servants, a hundred female servants, a hundred elephants, a hundred cows, a hundred buffaloes ... a hundred of everything! The laypeople really lapped it up. But can you imagine looking after a hundred buffaloes? Or a hundred cows, a hundred male and female servants? Can you imagine having to look after all of that? Would that be fun? People don’t consider this side of things. They have the desire to possess, to have the cows, the buffaloes, the servants, to have hundreds of them. But I say fifty buffaloes would be too much. Just twining the rope for all those brutes would be too much already! But people don’t consider this, they only think of the pleasure of acquiring. They don’t consider the trouble involved.

Why Are We Here?

If we don't have wisdom, everything around us will be a source of suffering. If we are wise these things – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind – will lead us out of suffering. Eyes aren't necessarily good things, you know. If you are in a bad mood just seeing other people can make you angry and make you lose sleep. Or you can fall in love with others. Love is suffering too, if you don't get what you want. Love and hate are both suffering, because of desire. Wanting is suffering, wanting not to have is suffering. Wanting to acquire things, even if you get them it's still suffering because you're afraid you'll lose them. There's only suffering. How are you going to live with that? You may have a large, luxurious house, but if your heart isn't good it never really works out as you expected.

Therefore, you should all take a look at yourselves. Why were we born? Do we ever really attain anything in this life? In the countryside here people start planting rice right from childhood. When they reach seventeen or eighteen they rush off and get married, afraid they won't have enough time to make their fortunes. They start working from an early age thinking they'll get rich that way. They plant rice until they're seventy or eighty or even ninety years old. I ask them, 'From the day you were born you've been working. Now it's almost time to go, what are you going to take with you?' They don't know what to say. All they can say is, 'beats me!' We have a saying in these parts, 'Don't tarry picking berries along the way, before you know it, night falls.' Just because of this 'beats me!' They're neither here nor there, content with just a 'beats me' sitting among the branches of the berry tree, gorging themselves with berries. 'Beats me, beats me.'

When you're still young you think that being single is not

so good, you feel a bit lonely. So you find a partner to live with. Put two together and there's friction! Living alone is too quiet, but living with others there's friction.

When children are small the parents think, 'When they get bigger we'll be better off.' They raise their children, three, four, or five of them, thinking that when the children are grown up their burden will be lighter. But when the children grow up they get even heavier. Like two pieces of wood, one big and one small. You throw away the small one and take the bigger one, thinking it will be lighter, but of course it's not. When children are small they don't bother you very much, just a ball of rice and a banana now and then. When they grow up they want a motorcycle or a car! Well, you love your children, you can't refuse. So you try to give them what they want. Sometimes the parents get into arguments over it. 'Don't go and buy him a car, we haven't got enough money!' But when you love your children you've got to borrow the money from somewhere. Maybe the parents even have to go without to get the things their children want. Then there's education. 'When they've finished their studies, we'll be all right.' There's no end to the studying! What are they going to finish? Only in the science of Buddhism is there a point of completion, all the other sciences just go round in circles. In the end it's a real headache. If there's a house with four or five children in it the parents argue every day.

The suffering that is waiting in the future we fail to see, we think it will never happen. When it happens, then we know. That kind of suffering, the suffering inherent in our bodies, is hard to foresee. When I was a child minding the buffaloes I'd take charcoal and rub it on my teeth to make them white.

I'd go back home and look in the mirror and see them so

nice and white. I was getting fooled by my own bones, that's all. When I reached fifty or sixty my teeth started to get loose. When the teeth start falling out it hurts so much. When you eat it feels as if you've been kicked in the mouth. It really hurts. I've been through this one already. So I just got the dentist to take them all out. Now I've got false teeth. My real teeth were giving me so much trouble I just had them all taken out, sixteen in one go. The dentist was reluctant to take out sixteen teeth at once, but I said to him, 'Just take them out, I'll take the consequences.' So he took them all out at once. Some were still good, too, at least five of them. He took them all out. But it was really touch and go. After having them out I couldn't eat any food for two or three days.

Before, as a young child minding the buffaloes, I used to think that polishing the teeth was a great thing to do. I loved my teeth, I thought they were good things. But in the end they had to go. The pain almost killed me. I suffered from toothache for months, years. Sometimes both my gums were swollen at once.

Some of you may get a chance to experience this for yourselves someday. If your teeth are still good and you're brushing them everyday to keep them nice and white, watch out! They may start playing tricks with you later on.

I'm just letting you know about these things – the suffering that arises from within, that arises within our own bodies. There's nothing within the body you can depend on. It's not too bad when you're still young, but as you get older things begin to break down. Everything begins to fall apart. Conditions go their natural way. Whether we laugh or cry over them they just go on their way. It makes no difference how we live or die, makes no difference to them. And there's no knowledge or science

which can prevent this natural course of things. You may get a dentist to look at your teeth, but even if he can fix them they still eventually go their natural way. Eventually even the dentist has the same trouble. Everything falls apart in the end.

These are things which we should contemplate while we still have some vigour; we should practise while we're young. If you want to make merit then hurry up and do so, don't just leave it up to the oldies. Most people just wait until they get old before they will go to a monastery and try to practise Dhamma. Women and men say the same thing, 'Wait till I get old first.' I don't know why they say that. Does an old person have much vigour? Let them try racing with a young person and see what the difference is. Why do they leave it till they get old? Just like they're never going to die. When they get to fifty or sixty years old or more, 'Hey, Grandma! Let's go to the monastery!' 'You go ahead, my ears aren't so good anymore.' You see what I mean? When her ears were good what was she listening to? 'Beats me!' she was just dallying with the berries. Finally when her ears are gone she goes to the temple. It's hopeless. She listens to the sermon but she hasn't got a clue what they're saying. People wait till they're all used up before they'll think of practising the Dhamma.

Today's talk may be useful for those of you who can understand it. These are things which you should begin to observe, they are our inheritance. They will gradually get heavier and heavier, a burden for each of us to bear. In the past my legs were strong, I could run. Now just walking around they feel heavy. Before, my legs carried me. Now, I have to carry them. When I was a child I'd see old people getting up from their seat. 'Oh!' Getting up they groan, 'Oh!' There's always this

'Oh!' But they don't know what it is that makes them groan like that. Even when it gets to this extent people don't see the bane of the body. You never know when you're going to be parted from it. What's causing all the pain is simply conditions going about their natural way. People call it arthritis, rheumatism, gout and so on, the doctor prescribes medicines, but it never completely heals. In the end it falls apart, even the doctor! This is conditions faring along their natural course. This is their way, their nature.

Now take a look at this. If you see it in advance you'll be better off, like seeing a poisonous snake on the path ahead of you. If you see it there you can get out of its way and not get bitten. If you don't see it you may keep on walking and step on it. And then it bites.

If suffering arises people don't know what to do. Where to go to treat it? They want to avoid suffering, they want to be free of it but they don't know how to treat it when it arises. And they live on like this until they get old, and sick, and die.

In olden times it was said that if someone was mortally ill one of the next of kin should whisper '*Bud-dho, Bud-dho*' in their ear. What are they going to do with *Buddho*? What good is *Buddho* going to be for them when they're almost on the funeral pyre? Why didn't they learn *Buddho* when they were young and healthy? Now with the breaths coming fitfully you go up and say, 'Mother, *Buddho, Buddho!*' Why waste your time? You'll only confuse her, let her go peacefully.

People don't know how to solve problems within their own hearts, they don't have a refuge. They get angry easily and have a lot of desires. Why is this? Because they have no refuge.

When people are newly married they can get on together all

right, but after age fifty or so they can't understand each other. Whatever the wife says the husband finds intolerable. Whatever the husband says the wife won't listen. They turn their backs on each other.

Now I'm just talking because I've never had a family. Why haven't I had a family? Just looking at this word 'household'* I knew what it was all about. What is a 'household'? This is a 'hold': if somebody were to get some rope and tie us up while we were sitting here, what would that be like? That's called 'being held'. Whatever that's like, 'being held' is like that. There is a circle of confinement. The man lives within his circle of confinement, and the woman lives within her circle of confinement.

When I read this word 'household', this is a heavy one. This word is no trifling matter, it's a real killer. The word 'hold' is a symbol of suffering. You can't go anywhere, you've got to stay within your circle of confinement.

Now we come to the word 'house'. This means 'that which hassles'. Have you ever toasted chillies? The whole house chokes and sneezes. This word 'household' spells confusion, it's not worth the trouble. Because of this word I was able to ordain and not disrobe. 'Household' is frightening. You're stuck and can't go anywhere. Problems with the children, with money and all the rest. But where can you go? You're tied down. There are sons and daughters, arguments in profusion until your dying

*There is a play on words in the Thai language here based on the word for family, *krorp krua*, which literally means 'kitchen-frame' or 'roasting circle'. In the English translation we have opted for a corresponding English word rather than attempt a literal translation of the Thai.

day, and there's nowhere else to go to no matter how much suffering it is. The tears pour out and they keep pouring. The tears will never be finished with this 'household', you know. If there's no household you might be able to finish with the tears but not otherwise.

Consider this matter. If you haven't come across it yet you may later on. Some people have experienced it already to a certain extent. Some are already at the end of their tether. 'Will I stay or will I go?' At Wat Pah Pong there are about seventy or eighty kutis. When they're almost full I tell the monk in charge to keep a few empty, just in case somebody has an argument with their spouse. Sure enough, in no long time a lady will arrive with her bags. 'I'm fed up with the world, Luang Por.' 'Whoa! Don't say that. Those words are really heavy.' Then the husband comes and says he's fed up too. After two or three days in the monastery their world-weariness disappears.

They say they're fed up but they're just fooling themselves. When they go off to a kuti and sit in the quiet by themselves, after a while the thoughts come: 'When is the wife going to come and ask me to go home?' They don't really know what's going on. What is this 'world-weariness' of theirs? They get upset over something and come running to the monastery. At home everything looked wrong; the husband was wrong, the wife was wrong, but after three days' quiet thinking, 'Hmm, the wife was right after all, it was I who was wrong.' 'Hubby was right, I shouldn't have got so upset.' They change sides. This is how it is, that's why I don't take the world too seriously. I know its ins and outs already, that's why I've chosen to live as a monk.

I would like to present today's talk to all of you for homework. Whether you're in the fields or working in the city, take

these words and consider them: 'Why was I born? What can I take with me?' Ask yourselves over and over. If you ask yourself these questions often you'll become wise. If you don't reflect on these things you will remain ignorant. Listening to today's talk, you may get some understanding, if not now, then maybe when you get home. Perhaps this evening. When you're listening to the talk everything is subdued, but maybe things are waiting for you in the car. When you get in the car it may get in with you. When you get home it may all become clear. 'Oh, that's what Luang Por meant. I couldn't see it before.'

I think that's enough for today. If I talk too long this old body gets tired.

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Given at Wat Tham Saeng Phet (The Monastery of the Diamond Light Cave) to a group of visiting laypeople, during the rains retreat of 1981, shortly before Ajahn Chah's health broke down.

Our Real Home

Now determine in your mind to listen respectfully to the Dhamma. While I am speaking, be as attentive to my words as if it was the Lord Buddha himself sitting before you. Close your eyes and make yourself comfortable, composing your mind and making it one-pointed. Humbly allow the Triple Gem of wisdom, truth and purity to abide in your heart as a way of showing respect to the Fully Enlightened One.

Today I have brought nothing of material substance to offer you, only the Dhamma, the teachings of the Lord Buddha. You should understand that even the Buddha himself, with his great store of accumulated virtue, could not avoid physical death. When he reached old age he ceded his body and let go of the heavy burden. Now you too must learn to be satisfied with the many years you've already depended on the body. You should feel that it's enough.

Like household utensils that you've had for a long time – cups, saucers, plates and so on – when you first had them they were clean and shining, but now after using them for so long, they're starting to wear out. Some are already broken, some have disappeared, and those that are left are wearing out, they have no stable form. And it's their nature to be that way.

Your body is the same; it's been continually changing from the day you were born, through childhood and youth, until now it's reached old age. You must accept this. The Buddha said that conditions, whether internal, bodily conditions or external conditions, are not-self, their nature is to change. Contemplate this truth clearly.

This very lump of flesh lying here in decline is reality (*saccadhamma*). The facts of this body are reality, they are the timeless teaching of the Lord Buddha. The Buddha taught us to contemplate this and come to terms with its nature. We must be able to be at peace with the body, no matter what state it is in. The Buddha taught that we should ensure that it's only the body that is locked up in jail and the mind is not imprisoned along with it. Now as your body begins to run down and wear out with age, don't resist, but also don't let your mind deteriorate along with it. Keep the mind separate. Give energy to the mind by realizing the truth of the way things are. The Lord Buddha taught that this is the nature of the body, it can't be any other way. Having been born it gets old and sick and then it dies. This is a great truth that you are presently witnessing. Look at the body with wisdom and realize this.

If your house is flooded or burnt to the ground, whatever the threat to it, let it concern only the house. If there's a flood, don't let it flood your mind. If there's a fire, don't let it burn your heart. Let it be merely the house, that which is outside of you that is flooded or burned. Now is the time to allow the mind to let go of attachments.

You've been alive a long time now. Your eyes have seen any number of forms and colours, your ears have heard so many sounds, you've had any number of experiences. And that's all

they were – experiences. You've eaten delicious foods, and all those good tastes were just good tastes, nothing more. The bad tastes were just bad tastes, that's all. If the eye sees a beautiful form that's all it is – a beautiful form. An ugly form is just an ugly form. The ear hears an entrancing, melodious sound and it's nothing more than that. A grating, discordant sound is simply that.

The Buddha said that rich or poor, young or old, human or animal, no being in this world can maintain itself in any single state for long. Everything experiences change and deprivation. This is a fact of life about which we can do nothing to remedy. But the Buddha said that what we can do is to contemplate the body and mind to see their impersonality, that neither of them is 'me' nor 'mine'. They have only a provisional reality. It's like this house, it's only nominally yours. You couldn't take it with you anywhere. The same applies to your wealth, your possessions and your family – they're yours only in name. They don't really belong to you, they belong to nature.

Now this truth doesn't apply to you alone, everyone is in the same boat – even the Lord Buddha and his enlightened disciples. They differed from us only in one respect, and that was their acceptance of the way things are. They saw that it could be no other way.

So the Buddha taught us to probe and examine the body, from the soles of the feet up to the crown of the head, and then back down to the feet again. Just take a look at the body. What sort of things do you see? Is there anything intrinsically clean there? Can you find any abiding essence? This whole body is steadily degenerating. The Buddha taught us to see that it doesn't belong to us. It's natural for the body to be this way,

because all conditioned phenomena are subject to change. How else would you have it? In fact there is nothing wrong with the way the body is. It's not the body that causes suffering, it's wrong thinking. When you see things in the wrong way, there's bound to be confusion.

It's like the water of a river. It naturally flows downhill, it never flows uphill. That's its nature. If a person was to go and stand on the river bank and want the water to flow back uphill, he would be foolish. Wherever he went, his foolish thinking would allow him no peace of mind. He would suffer because of his wrong view, his thinking against the stream. If he had right view he would see that the water must inevitably flow downhill, and until he realized and accepted that fact he would be bewildered and frustrated.

The river that must flow down the gradient is like your body. Having been young, your body's become old and is meandering towards its death. Don't go wishing it were otherwise, it's not something you have the power to remedy. The Buddha told us to see the way things are and then let go of our clinging to them. Take this feeling of letting go as your refuge.

Keep meditating even if you feel tired and exhausted. Let your mind be with the breath. Take a few deep breaths and then establish the attention on the breath, using the mantra word *Bud-dho*. Make this practice continual. The more exhausted you feel the more subtle and focused your concentration must be, so that you can cope with any painful sensations that arise. When you start to feel fatigued then bring all your thinking to a halt, let the mind gather itself together and then turn to knowing the breath. Just keep up the inner recitation, *Bud-dho, Bud-dho*. Let go of all externals. Don't go grasping at

thoughts of your children and relatives, don't grasp at anything whatsoever. Let go. Let the mind unite in a single point and let that composed mind dwell with the breath. Let the breath be its sole object of knowledge. Concentrate until the mind becomes increasingly subtle, until feelings are insignificant and there is great inner clarity and wakefulness. Then any painful sensations that arise will gradually cease of their own accord.

Finally you'll look on the breath as if it were some relatives come to visit you. When the relatives leave, you follow them out to see them off. You watch until they've walked up the drive and out of sight, and then you go back indoors. We watch the breath in the same way. If the breath is coarse we know that it's coarse, if it's subtle we know that it's subtle. As it becomes increasingly fine we keep following it, at the same time awakening the mind. Eventually the breath disappears altogether and all that remains is that feeling of alertness. This is called meeting the Buddha. We have that clear, wakeful awareness called *Bud-dho*, the one who knows, the awakened one, the radiant one. This is meeting and dwelling with the Buddha, with knowledge and clarity. It was only the historical Buddha who passed away. The true Buddha, the Buddha that is clear, radiant knowing, can still be experienced and attained today. And if we do attain it, the heart is one.

So let go, put everything down, everything except the knowing. Don't be fooled if visions or sounds arise in your mind during meditation. Lay them all down. Don't take hold of anything at all, just stay with this unified awareness. Don't worry about the past or the future, just be still and you will reach the place where there's no advancing, no retreating and no stopping, where there's nothing to grasp at or cling to. Why?

Because there's no self, no 'me' or 'mine'. It's all gone. The Buddha taught to empty yourself of everything in this way, not to carry anything around; he taught us to know, and having known, let go.

Realizing the Dhamma, the path to freedom from the round of birth and death, is a task that we all have to do alone. So keep trying to let go and understand the teachings. Put effort into your contemplation. Don't worry about your family. At the moment they are as they are, in the future they will be like you. There's no-one in the world who can escape this fate. The Buddha taught to lay down those things that lack a real abiding essence. If you lay everything down you will see the real truth, if you don't, you won't. That's the way it is. And it's the same for everyone in the world. So don't grasp at anything.

Even if you find yourself thinking, well that's all right too, as long as you think wisely. Don't think foolishly. If you think of your children, think of them with wisdom, not with foolishness. Whatever the mind turns to, think of it with wisdom, be aware of its nature. To know something with wisdom is to let it go and have no suffering over it. The mind is bright, joyful and at peace. It turns away from distractions and is undivided. Right now what you can look to for help and support is your breath.

