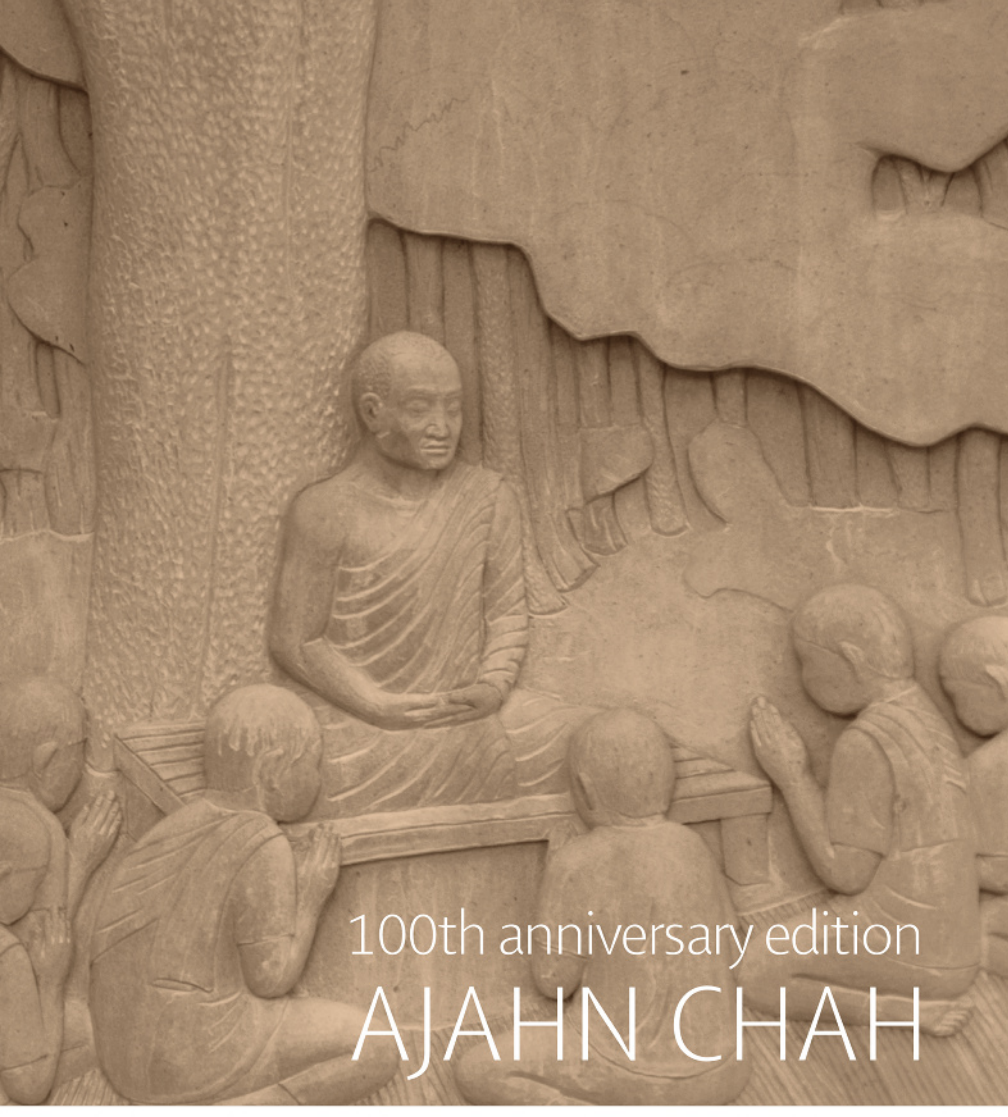

100th anniversary edition

AJAHN CHAH

Everything is Teaching Us

Everything is Teaching Us
by Ajahn Chah

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

Published by Amaravati Publications
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
St Margarets Lane
Great Gaddesden
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ
UK
www.amaravati.org
(+44) (0)1442 842455

If you are interested in translating this text into another language,
please contact us at publications@amaravati.org

ISBN 978-1-78432-106-2

Translated by Paul Breiter

Material included in this book has been previously published by Wat Pah Nanachat, Thailand, reprinted here with permission.