This is your own work, no-one else's. Leave others to do their own work. You have your own duty and responsibility, you don't have to take on those of your family. Don't take on anything else, let it all go. This letting go will make your mind calm. Your sole responsibility right now is to focus your mind and bring it to peace. Leave everything else to the others. Forms, sounds, odours, tastes ... leave them to the others to attend to. Put everything behind you and do your own work, fulfil your

own responsibility. Whatever arises in your mind, be it fear of pain, fear of death, anxiety about others or whatever, say to it, 'Don't disturb me. You're no longer any concern of mine.' Just keep this to yourself when you see those 'dhammas' arise.

What does the word dhamma refer to? Everything is a dhamma, there is nothing that is not a dhamma. And what about 'world'? The world is the very mental state that is agitating you at the present moment. 'What are they going to do? When I'm gone who will look after them? How will they manage?' This is all just the 'world'. Even the mere arising of a thought fearing death or pain is the world. Throw the world away! The world is the way it is. If you allow it to dominate your mind it becomes obscured and can't see itself. So whatever appears in the mind, just say, 'This isn't my business. It's impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self.'

Thinking you'd like to go on living for a long time will make you suffer. But thinking you'd like to die right away or very quickly isn't right either. It's suffering, isn't it? Conditions don't belong to us, they follow their own natural laws. You can't do anything about the way the body is. You can beautify it a little, make it attractive and clean for a while, like the young girls who paint their lips and let their nails grow long, but when old age arrives, everybody's in the same boat. That's the way the body is, you can't make it any other way. What you can improve and beautify is the mind.

Anyone can build a house of wood and bricks, but the Buddha taught that that sort of home is not our real home, it's only nominally ours. It's home in the world and it follows the ways of the world. Our real home is inner peace. An external, material home may well be pretty but it is not very peaceful.

There's this worry and then that, this anxiety and then that. So we say it's not our real home, it's external to us. Sooner or later we'll have to give it up. It's not a place we can live in permanently because it doesn't truly belong to us, it belongs to the world. Our body is the same. We take it to be a self, to be 'me' or 'mine', but in fact it's not really so at all, it's another worldly home. Your body has followed its natural course from birth, and now that it's old and sick, you can't forbid it from being that. That's the way it is. Wanting it to be any different would be as foolish as wanting a duck to be like a chicken. When you see that that's impossible – that a duck must be a duck and a chicken must be a chicken, and that the bodies have to get old and die – you will find courage and energy. However much you want the body to go on lasting, it won't do that.

The Buddha said:

Aniccā vata saṅkhārā

Impermanent, alas, are all conditions,

Uppāda-vaya-dhammino

Subject to rise and fall.

Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti

Having arisen, they cease.

Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho.

Their stilling is bliss.

The word *saṅkhārā* refers to this body and mind. *Saṅkhārā* are impermanent and unstable. Having come into being they disappear, having arisen they pass away, and yet everyone wants them to be permanent. This is foolishness. Look at the breath. Once it's gone in, it goes out, that's its nature, that's how it

has to be. The inhalations and exhalations have to alternate, there must be change. Conditions exist through change, you can't prevent it. Just think, could you exhale without inhaling? Would it feel good? Or could you just inhale? We want things to be permanent but they can't be, it's impossible. Once the breath has come in, it must go out. When it's gone out it comes back in again, and that's natural, isn't it? Having been born we get old and then die, and that's totally natural and normal. It's because conditions have done their job, because the in-breaths and out-breaths have alternated in this way, that the human race is still here today.

As soon as we are born we are dead. Our birth and our death are just one thing. It's like a tree: when there's a root there must be branches, when there are branches there must be a root. You can't have one without the other. It's a little funny to see how at death, people are so grief-stricken and distracted and at birth, how happy and delighted. It's delusion, nobody has ever looked at this clearly. I think if you really want to cry it would be better to do so when someone's born. Birth is death, death is birth; the branch is the root, the root is the branch. If you must cry, cry at the root, cry at the birth. Look closely: if there was no birth there would be no death. Can you understand this?

Don't worry about things too much, just think 'this is the way things are.' This is your work, your duty. Right now nobody can help you, there's nothing that your family and possessions can do for you. All that can help you now is clear awareness.

So don't waver. Let go. Throw it all away.

Even if you don't let go, everything is starting to leave you anyway. Can you see how all the different parts of your body are trying to slip away? Take your hair; when you were young it

was thick and black. Now it's falling out. It's leaving. Your eyes used to be good and strong but now they're weak, your sight is unclear. When your organs have had enough they leave, this isn't their home. When you were a child your teeth were healthy and firm, now they're wobbly, or you've got false ones. Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue – everything is trying to leave because this isn't their home. You can't make a permanent home in conditions, you can only stay for a short time and then you have to go. It's like a tenant watching over his tiny little house with failing eyes. His teeth aren't so good, his eyes aren't so good, his body's not so healthy, everything is leaving.

So you needn't worry about anything because this isn't your real home, it's only a temporary shelter. Having come into this world you should contemplate its nature. Everything there is preparing to disappear. Look at your body. Is there anything there that's still in its original form? Is your skin as it used to be? Is your hair? They aren't the same, are they? Where has everything gone? This is nature, the way things are. When their time is up, conditions go their way. In this world there is nothing to rely on – it's an endless round of disturbance and trouble, pleasure and pain. There's no peace.

When we have no real home we're like aimless travellers out on the road, going here and there, stopping for a while and then setting off again. Until we return to our real homes we feel uneasy, just like a villager who's left his village. Only when he gets home can he really relax and be at peace.

Nowhere in the world is there any real peace to be found. The poor have no peace and neither do the rich; adults have no peace and neither do the highly educated. There's no peace anywhere, that's the nature of the world. Those who have few

possessions suffer, and so do those who have many. Children, adults, old and young ... everyone suffers. The suffering of being old, the suffering of being young, the suffering of being wealthy and the suffering of being poor – it's all nothing but suffering.

When you've contemplated things in this way you'll see *aniccam*, impermanence, and *dukkham*, unsatisfactoriness. Why are things impermanent and unsatisfactory? Because they are *anattā*, not-self.

Both your body that is lying sick and in pain, and the mind that is aware of its sickness and pain, are called dhamma. That which is formless, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions, is called *nāma-dhamma*. That which is racked with aches and pains is called *rūpa-dhamma*. The material is dhamma and the immaterial is dhamma. So we live with dhamma, in dhamma, and we are dhamma. In truth there is no self to be found, there are only dhammas continually arising and passing away as is their nature. Every single moment we're undergoing birth and death. This is the way things are.

When we think of the Lord Buddha, how truly he spoke, we feel how worthy he is of reverence and respect. Whenever we see the truth of something we see his teachings, even if we've never actually practised the Dhamma. But even if we have a knowledge of the teachings, have studied and practised them, as long as we still haven't seen the truth we are still homeless.

So understand this point. All people, all creatures, are preparing to leave. When beings have lived an appropriate time they must go on their way. Rich, poor, young and old must all experience this change.

When you realize that's the way the world is you'll feel that it's a wearisome place. When you see that there's nothing real or

substantial you can rely on you'll feel wearied and disenchanted. Being disenchanted doesn't mean you are averse; the mind is clear. It sees that there's nothing to be done to remedy this state of affairs, it's just the way the world is. Knowing in this way you can let go of attachment; you can let go with a mind that is neither happy nor sad, but at peace with conditions through seeing their changing nature with wisdom. *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā* – all conditions are impermanent.

To put it simply, impermanence is the Buddha. If we truly see an impermanent condition, we'll see that it's permanent. It's permanent in the sense that its subjection to change is unchanging. This is the permanence that living beings possess. There is continual transformation, from childhood through to old age, and that very impermanence, that propensity to change, is permanent and fixed. If you look at it like this your heart will be at ease. It's not just you who has to go through this, everyone has to.

When you consider things in this way you'll see them as wearisome, and disenchantment will arise. Your delight in the world of sense pleasures will disappear. You'll see that if you have many possessions, you have to leave a lot behind. If you have a few, you leave few behind. Wealth is just wealth, long life is just long life; they're nothing special.

What is important is that we should do as the Lord Buddha taught and build our own home, building it by the method that I've been explaining to you. Build your own home. Let go. Let go until the mind reaches the peace that is free from advancing, free from retreating and free from stopping still. Pleasure is not your home, pain is not your home. Pleasure and pain both decline and pass away.

The great teacher saw that all conditions are impermanent and so he taught us to let go of our attachment to them. When we reach the end of our life we'll have no choice anyway, we won't be able to take anything with us. So wouldn't it be better to put things down before then? They're just a heavy burden to carry around, why not throw off that load now? Why bother to drag these things around? Let go, relax, and let your family look after you.

Those who nurse the sick grow in goodness and virtue. The patient who is giving others that opportunity shouldn't make things difficult for them. If there's pain or some problem or other, let them know and keep the mind in a wholesome state. One who is nursing parents should fill his or her mind with warmth and kindness and not get caught up in aversion. This is the one time you can repay your debt to them. From your birth through your childhood, as you've grown up, you've been dependent on your parents. That you are here today is because your mother and father have helped you in so many ways. You owe them an incredible debt of gratitude.

So today, all of you children and relatives gathered together here, observe how your mother has become your child. Before you were her children, now she has become yours. She has become older and older until she has become a child again. Her memory goes, her eyes don't see well and her ears aren't so good. Sometimes she garbles her words. Don't let it upset you. You who are nursing the sick must know how to let go also. Don't hold onto things, just let her have her own way. When a young child is disobedient sometimes the parents let it have its own way just to keep the peace, just to make it happy. Now your mother is just like that child. Her memories and perceptions

are confused. Sometimes she muddles up your names, or asks you to bring a cup when she wants a plate. It's normal, don't be upset by it.

Let the patient bear in mind the kindness of those who nurse and patiently endure the painful feelings. Exert yourself mentally, don't let the mind become scattered and confused, and don't make things difficult for those looking after you. Let those who are nursing fill their minds with virtue and kindness. Don't be averse to the unattractive side of the job, cleaning up the mucous and phlegm, urine and excrement. Try your best. Everyone in the family give a hand.

She is the only mother you have. She gave you life, she has been your teacher, your doctor and your nurse – she's been everything to you. That she has brought you up, shared her wealth with you and made you her heir is the great goodness of parents. That is why the Buddha taught the virtues of *kataññū* and *katavedī*, knowing our debt of gratitude and trying to repay it. These two dhammas are complimentary. If our parents are in need, unwell or in difficulty, then we do our best to help them. This is *kataññū-katavedī*, the virtue that sustains the world. It prevents families from breaking up, and makes them stable and harmonious.

Today I have brought you the gift of Dhamma in this time of illness. I have no material things to offer you, there seem to be plenty of those in this house already. And so I give you the Dhamma, something which has lasting worth, something which you'll never be able to exhaust. Having received it you can pass it on to as many others as you like and it will never be depleted. That is the nature of Truth. I am happy to have been able to give you this gift of Dhamma and hope it will give you the strength to deal with your pain.

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A talk addressed to an aging lay disciple approaching her death.

The Four Noble Truths

Today I have been invited by the abbot to give you a teaching, so I ask you all to sit quietly and compose your minds. Due to the language barrier we must make use of a translator, so if you do not pay proper attention you may not understand.

My stay here has been very pleasant. Both the Master and you, his followers, have been very kind, all friendly and smiling, as befits those who are practising the true Dhamma. Your property, too, is very inspiring, but so big! I admire your dedication in renovating it to establish a place for practising the Dhamma.

Having been a teacher for many years now, I've been through my share of difficulties. At present there are altogether about forty branch monasteries* of my monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong, but even these days I have followers who are hard to teach. Some know but don't bother to practise, some don't know and don't try to find out. I don't know what to do with them. Why do human beings have minds like this? Being ignorant is not so good, but even when I tell them, they still don't listen. I don't know what more I can do. People are so full of doubts

* At the time of printing this book (2018), there are over three-hundred branch monasteries, large and small, of Wat Nong Pah Pong.

in their practice, they're always doubting. They all want to go to Nibbāna, but they don't want to walk the path. It's baffling. When I tell them to meditate they're afraid, or if not afraid then just plain sleepy. Mostly they like to do the things I don't teach. When I met the Venerable Abbot here I asked him what his followers were like. He said they're the same. This is the pain of being a teacher.

The teaching I will present to you today is a way to solve problems in the present moment, in this present life. Some people say that they have so much work to do that they have no time to practise the Dhamma. 'What can we do?' they ask. I ask them, 'Don't you breathe while you're working?' 'Yes, of course we breathe!' 'So how come you have time to breathe when you're so busy?' They don't know what to answer. 'If you simply have sati while working you will have plenty of time to practise.'

Practising meditation is just like breathing. While working we breathe, while sleeping we breathe, while sitting down we breathe. Why do we have time to breathe? Because we see the importance of the breath, we can always find time to breathe. In the same way, if we see the importance of meditation practice we will find the time to practise.

Have any of you ever suffered? Have you ever been happy? Right here is the truth, this is where you must practise the Dhamma. Who is it who is happy? The mind is happy. Who suffers? The mind suffers. Wherever these things arise, that's where they cease. Have you experienced happiness? Have you experienced suffering? This is our problem. If we know *dukkha*, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the way leading to the end of suffering we can solve the problem.

There are two kinds of suffering: ordinary suffering and the extraordinary kind. Ordinary suffering is the suffering which is the inherent nature of conditions: standing is suffering, sitting is suffering, lying down is suffering. This is the suffering that is inherent in all conditioned phenomena. Even the Buddha experienced these things, he experienced comfort and pain, but he recognized them as conditions in nature. He knew how to overcome these ordinary, natural feelings of comfort and pain through understanding their true nature. Because he understood this ‘natural suffering’ those feelings didn’t upset him.

The important kind of suffering is the second kind, the suffering that creeps in from the outside, the ‘extraordinary suffering’. If we are sick we may have to get an injection from the doctor. When the needle pierces the skin there is some pain which is only natural. When the needle is withdrawn that pain disappears. This is like the ordinary kind of suffering, it’s no problem, everybody experiences it. The extraordinary suffering is the suffering that arises from what we call *upādāna*, grasping onto things. This is like having an injection with a syringe filled with poison. This is no longer an ordinary kind of pain, it is the pain which ends in death. This is similar to the suffering which arises from grasping.

Wrong view, not knowing the impermanent nature of all conditioned things, is another kind of problem. Conditioned things are the realm of *saṃsāra*. Not wanting things to change – if we think like this we must suffer. When we think that the body is ourselves or belonging to us, we are afraid when we see it change. Consider the breath: once it comes in it must go out, having gone out it must come in again. This is its nature, this is how we manage to live. Things don’t function in that way. This is how conditions are but we don’t realize it.

Suppose we lost something. If we thought that object was really ours, we would brood over it. If we couldn't see it as a conditioned thing faring according to the laws of nature, we would experience suffering. But if you breathe in, can you live? Conditioned things must naturally change in this way. To see this is to see the Dhamma, to see *aniccam*, change. We live dependent on this change. When we know how things are, then we can let go of them.

The practice of Dhamma is to develop an understanding of the way of things so that suffering doesn't arise. If we think wrongly we are at odds with the world, at odds with the Dhamma and with the truth. Suppose you were sick and had to go into hospital. Most people think, 'Please don't let me die, I want to get better.' This is wrong thinking, it will lead to suffering. You have to think to yourself, 'If I recover I recover, if I die I die.' This is right thinking, because you can't ultimately control conditions. If you think like this, whether you die or recover, you can't go wrong, you don't have to worry. The mind that wants to get better at all costs, and is afraid of the thought of dying, is the mind which doesn't understand conditions. You should think, 'If I get better that's fine, if I don't get better that's fine.' This way we can't go wrong, we don't have to be afraid or cry, because we have tuned ourselves in to the way things are.

The Buddha saw clearly. His teaching is always relevant, never out-dated. It never changes. In the present day it's still the way it is, it hasn't changed. By taking this teaching to heart we can gain the reward of peace and well-being.

In the teachings there is the reflection of 'not-self': 'this is not my self, this does not belong to me'. But people don't like to listen to this kind of teaching because they are attached to the

idea of self. This is the cause of suffering. You should take note of this.

Today a woman asked about how to deal with anger. I told her that the next time she gets angry, she should wind up her alarm clock and put it in front of her. Then she should give herself two hours for the anger to go away. If it was really her anger she could probably tell it to go away like this: 'In two hours be gone!' But anger isn't really ours to command. Sometimes in two hours it's still not gone, at other times in one hour it's gone already. Holding onto anger as a personal possession will cause suffering. If it really belonged to us it would have to obey us. If it doesn't obey us that means it's only a deception. Don't fall for it. Whether the mind is happy or sad, don't fall for it. Whether the mind loves or hates, don't fall for it, it's all a deception.

Have any of you ever been angry? When you are angry does it feel good or bad? If it feels bad then why don't you throw that feeling away? Why bother to keep it? How can you say that you are wise and intelligent when you hold on to such things? Since the day you were born, how many times has the mind tricked you into anger? Some days the mind can even cause a whole family to quarrel, or cause you to cry all night. And yet we still continue to get angry, we still hold onto things and suffer. If you don't see suffering, you will have to keep suffering indefinitely, with no chance for respite. The world of saṃsāra is like this. If we know the way it is, we can solve the problem.

The Buddha's teaching states that there is no better means to overcome suffering than to see that 'this is not my self,' 'this is not mine.' This is the greatest method. But we don't usually pay attention to this. When suffering arises we simply cry over

it without learning from it. Why is that so? We must take a good hard look at these things, to develop the *Buddho*, the one who knows.

Take note, some of you may not be aware that this is Dhamma teaching. I'm going to give you some Dhamma that's outside the scriptures. Most people read the scriptures but don't see the Dhamma. Today I am going to give you a teaching that's outside the scriptures. Some people may miss the point or not be able to understand it.

Suppose two people are walking together and see a duck and a chicken. One of them says, 'Why isn't that chicken like the duck, why isn't the duck like the chicken?' He wants the chicken to be a duck and the duck to be a chicken. It's impossible. If it's impossible, then even if that person were to wish for the duck to be a chicken and the chicken to be a duck for the rest of his life it would not come to pass, because the chicken is a chicken and the duck is a duck. As long as that person thought like that he would suffer. The other person might see that the chicken is a chicken and the duck is a duck, and that's all there is to it. There is no problem. He sees rightly. If you want the duck to be a chicken and the chicken to be a duck, you are really going to suffer.