The Dhamma talk titled '*It Can Be Done*' is omitted from the electronic edition due to the copyright restriction by Shambhala Publications.

See page 169 for more details on your rights and restrictions under this licence.

Produced with the LaTeX typesetting system, set in Gentium, Gilda Display and Accanthis.

100th anniversary edition, 2018

The picture on the cover of this book, 'Everything is Teaching Us', depicts Ajahn Chah teaching some of the villagers of Bahn Kor, sitting under the great mango tree that was the centre of the new monastery, when he had just moved in to the forest, in March 1954. The scene depicts when Ajahn Chah first taught in Wat Nong Pah Pong and warned the villagers of some strange lights that would appear in the sky during the coming night. Behind is one of the monastic huts (kutis) built in the forest in those earliest days.

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.

Contents

Everything is Teaching Us

AJAHN CHAH

About Being Careful

The Buddha taught to see the body in the body. What does this mean? We are all familiar with the parts of the body such as hair, nails, teeth and skin. So how do we see the body in the body? If we recognize all these things as being impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, that's what is called 'seeing the body in the body'. Then it isn't necessary to go into detail and meditate on the separate parts. It's like having fruit in a basket. If we have already counted the pieces of fruit, then we know what's there, and when we need to, we can pick up the basket and take it away, and all the pieces come with it. We know the fruit is all there, so we don't have to count it again.

Having meditated on the thirty-two parts of the body, and recognized them as something not stable or permanent, we no longer need to weary ourselves separating them like this and meditating in such detail; just as we don't have to dump all the fruit out of the basket and count it again and again. But we do carry the basket along to our destination, walking mindfully and carefully, taking care not to stumble and fall.

When we see the body in the body, which means we see the Dhamma in the body, knowing our own and others' bodies as impermanent phenomena, we don't need detailed explanations.

Sitting here, we have mindfulness constantly in control, knowing things as they are. Meditation then becomes quite simple. It's the same if we meditate on *Buddho* – if we understand what *Buddho* really is, we don't need to repeat the word *'Buddho'*. It means having full knowledge and firm awareness. This is meditation.

Still, meditation is generally not well understood. We practise in a group, but we often don't know what it's all about. Some people think meditation is really hard to do. 'I come to the monastery, but I can't sit. I don't have much endurance. My legs hurt, my back aches, I'm in pain all over.' So they give up on it and don't come anymore, thinking they can't do it.

But in fact samādhi is not sitting. Samādhi isn't walking. It isn't lying down or standing. Sitting, walking, closing the eyes, opening the eyes, these are all mere actions. Having your eyes closed doesn't necessarily mean you're practising samādhi. It could just mean that you're drowsy and dull. If you're sitting with your eyes closed but you're falling asleep, your head bobbing all over and your mouth hanging open, that's not sitting in samādhi. It's sitting with your eyes closed. Samādhi and closed eyes are two separate matters. Real samādhi can be practised with eyes open or eyes closed. You can be sitting, walking, standing or lying down.

Samādhi means the mind is firmly focused, with all-encompassing mindfulness, restraint, and caution. You are constantly aware of right and wrong, constantly watching all conditions arising in the mind. When it shoots off to think of something, having a mood of aversion or longing, you are aware of that. Some people get discouraged: 'I just can't do it. As soon as I sit, my mind starts thinking of home. That's evil.' (Thai:

bahp) Hey! If just that much is evil, the Buddha never would have become Buddha. He spent five years struggling with his mind, thinking of his home and his family. It was only after six years that he awakened.