In the same way, the law of *aniccam* states that all things are impermanent. If you want things to be permanent you're going to suffer. Whenever impermanence shows itself you're going to be disappointed. One who sees that things are naturally impermanent will be at ease, there will be no conflict. The one who wants things to be permanent is going to have conflict, maybe even losing sleep over it. This is to be ignorant of *aniccam*, impermanence, the teaching of the Buddha.

If you want to know the Dhamma where should you look? You must look within the body and the mind. You won't find it in the shelves of a bookcase. To really see the Dhamma you have to look within your own body and mind. There are only these two things. The mind is not visible to the physical eye, it must be seen with the 'mind's eye'. Before the Dhamma can be realized you must know where to look. The Dhamma that is in the body must be seen in the body. And with what do we look at the body? We look at the body with the mind. You won't find the Dhamma looking anywhere else, because both happiness and suffering arise right here. Have you seen happiness arising in the trees? Or from the rivers, or the weather? Happiness and suffering are feelings which arise in our own bodies and minds.

Therefore the Buddha tells us to know the Dhamma right here. The Dhamma is right here, we must look right here. The Master may tell you to look at the Dhamma in the books, but if you think that this is where the Dhamma *really* is, you'll never see it. Having looked at the books you must reflect on those teachings inwardly. Then you can understand the Dhamma. Where does the real Dhamma exist? It exists right here in this body and mind of ours. This is the essence of contemplation practice.

When we do this, wisdom will arise in our minds. When there is wisdom in our minds, then no matter where we look there is Dhamma, we will see *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā* at all times. *Aniccam* means transient. If we cling to the things that are transient we must suffer, *dukkham* because they are not us or ours (*anattā*). But we don't see this, we always see them as being our self and belonging to us.

This means that you don't see the truth of convention. You

should understand conventions. For example, all of us sitting here have names. Are our names born with us or are they assigned to us afterwards? Do you understand? This is convention. Is convention useful? Of course it's useful. For example, suppose there are four men, A, B, C, and D. They all must have their individual names for convenience in communicating and working together. If we wanted to speak to Mr. A we could call Mr. A and he would come, not the others. This is the convenience of convention. But when we look deeply into the matter we will see that really there isn't anybody there. We will see transcendence. There is only earth, water, wind and fire, the four elements. This is all there is to this body of ours.

But we don't see it in this way because of the clinging power of *attavādupādāna*.^{*} If we were to look clearly we would see that there isn't really much to what we call a person. The solid part is the earth element, the fluid part is the water element, the part which provides heat is called the fire element. When we break things down we see that there is only earth, water, wind and fire. Where is the person to be found? There isn't one.

That's why the Buddha taught that there is no higher practice than to see that 'this is not my self and does not belong to me.' They are simply conventions. If we understand everything clearly in this way we will be at peace. If we realize in the present moment the truth of impermanence, that things are not our self or belonging to us, then when they disintegrate we are at peace with them, because they don't belong to anybody

^{*}One of the Four Bases of Clinging: *Kāmapādāna*, clinging to sense objects; *silabbatupādāna*: clinging to rites and rituals; *diṭṭhupādāna*: clinging to views, and *attavādupādāna*, clinging to the idea of self.

anyway. They are merely the elements of earth, water, wind and fire.

It's difficult for people to see this, but even so it's not beyond our ability. If we can see this, we will find contentment, we will not have so much anger, greed or delusion. There will always be Dhamma in our hearts. There will be no need for jealousy and spite, because everybody is simply earth, water, wind and fire. There's nothing more to them than this. When we accept this truth we will see the truth of the Buddha's teaching.

If we could see the truth of the Buddha's teaching we wouldn't have to use up so many teachers! It wouldn't be necessary to listen to teachings every day. When we understand then we simply do what's required of us. But what makes people so difficult to teach is that they don't accept the teaching and argue with the teachers and the teaching. In front of the teacher they behave a little better, but behind his back they become thieves! People are really difficult to teach. The people in Thailand are like this, that's why they have to have so many teachers.

Be careful; if you're not careful you won't see the Dhamma. You must be circumspect, taking the teaching and considering it well. Is this flower pretty? Do you see the ugliness within this flower? For how many days will it be pretty? What will it be like from now on? Why does it change so? In three or four days you have to take it and throw it away, right? It loses all its beauty. People are attached to beauty, attached to goodness. If anything is good they just fall for it completely. The Buddha tells us to look at pretty things as just pretty; we shouldn't become attached to them. If there is a pleasant feeling, we shouldn't fall for it. Goodness is not a sure thing, beauty is not a sure

thing. Nothing is certain. There is nothing in this world that is a certainty. This is the truth. The things that aren't true are the things that change, such as beauty. The only truth it has is in its constant changing. If we believe that things are beautiful, when their beauty fades our mind loses its beauty too. When things are no longer good our mind loses its goodness too. When they are destroyed or damaged we suffer because we have clung to them as being our own. The Buddha tells us to see that these things are simply constructs of nature. Beauty appears and in not many days it fades. To see this is to have wisdom.

Therefore we should see impermanence. If we think something is pretty, we should tell ourselves it isn't, if we think something is ugly, we should tell ourselves it isn't. Try to see things in this way, constantly reflect in this way. We will then see the truth within untrue things, and see the certainty within the things that are uncertain.

Today I have been explaining the way to understand suffering, what causes suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. When you know suffering you should throw it out. Knowing the cause of suffering you should throw it out. Practise to see the cessation of suffering. See *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā* and suffering will cease.

When suffering ceases where do we go? What are we practising for? We are practising to relinquish, not in order to gain anything. There was a woman this afternoon who told me that she is suffering. I asked her what she wants to be, and she said she wants to be enlightened. I said, 'As long as you want to be enlightened you will never become enlightened. Don't want anything.'

When we know the truth of suffering, we throw out suffering. When we know the cause of suffering, then we don't create those causes, but instead practise to bring suffering to its cessation. The practice leading to the cessation of suffering is to see that 'this is not a self,' 'this is not me or them.' Seeing in this way enables suffering to cease. It's like reaching our destination and stopping. That's cessation. That's getting close to Nibbāna. To put it another way, going forward is suffering, retreating is suffering and stopping is suffering. Not going forward, not retreating and not stopping, is anything left? Body and mind cease here. This is the cessation of suffering. Hard to understand, isn't it? If we diligently and consistently study this teaching we will transcend things and reach understanding; there will be cessation. This is the ultimate teaching of the Buddha, it's the finishing point. The Buddha's teaching finishes at the point of total relinquishment.

Today I offer this teaching to you all and to the Venerable Master also. If there is anything wrong in it I ask your forgiveness. But don't be in a hurry to judge whether it is right or wrong, just listen to it first. If I were to give you all a fruit and tell you it's delicious, you should take note of my words, but not believe me offhand, because you haven't tasted it yet. The teaching I give you today is the same. If you want to know whether the 'fruit' is sweet or sour you have to slice a piece off and taste it. Then you will know its sweetness or sourness. Then you could believe me, because then you'd have seen for yourself. So please don't throw this 'fruit' away, keep it and taste it, know its taste for yourself.

The Buddha didn't have a teacher, you know. An ascetic once asked him who his teacher was, and the Buddha answered

that he didn't have one.* The ascetic just walked off shaking his head. The Buddha was being too honest. He was speaking to one who couldn't know or accept the truth. That's why I tell you not to believe me. The Buddha said that to simply believe others is foolish, because there is no clear knowing within. That's why the Buddha said 'I have no teacher.' This is the truth. But you should look at this in the right way. If you misunderstand it you won't respect your teacher. Don't go saying 'I have no teacher.' You must rely on your teacher to tell you what is right and wrong, and then you must practise accordingly.

Today is a fortunate day for all of us. I have had a chance to meet with all of you and the Venerable Master. You wouldn't think that we could meet like this because we live so far apart. I think there must be some special reason that we have been able to meet in this way. The Buddha taught that everything that arises must have a cause. Don't forget this. There must be some cause. Perhaps in a previous existence we were brothers and sisters in the same family. It's possible. Another teacher didn't come, but I did. Why is that? Perhaps we are creating the causes in the present moment itself. This is also possible.

I leave you all with this teaching. May you be diligent and arduous in the practice. There is nothing better than the practice of Dhamma; Dhamma is the supporter of the whole world. People are confused these days because they do not

* Soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha was walking on his way to Benares and was approached by a wandering ascetic, who said, 'Your features are clear, friend, your bearing serene. Who is your teacher?' The Buddha answered that there was no-one in this world who could claim to be his teacher, because he was completely self-enlightened. The ascetic could not understand his answer, and walked off, muttering, 'Well, good for you, friend, good for you.'

know the Dhamma. If we have the Dhamma with us we will be content. I am happy to have had this opportunity to help you and the Venerable Teacher in developing the practice of Dhamma. I leave you with my heartfelt good wishes. Tomorrow I will be leaving, I'm not sure where for. This is only natural. When there is coming there must be going, when there is going there must be coming. This is how the world is. We shouldn't be overjoyed or upset by the changes in the world. There is happiness and then there is suffering; there is suffering and then there is happiness; there is gain and then there is loss; there is loss and then there is gain. This is the way things are.

In the Buddha's time there were disciples of the Buddha who didn't like him, because the Buddha exhorted them to be diligent, to be heedful. Those who were lazy were afraid of the Buddha and resented him. When he died, one group of disciples cried and were distressed that they would no longer have the Buddha to guide them. These ones were still not clever. Another group of disciples were pleased and relieved that they would no longer have the Buddha on their backs telling them what to do. A third group of disciples were equanimous. They reflected that what arises passes away as a natural consequence. There were these three groups. Which group do you identify with? Do you want to be one of the pleased ones or what? The group of disciples who cried when the Buddha passed away had not yet realized the Dhamma. The second group were those who resented the Buddha. He was always forbidding them from doing the things they wanted to do. They lived in fear of the Buddha's scorn and reprimands, so when he passed away they were relieved.

These days things aren't much different. It's possible that

the teacher here has some followers who are resentful towards him. They might not show it outwardly but it's there in the mind. It's normal for people who still have defilements to feel this way. Even the Buddha had people hating him. I myself have followers who resent me also. I tell them to give up evil actions, but they cherish their evil actions. So they hate me. There are plenty like this. May all of you who are intelligent make yourselves firm in the practice of Dhamma.

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*This talk was given at the Manjushri Institute in Cumbria,
U.K., in 1977.*

Supports for Meditation *

Seekers of goodness who have gathered here, please listen in peace. Listening to the Dhamma in peace means to listen with a one-pointed mind, paying attention to what you hear and then letting go. Listening to the Dhamma is of great benefit. While listening to the Dhamma we are encouraged to firmly establish both body and mind in samādhi, because it is one kind of Dhamma practice. In the time of the Buddha people listened to Dhamma talks intently, with a mind aspiring to real understanding, and some actually realized the Dhamma while listening.

This place is well suited to meditation practice. Having stayed here a couple of nights I can see that it is an important place. On the external level it is already peaceful, all that remains is the internal level, your hearts and minds. So I ask all of you to make an effort to pay attention.

Why have you gathered here to practise meditation? It's because your hearts and minds do not understand what should be understood. In other words, you don't truly know how things are, or what is what. You don't know what is wrong and what

* *Note:* This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: '*Meditation*'

is right, what it is that brings you suffering and causes you to doubt. So first you have to make yourselves calm. The reason that you have come here to develop calm and restraint is that your hearts and minds are not at ease. Your minds are not calm, not restrained. They are swayed by doubting and agitation. This is why you have come here today and are now listening to the Dhamma.

I would like you to concentrate and listen carefully to what I say, and I ask permission to speak frankly because that's how I am. Please understand that even if I do speak in a forceful manner, I am doing so out of goodwill. I ask your forgiveness if there is anything I say that upsets you, because the customs of Thailand and those of the West are not the same. Actually, speaking a little forcefully can be good because it helps to stir people up who might otherwise be sleepy or drowsy; and rather than rousing themselves to hear the Dhamma, allow themselves to drift instead into complacency, and as a result they never understand anything.

Although there may appear to be many ways to practise, really there is only one. As with fruit trees, it is possible to get fruit quickly by planting a cutting, but the tree would not be resilient or long lasting. Another way is to cultivate a tree right from the seed, which produces a strong and resilient tree. Practice is the same.

When I first began to practise I had problems understanding this. As long as I still didn't know what was what, sitting meditation was a real chore, even bringing me to tears on occasion. Sometimes I would be aiming too high, other times not high enough, never finding the point of balance. To practise in a way that's peaceful means to place the mind neither too high or too low, but at the point of balance.

I can see that it's very confusing for you, coming from different places and having practised in different ways with different teachers. Coming to practise here, you must be plagued with all kinds of doubts. One teacher says you must practise in one way, another says you should practise another way. You wonder which method to use, unsure of the essence of the practice. The result is confusion. There are so many teachers and so many teachings that nobody knows how to harmonize their practice. As a result there is a lot of doubt and uncertainty.

So you must try not to think too much. If you do think, then do so with awareness. But so far your thinking has been done with no awareness. First you must make your mind calm. Where there is knowing there is no need to think; awareness will arise in its place, and this will in turn become wisdom (*paññā*). But the ordinary kind of thinking is not wisdom, it is simply the aimless and unaware wandering of the mind, which inevitably results in agitation. This is not wisdom.

At this stage you don't need to think. You've already done a great deal of thinking at home, haven't you? It just stirs up the heart. You must establish some awareness. Obsessive thinking can even bring you tears, just try it out. Getting lost in some train of thought won't lead you to the truth, it's not wisdom. The Buddha was a very wise person, he'd learned how to stop thinking. In the same way you are practising here in order to stop thinking and thereby arrive at peace. If you are already calm it is not necessary to think, wisdom will arise in its place.

To meditate you do not have to think much more than to resolve that right now is the time for training the mind and nothing else. Don't let the mind shoot off to the left or to the right, to the front or behind, above or below. Our only duty

right now is to practise mindfulness of the breathing. Fix your attention at the head and move it down through the body to the tips of the feet, and then back up to the crown of the head. Pass your awareness down through the body, observing with wisdom. We do this to gain an initial understanding of the way the body is. Then begin the meditation, noting that at this time your sole duty is to observe the inhalations and exhalations. Don't force the breath to be any longer or shorter than normal, just allow it to continue easily. Don't put any pressure on the breath, rather let it flow evenly, letting go with each in-breath and out-breath.

You must understand that you are letting go as you do this, but there should still be awareness. You must maintain this awareness, allowing the breath to enter and leave comfortably. There is no need to force the breath, just allow it to flow easily and naturally. Maintain the resolve that at this time you have no other duties or responsibilities. Thoughts about what will happen, what you will know or see during the meditation may arise from time to time, but once they arise just let them cease by themselves, don't be unduly concerned over them.

During the meditation there is no need to pay attention to sense impressions. Whenever the mind is affected by sense impingement, wherever there is a feeling or sensation in the mind, just let it go. Whether those sensations are good or bad is unimportant. It is not necessary to make anything out of those sensations, just let them pass away and return your attention to the breath. Maintain the awareness of the breath entering and leaving. Don't create suffering over the breath being too long or too short, simply observe it without trying to control or suppress it in any way. In other words, don't attach. Allow the breath to continue as it is, and the mind will become calm.

As you continue the mind will gradually lay things down and come to rest, the breath becoming lighter and lighter until it becomes so faint that it seems like it's not there at all. Both the body and the mind will feel light and energized. All that will remain will be a one-pointed knowing. You could say that the mind has changed and reached a state of calm.

If the mind is agitated, set up mindfulness and inhale deeply till there is no space left to store any air, then release it all completely until none remains. Follow this with another deep inhalation until you are full, then release the air again. Do this two or three times, then re-establish concentration. The mind should be calmer. If anymore sense impressions cause agitation in the mind, repeat the process on every occasion. Similarly with walking meditation. If while walking, the mind becomes agitated, stop still, calm the mind, re-establish the awareness with the meditation object and then continue walking. Sitting and walking meditation are in essence the same, differing only in terms of the physical posture used.

Sometimes there may be doubt, so you must have sati, to be the one who knows, continually following and examining the agitated mind in whatever form it takes. This is to have sati. Sati watches over and takes care of the mind. You must maintain this knowing and not be careless or wander astray, no matter what condition the mind takes on.

The trick is to have sati taking control and supervising the mind. Once the mind is unified with sati a new kind of awareness will emerge. The mind that has developed calm is held in check by that calm, just like a chicken held in a coop; the chicken is unable to wander outside, but it can still move around within the coop. Its walking to and fro doesn't get it

into trouble because it is restrained by the coop. Likewise the awareness that takes place when the mind has sati and is calm does not cause trouble. None of the thinking or sensations that take place within the calm mind cause harm or disturbance.

Some people don't want to experience any thoughts or feelings at all, but this is going too far. Feelings arise within the state of calm. The mind is both experiencing feelings and calm at the same time, without being disturbed. When there is calm like this there are no harmful consequences. Problems occur when the 'chicken' gets out of the 'coop'. For instance, you may be watching the breath entering and leaving and then forget yourself, allowing the mind to wander away from the breath, back home, off to the shops or to any number of different places. Maybe even half an hour passes before you suddenly realize you're supposed to be practising meditation and reprimand yourself for your lack of sati. This is where you have to be really careful, because this is where the chicken gets out of the coop – the mind leaves its base of calm.

You must take care to maintain the awareness with sati and try to pull the mind back. Although I use the words 'pull the mind back', in fact the mind doesn't really go anywhere, only the object of awareness has changed. You must make the mind stay right here and now. As long as there is sati there will be presence of mind. It seems like you are pulling the mind back but really it hasn't gone anywhere, it has simply changed a little. It seems that the mind goes here and there, but in fact the change occurs right at the one spot. When sati is regained, in a flash you are back with the mind without it having to be brought from anywhere.

When there is total knowing, a continuous and unbroken

awareness at each and every moment, this is called presence of mind. If your attention drifts from the breath to other places then the knowing is broken. Whenever there is awareness of the breath the mind is there. With just the breath and this even and continuous awareness you have presence of mind.

There must be both *sati* and *sampajañña*. *Sati* is recollection and *sampajañña* is self-awareness. Right now you are clearly aware of the breath. This exercise of watching the breath helps *sati* and *sampajañña* develop together. They share the work. Having both *sati* and *sampajañña* is like having two workers to lift a heavy plank of wood. Suppose there are two people trying to lift some heavy planks, but the weight is so great, they have to strain so hard, that it's almost unendurable. Then another person, imbued with goodwill, sees them and rushes in to help. In the same way, when there is *sati* and *sampajañña*, then *paññā* (wisdom) will arise at the same place to help out. Then all three of them support each other.