So, some people feel that these sudden arisings of thought are wrong or evil. You may have an impulse to kill someone. But you are aware of it in the next instant, you realize that killing is wrong, so you stop and refrain. Is there harm in this? What do you think? Or if you have a thought about stealing something and that is followed by a stronger recollection that to do so is wrong, and so you refrain from acting on it – is that bad kamma? It's not that every time you have an impulse you instantly accumulate bad kamma. Otherwise, how could there be any way to liberation? Impulses are merely impulses. Thoughts are merely thoughts. In the first instance, you haven't created anything yet. In the second instance, if you act on it with body, speech or mind, then you are creating something. *Avijjā* has taken control. If you have the impulse to steal and then you are aware of yourself and aware that this would be wrong, this is wisdom, and there is *vijjā* instead. The mental impulse is not consummated.

This is timely awareness, wisdom arising and informing our experience. If there is the first mind-moment of wanting to steal something and then we act on it, that is the dhamma of delusion; the actions of body, speech and mind that follow the impulse will bring negative results.

This is how it is. Merely having the thoughts is not negative kamma. If we don't have any thoughts, how will wisdom develop? Some people simply want to sit with a blank mind. That's wrong understanding.

I'm talking about samādhi that is accompanied by wisdom. In fact, the Buddha didn't wish for a lot of samādhi. He didn't want *jhāna* and *samāpatti.* He saw samādhi as one component factor of the path. Sīla, samādhi and paññā are components or ingredients, like ingredients used in cooking. We use spices in cooking to make food tasty. The point isn't the spices themselves, but the food we eat. Practising samādhi is the same. The Buddha's teachers, Uddaka and Ālāra, put heavy emphasis on practising the *jhāna*, and attaining various kinds of powers like clairvoyance. But if you get that far, it's hard to undo. Some places teach this deep tranquillity, to sit with delight in quietude. The meditators then get intoxicated by their samādhi. If they have sīla, they get intoxicated by their sīla. If they walk the path, they become intoxicated by the path, dazzled by the beauty and wonders they experience, and they don't reach the real destination.

The Buddha said that this is a subtle error. Still, it's correct for those on a coarse level. But actually, what the Buddha wanted was for us to have an appropriate measure of samādhi, without getting stuck there. After we train in and develop samādhi, then samādhi should develop wisdom.

Samādhi that is on the level of samatha – tranquillity – is like a rock covering grass. In samādhi that is sure and stable, even when the eyes are opened, wisdom is there. When wisdom has been born, it encompasses and knows ('rules') all things. So the Teacher did not want those refined levels of concentration and cessation, because they become a diversion and then one forgets the path.

So it is necessary not to be attached to sitting or any other particular posture. Samādhi doesn't reside in having the eyes

closed, the eyes open, or in sitting, standing, walking or lying down. Samādhi pervades all postures and activities. Older persons, who often can't sit very well, can contemplate especially well and practise samādhi easily; they too can develop a lot of wisdom.

How is it that they can develop wisdom? Everything is rousing them. When they open their eyes, they don't see things as clearly as they used to. Their teeth give them trouble and fall out. Their bodies ache most of the time. Just that is the place of study. So really, meditation is easy for old folks. Meditation is hard for youngsters. Their teeth are strong, so they can enjoy their food. They sleep soundly. Their faculties are intact and the world is fun and exciting to them, so they get deluded in a big way. When the old ones chew on something hard they're soon in pain. Right there the *devadūta* are talking to them; they're teaching them every day. When they open their eyes their sight is fuzzy. In the morning their backs ache. In the evening their legs hurt. That's it! This is really an excellent subject to study. Some of you older people will say you can't meditate. What do you want to meditate on? Who will you learn meditation from?