With *paññā* there will be an understanding of sense objects. For instance, during the meditation sense objects are experienced which give rise to feelings and moods. You may start to think of a friend, but then *paññā* should immediately counter with 'It doesn't matter,' 'Stop' or 'Forget it.' Or if there are thoughts about where you will go tomorrow, then the response would be, 'I'm not interested, I don't want to concern myself with such things.' Maybe you start thinking about other people, then you should think, 'No, I don't want to get involved.' 'Just let go,' or 'It's all uncertain and never a sure thing.' This is how you should deal with things in meditation, recognizing them as 'not sure, not sure', and maintaining this kind of awareness.

You must give up all the thinking, the inner dialogue and

the doubting. Don't get caught up in these things during the meditation. In the end all that will remain in the mind in its purest form are sati, *sampajañña* and *paññā*. Whenever these things weaken doubts will arise, but try to abandon those doubts immediately, leaving only sati, *sampajañña* and *paññā*. Try to develop sati like this until it can be maintained at all times. Then you will understand sati, *sampajañña* and *samādhi* thoroughly.

Focusing the attention at this point there will be sati, *sampajañña*, *samādhi* and *paññā* together. Whether you are attracted to or repelled by external sense objects, you will be able to tell yourself, 'It's not sure.' Either way they are just hindrances to be swept away till the mind is clean. All that should remain is sati, recollection; *sampajañña*, clear awareness; *samādhi*, the firm and unwavering mind; and *paññā*, or consummate wisdom. For the time being I will say just this much on the subject of meditation.

Now, about the tools or aids to meditation practice – there should be *mettā* (goodwill) in your heart; in other words, the qualities of generosity, kindness and helpfulness. These should be maintained as the foundation for mental purity. For example, begin doing away with *lobha*, or selfishness, by giving. When people are selfish they aren't happy. Selfishness leads to a sense of discontent, and yet people tend to be very selfish without realizing how it affects them.

You can experience this at any time, especially when you are hungry. Suppose you get some apples and you have the opportunity to share them with a friend; you think it over for a while, and, sure, the intention to give is there all right, but you want to give the smaller one. To give the big one would be

... well, such a shame. It's hard to think straight. You tell them to go ahead and take one, but then you say, 'Take this one!' and give them the smaller apple! This is one form of selfishness that people usually don't notice. Have you ever been like this?

You really have to go against the grain to give. Even though you may really only want to give the smaller apple, you must force yourself to give away the bigger one. Of course, once you have given it to your friend, you feel good inside. Training the mind by going against the grain in this way requires self-discipline – you must know how to give and how to give up, not allowing selfishness to stick. Once you learn how to give, if you are still hesitating over which fruit to give, then while you are deliberating you will be troubled, and even if you give the bigger one, there will still be a sense of reluctance. But as soon as you firmly decide to give the bigger one, the matter is over and done with. This is going against the grain in the right way.

Doing this you win mastery over yourself. If you can't do it you will be a victim of yourself and continue to be selfish. All of us have been selfish in the past. This is a defilement which needs to be cut off. In the Pāli scriptures, giving is called '*dāna*,' which means bringing happiness to others. It is one of those conditions which help to cleanse the mind from defilement. Reflect on this and develop it in your practice.

You may think that practising like this involves hounding yourself, but it doesn't really. Actually it's hounding craving and the defilements. If defilements arise within you, you have to do something to remedy them. Defilements are like a stray cat. If you give it as much food as it wants, it will always be coming around looking for more food, but if you stop feeding it, after a couple of days it'll stop coming around. It's the same with the

defilements, they won't come to disturb you, they'll leave your mind in peace. So rather than being afraid of defilement, make the defilements afraid of you. To make the defilements afraid of you, you must see the Dhamma within your minds.

Where does the Dhamma arise? It arises with our knowing and understanding in this way. Everyone is able to know and understand the Dhamma. It's not something that has to be found in books, you don't have to do a lot of study to see it, just reflect right now and you can see what I am talking about. Everybody can see it because it exists right within our hearts. Everybody has defilements, don't they? If you are able to see them, you can understand. In the past you've looked after and pampered your defilements, but now you must know your defilements and not allow them to come and bother you.

The next constituent of practice is moral restraint (*sīla*). *Sīla* watches over and nurtures the practice in the same way as parents look after their children. Maintaining moral restraint means not only to avoid harming others but also to help and encourage them. At the very least you should maintain the Five Precepts, which are:

1. Not only not to kill or deliberately harm others, but to spread goodwill towards all beings.
2. To be honest, refraining from infringing on the rights of others, in other words, not stealing.
3. Knowing moderation in sexual relations: In the household life there exists the family structure, based around husband and wife. Know who your husband or wife is, know moderation, know the proper bounds of sexual

activity. Some people don't know the limits. One husband or wife isn't enough, they have to have a second or third. The way I see it, you can't consume even one partner completely, so to have two or three is just plain indulgence. You must try to cleanse the mind and train it to know moderation. Knowing moderation is true purity, without it there are no limits to your behaviour. When eating delicious food, don't dwell too much on how it tastes, think of your stomach and consider how much is appropriate to its needs. If you eat too much you get trouble, so you must know moderation.

4. To be honest in speech – this is also a tool for eradicating defilements. You must be honest and straight, truthful and upright.
5. To refrain from taking intoxicants. You must know restraint and preferably give these things up altogether. People are already intoxicated enough with their families, relatives and friends, material possessions, wealth and all the rest of it. That's quite enough already without making things worse by taking intoxicants as well. These things just create darkness in the mind. Those who take large amounts should try to gradually cut down and eventually give it up altogether.

Maybe I should ask your forgiveness, but my speaking in this way is out of a concern for your benefit, so that you can understand that which is good. You need to know what is what. What are the things that are oppressing you in your everyday lives? What are the actions which cause this oppression? Good

actions bring good results and bad actions bring bad results. These are the causes.

Once moral restraint is pure there will be a sense of honesty and kindness towards others. This will bring about contentment and freedom from worries and remorse. Remorse resulting from aggressive and hurtful behaviour will not be there. This is a form of happiness. It is almost like a heavenly state. There is comfort, you eat and sleep in comfort with the happiness arising from moral restraint. This is the result; maintaining moral restraint is the cause. This is a principle of Dhamma practice – refraining from bad actions so that goodness can arise. If moral restraint is maintained in this way, evil will disappear and good will arise in its place. This is the result of right practice.

But this isn't the end of the story. Once people have attained some happiness they tend to be heedless and not go any further in the practice. They get stuck on happiness. They don't want to progress any further, they prefer the happiness of 'heaven'. It's comfortable but there's no real understanding. You must keep reflecting to avoid being deluded. Reflect again and again on the disadvantages of this happiness. It's transient, it doesn't last forever. Soon you are separated from it. It's not a sure thing; once happiness disappears then suffering arises in its place and the tears come again. Even heavenly beings end up crying and suffering.

So the Lord Buddha taught us to reflect on the disadvantages of happiness, that there exists an unsatisfactory side to it. Usually when this kind of happiness is experienced, there is no real understanding of it. The peace that is truly certain and lasting is covered over by this deceptive happiness.

This happiness is not a certain or permanent kind of peace, but rather a form of defilement, a refined form of defilement to which we attach. Everybody likes to be happy. Happiness arises because of our liking for something. As soon as that liking changes to dislike, suffering arises. We must reflect on this happiness to see its uncertainty and limitation. Once things change suffering arises. This suffering is also uncertain; don't think that it is fixed or absolute. This kind of reflection is called *ādinavakathā*, the reflection on the inadequacy and limitation of the conditioned world. This means to reflect on happiness rather than accepting it at face value. Seeing that it is uncertain, you shouldn't cling fast to it. You should take hold of it but then let it go, seeing both the benefit and the harm of happiness. To meditate skilfully you have to see the disadvantages inherent within happiness. Reflect in this way. When happiness arises, contemplate it thoroughly until the disadvantages become apparent.

When you see that things are imperfect (*dukkha*) your heart will come to understand the *nekkhammakathā*, the reflection on renunciation. The mind will become disinterested and seek for a way out. Disinterest comes from having seen the way forms really are, the way tastes really are, the way love and hatred really are. By disinterest we mean that there is no longer the desire to cling to or attach to things. There is a withdrawal from clinging, to a point where you can abide comfortably, observing with an equanimity that is free of attachment. This is the peace that arises from practice.



Given at the Hampstead Vihara, London, 1977.

Living in the World*

Most people still don't know the essence of meditation practice. They think that walking meditation, sitting meditation and listening to Dhamma talks are the practice. These are only the outer forms of practice. The real practice takes place when the mind encounters a sense object. That's the place to practise, where sense contact occurs. When people say things we don't like, there is resentment, if they say things we like, we experience pleasure. Now this is the place to practise. How are we going to practise with these things? This is the crucial point. If we just run around chasing after happiness and running away from suffering all the time, we can practise until the day we die and never see the Dhamma. This is useless. When pleasure and pain arise how are we going to use the Dhamma to be free of them? This is the point of practice.

Usually when people encounter something disagreeable they don't open up to it. For instance when people are criticized: 'Don't bother me! Why blame me?' This is someone who's closed himself off. Right there is the place to practise. When people criticize us we should listen. Are they speaking the

* *Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: 'Living in the World with Dhamma'*

truth? We should be open and consider what they are saying. Maybe there is something in what they say, perhaps there is something blameworthy within us. They may be right and yet we immediately take offence. If people point out our faults we should strive to be rid of these faults and improve ourselves. This is how intelligent people practise.

The place where there is confusion is the place where peace can arise. When confusion is penetrated with understanding, what remains is peace. Some people can't accept criticism, they're arrogant. Instead they turn around and argue. This is especially so when adults deal with children. Actually children may say some intelligent things sometimes but if you happen to be their mother, for instance, you can't give in to them. If you are a teacher your students may sometimes tell you something you didn't know, but because you are the teacher you can't listen. This is not right thinking.

In the Buddha's time there was one disciple who was very astute. At one time, as the Buddha was expounding the Dhamma, he turned to this monk and asked, 'Sāriputta, do you believe this?' Venerable Sāriputta replied, 'No, I don't yet believe it.' The Buddha praised his answer; 'That's very good, Sāriputta, you are one who is endowed with wisdom. One who is wise doesn't readily believe, he listens with an open mind and then weighs up the truth of that matter before believing or disbelieving.'

Now the Buddha here has set a fine example for a teacher. What Venerable Sāriputta said was true, he simply expressed his true feelings. Some people would think that to say you didn't believe that teaching would be like questioning the teacher's authority, they'd be afraid to say such a thing. They'd just

go ahead and agree. This is how the worldly way goes. But the Buddha didn't take offence. He said that you needn't be ashamed of those things which aren't wrong or bad. It's not wrong to say that you don't believe if you don't believe. That's why Venerable Sāriputta said, 'I don't yet believe it.' The Buddha praised him; 'This monk has much wisdom. He carefully considers before believing anything.' The Buddha's actions here are a good example for one who is a teacher of others. Sometimes you can learn things even from small children; don't cling blindly to positions of authority.

Whether you are standing, sitting, or walking around in various places, you can always study the things around you. We study in the natural way, receptive to all things, be they sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings or thoughts. The wise person considers them all. In the real practice, we come to the point where there are no longer any concerns weighing on the mind.

If we still don't know like and dislike as they arise, there is still some concern in our minds. If we know the truth of these things, we reflect, 'Oh, there is nothing to this feeling of liking here. It's just a feeling that arises and passes away. Dislike is nothing more, just a feeling that arises and passes away. Why make anything out of them?' If we think that pleasure and pain are personal possessions, then we're in for trouble, we never get beyond the point of having some concern or other in an endless chain. This is how things are for most people.

But these days teachers don't often talk about the mind when teaching the Dhamma, they don't talk about the truth. If you talk about the truth people may take exception. They say things like, 'He doesn't know time and place, he doesn't know how to speak nicely.' But people should listen to the

truth. A true teacher doesn't just talk from memory, he speaks the truth. People in society usually speak from memory, the teacher speaks the truth. People in the society usually speak from memory, and what's more they usually speak in such a way as to exalt themselves. The true monk doesn't speak like that, he speaks the truth, the way things are.

No matter how much the teacher explains the truth, it's difficult for people to understand. It's hard to understand the Dhamma. If you understand the Dhamma you should practise accordingly. It may not be necessary to become a monk, although the monk's life is the ideal form for practice. To really practise, you have to forsake the confusion of the world, give up family and possessions, and take to the forests. These are the ideal places to practise.

But if we still have family and responsibilities how are we to practise? Some people say it's impossible to practise Dhamma as a layperson. Consider, which group is larger, monks or laypeople? There are far more laypeople. Now if only the monks practise and the laypeople don't, then that means there's going to be a lot of confusion. This is wrong understanding. 'I can't become a monk.' Becoming a monk isn't the point! Being a monk doesn't mean anything, if you don't practise. If you really understand the practice of Dhamma then no matter what position or profession you hold in life, be it a teacher, doctor, civil servant or whatever, you can practise the Dhamma every minute of the day.

To think you can't practise as a layman is to lose track of the path completely. Why is it people can find the incentive to do other things? If they feel they are lacking something they make an effort to obtain it. If there is sufficient desire, people can do

anything. Some say, 'I haven't got time to practise the Dhamma.' I say, 'Then how come you've got time to breathe?' Breathing is vital to people's lives. If they saw Dhamma practice as vital to their lives, they would see it as important as their breathing.

The practice of Dhamma isn't something you have to go running around for or exhaust yourself over. Just look at the feelings which arise in your mind. When the eye sees form, ear hears sounds, nose smells odours and so on, they all come to this one mind, 'the one who knows.' Now when the mind perceives these things what happens? If we like that object we experience pleasure, if we dislike it we experience displeasure. That's all there is to it.

So where are you going to find happiness in this world? Do you expect everybody to say only pleasant things to you all your life? Is that possible? No, it's not. If it's not possible, then where are you going to go? The world is simply like this, we must know the world – *lokavidū* – know the truth of this world. The world is something we should clearly understand. The Buddha lived in this world, he didn't live anywhere else. He experienced family life, but he saw its limitations and detached himself from them. Now, how are you as laypeople going to practise? If you want to practise, you must make an effort to follow the path. If you persevere with the practice, you too will see the limitations of this world and be able to let go.

People who drink alcohol sometimes say, 'I just can't give it up.' Why can't they give it up? Because they don't yet see the liability in it. If they clearly saw the liability in it, they wouldn't have to wait to be told to give it up. If you don't see the liability of something, that means you also can't see the benefit of giving it up. Your practice becomes fruitless, you are

just playing at practice. If you clearly see the liability and the benefit of something you won't have to wait for others to tell you about it.

Consider the story of the fisherman who finds something in his fish-trap. He knows something is in there, he can hear it flapping about inside. Thinking it's a fish, he reaches his hand into the trap, only to find a different kind of animal. He can't yet see it, so he's in two minds about it. It could be an eel,* but then again it could be a snake. If he throws it away he may regret it, it could be an eel. On the other hand, if he keeps holding on to it and it turns out to be a snake it may bite him. He's caught in a state of doubt. His desire is so strong he holds on, just in case it's an eel, but the minute he brings it out and sees the striped skin he throws it down straight away. He doesn't have to wait for someone to call out, 'It's a snake, it's a snake, let go!' The sight of the snake tells him what to do much more clearly than words could do. Why? Because he sees the danger – snakes can bite! Nobody has to tell him about it. In the same way, if we practise till we see things as they are, we won't meddle with things that are harmful.

People don't usually practise in this way, they usually do other things. They don't contemplate things, they don't reflect on old age, sickness and death. They only talk about non-ageing and non-death, so they never develop the right feeling for Dhamma practice. They go and listen to Dhamma talks but they don't really listen. Sometimes I get invited to give talks at important functions, but it's a nuisance for me to go. Why so? Because when I look at the people gathered there I can see that

* Considered a delicacy in some parts of Thailand.

they haven't come to listen to the Dhamma. Some are smelling of alcohol, some are smoking cigarettes, some are chatting; they don't look at all like people who have come out of faith in the Dhamma. Giving talks at such places is of little fruit. People who are sunk in heedlessness tend to think things like, 'When is he ever going to stop talking? Can't do this, can't do that ...' Their minds just wander all over the place.

Sometimes they even invite me to give a talk just for the sake of formality: 'Please give us just a small Dhamma talk, Venerable Sir.' They don't want me to talk too much, it might annoy them! As soon as I hear people say this I know what they're about. These people don't like listening to Dhamma. It annoys them. If I just give a small talk they won't understand. If you take only a little food, is it enough? Of course not.

Sometimes I'm giving a talk, just warming up to the subject, and some drunkard will call out, 'Okay, make way, make way for the Venerable Sir, he's coming out now!' – trying to drive me away! If I meet this kind of person I get a lot of food for reflection, I get an insight into human nature. It's like a person having a bottle full of water and then asking for more. There's nowhere to put it. It isn't worth the time and energy to teach them, because their minds are already full. Pour anymore in and it just overflows uselessly. If their bottle was empty, there would be somewhere to put the water, and both the giver and the receiver would benefit.

In this way, when people are really interested in Dhamma and sit quietly, listening carefully, I feel more inspired to teach. If people don't pay attention it's just like the man with the bottle full of water, there's no room to put anymore. It's hardly worth my while talking to them. In situations like this I just don't find

any energy arising to teach. You can't put much energy into giving, when no-one's putting much energy into receiving.

These days giving talks tends to be like this, and it's getting worse all the time. People don't search for truth, they study simply to find the necessary knowledge to make a living, raise families and look after themselves. They study for a livelihood. There may be some study of Dhamma, but not much. Students nowadays have much more knowledge than students of previous times. They have all the requisites at their disposal, everything is more convenient. But they also have a lot more confusion and suffering than before. Why is this? Because they only look for the kind of knowledge used to make a living.

Even the monks are like this. Sometimes I hear them say, 'I didn't become a monk to practise the Dhamma, I only ordained to study.' These are the words of someone who has completely cut off the path of practice. There's no way ahead, it's a dead end. When these monks teach it's only from memory. They may teach one thing but their minds are in a completely different place. There's no truth in such teachings.