This is seeing the body in the body and sensation in sensation. Are you seeing these or are you running away? Saying you can't practise because you're too old is only due to wrong understanding. The question is, are things clear to you? Elderly persons have a lot of thinking, a lot of sensation, a lot of discomfort and pain. Everything appears! If they meditate, they can really testify to it. So I say that meditation is easy for old folks. They can do it best. Everyone says, 'When I'm old, I'll go to the monastery.' If you understand this, it's true all right. You have to see it within yourself. When you sit, it's true; when you stand

up, it's true; when you walk, it's true. Everything is a hassle, everything is presenting obstacles – and everything is teaching you. Isn't this so? Can you just get up and walk away so easily now? When you stand up, it's 'Oy!' Or haven't you noticed? And it's 'Oy!' when you walk. It's prodding you.

When you're young you can just stand up and walk, going on your way. But you don't really know anything. When you're old, every time you stand up it's 'Oy!' Isn't that what you say? 'Oy! Oy!' Every time you move, you learn something. So how can you say it's difficult to meditate? Where else is there to look? It's all correct. The *devadūta* are telling you something. It's most clear. *Saṅkhārā* are telling you that they are not stable or permanent, not you or yours. They are telling you this every moment.

But we think differently. We don't think that this is right. We entertain wrong view and our ideas are far from the truth. But actually, old people can see impermanence, suffering and lack of self, and give rise to dispassion and disenchantment – because the evidence is right there within them all the time. I think that's good.

Having the inner sensitivity that is always aware of right and wrong is called *Buddho*. It's not necessary to be continually repeating *'Buddho'*. You've counted the fruit in your basket. Every time you sit down, you don't have to go to the trouble of spilling out the fruit and counting it again. You can leave it in the basket. But someone with mistaken attachment will keep counting. He'll stop under a tree, spill it out and count, and put it back in the basket. Then he'll walk on to the next stopping place and do it again. But he's just counting the same fruit. This is craving itself. He's afraid that if he doesn't count, there will be some mistake. We are afraid that if we don't keep

saying *'Buddho'*, we'll be mistaken. How are we mistaken? Only the person who doesn't know how much fruit there is needs to count. Once you know, you can take it easy and just leave it in the basket. When you're sitting, you just sit. When you're lying down, you just lie down because your fruit is all there with you.

By practising virtue and creating merit, we say, '*Nibbāna paccayo hotu*', (may it be a condition for realizing Nibbāna). As a condition for realizing Nibbāna, making offerings is good. Keeping precepts is good. Practising meditation is good. Listening to Dhamma teachings is good. May they become conditions for realizing Nibbāna.

But what is Nibbāna all about anyway? Nibbāna means not grasping. Nibbāna means not giving meaning to things. Nibbāna means letting go. Making offerings and doing meritorious deeds, observing moral precepts, and meditating on loving-kindness: all these are for getting rid of defilements and craving, for not wishing for anything, not wishing to be, or become anything; for making the mind empty – empty of self-cherishing, empty of concepts of self and other.

Nibbāna paccayo hotu: make it become a cause for Nibbāna. Practising generosity is giving up, letting go. Listening to teachings is for the purpose of gaining knowledge to give up and let go, to uproot clinging to what is good and to what is bad. At first we meditate to become aware of the wrong and the bad. When we recognize that, we give it up and we practise what is good. Then, when some good is achieved, don't get attached to that good. Remain halfway in the good, or above the good – don't dwell under the good. If we are under the good, then the good pushes us around, and we become slaves to it. We become slaves, and it forces us to create all sorts of kamma and demerit.

It can lead us into anything, and the result will be the same kind of unhappiness and unfortunate circumstances we found ourselves in before.