This is how the world is. If you try to live simply, practising the Dhamma and living peacefully, they say you are weird and anti-social. They say you're obstructing progress in society. They even intimidate you. Eventually you might even start to believe them and revert to the worldly ways, sinking deeper and deeper into the world until it's impossible to get out. Some people say, 'I can't get out now, I've gone in too deeply.' This is how society tends to be. It doesn't appreciate the value of Dhamma.

The value of Dhamma isn't to be found in books. Those are just the external appearances of Dhamma, they're not the

realization of Dhamma as a personal experience. If you realize the Dhamma, you realize your own mind, you see the truth there. When the truth becomes apparent, it cuts off the stream of delusion.

The teaching of the Buddha is the unchanging truth, whether in the present or in any other time. The Buddha revealed this truth 2,500 years ago and it's been the truth ever since. Nothing should be added to or taken away from it. The Buddha said, 'What the *Tathāgata* has laid down should not be discarded, what has not been laid down by the *Tathāgata* should not be added to the teachings.' He 'sealed off' the teachings. Why did the Buddha seal them off? Because these teachings are the words of one who has no defilements. No matter how the world may change, these teachings are unaffected, they don't change with it. If something is wrong, even if people say it's right doesn't make it any the less wrong. If something is right, that doesn't change just because people say it's not. Generation after generation may come and go but these things don't change, because these teachings are the truth.

Now, who created this truth? The truth itself created the truth! Did the Buddha create it? No, he didn't. The Buddha only *discovered* the truth, the way things are, and then he set out to declare it. The truth is constantly true, whether a Buddha arises in the world or not. The Buddha only 'owns' the Dhamma in this sense, he didn't actually create it. It's been here all the time. No one had previously searched for and found the Deathless then taught it as the Dhamma. But the Buddha didn't invent it, it was already there.

At some point in time, the truth is illuminated and the practice of Dhamma flourishes. As time goes on and generations

pass away, the practice degenerates until the teaching fades away completely. After a time the teaching is re-founded and flourishes once more. As time goes on the adherents of the Dhamma multiply, prosperity sets in, and once more the teaching begins to follow the darkness of the world. And so once more it degenerates until such a time as it can no longer hold ground. Confusion reigns once more. Then it is time to re-establish the truth. In fact the truth doesn't go anywhere. When Buddhas pass away, the Dhamma doesn't disappear with them.

The world revolves like this. It's something like a mango tree. The tree matures, blossoms, and fruits appear and grow to ripeness. They become rotten and the seed goes back into the ground to become a new mango tree. The cycle starts once more. Eventually there are more ripe fruits which proceed to fall, rot, sink into the ground as seeds and grow once more into trees. This is how the world is. It doesn't go very far, it just revolves around the same old things.

Our lives these days are the same. Today we are simply doing the same old things we've always done. People think too much. There are so many things to get interested in, but none of them leads to completion. There are the sciences like mathematics, physics, psychology and so on. You can delve into any of these but you can only finalize things with the truth.

Suppose there was a cart being pulled by an ox. As long as the ox pulls the cart the tracks will follow. The wheels are round yet the tracks are long; the tracks are long yet the wheels are merely circles. Just looking at a stationary cart you can't see anything long about it, but once the ox starts moving you see the tracks stretching out behind you. As long as the ox pulls, the wheels keep on turning, but there comes a day when the ox

tires and throws off its harness. The ox walks off and leaves the empty cart sitting there. The wheels no longer turn. In time the cart falls apart, its components go back into the four elements – earth, water, wind and fire.

Searching for peace within the world, the cart wheel tracks stretch out endlessly behind you. As long as you follow the world there is no stopping, no rest. If you simply stop following it, the cart comes to rest, the wheels no longer turn. Following the world turns the wheels ceaselessly. Creating bad kamma is like this. As long as you follow the old ways, there is no stopping. If you stop, there is stopping. This is how we practise the Dhamma.

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An informal talk given after an invitation to receive alms-food at a lay person's house in Ubon, the district capital, close to Wat Pah Pong.

Tuccho Pothila *

There are two ways to support Buddhism. One is known as *āmisapūjā*, supporting through material offerings: the four requisites of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. There, material offerings are given to the Saṅgha of monks and nuns, enabling them to live in reasonable comfort for the practice of Dhamma. This fosters the direct realization of the Buddha's teaching, in turn bringing continued prosperity to the Buddhist religion.

Buddhism can be likened to a tree. A tree has roots, a trunk, branches, twigs and leaves. All the leaves and branches, including the trunk, depend on the roots to absorb nutriment from the soil. Just as the tree depends on the roots to sustain it, our actions and our speech are like 'branches' and 'leaves', which depend on the mind, the 'root', absorbing nutriment, which it then sends out to the 'trunk', 'branches' and 'leaves'. These in turn bear fruit as our speech and actions. Whatever state the mind is in, skilful or unskilful, it expresses that quality outwardly through our actions and speech.

Therefore, the support of Buddhism through the practical

* *Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: 'Tuccho Pothila - Venerable Empty-Scripture'*

application of the teaching is the most important kind of support. For example, in the ceremony of determining the precepts on observance days, the teacher describes those unskillful actions which should be avoided. But if you simply go through this ceremony without reflecting on their meaning, progress is difficult and you will be unable to find the true practice. The real support of Buddhism must therefore be done through *paṭipatti-pūjā*, the ‘offering’ of practice, cultivating true restraint, concentration and wisdom. Then you will know what Buddhism is all about. If you don’t understand through practice, you still won’t know, even if you learn the whole Tipiṭaka.

In the time of the Buddha there was a monk known as Tuccho Pothila. Tuccho Pothila was very learned, thoroughly versed in the scriptures and texts. He was so famous that he was revered by people everywhere and had eighteen monasteries under his care. When people heard the name ‘Tuccho Pothila’ they were awe-struck and nobody would dare question anything he taught, so much did they revere his command of the teachings. Tuccho Pothila was one of the Buddha’s most learned disciples.

One day he went to pay respects to the Buddha. As he was paying his respects, the Buddha said, ‘Ah, hello, Venerable Empty Scripture!’ Just like that! They conversed for a while until it was time to go, and then, as he was taking leave of the Buddha, the Buddha said, ‘Oh, leaving now, Venerable Empty Scripture?’

That was all the Buddha said. On arriving, ‘Oh, hello, Venerable Empty Scripture.’ When it was time to go, ‘Ah, leaving now, Venerable Empty Scripture?’ The Buddha didn’t expand on it, that was all the teaching he gave. Tuccho Pothila, the eminent

teacher, was puzzled, ‘Why did the Buddha say that? What did he mean?’ He thought and thought, turning over everything he had learned, until eventually he realized, ‘It’s true! Venerable Empty Scripture – a monk who studies but doesn’t practise.’ When he looked into his heart he saw that really he was no different from laypeople. Whatever they aspired to he also aspired to, whatever they enjoyed he also enjoyed. There was no real ‘*samaṇa*’ within him, no truly profound quality capable of firmly establishing him in the Noble Way and providing true peace.

So he decided to practise. But there was nowhere for him to go to. All the teachers around were his own students, no-one would dare accept him. Usually when people meet their teacher they become timid and deferential, and so no-one would dare become his teacher.

Finally he went to see a certain young novice, who was enlightened, and asked to practise under him. The novice said, ‘Yes, sure you can practise with me, but only if you’re sincere. If you’re not sincere then I won’t accept you.’ Tuccho Pothila pledged himself as a student of the novice.

The novice then told him to put on all his robes. Now there happened to be a muddy bog nearby. When Tuccho Pothila had neatly put on all his robes, expensive ones they were, too, the novice said, ‘Okay, now run down into this muddy bog. If I don’t tell you to stop, don’t stop. If I don’t tell you to come out, don’t come out. Okay, run!’

Tuccho Pothila, neatly robed, plunged into the bog. The novice didn’t tell him to stop until he was completely covered in mud. Finally he said, ‘You can stop, now’ so he stopped. ‘Okay, come out now!’ and so he came out.

This clearly showed the novice that Tuccho Pothila had given up his pride. He was ready to accept the teaching. If he wasn't ready to learn he wouldn't have run into the bog like that, being such a famous teacher, but he did it. The young novice, seeing this, knew that Tuccho Pothila was sincerely determined to practise.

When Tuccho Pothila had come out of the bog, the novice gave him the teaching. He taught him to observe the sense objects, to know the mind and to know the sense objects, using the simile of a man catching a lizard hiding in a termite mound. If the mound had six holes in it, how would he catch it? He would have to seal off five of the holes and leave just one open. Then he would have to simply watch and wait, guarding that one hole. When the lizard ran out he could catch it.

Observing the mind is like this. Closing off the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, we leave only the mind. To 'close off' the senses means to restrain and compose them, observing only the mind. Meditation is like catching the lizard. We use sati to note the breath. Sati is the quality of recollection, as in asking yourself, 'What am I doing?' *Sampajañña* is the awareness that 'now I am doing such and such'. We observe the in and out breathing with sati and *sampajañña*.

This quality of recollection is something that arises from practice, it's not something that can be learned from books. Know the feelings that arise. The mind may be fairly inactive for a while and then a feeling arises. Sati works in conjunction with these feelings, recollecting them. There is sati, the recollection that 'I will speak', 'I will go', 'I will sit' and so on, and then there is *sampajañña*, the awareness that 'now I am walking', 'I am lying down', 'I am experiencing such and such a mood.' With sati and

sampajañña, we can know our minds in the present moment and we will know how the mind reacts to sense impressions.

That which is aware of sense objects is called 'mind'. Sense objects 'wander into' the mind. For instance, there is a sound, like the electric drill here. It enters through the ear and travels inwards to the mind, which acknowledges that it is the sound of an electric drill. That which acknowledges the sound is called 'mind'.

Now this mind which acknowledges that sound is quite basic. It's just the average mind. Perhaps annoyance arises within the one who acknowledges. We must further train 'the one who acknowledges' to become 'the one who knows' in accordance with the truth – known as *Buddho*. If we don't clearly know in accordance with the truth then we get annoyed at sounds of people, cars, electric drills and so on. This is just the ordinary, untrained mind acknowledging the sound with annoyance. It knows in accordance with its preferences, not in accordance with the truth. We must further train it to know with vision and insight, *ñāṇadassana*,* the power of the refined mind, so that it knows the sound as simply sound. If we don't cling to sound there is no annoyance. The sound arises and we simply note it. This is called truly knowing the arising of sense objects. If we develop the *Buddho*, clearly realizing the sound as sound, then it doesn't annoy us. It arises according to conditions, it is not a being, an individual, a self, an 'us' or 'them'. It's just sound. The mind lets go.

This knowing is called *Buddho*, the knowledge that is clear and penetrating. With this knowledge we can let the sound

* Literally: knowledge and insight (into the Four Noble Truths).

simply be sound. It doesn't disturb us unless we disturb it by thinking, 'I don't want to hear that sound, it's annoying.' Suffering arises because of this thinking. Right here is the cause of suffering, that we don't know the truth of this matter, we haven't developed the *Buddho*. We are not yet clear, not yet awake, not yet aware. This is the raw, untrained mind. This mind is not yet truly useful to us.

Therefore the Buddha taught that this mind must be trained and developed. We must develop the mind just like we develop the body, but we do it in a different way. To develop the body we must exercise it, jogging in the morning and evening and so on. This is exercising the body. As a result the body becomes more agile, stronger, the respiratory and nervous systems become more efficient. To exercise the mind we don't have to move it around, but bring it to a halt, bring it to rest.

For instance, when practising meditation, we take an object, such as the in- and out-breathing, as our foundation. This becomes the focus of our attention and reflection. We look at the breathing. To look at the breathing means to follow the breathing with awareness, noting its rhythm, its coming and going. We put awareness into the breath, following the natural in and out breathing and letting go of all else. As a result of staying on one object of awareness, our mind becomes refreshed. If we let the mind think of this, that and the other, there are many objects of awareness; the mind doesn't unify, it doesn't come to rest.

To say the mind stops means that it feels as if it's stopped, it doesn't go running here and there. It's like having a sharp knife. If we use the knife to cut at things indiscriminately, such as stones, bricks and grass, our knife will quickly become blunt.

We should use it for cutting only the things it was meant for. Our mind is the same. If we let the mind wander after thoughts and feelings which have no value or use, the mind becomes tired and weak. If the mind has no energy, wisdom will not arise, because the mind without energy is the mind without samādhi.

If the mind hasn't stopped you can't clearly see the sense objects for what they are. The knowledge that the mind is the mind, sense objects are merely sense objects, is the root from which Buddhism has grown and developed. This is the heart of Buddhism.

We must cultivate this mind, develop it, training it in calm and insight. We train the mind to have restraint and wisdom by letting the mind stop and allowing wisdom to arise, by knowing the mind as it is.

You know, the way we human beings are, the way we do things, we are just like little children. A child doesn't know anything. To an adult observing the behaviour of a child, the way it plays and jumps around, its actions don't seem to have much purpose. If our mind is untrained it is like a child. We speak without awareness and act without wisdom. We may fall to ruin or cause untold harm and not even know it. A child is ignorant, it plays as children do. Our ignorant mind is the same.

So we should train this mind. The Buddha taught us to train the mind, to teach the mind. Even if we support Buddhism with the four requisites, our support is still superficial, it reaches only the 'bark' or 'sapwood' of the tree. The real support of Buddhism must be done through the practice, nowhere else, training our actions, speech and thoughts according to the teachings. This is much more fruitful. If we are straight and honest, possessed of restraint and wisdom, our practice will

bring prosperity. There will be no cause for spite and hostility. This is how our religion teaches us.

If we determine the precepts simply out of tradition, then even though the Ajahn teaches the truth, our practice will be deficient. We may be able to study the teachings and repeat them, but we have to practise them if we really want to understand. If we do not develop the practice, this may well be an obstacle to our penetrating to the heart of Buddhism for countless lifetimes to come. We will not understand the essence of the Buddhist religion.

Therefore the practice is like a key, the key of meditation. If we have the right key in our hand, no matter how tightly the lock is closed, when we take the key and turn it, the lock falls open. If we have no key we can't open the lock. We will never know what is in the trunk.

Actually there are two kinds of knowledge. One who knows the Dhamma doesn't simply speak from memory, he speaks the truth. Worldly people usually speak with conceit. For example, suppose there were two people who hadn't seen each other for a long time, maybe they had gone to live in different provinces or countries for a while, and then one day they happened to meet on the train, 'Oh! What a surprise. I was just thinking of looking you up!' Perhaps it's not true. Really they hadn't thought of each other at all, but they say so out of excitement. And so it becomes a lie. Yes, it's lying out of heedlessness. This is lying without knowing it. It's a subtle form of defilement, and it happens very often.

So with regard to the mind, Tuccho Pothila followed the instructions of the novice: breathing in, breathing out, mindfully aware of each breath, until he saw the liar within him, the

lying of his own mind. He saw the defilements as they came up, just like the lizard coming out of the termite mound. He saw them and perceived their true nature as soon as they arose. He noticed how one minute the mind would concoct one thing, the next moment something else.

Thinking is a *sañkhata dhamma*, something which is created or concocted from supporting conditions. It's not *asañkhata dhamma*, the unconditioned. The well-trained mind, one with perfect awareness, does not concoct mental states. This kind of mind penetrates to the Noble Truths and transcends any need to depend on externals. To know the Noble Truths is to know the truth.

The proliferating mind tries to avoid this truth, saying, 'that's good' or 'this is beautiful', but if there is *Buddho* in the mind it can no longer deceive us, because we know the mind as it is. The mind can no longer create deluded mental states, because there is the clear awareness that all mental states are unstable, imperfect, and a source of suffering to one who clings to them.

For Tuccho Pothila, 'the one who knows' was constantly in his mind, wherever he went. He observed the various creations and proliferation of the mind with understanding. He saw how the mind lied in so many ways. He grasped the essence of the practice, seeing that 'This lying mind is the one to watch – this is the one which leads us into extremes of happiness and suffering and causes us to endlessly spin around in the cycle of 'saṃsāra', with its pleasure and pain, good and evil – all because of this lying mind.' Tuccho Pothila realized the truth, and grasped the essence of the practice, just like a man grasping the tail of the lizard. He saw the workings of the deluded mind.

For us it's the same. Only this mind is important. That's why we need to train the mind. Now if the mind is the mind, what are we going to train it with? By having continuous sati and *sampajañña* we will be able to know the mind. This one who knows is a step beyond the mind, it is that which knows the state of the mind. The mind is the mind. That which knows the mind as simply mind is the one who knows. It is above the mind. The one who knows is above the mind, and that is how it is able to look after the mind, to teach the mind to know what is right and what is wrong. In the end everything comes back to this proliferating mind. If the mind is caught up in its proliferations there is no awareness and the practice is fruitless.

So we must train this mind to hear the Dhamma, to cultivate the *Buddho*, the clear and radiant awareness; that which exists above and beyond the ordinary mind, and knows all that goes on within it. This is why we meditate on the word *Buddho*, so that we can know the mind beyond the mind. Just observe all the mind's movements, whether good or bad, until the one who knows realizes that the mind is simply mind, not a self or a person. This is called *cittānupassanā*, contemplation of mind.* Seeing in this way we will understand that the mind is transient, imperfect and ownerless. This mind doesn't belong to us.

We can summarize thus: the mind is that which acknowledges sense objects; sense objects are sense objects as distinct from the mind; 'the one who knows' knows both the mind and the sense objects for what they are. We must use sati to constantly cleanse the mind. Everybody has sati, even a cat has

*One of the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling, mind, and dhammas.

it when it's going to catch a mouse. A dog has it when it barks at people. This is a form of sati, but it's not sati according to the Dhamma. Everybody has sati, but there are different levels of it, just as there are different levels of looking at things. For instance, when I say to contemplate the body, some people say, 'What is there to contemplate in the body? Anybody can see it. *Kesā* we can see already, *lomā* we can see already, hair, nails, teeth and skin we can see already. So what?'

This is how people are. They can see the body all right but their seeing is faulty, they don't see with the *Buddho*, 'the one who knows', the awakened one. They only see the body in the ordinary way, they see it visually. Simply to see the body is not enough. If we only see the body there is trouble. You must see the body within the body, then things become much clearer. Just seeing the body you get fooled by it, charmed by its appearance. Not seeing transience, imperfection and ownerlessness, *kāmachanda* arises. You become fascinated by forms, sounds, odours, flavours and feelings. Seeing in this way is to see with the mundane eye of the flesh, causing you to love and hate and discriminate into pleasant and unpleasant feeling.