Give up evil and develop merit – give up the negative and develop what is positive. Developing merit, remain above merit. Remain above merit and demerit, above good and evil. Keep on practising with a mind that is giving up, letting go and getting free. It's the same no matter what you are doing: if you do it with a mind of letting go it is a cause for realizing Nibbāna. What you do free of desire, free of defilement, free of craving, all merges with the path, meaning Noble Truth, meaning *saccadhamma.* The Four Noble Truths are having the wisdom that knows *taṇhā,* which is the source of *dukkha. Kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhavataṇhā*: these are the origination, the source. If you are wishing for anything or wanting to be anything, you are nourishing *dukkha*, bringing *dukkha* into existence, because this is what gives birth to *dukkha*. These are the causes. If we create the causes of *dukkha*, then *dukkha* will come about. The cause is *vibhavataṇhā*: this restless, anxious craving. One becomes a slave to desire and creates all sorts of kamma and wrongdoing because of it, and thus suffering is born. Simply speaking, *dukkha* is the child of desire. Desire is the parent of *dukkha*. When there are parents, *dukkha* can be born. When there are no parents, *dukkha* can not come about – there will be no offspring.

This is where meditation should be focused. We should see all the forms of *taṇhā*, which cause us to have desires. But talking about desire can be confusing. Some people get the idea that any kind of desire, such as desire for food and the material requisites for life, is *taṇhā*. But we can have this kind of desire

in an ordinary and natural way. When you're hungry and desire food, you can take a meal and be done with it. That's quite ordinary. This is desire that's within boundaries and doesn't have ill effects. This kind of desire isn't sensuality. If it's sensuality, then it becomes something more than desire. There will be craving for more things to consume, seeking out flavours, seeking enjoyment in ways that bring hardship and trouble, such as drinking liquor and beer.

Some tourists told me about a place where people eat live monkeys' brains. They put a monkey in the middle of the table and cut open its skull. Then they spoon out the brain to eat. That's eating like demons or hungry ghosts. It's not eating in a natural or ordinary way. Doing things like this, eating becomes *taṇhā*. They say that the blood of monkeys makes them strong. So they try to get hold of such animals and when they eat them they're drinking liquor and beer too. This isn't ordinary eating. It's the way of ghosts and demons mired in sensual craving. It's eating coals, eating fire, eating everything everywhere. This sort of desire is what is *taṇhā*. There is no moderation. Speaking, thinking, dressing, everything such people do goes to excess. If our eating, sleeping, and other necessary activities are done in moderation, there is no harm in them. So you should be aware of yourselves in regard to these things; then they won't become a source of suffering. If we know how to be moderate and thrifty in our needs, we can be comfortable.

Practising meditation and creating merit and virtue are not really such difficult things to do, provided we understand them well. What is wrongdoing? What is merit? Merit is what is good and beautiful, not harming ourselves or others with our thinking, speaking, and acting. If we do this, there is happiness.

Nothing negative is being created. Merit is like this. Skilfulness is like this.

It's the same with making offerings and giving charity. When we give, what is it that we are trying to give away? Giving is for the purpose of destroying self-cherishing, the belief in a self along with selfishness. Selfishness is powerful, extreme suffering. Selfish people always want to be better than others and to get more than others. A simple example is how, after they eat, they don't want to wash their dishes. They let someone else do it. If they eat in a group, they will leave it to the group. After they eat, they take off. This is selfishness, not being responsible, and it puts a burden on others. What it really amounts to is someone who doesn't care about himself, who doesn't help himself and who really doesn't love himself. In practising generosity, we are trying to cleanse our hearts of this attitude. This is called creating merit through giving, in order to have a mind of compassion and caring towards all living beings without exception.

If we can be free of just this one thing, selfishness, then we will be like the Lord Buddha. He wasn't out for himself, but sought the good of all. If we have the path and fruit arising in our hearts like this we can certainly progress. With this freedom from selfishness, all the activities of virtuous deeds, generosity, and meditation will lead to liberation. Whoever practises like this will become free and go beyond – beyond all convention and appearance.