The Buddha taught that this is not enough. You must see with the 'mind's eye'. See the body within the body. If you really look into the body, Ugh! It's so repulsive. There are today's things and yesterday's things all mixed up in there, you can't tell what's what. Seeing in this way is much clearer than to see with the carnal eye. Contemplate, see with the eye of the mind, with the wisdom eye.

People understand this in different ways. Some people don't know what there is to contemplate in the five meditations, head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. They say they can see

all those things already, but they can only see them with the carnal eye, with this 'crazy eye' which only looks at the things it wants to look at. To see the body in the body you have to look more clearly.

This is the practice that can uproot clinging to the five khandhas. To uproot attachment is to uproot suffering, because attachment to the five khandhas is the cause of suffering. If suffering arises it is here. It's not that the five khandhas are in themselves suffering, but the clinging to them as being one's own, that's suffering.

If you see the truth of these things clearly through meditation practice, then suffering becomes unwound, like a screw or a bolt. When the bolt is unwound, it withdraws. The mind unwinds in the same way, letting go; withdrawing from the obsession with good and evil, possessions, praise and status, happiness and suffering.

If we don't know the truth of these things it's like tightening the screw all the time. It gets tighter and tighter until it's crushing you and you suffer over everything. When you know how things are then you unwind the screw. In Dhamma language we call this the arising of *nibbidā*, disenchantment. You become weary of things and lay down the fascination with them. If you unwind in this way you will find peace.

The cause of suffering is clinging to things. So we should get rid of the cause, cut off its root and not allow it to cause suffering again. People have only one problem – the problem of clinging. Just because of this one thing people will kill each other. All problems, be they individual, family or social, arise from this one root. Nobody wins, they kill each other but in the end no-one gets anything. It is all pointless, I don't know why people keep on killing each other.

Power, possessions, status, praise, happiness and suffering – these are the worldly dhammas. These worldly dhammas engulf worldly beings. Worldly beings are led around by the worldly dhammas: gain and loss, acclaim and slander, status and loss of status, happiness and suffering. These dhammas are trouble makers; if you don't reflect on their true nature you will suffer. People even commit murder for the sake of wealth, status or power. Why? Because they take this too seriously. They get appointed to some position and it goes to their heads, like the man who became headman of the village. After his appointment he became 'power-drunk'. If any of his old friends came to see him he'd say, 'Don't come around so often. Things aren't the same anymore.'

The Buddha taught us to understand the nature of possessions, status, praise and happiness. Take these things as they come but let them be. Don't let them go to your head. If you don't really understand these things, you become fooled by your power, your children and relatives, by everything! If you understand them clearly, you know they're all impermanent conditions. If you cling to them, they become defiled.

All of these things arise afterwards. When people are first born there are simply *nāma* and *rūpa*, that's all. We add on the business of 'Mr. Jones', 'Miss Smith' or whatever later on. This is done according to convention. Still later there are the appendages of 'Colonel', 'General' and so on. If we don't really understand these things we think they are real and carry them around with us. We carry possessions, status, name and rank around. If you have power you can call all the tunes ... 'Take this one and execute him. Take that one and throw him in jail.' Rank gives power. Clinging takes hold here at this word, 'rank'.

As soon as people have rank they start giving orders; right or wrong, they just act on their moods. So they go on making the same old mistakes, deviating further and further from the true path.

One who understands the Dhamma won't behave like this. Good and evil have been in the world since who knows when. If possessions and status come your way, then let them simply be possessions and status – don't let them become your identity. Just use them to fulfil your obligations and leave it at that. You remain unchanged. If we have meditated on these things, no matter what comes our way we will not be misled by it. We will be untroubled, unaffected and constant. Everything is pretty much the same, after all.

This is how the Buddha wanted us to understand things. No matter what you receive, the mind does not add anything to it. They appoint you a city councillor, 'Okay, so I'm a city councillor, but I'm not.' They appoint you head of the group, 'Sure I am, but I'm not.' Whatever they make of you, 'Yes I am, but I'm not!' In the end what are we anyway? We all just die in the end. No matter what they make you, in the end it's all the same. What can you say? If you can see things in this way you will have a solid abiding and true contentment. Nothing is changed.

Don't be fooled by things. Whatever comes your way, it's just conditions. There's nothing which can entice a mind like this to create or proliferate, to seduce it into greed, aversion or delusion.

This is what it is to be a true supporter of Buddhism. Whether you are among those who are being supported (i.e., the Saṅgha) or those who are supporting (the laity) please consider this thoroughly. Cultivate the *sīla-dhamma* within you. This is

the surest way to support Buddhism. To support Buddhism with the offerings of food, shelter and medicine is good also, but such offerings only reach the 'sapwood' of Buddhism. Please don't forget this. A tree has bark, sapwood and heartwood, and these three parts are interdependent. The heartwood must rely on the bark and the sapwood. The sapwood relies on the bark and the heartwood. They all exist interdependently, just like the teachings of moral discipline, concentration and wisdom (Sīla, samādhi, paññā). The teaching on moral discipline is to establish your speech and actions in rectitude. The teaching on concentration is to firmly fix the mind. The teaching on wisdom is the thorough understanding of the nature of all conditions. Study this, practise this, and you will understand Buddhism in the most profound way.

If you don't realize these things, you will be fooled by possessions, fooled by rank, fooled by anything you come into contact with. Simply supporting Buddhism in the external way will never put an end to the fighting and squabbling, the grudges and animosity, the stabbing and shooting. If these things are to cease we must reflect on the nature of possessions, rank, praise, happiness and suffering. We must consider our lives and bring them in line with the teaching. We should reflect that all beings in the world are part of one whole. We are like them, they are like us. They have happiness and suffering just like we do. It's all much the same. If we reflect in this way, peace and understanding will arise. This is the foundation of Buddhism.

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An informal talk given at Ajahn Chah's kuti, to a group of laypeople, one evening in 1978.

Still, Flowing Water

Now please pay attention, not allowing your mind to wander off after other things. Create the feeling that right now you are sitting on a mountain or in a forest somewhere, all by yourself. What do you have sitting here right now? There is body and mind, that's all, only these two things. All that is contained within this frame sitting here now is called 'body'. The 'mind' is that which is aware and is thinking at this very moment. These two things are also called *nāma* and *rūpa*. *Nāma* refers to that which has no *rūpa*, or form. All thoughts and feelings, or the four mental khandhas of feeling, perception, volition and consciousness, are *nāma*, they are all formless. When the eye sees form, that form is called *rūpa*, while the awareness is called *nāma*. Together they are called *nāma* and *rūpa*, or simply mind and body.

Understand that only body and mind are sitting here in this present moment. But we get these two things confused with each other. If you want peace you must know the truth of them. The mind in its present state is still untrained; it's dirty, not clear. It is not yet the pure mind. We must train this mind further through the practice of meditation.

Some people think that meditation means to sit in some

special way, but in actual fact standing, sitting, walking and reclining are all vehicles for meditation practice. You can practise at all times. Samādhi literally means 'the firmly established mind.' To develop samādhi you don't have to go bottling the mind up. Some people try to get peaceful by sitting quietly and having nothing disturb them at all, but that's just like being dead. The practice of samādhi is for developing wisdom and understanding.

Samādhi is the firm mind, the one-pointed mind. On which point is it fixed? It's fixed on the point of balance. That's its point. But people practise meditation by trying to silence their minds. They say, 'I try to sit in meditation but my mind won't be still for a minute. One instant it flies off one place, the next instant it flies off somewhere else. How can I make it stop and be still?' You don't have to make it stop, that's not the point. Where there is movement is where understanding can arise. People complain, 'It runs off and I pull it back again; then it goes off again and I pull it back once more.' So they just sit there pulling back and forth like this.

They think their minds are running all over the place, but actually it only seems like the mind is running around. For example, look at this hall here. 'Oh, it's so big!' you say. Actually it's not big at all. Whether or not it seems big depends on your perception of it. In fact this hall is just the size it is, neither big nor small, but people run around after their feelings all the time.

In order to meditate to find peace, you must understand what peace is. If you don't understand it you won't be able to find it. For example, suppose today you brought a very expensive pen with you to the monastery. Now suppose that,

on your way here, you put the pen in your front pocket, but later you put it in the back pocket. Now when you search your front pocket, it's not there! You get a fright. You get a fright because of your misunderstanding, you don't see the truth of the matter. Suffering is the result. Whether standing, walking, coming and going, you can't stop worrying about your lost pen. Your wrong understanding causes you to suffer. Understanding wrongly causes suffering. 'Such a shame! I only bought that pen a few days ago and now it's lost.'

But then you remember, 'Oh, of course! When I went to bathe I put the pen in my back pocket.' As soon as you remember this you feel better again, even without seeing your pen. You see that? You're happy again, you can stop worrying about your pen. You're sure about it now. As you're walking along you run your hand over your back pocket and there it is. Your mind was deceiving you all along. The worry comes from your ignorance. Now, seeing the pen, you are beyond doubt, your worries are calmed. This sort of peace comes from seeing the cause of the problem, *samudaya*, the cause of suffering. As soon as you remember that the pen is in your back pocket there is *nirodha*, the cessation of suffering.

So you must contemplate in order to find peace. What people usually refer to as peace is simply the calming of the mind, not the calming of the defilements. The defilements are simply being temporarily subdued, just like grass covered by a rock. In three or four days you take the rock off the grass and in no long time it grows up again. The grass hadn't really died, it was simply being suppressed. It's the same when sitting in meditation: the mind is calmed but the defilements are not really calmed. Therefore, *samādhi* is not a sure thing. To find

real peace you must develop wisdom. Samādhi is one kind of peace, like the rock covering the grass. In a few days you take the rock away and the grass grows up again. This is only a temporary peace. The peace of wisdom is like putting the rock down and not lifting it up, just leaving it where it is. The grass can't possibly grow again. This is real peace, the calming of the defilements, the sure peace which results from wisdom.

We speak of wisdom (paññā) and samādhi as separate things, but in essence they are one and the same. Wisdom is the dynamic function of samādhi; samādhi is the passive aspect of wisdom. They arise from the same place but take different directions. They have different functions, like this mango here. A small green mango eventually grows larger and larger until it is ripe. It is the same mango, the small one, the larger one and the ripe one are the same mango, but its condition changes. In Dhamma practice, one condition is called samādhi, the later condition is called paññā, but in actuality sila, samādhi, and paññā are all the same thing, just like the mango.

In any case, in our practice, no matter what aspect you refer to, you must always begin from the mind. Do you know what this mind is? What is the mind like? What is it? Where is it? Nobody knows. All we know is that we want to go over here or over there, we want this and we want that, we feel good or we feel bad, but the mind itself seems impossible to know. What is the mind? The mind doesn't have form. That which receives impressions, both good and bad, we call 'mind'. It's like the owner of a house. The owner stays at home while visitors come to see him. He is the one who receives the visitors. Who receives sense impressions? What is it that perceives? Who lets go of sense impressions? That is what we call 'mind'.

But people can't see it, they think themselves around in circles. 'What is the mind, what is the brain?' Don't confuse the issue like this. What is it that receives impressions? Some impressions it likes and some it doesn't like. Who is that? Is there one who likes and dislikes? Sure there is, but you can't see it. That is what we call 'mind'.

In our practice it isn't necessary to talk of samatha or vipassanā; just call it the practice of Dhamma, that's enough. And conduct this practice from your own mind. What is the mind? The mind is that which receives, or is aware of, sense impressions. With some sense impressions there is a reaction of like, with others the reaction is dislike. The receiver of impressions leads us into happiness and suffering, right and wrong. But it doesn't have any form. We assume it to be a self, but it's really only *nāma-dhamma*. Does 'goodness' have any form? Does evil? Do happiness and suffering have any form? You can't find them. Are they round or are they square, short or long? Can you see them? These things are *nāma-dhamma*, they can't be compared to material things, they are formless, but we know that they do exist.

Therefore, it is said, to begin the practice by calming the mind. Put awareness into the mind. If the mind is aware it will be at peace. Some people don't go for awareness, they just want to have peace, a kind of blanking out. So they never learn anything. If we don't have this 'one who knows', what is there to base our practice on?

If there is no long, there is no short, if there is no right, there can be no wrong. People these days study away, looking for good and evil. But that which is beyond good and evil they know nothing of. All they know is the right and the wrong – 'I'm

going to take only what is right. I don't want to know about the wrong. Why should I?' If you try to take only what is right in a short time it will go wrong again. Right leads to wrong. People keep searching among the right and wrong, they don't try to find that which is neither right nor wrong. They study about good and evil, they search for virtue, but they know nothing of that which is beyond good and evil. They study the long and the short, but that which is neither long nor short they know nothing of.

This knife has a blade, an edge and a handle. Can you lift only the blade? Can you lift only the the edge of the blade, or the handle? The handle, the edge and the blade are all parts of the same knife: when you pick up the knife you get all three parts together.

In the same way, if you pick up that which is good, the bad must follow. People search for goodness and try to throw away evil, but they don't study that which is neither good nor evil. If you don't study this, there can be no completion. If you pick up goodness, badness follows. If you pick up happiness, suffering follows. The practice of clinging to goodness and rejecting evil is the Dhamma of children, it's like a toy. Sure, it's all right, you can take just this much, but if you grab onto goodness, evil will follow. The end of this path is confused, it's not so good.

Take a simple example. You have children – now suppose you want to only love them and never experience hatred. This is the thinking of one who doesn't know human nature. If you hold onto love, hatred will follow. In the same way, people decide to study the Dhamma to develop wisdom, studying good and evil as closely as possible. Now, having known good and evil, what do they do? They try to cling to the good, and evil follows.

They didn't study that which is beyond good and evil. This is what you should study.

'I'm going to be like this,' 'I'm going to be like that,' but they never say, 'I'm not going to be anything because there really isn't any 'I'. This they don't study. All they want is goodness. If they attain goodness, they lose themselves in it. If things get too good they'll start to go bad, and so people end up just swinging back and forth like this.

In order to calm the mind and become aware of the perceiver of sense impressions, we must observe it. Follow the 'one who knows'. Train the mind until it is pure. How pure should you make it? If it's really pure, the mind should be above both good and evil, above even purity. It's finished. That's when the practice is finished.

What people call sitting in meditation is merely a temporary kind of peace. But even in such peace there are experiences. If an experience arises there must be someone who knows it, who looks into it, queries it and examines it. If the mind is simply blank then that's not so useful. You may see some people who look very restrained and think they are peaceful, but the real peace is not simply the peaceful mind. It's not the peace which says, 'May I be happy and never experience any suffering.' With this kind of peace, eventually even the attainment of happiness becomes unsatisfying. Suffering results. Only when you can make your mind beyond both happiness and suffering will you find true peace. That's the true peace. This is the subject most people never study, they never really see this one.

The right way to train the mind is to make it bright, to develop wisdom. Don't think that training the mind is simply sitting quietly. That's the rock covering the grass. People get

drunk over it. They think that samādhi is sitting. That's just one of the words for samādhi. But really, if the mind has samādhi, then walking is samādhi, sitting is samādhi, there is samādhi in the sitting posture, in the walking posture, in the standing and reclining postures. It's all practice.

Some people complain, 'I can't meditate, I'm too restless. Whenever I sit down I think of this and that. I can't do it. I've got too much bad kamma I should use up my bad kamma first and then come back and try meditating.' Sure, just try it. Try using up your bad kamma.

This is how people think. Why do they think like this? These so-called hindrances are the things we must study. Whenever we sit, the mind immediately goes running off. We follow it and try to bring it back and observe it once more, then it goes off again. This is what you're supposed to be studying. Most people refuse to learn their lessons from nature, like a naughty schoolboy who refuses to do his homework. They don't want to see the mind changing. How then are you going to develop wisdom? We have to live with change like this. When we know that the mind is just this way, constantly changing, when we know that this is its nature, we will understand it. We have to know when the mind is thinking good and bad, changing all the time, we have to know these things. If we understand this point, then even while we are thinking we can be at peace.

For example, suppose at home you have a pet monkey. Monkeys don't stay still for long, they like to jump around and grab onto things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to the monastery and see the monkey here. This monkey doesn't stay still either, it jumps around just the same. But it doesn't bother you, does it? Why doesn't it bother you? Because you've raised a

monkey before, you know what they're like. If you know just one monkey, no matter how many provinces you go to, no matter how many monkeys you see, you won't be bothered by them, will you? This is one who understands monkeys.

If we understand monkeys, then we won't become a monkey. If you don't understand monkeys you may become a monkey yourself! Do you understand? When you see it reaching for this and that, you shout, 'Hey!' You get angry. 'That damned monkey!' This is one who doesn't know monkeys. One who knows monkeys sees that the monkey at home and the monkey in the monastery are just the same. Why should you get annoyed by them? When you see what monkeys are like, that's enough, you can be at peace.

Peace is like this. We must know sensations. Some sensations are pleasant, some are unpleasant, but that's not important. That's just their business. Just like the monkey, all monkeys are the same. We understand sensations as sometimes agreeable, sometimes not – that's just their nature. We should understand them and know how to let them go. Sensations are uncertain. They are transient, imperfect and ownerless. Everything that we perceive is like this. When eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind receive sensations, we know them, just like knowing the monkey. Then we can be at peace.

When sensations arise, know them. Why do you run after them? Sensations are uncertain. One minute they are one way, the next minute another. They exist dependent on change. And all of us here exist dependent on change. The breath goes out, then it must come in. It must have this change. Try only breathing in, can you do that? Or try just breathing out without taking in another breath, can you do it? If there was no change

like this, how long could you live for? There must be both the in-breath and the out-breath.

Sensations are the same. There must be these things. If there were no sensations, you couldn't develop wisdom. If there is no wrong, there can be no right. You must be right first before you can see what is wrong, and you must understand the wrong first to be right. This is how things are.

For the really earnest student, the more sensations the better. But many meditators shrink away from sensations, they don't want to deal with them. This is like the naughty schoolboy who won't go to school, won't listen to the teacher. These sensations are teaching us. When we know sensations, then we are practising Dhamma. The peace within sensations is just like understanding the monkey here. When you understand what monkeys are like, you are no longer troubled by them.

The practice of Dhamma is like this. It's not that the Dhamma is very far away, it's right with us. The Dhamma isn't about the angels on high or anything like that. It's simply about us, about what we are doing right now. Observe yourself. Sometimes there is happiness, sometimes suffering, sometimes comfort, sometimes pain, sometimes love, sometimes hate. This is Dhamma. Do you see it? You should know this Dhamma, you have to read your experiences.

You must know sensations before you can let them go. When you see that sensations are impermanent you will be untroubled by them. As soon as a sensation arises, just say to yourself, 'Hmmm, this is not a sure thing.' When your mood changes, 'Hmmm, not sure.' You can be at peace with these things, just like seeing the monkey and not being bothered by it. If you know the truth of sensations, that is knowing the

Dhamma. You let go of sensations, seeing that invariably, they are all uncertain.

What we call uncertainty, here, is the Buddha. The Buddha is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the characteristic of uncertainty. Whoever sees the uncertainty of things sees the unchanging reality of things. That's what the Dhamma is like. And that is the Buddha. If you see the Dhamma you see the Buddha; seeing the Buddha, you see the Dhamma. If you know *aniccam*, (uncertainty), you will let go of things and not grasp onto them.

You say, 'Hey, don't break my glass!' Can you prevent something that is breakable from breaking? If it doesn't break now it will break later on. If you don't break it, someone else will. If someone else doesn't break it, one of the chickens will! The Buddha says to accept this. He penetrated the truth of these things, seeing that this glass is already broken. Whenever you use this glass you should reflect that it's already broken. Do you understand this? The Buddha's understanding was like this. He saw the broken glass within the unbroken one. Whenever its time is up it will break. Develop this kind of understanding. Use the glass, look after it, until when, one day, it slips out of your hand. 'Smash!' No problem. Why is there no problem? Because you saw its brokenness before it broke!

But usually people say, 'I love this glass so much, may it never break.' Later on the dog breaks it. 'I'll kill that damn dog!' You hate the dog for breaking your glass. If one of your children breaks it you'll hate them too. Why is this? Because you've dammed yourself up, the water can't flow. You've made a dam without a spillway. The only thing the dam can do is burst, right? When you make a dam you must make a spillway also. When the water rises up too high, the water can flow off safely.

When it's full to the brim you open your spillway. You have to have a safety valve like this. Impermanence is the safety valve of the Noble Ones. If you have this 'safety valve' you will be at peace.

Practise constantly, standing, walking, sitting, lying down, using sati to watch over and protect the mind. This is samādhi and wisdom. They are both the same thing, but they have different aspects.

If we really see uncertainty clearly, we will see that which is certain. The certainty is that things must inevitably be this way, they can not be otherwise. Do you understand? Knowing just this much you can know the Buddha, you can rightly do reverence to him.

As long as you don't throw out the Buddha you won't suffer. As soon as you throw out the Buddha you will experience suffering. As soon as you throw out the reflections on transience, imperfection and ownerlessness you'll have suffering. If you can practise just this much it's enough; suffering won't arise, or if it does arise you can settle it easily, and it will be a cause for suffering not arising in the future. This is the end of our practice, at the point where suffering doesn't arise. And why doesn't suffering arise? Because we have sorted out the cause of suffering, *samudaya*.

For instance, if this glass were to break, you would experience suffering. We know that this glass will be a cause for suffering, so we get rid of the cause. All dhammas arise because of a cause. They must also cease because of a cause. So, if there is suffering on account of this glass here, we should let go of this cause. If we reflect beforehand that this glass is already broken, even when it isn't, the cause ceases. When there is no longer any

cause, that suffering is no longer able to exist; it ceases. This is cessation.

You don't have to go beyond this point, just this much is enough. Contemplate this in your own mind. Basically you should all have the Five Precepts as a foundation for behaviour. It's not necessary to go and study the Tipitaka, just concentrate on the Five Precepts first. At first you will make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back and establish your precepts again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. When you realize it, re-establish yourself.

Practising like this, your sati will improve and become more consistent, just like the drops of water falling from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little, the drops fall out slowly; plop! ... plop! ... plop! ... If we tilt the kettle up a little bit more, the drops become more rapid; plop, plop, plop! ... If we tilt the kettle up even further the 'plops' go away and the water flows into a steady stream. Where do the 'plops' go to? They don't go anywhere, they change into a steady stream of water.

We have to talk about the Dhamma like this, using similes, because the Dhamma has no form. Is it square or is it round? You can't say. The only way to talk about it is through similes like this. Don't think that the Dhamma is far away from you. It lies right with you, all around. Take a look; one minute you are happy, the next sad, the next angry. It's all Dhamma. Look at it and understand. Whatever it is that causes suffering, you should remedy. If suffering is still there, take another look, you don't yet see clearly. If you could see clearly you wouldn't suffer because the cause would no longer be there. If suffering is still there, if you're still having to endure, then you're not yet on the right track. Wherever you get stuck, whenever you're suffering

too much, right there you're wrong. Whenever you're so happy you're floating in the clouds, there, wrong again!

If you practise like this, you will have sati at all times, in all postures. With sati, and *sampajañña*, you will know right and wrong, happiness and suffering. Knowing these things, you will know how to deal with them.

I teach meditation like this. When it's time to sit in meditation then sit, that's not wrong. You should practise this also. But meditation is not only sitting. You must allow your mind to fully experience things, allow them to flow and consider their nature. How should you consider them? See them as transient, imperfect and ownerless. It's all uncertain. 'This is so beautiful, I really must have it.' That's not a sure thing. 'I don't like this at all'. Tell yourself right there, 'Not sure!' Is this true? Absolutely, no mistake. But just try taking things for real. 'I'm going to get this thing for sure.' You've gone off the track already. Don't do this. No matter how much you like something, you should reflect that it's uncertain.

Some kinds of food seem so delicious, but still you should reflect that it's not a sure thing. It may seem so sure, that it's so delicious, but still you must tell yourself, 'Not sure!' If you want to test out whether it's sure or not, try eating your favourite food every day. Every single day, mind you. Eventually you'll complain, 'This doesn't taste so good anymore.' Eventually you'll think, 'Actually I prefer that kind of food.' That's not a sure thing either! You must allow things to flow, just like the in and out breaths. There has to be both the in breath and the out breath, the breathing depends on change. Everything depends on change like this.

These things lie with us, nowhere else. If we no longer

doubt, whether sitting, standing, walking, or reclining, we will be at peace. Samādhi isn't just sitting. Some people sit until they fall into a stupor. They might as well be dead, they can't tell north from south. Don't take it to such an extreme. If you feel sleepy, then walk, change your posture. Develop wisdom. If you are really tired, have a rest. As soon as you wake up then continue the practice, don't let yourself drift into a stupor. You must practise like this. Have reason, wisdom, circumspection.

Start the practice with your own mind and body, seeing them as impermanent. Everything else is the same. Keep this in mind when you think the food is so delicious, you must tell yourself, 'Not a sure thing!' You have to whack it first. But usually it just whacks you every time, doesn't it? If you don't like anything, you just suffer over it. This is how things whack us. 'If she likes me, I like her.' They whack us again. You never get a punch in! You must see it like this. Whenever you like anything just say to yourself, 'This is not a sure thing!' You have to go against the grain somewhat in order to really see the Dhamma.

Practise in all postures, sitting, standing, walking, lying. You can experience anger in any posture, right? You can be angry while walking, while sitting, while lying down. You can experience desire in any posture. So our practice must extend to all postures; standing, walking, sitting and lying down. It must be consistent. Don't just put on a show, really do it.

While sitting in meditation, some incident might arise. Before it is settled another one comes racing in. Whenever these things come up, just tell yourself, 'Not sure, not sure.' Just whack it before it gets a chance to whack you.

Now this is the important point. If you know that all things are impermanent, all your thinking will gradually unwind.

When you reflect on the uncertainty of everything that passes, you'll see that all things go the same way. Whenever anything arises, all you need to say is, 'Oh, another one!'

Have you ever seen flowing water? Have you ever seen still water? If your mind is peaceful, it will be just like still, flowing water. Have you ever seen still, flowing water? There! You've only ever seen flowing water and still water, haven't you? But you've never seen still, flowing water. Right there, right where your thinking can not take you, even though it's peaceful you can develop wisdom. Your mind will be like flowing water, and yet it's still. It's almost as if it were still, and yet it's flowing. So I call it 'still, flowing water.' Wisdom can arise here.

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*Given at Wat Tham Saeng Phet, during the rains retreat
of 1981.*

Toward the Unconditioned

Today is the day on which we Buddhists come together to observe the *uposatha* precepts and listen to the Dhamma, as is our custom. The point of listening to the Dhamma is, firstly, to create some understanding of the things we don't yet understand; to clarify them and secondly, to improve our grasp of the things we understand already. We must rely on Dhamma talks to improve our understanding, and listening is the crucial factor.

For today's talk please pay special attention. First of all, straighten up your posture to make it suitable for listening. Don't be too tense. Now, all that remains is to establish your minds, making your minds firm in *samādhi*. The mind is the important ingredient. The mind is that which perceives good and evil, right and wrong. If we are lacking in *sati* for even one minute, we are crazy for that minute; if we are lacking in *sati* for half an hour, we will be crazy for half an hour. However much our mind is lacking in *sati*, that's how crazy we are. That's why it's especially important to pay attention when listening to the Dhamma.

All creatures in this world are plagued by nothing other than suffering. There is only suffering disturbing the mind. The purpose of studying the Dhamma is to utterly destroy this

suffering. If suffering arises, it's because we don't really know it. No matter how much we try to control it through will power, or through wealth and possessions, it is impossible. If we don't thoroughly understand suffering and its cause, no matter how much we try to 'trade it off' with our deeds, thoughts or worldly riches, there's no way we can get rid of it. Only through clear knowledge and awareness, through knowing the truth of it, can suffering disappear. And this applies not only to homeless ones, the monks and novices, but also to householders. For anybody who knows the truth of things, suffering automatically ceases.

The states of good and evil are constant truths. Dhamma means that which is constant, which maintains itself. Turmoil maintains its turmoil, serenity maintains its serenity. Good and evil maintain their respective conditions – like hot water: it maintains its hotness, it doesn't change for anybody. Whether a young person or an old person drinks it, it's hot. It's hot for every nationality of people. So Dhamma is defined as that which maintains its condition. In our practice we must know heat and coolness, right and wrong, good and evil. Knowing evil, for example, we will not create the causes for evil, and evil will not arise.

Dhamma practitioners should know the source of the various dhammas. By quelling the cause of heat, heat can not arise. The same with evil: it arises from a cause. If we practise the Dhamma till we know the Dhamma, we will know the source of things, their causes. If we extinguish the cause of evil, evil is also extinguished, we don't have to go running after evil to put it out.

This is the practice of Dhamma. But many study the Dhamma, learn it, even practise it, but are not yet with the

Dhamma, and have not yet quenched the cause of evil and turmoil within their own hearts. As long as the cause of heat is still present, we can't possibly prevent heat from being there. In the same way, as long as the cause of confusion is within our minds, we can not possibly prevent confusion from being there, because it arises from this source. As long as the source is not quenched, confusion will arise again.

Whenever we create good actions, goodness arises in the mind. It arises from its cause. This is called *kusala*. If we understand causes in this way, we can create those causes and the results will naturally follow.

But people don't usually create the right causes. They want goodness so much, and yet they don't work to bring it about. All they get are bad results, embroiling the mind in suffering. All people want these days is money. They think that if they just get enough money everything will be all right; so they spend all their time looking for money, they don't look for goodness. This is like wanting meat, but not wanting salt to preserve it. You just leave the meat around the house to rot. Those who want money should know not only how to find it, but also how to look after it. If you want meat, you can't expect to buy it and then just leave it laying around in the house. It'll just go rotten. This kind of thinking is wrong. The result of wrong thinking is turmoil and confusion. The Buddha taught the Dhamma so that people would put it into practice, in order to know it and see it, and to be one with it, to make the mind Dhamma. When the mind is Dhamma, it will attain happiness and contentment. The restlessness of *saṃsāra* is in this world, and the cessation of suffering is also in this world.

The practice of Dhamma is therefore for leading the mind

to the transcendence of suffering. The body can't transcend suffering – having been born it must experience pain and sickness, ageing and death. Only the mind can transcend clinging and grasping. All the teachings of the Buddha, which we call *pariyatti*, are a skilful means to this end. For instance, the Buddha taught about *upādinnaka-saṅkhārā* and *anupādinnaka-saṅkhārā*; mind-attended conditions and non-mind-attended conditions. Non-mind-attended conditions are usually defined as such things as trees, mountains, rivers and so on – inanimate things. Mind-attended conditions are defined as animate things – animals, human beings and so on. Most students of Dhamma take this definition for granted, but if you consider the matter deeply, how the human mind gets so caught up in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, and mental states, you might see that really there isn't anything which is not mind-attended. As long as there is craving in the mind everything becomes mind-attended.

Studying the Dhamma without practising it, we will be unaware of its deeper meanings. For instance, we might think that the pillars of this meeting hall, the tables, benches and all inanimate things are 'not mind-attended'. We only look at one side of things. But just try getting a hammer and smashing some of these things and you'll see whether they're mind-attended or not!

It's our own mind, clinging to the tables, chairs and all of our possessions, which attends these things. Even when one little cup breaks, it hurts, because our mind is 'attending' that cup. Whatever we feel to be ours, trees, mountains or whatever, have a mind attending them. If not their own, then someone else's. These are all 'mind-attended conditions', not 'non-mind-attended'.

It's the same for our body. Normally we would say that the body is mind-attended. The 'mind' which attends the body is none other than *upādāna*; latching onto the body and clinging to it as being 'me' and 'mine'.

Just as a blind man can not conceive of colours – no matter where he looks, no colours can be seen – just so for the mind blocked by craving and delusion; all objects of consciousness become mind-attended. For the mind tainted with craving and obstructed by delusion, everything becomes mind-attended. Tables, chairs, animals and everything else. If we understand that there is an intrinsic self, the mind attaches to everything. All of nature becomes mind-attended, there is always clinging and attachment.

The Buddha talked about *saṅkhata* dhammas and *asaṅkhata* dhammas – conditioned and unconditioned things. Conditioned things are innumerable – material or immaterial, big or small. If our mind is under the influence of delusion, it will proliferate about these things, dividing them up into good and bad, short and long, coarse and refined. Why does the mind proliferate like this? Because it doesn't know determined reality (*sammuti-sacca*), it doesn't see the Dhamma. Not seeing the Dhamma, the mind is full of clinging. As long as the mind is held down by clinging, there can be no escape; there is confusion, birth, old age, sickness and death, even in the thinking processes. This kind of mind is called the *saṅkhata dhamma* (conditioned mind).

Asaṅkhata dhamma, the unconditioned, refers to the mind which has seen Dhamma, the truth, of the five khandhas as they are – as transient, imperfect and ownerless. All ideas of 'me' and 'them', 'mine' and 'theirs', belong to the determined

reality. Really, they are all conditions. When we know the truth of conditions, as neither ourselves nor belonging to us, we let go of conditions and the determined. When we let go of conditions we attain the Dhamma, we enter into and realize the Dhamma. When we attain the Dhamma we know clearly. What do we know? We know that there are only conditions and determinations, no being, no self, no 'us' nor 'them'. This is knowledge of the way things are.

Seeing in this way the mind transcends things. The body may grow old, get sick and die, but the mind transcends this state. When the mind transcends conditions, it knows the unconditioned. The mind becomes the unconditioned, the state which no longer contains conditioning factors. The mind is no longer conditioned by the concerns of the world, conditions no longer contaminate the mind. Pleasure and pain no longer affect it. Nothing can affect the mind or change it, the mind is assured, it has escaped all constructions. Seeing the true nature of conditions and the determined, the mind becomes free. This freed mind is called the 'unconditioned', that which is beyond the power of constructing influences.

If the mind doesn't really know conditions and determinations, it is moved by them. Encountering good, bad, pleasure, or pain, it proliferates about them. Why does it proliferate? Because there is still a cause. What is the cause? The cause is the understanding that the body is one's self, or belongs to the self; that feelings are self or belonging to self; that perception is self or belonging to self; that conceptual thought is self or belonging to self; that consciousness is self or belonging to self. The tendency to conceive things in terms of self is the source of happiness, suffering, birth, old age, sickness and death.

This is the worldly mind, spinning around and changing at the directives of worldly conditions. This is the conditioned mind.

If we receive some windfall, our mind is conditioned by it. That object influences our mind into a feeling of pleasure, but when it disappears, our mind is conditioned by it into suffering. The mind becomes a slave of conditions, a slave of desire. No matter what the world presents to it, the mind is moved accordingly. This mind has no refuge, it is not yet assured of itself, not yet free. It is still lacking a firm base. This mind doesn't yet know the truth of conditions. Such is the conditioned mind.

All of you listening to the Dhamma here, reflect for a while. Even a child can make you angry, isn't that so? Even a child can trick you. He could trick you into crying, laughing – he could trick you into all sorts of things. Even old people get duped by these things. The mind of a deluded person who doesn't know the truth of conditions is always being shaped into countless reactions, such as love, hate, pleasure and pain. They shape our minds like this because we are enslaved by them. We are slaves of *taṇhā*, craving. Craving gives all the orders, and we simply obey.

I hear people complaining, 'Oh, I'm so miserable. Night and day I have to go to the fields, I have no time at home. In the middle of the day I have to work in the hot sun with no shade. No matter how cold it is I can't stay at home, I have to go to work. I'm so oppressed.'

If I ask them, 'Why don't you just leave home and become a monk?' they say, 'I can't leave, I have responsibilities.' *Taṇhā* pulls them back. Sometimes when you're doing the ploughing you might be bursting to urinate so much you just have to do it while you're ploughing, like the buffaloes! This is how much craving enslaves them.

When I ask, ‘How are you going? Haven’t you got time to come to the monastery?’ they say, ‘Oh, I’m really in deep.’ I don’t know what it is they’re stuck in so deeply! These are just conditions, concoctions. The Buddha taught to see appearances as such, to see conditions as they are. This is seeing the Dhamma, seeing things as they really are. If you really see these two things, you must throw them out, let them go.

No matter what you may receive, it has no real substance. At first it may seem good, but it will eventually go bad. It will make you love and make you hate, make you laugh and cry, make you go whichever way it pulls you. Why is this? Because the mind is undeveloped. Conditions become conditioning factors of the mind, making it big and small, happy and sad.

In the time of our forefathers, when a person died they would invite the monks to go and recite the recollections on impermanence:

Aniccā vata saṅkhārā

Impermanent are all conditioned things

Uppāda-vaya-dhammino

Of the nature to arise and pass away

Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti

Having been born, they all must perish

Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho.

The cessation of conditions is true happiness.