The basic principles of practice are not beyond our understanding. For example, if we lack wisdom, when practising generosity, there won't be any merit. Without understanding, we think that generosity merely means giving things. 'When I

feel like giving, I'll give. If I feel like stealing something, I'll steal it. Then if I feel generous, I'll give something.' It's like having a barrel full of water. You scoop out a bucketful, and then you pour back in a bucketful. Scoop it out again, pour it in again, scoop it out and pour it in – like this. When will you empty the barrel? Can you see an end to it? Can you see such practice becoming a cause for realizing Nibbāna? Will the barrel become empty? One scoop out, one scoop in – can you see when it will be finished?

Going back and forth like this is *vaṭṭa,* the cycle itself. If we're talking about really letting go, giving up good as well as evil, there's only scooping out. Even if there's only a little bit, you scoop it out. You don't put in anything more, and you keep scooping out. Even if you only have a small scoop to use, you do what you can and in this way the time will come when the barrel is empty. If you're scooping out a bucket and pouring back a bucket, scooping out and then pouring back – well, think about it. When will you see an empty barrel? This Dhamma isn't something distant. It's right here in the barrel. You can do it at home. Try it. Can you empty a water barrel like that? Do it all day tomorrow and see what happens.

'Giving up all evil, practising what is good, purifying the mind.' We give up wrongdoing first, and then start to develop the good. What is the good and meritorious? Where is it? It's like fish in the water. If we scoop all the water out, we'll get the fish – that's a simple way to put it. If we scoop out and pour back in, the fish remain in the barrel. If we don't remove all forms of wrongdoing, we won't see merit and we won't see what is true and right. Scooping out and pouring back, scooping out and pouring back, we only remain as we are. Going back

and forth like this, we only waste our time and whatever we do is meaningless. Listening to teachings is meaningless. Making offerings is meaningless. All our efforts to practise are in vain. We don't understand the principles of the Buddha's way, so our actions don't bear the desired fruit.

When the Buddha taught about practice, he wasn't only talking about something for ordained people. He was talking about practising well, practising correctly. *Supaṭipanno* means those who practise well. *Ujupaṭipanno* means those who practise directly. *Ñāyapaṭipanno* means those who practise for the realization of path, fruition and Nibbāna. *Sāmīcipaṭipanno* are those who practise inclined towards truth. It could be anyone. These are the Saṅgha of true disciples (*sāvaka*) of the Lord Buddha. Laywomen living at home can be *sāvaka*. Laymen can be *sāvaka*. Bringing these qualities to fulfilment is what makes one a *sāvaka*. One can be a true disciple of the Buddha and realize enlightenment.

Most of us in the Buddhist fold don't have such complete understanding. Our knowledge doesn't go this far. We do our various activities thinking that we will get some kind of merit from them. We think that listening to teachings or making offerings is meritorious. That's what we're told. But someone who gives offerings to 'get' merit is making bad kamma.

You can't quite understand this. Someone who gives in order to get merit has instantly accumulated bad kamma. If you give in order to let go and free the mind, that brings you merit. If you do it to get something, that's bad kamma.

Listening to teachings to really understand the Buddha's way is difficult. The Dhamma becomes hard to understand when the practice that people do – keeping precepts, sitting in

meditation, giving – is for getting something in return. We want merit, we want something. Well, if something can be obtained, who gets it? We get it. When that is lost, whose thing is it that's lost? The person who doesn't have something doesn't lose anything. And when it's lost, who suffers over it?

Don't you think that living your life to get things, brings you suffering? Otherwise you can just go on as before trying to get everything. And yet, if we make the mind empty, then we gain everything. Higher realms, Nibbāna and all their accomplishments – we gain all of it. In making offerings, we don't have any attachment or aim; the mind is empty and relaxed. We can let go and put down. It's like carrying a log and complaining it's heavy. If someone tells you to put it down, you'll say, 'If I put it down, I won't have anything.' Well, now you do have something – you have heaviness. But you don't have lightness. So do you want lightness, or do you want to keep carrying? One person says to put it down, the other says he's afraid he won't have anything. They're talking past each other.