All conditions are impermanent. The body and the mind are both impermanent. They are impermanent because they do not remain fixed and unchanging. All things that are born must necessarily change, they are transient – especially our body.

What is there that doesn't change within this body? Are hair, nails, teeth, skin still the same as they used to be? The condition of the body is constantly changing, so it is impermanent. Is the body stable? Is the mind stable? Think about it. How many times is there arising and ceasing even in one day? Both body and mind are constantly arising and ceasing, conditions are in a state of constant turmoil.

The reason you can't see these things in line with the truth is because you keep believing the untrue. It's like being guided by a blind man. How can you travel in safety? A blind man will only lead you into forests and thickets. How could he lead you to safety when he can't see? In the same way our mind is deluded by conditions, creating suffering in the search for happiness, creating difficulty in the search for ease. Such a mind only makes for difficulty and suffering. Really we want to get rid of suffering and difficulty, but instead we create those very things. All we can do is complain. We create bad causes, and the reason we do is because we don't know the truth of appearances and conditions.

Conditions are impermanent, both the mind-attended and the non-mind-attended ones.

In practice, the non-mind-attended conditions are non-existent. What is there that is not mind-attended? Even your own toilet, which you would think would be non-mind-attended; try letting someone smash it with a sledge hammer! He would probably have to contend with the 'authorities'. The mind attends everything, even faeces and urine. Except for the person who sees clearly the way things are, there are no such things as non-mind-attended conditions.

Appearances are determined into existence. Why must we

determine them? Because they don't intrinsically exist. For example, suppose somebody wanted to make a marker. He would take a piece of wood or a rock and place it on the ground, and then call it a marker. Actually it's not a marker. There isn't any marker, that's why you must determine it into existence. In the same way we 'determine' cities, people, cattle – everything! Why must we determine these things? Because originally they do not exist.

Concepts such as 'monk' and 'layperson' are also 'determinations'. We determine these things into existence because intrinsically they aren't here. It's like having an empty dish – you can put anything you like into it because it's empty. This is the nature of determined reality. Men and women are simply determined concepts, as are all the things around us.

If we know the truth of determinations clearly, we will know that there are no beings, because 'beings' are determined things. Understanding that these things are simply determinations, you can be at peace. But if you believe that the person, being, the 'mine', the 'theirs', and so on are intrinsic qualities, then you must laugh and cry over them. These are the proliferations of conditioning factors. If we take such things to be ours there will always be suffering. This is *micchādiṭṭhi*, wrong view. Names are not intrinsic realities, they are provisional truths. Only after we are born do we obtain names, isn't that so? Or did you have your name already when you were born? The name usually comes afterwards, right? Why must we determine these names? Because intrinsically they aren't there.

We should clearly understand these determinations. Good, evil, high, low, black and white are all determinations. We are all lost in determinations. This is why at the funeral ceremonies

the monks chant, *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā ...* Conditions are impermanent, they arise and pass away. That's the truth. What is there that, having arisen, doesn't cease? Good moods arise and then cease. Have you ever seen anybody cry for three or four years? At the most, you may see people crying a whole night, and then the tears dry up. Having arisen, they cease.

Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho: If we understand *saṅkhāras* (proliferations), and thereby subdue them, this is the greatest happiness. To be calmed of proliferations, calmed of 'being', calmed of individuality, of the burden of self, is true merit. Transcending these things one sees the unconditioned. This means that no matter what happens, the mind doesn't proliferate around it. There's nothing that can throw the mind off its natural balance. What else could you want? This is the end, the finish.

The Buddha taught the way things are. Our making offerings and listening to Dhamma talks and so on is in order to search for and realize this. If we realize this, we don't have to go and study vipassanā, it will happen of itself. Both samatha and vipassanā are determined into being, just like other determinations. The mind which knows, which is beyond such things, is the culmination of the practice.

Our practice, our inquiry, is in order to transcend suffering. When clinging is finished with, states of being are finished with. When states of being are finished with, there is no more birth or death. When things are going well, the mind does not rejoice, and when things are going badly, the mind does not grieve. The mind is not dragged all over the place by the tribulations of the world, and so the practice is finished. This is the basic principle for which the Buddha gave the teaching.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma for use in our lives. Even

when we die there is the teaching *Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho*. But we don't subdue these conditions, we only carry them around, as if the monks were telling us to do so. We carry them around and cry over them. This is getting lost in conditions. Heaven, hell and Nibbāna are all to be found at this point.

Practising the Dhamma is in order to transcend suffering in the mind. If we know the truth of things as I've explained here, we will automatically know the Four Noble Truths – suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

People are generally ignorant when it comes to determinations, they think they all exist of themselves. When the books tell us that trees, mountains and rivers are non-mind-attended conditions, this is simplifying things. This is just the superficial teaching, there's no reference to suffering, as if there was no suffering in the world. This is just the shell of Dhamma. If we were to explain things in terms of ultimate truth, we would see that it's people who go and tie all these things down with their attachments. How can you say that things have no power to shape events, that they are not mind-attended, when people will beat their children even over one tiny needle? One single plate or cup, a plank of wood – the mind attends all these things. Just watch what happens if someone goes and smashes one of them up and you'll find out. Everything is capable of influencing us in this way. Knowing these things fully is our practice, examining those things which are conditioned, unconditioned, mind-attended, and non-mind-attended.

This is part of the 'external teaching', as the Buddha once referred to them. At one time the Buddha was staying in a forest. Taking a handful of leaves, he asked the bhikkhus, 'Bhikkhus,

which is the greater number, the leaves I hold in my hand or the leaves scattered over the forest floor?’

The bhikkhus answered, ‘The leaves in the Blessed One’s hand are few, the leaves scattered around the forest floor are by far the greater number.’

‘In the same way, bhikkhus, the whole of the Buddha’s teaching is vast, but these are not the essence of things, they are not directly related to the way out of suffering. There are so many aspects to the teaching, but what the Tathāgata really wants you to do is to transcend suffering, to inquire into things and abandon clinging and attachment to form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness.* Stop clinging to these things and you will transcend suffering. These teachings are like the leaves in the Buddha’s hand. You don’t need so much, just a little is enough. As for the rest of the teaching, you needn’t worry yourselves over it. It is just like the vast earth, abundant with grasses, soil, mountains, forests. There’s no shortage of rocks and pebbles, but all those rocks are not as valuable as one single jewel. The Dhamma of the Buddha is like this, you don’t need a lot.

So whether you are talking about the Dhamma or listening to it, you should know the Dhamma. You needn’t wonder where the Dhamma is, it’s right here. No matter where you go to study the Dhamma, it is really in the mind. The mind is the one who clings, the mind is the one who speculates, the mind is the one who transcends, who lets go. All this external study is really about the mind. No matter if you study the Tipiṭaka, the *Abhidhamma* or whatever, don’t forget where it came from.

*The five khandhas.

When it comes to the practice, the only things you really need to make a start are honesty and integrity, you don't need to make a lot of trouble for yourself. None of you laypeople have studied the Tipiṭaka, but you are still capable of greed, anger and delusion, aren't you? Where did you learn about these things from? Did you have to read the *Tipiṭaka* or the *Abhidhamma* to have greed, hatred and delusion? Those things are already there in your mind, you don't have to study books to have them. But the teachings are for inquiring into and abandoning these things.

Let the knowing spread from within you and you will be practising rightly. If you want to see a train, just go to the central station, you don't have to go travelling all the way up the Northern Line, the Southern Line, the Eastern Line and the Western Line to see all the trains. If you want to see trains, every single one of them, you'd be better off waiting at Grand Central Station, that's where they all terminate.

Now some people tell me, 'I want to practise but I don't know how. I'm not up to studying the scriptures, I'm getting old now, my memory's not good.' Just look right here, at 'Central Station'. Greed arises here, anger arises here, delusion arises here. Just sit here and you can watch as all these things arise. Practise right here, because right here is where you're stuck. Right here is where the determined arises, where conventions arise, and right here is where the Dhamma will arise.

Therefore, the practice of Dhamma doesn't distinguish between class or race, all it asks is that we look into, see and understand. At first, we train the body and speech to be free of taints, which is *sīla*. Some people think that to have *sīla* you must memorize Pāli phrases and chant all day and all night,

but really all you have to do is make your body and speech blameless, and that's *sīla*. It's not so difficult to understand, just like cooking food; put in a little bit of this and a little bit of that, till it's just right and it's delicious! You don't have to add anything else to make it delicious, it's delicious already, if only you add the right ingredients. In the same way, taking care that our actions and speech are proper will give us *sīla*.

Dhamma practice can be done anywhere. In the past I travelled all over looking for a teacher because I didn't know how to practise. I was always afraid that I was practising wrongly. I'd be constantly going from one mountain to another, from one place to another, until I stopped and reflected on it. Now I understand. In the past I must have been quite stupid, I went all over the place looking for places to practise meditation – I didn't realize it was already there, in my heart. All the meditation you want is right there inside you. There is birth, old age, sickness and death right here within you. That's why the Buddha said *Paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*: the wise must know for themselves. I'd said the words before but I still didn't know their meaning. I travelled all over looking for it until I was ready to drop dead from exhaustion – only then, when I stopped, did I find what I was looking for, inside of me. So now I can tell you about it.

So in your practice of *sīla*, just practise as I've explained here. Don't doubt the practice. Even though some people may say you can't practise at home, that there are too many obstacles; if that's the case, then even eating and drinking are going to be obstacles. If these things are obstacles to practise, then don't eat! If you stand on a thorn, is that good? Isn't not standing on a thorn better? Dhamma practice brings benefit to all people, irrespective of class. However much you practise, that's how much you will know the truth.

Some people say they can't practise as a lay person, the environment is too crowded. If you live in a crowded place, then look into crowdedness, make it open and wide. The mind has been deluded by crowdedness, train it to know the truth of crowdedness.

The more you neglect the practice, the more you neglect going to the monastery and listening to the teaching, the more your mind will sink down into the bog, like a frog going into a hole. Someone comes along with a hook and the frog's done for, he doesn't have a chance. All he can do is stretch out his neck and offer it to them. So watch out that you don't work yourself into a tiny corner – someone may just come along with a hook and scoop you up. At home, being pestered by your children and grandchildren, you are even worse off than the frog! You don't know how to detach from these things. When old age, sickness and death come along, what will you do? This is the hook that's going to get you. Which way will you turn?

This is the predicament our minds are in. Engrossed in the children, the relatives, the possessions, and you don't know how to let them go. Without morality or understanding to free things up, there is no way out for you. When feeling, perception, volition and consciousness produce suffering you always get caught up in it. Why is there this suffering? If you don't investigate you won't know. If happiness arises, you simply get caught up in happiness, delighting in it. You don't ask yourself, 'Where does this happiness come from?'

So change your understanding. You can practise anywhere because the mind is with you everywhere. If you think good thoughts while sitting, you can be aware of them; if you think bad thoughts, you can be aware of them also. These things

are with you. While lying down, if you think good thoughts or bad thoughts, you can know them also, because the place to practise is in the mind. Some people think you have to go to the monastery every single day. That's not necessary, just look at your own mind. If you know where the practice is you'll be assured.

The Buddha's teaching tells us to watch ourselves, not to run after fads and superstitions. That's why he said,

Silena sugatiṃ yanti

Moral rectitude leads to well-being

Silena bhogasampadā

Moral rectitude leads to wealth

Silena nibbutiṃ yanti

Moral rectitude leads to Nibbāna

Tasmā sīlam visodhaye

Therefore, maintain your precepts purely

Sīla refers to our actions. Good actions bring good results, bad actions bring bad results. Don't expect the gods to do things for you, or the angels and guardian deities to protect you, or the auspicious days to help you. These things aren't true, don't believe in them. If you believe in them, you will suffer. You'll always be waiting for the right day, the right month, the right year, the angels and guardian deities ... you'll suffer that way. Look into your own actions and speech, into your own kamma. Doing good you inherit goodness, doing bad you inherit badness.

If you understand that good and bad, right and wrong all lie within you, then you won't have to go looking for those things

somewhere else. Just look for these things where they arise. If you lose something here, you must look for it here. Even if you don't find it at first, keep looking where you dropped it. But usually, we lose it here then go looking over there. When will you ever find it? Good and bad actions lie within you. One day you're bound to see it, just keep looking right there.

All beings fare according to their kamma. What is kamma? People are too gullible. If you do bad actions, they say Yama, the king of the underworld, will write it all down in a book. When you go there he takes out his accounts and looks you up. You're all afraid of the Yama in the after-life, but you don't know the Yama within your own minds. If you do bad actions, even if you sneak off and do it by yourself, this Yama will write it all down. There are probably many among you people sitting here who have secretly done bad things, not letting anyone else see. But you see it, don't you? This Yama sees it all. Can you see it for yourself? All of you, think for a while ... Yama has written it all down, hasn't he? There's no way you can escape it. Whether you do it alone or in a group, in a field or wherever.

Is there anybody here who has ever stolen something? There are probably a few of us who are ex-thieves. Even if you don't steal other people's things you still may steal your own. I myself have that tendency, that's why I reckon some of you may be the same. Maybe you have secretly done bad things in the past, not letting anyone else know about it. But even if you don't tell anyone else about it, you must know about it. This is the Yama who watches over you and writes it all down. Wherever you go he writes it all down in his account book. We know our own intention. When you do bad actions, badness is there, if you do good actions, goodness is there. There's nowhere you can

go to hide. Even if others don't see you, you must see yourself. Even if you go into a deep hole you'll still find yourself there. There's no way you can commit bad actions and get away with it. In the same way, why shouldn't you see your own purity? See it all – the peaceful, the agitated, the liberation or the bondage – see all these for yourselves.

In this Buddhist religion you must be aware of all your actions. We don't act like the Brāhmins, who go into your house and say, 'May you be well and strong, may you live long.' The Buddha doesn't talk like that. How will the disease go away with just talk? The Buddha's way of treating the sick was to say, 'Before you were sick what happened? What led up to your sickness?' Then you tell him how it came about. 'Oh, it's like that, is it? Take this medicine and try it out.' If it's not the right medicine he tries another one. If it's right for the illness, then that's the right one. This way is scientifically sound. As for the Brāhmins, they just tie a string around your wrist and say, 'Okay, be well, be strong, when I leave this place you just get right on up and eat a hearty meal and be well.' No matter how much you pay them, your illness won't go away, because their way has no scientific basis. But this is what people like to believe.

The Buddha didn't want us to put too much store in these things, he wanted us to practise with reason. Buddhism has been around for thousands of years now, and most people have continued to practise as their teachers have taught them, regardless of whether it's right or wrong. That's stupid. They simply follow the example of their forebears.

The Buddha didn't encourage this sort of thing. He wanted us to do things with reason. For example, at one time when he was teaching the monks, he asked Venerable Sāriputta,

‘Sāriputta, do you believe this teaching?’ Venerable Sāriputta replied, ‘I don’t yet believe it.’ The Buddha praised his answer: ‘Very good, Sāriputta. A wise person doesn’t believe too readily. He looks into things, into their causes and conditions, and sees their true nature before believing or disbelieving.’

But most teachers these days would say, ‘What?! You don’t believe me? Get out of here!’ Most people are afraid of their teachers. Whatever their teachers do, they just blindly follow. The Buddha taught to adhere to the truth. Listen to the teaching and then consider it intelligently, inquire into it. It’s the same with my Dhamma talks – go and consider it. Is what I say right? Really look into it, look within yourself.

So it is said to guard your mind. Whoever guards his mind will free himself from the shackles of Māra. It’s just this mind which goes and grabs onto things, knows things, sees things, experiences happiness and suffering – just this very mind. When we fully know the truth of determinations and conditions, we will naturally throw off suffering.

All things are just as they are. They don’t cause suffering in themselves, just like a thorn, a really sharp thorn. Does it make you suffer? No, it’s just a thorn, it doesn’t bother anybody. But if you go and stand on it, then you’ll suffer. Why is there this suffering? Because you stepped on the thorn. The thorn is just minding its own business, it doesn’t harm anybody. Only if you step on the thorn will you suffer over it. It’s because of ourselves that there’s pain. Form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness – all things in this world are simply there as they are. It’s us who pick fights with them. And if we hit them, they’re going to hit us back. If they’re left on their own, they won’t bother anybody; only the swaggering drunkard gives

them trouble. All conditions fare according to their nature. That's why the Buddha said, *Tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho*. If we subdue conditions, seeing determinations and conditions as they really are, as neither 'me' nor 'mine', 'us' nor 'them', when we see that these beliefs are simply *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the conditions are freed of the self-delusion.

If you think 'I'm good', 'I'm bad', 'I'm great', 'I'm the best', then you are thinking wrongly. If you see all these thoughts as merely determinations and conditions, then when others say 'good' or 'bad' you can leave it be with them. As long as you still see it as 'me' and 'you' it's like having three hornets nests – as soon as you say something the hornets come buzzing out to sting you. The three hornets nests are *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *vicikicchā*, and *sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.*

Once you look into the true nature of determinations and conditions, pride can not prevail. Other people's fathers are just like our father, their mothers are just like ours, their children are just like ours. We see the happiness and suffering of other beings as just like ours.

If we see in this way, we can come face to face with the future Buddha, it's not so difficult. Everyone is in the same boat. Then the world will be as smooth as a drum skin. If you want to wait around to meet Phra Sri Ariya Metteyya, the future Buddha, then just don't practise; you'll probably be around long enough to see him. But he's not crazy that he'd take people like that for disciples! Most people just doubt. If you no longer doubt about the self, then no matter what people may say about you, you aren't concerned, because your mind has let go, it is at

*Self-view, doubt, and attachment to rites and practices.

peace. Conditions become subdued. Grasping after the forms of practice, that teacher is bad, that place is no good, this is right, that's wrong No. There's none of these things. All this kind of thinking is all smoothed over. You come face to face with the future Buddha. Those who only hold up their hands and pray will never get there.

So this is the practice. If I talked anymore it would just be more of the same. Another talk would just be the same as this. I've brought you this far, now you think about it. I've brought you to the path, whoever's going to go, it's there for you. Those who aren't going can stay. The Buddha only sees you to the beginning of the path. *Akkhātaro Tathāgatā* – the *Tathāgata* only points the way. For my practice he only taught this much. The rest was up to me. Now I teach you, I can tell you just this much. I can bring you only to the beginning of the path, whoever wants to go back can go back, whoever wants to travel on can travel on. It's up to you, now.

* * *

*Given on a lunar observance night (Uposatha) at Wat
Pah Pong, 1976.*

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