We want happiness, we want ease, we want tranquillity and peace. It means we want lightness. We carry the log, and then someone sees us doing this and tells us to drop it. We say we can't because what would we have then? But the other person says that if we drop it, we can get something better. The two have a hard time communicating.

If we make offerings and practise good deeds in order to get something, it doesn't work out. What we get is becoming and birth. It isn't a cause for realizing Nibbāna. Nibbāna is giving up and letting go. Trying to get, to hold on, to give meaning to things, aren't causes for realizing Nibbāna. The Buddha wanted us to look here, at this empty place of letting go. This is merit. This is skilfulness.

Once we have done practice – any sort of merit and virtue – we should feel that our part is done. We shouldn't carry it any further. We do it for the purpose of giving up defilements and craving. We don't do it for the purpose of creating defilements, craving and attachment. Then where will we go? We don't go anywhere. Our practice is correct and true.

Most of us Buddhists, though we follow the forms of practice and learning, have a hard time understanding this kind of talk. It's because Māra, meaning ignorance, meaning craving – the desire to get, to have, and to be – enshrouds the mind. We only find temporary happiness. For example, when we are filled with hatred towards someone it takes over our minds and gives us no peace. We think about the person all the time, thinking what we can do to strike out at him. The thinking never stops. Then maybe one day we get a chance to go to his house and curse him and tell him off. That gives us some release. Does that make an end of our defilements? We found a way to let off steam and we feel better for it. But we haven't rid ourselves of the affliction of anger, have we? There is some happiness in defilement and craving, but it's like this. We're still storing the defilement inside and when the conditions are right, it will flare up again even worse than before. Then we will want to find some temporary release again. Do the defilements ever get finished in this way?

It's similar when someone's spouse or children die, or when people suffer big financial loss. They drink to relieve their sorrow. They go to a movie to relieve their sorrow. Does it really relieve the sorrow? The sorrow actually grows; but for the time being they can forget about what happened so they call it a way to cure their misery. It's like if you have a cut on the bottom of

your foot that makes walking painful. Anything that contacts it hurts and so you limp along complaining of the discomfort. But if you see a tiger coming your way, you'll take off and start running without any thought of your cut. Fear of the tiger is much more powerful than the pain in your foot, so it's as if the pain is gone. The fear made it something small.

You might experience problems at work or at home that seem so big. Then you get drunk and in that drunken state of more powerful delusion, those problems no longer trouble you so much. You think it solved your problems and relieved your unhappiness. But when you sober up the old problems are back. So what happened to your solution? You keep suppressing the problems with drink and they keep on coming back. You might end up with cirrhosis of the liver, but you don't get rid of the problems; and then one day you are dead.

There is some comfort and happiness here; it's the happiness of fools. It's the way that fools stop their suffering. There's no wisdom here. These different confused conditions are mixed in the heart that has a feeling of well-being. If the mind is allowed to follow its moods and tendencies, it feels some happiness. But this happiness is always storing unhappiness within it. Each time it erupts our suffering and despair will be worse. It's like having a wound. If we treat it on the surface but inside it's still infected, it's not cured. It looks okay for a while, but when the infection spreads we have to start cutting. If the inner infection is never cured, we can be operating on the surface again and again with no end in sight. What can be seen from the outside may look fine for a while, but inside it's the same as before.

The way of the world is like this. Worldly matters are never

finished. So the laws of the world in the various societies are constantly resolving issues. New laws are always being established to deal with different situations and problems. Something is dealt with for a while, but there's always a need for further laws and solutions. There's never the internal resolution, only surface improvement. The infection still exists within, so there's always need for more cutting. People are only good on the surface, in their words and their appearance. Their words are good and their faces look kind, but their minds aren't so good.

When we get on a train and see some acquaintance there we say, 'Oh, how good to see you! I've been thinking about you a lot lately! I've been planning to visit you!' But it's just talk. We don't really mean it. We're being good on the surface, but we're not so good inside. We say the words, but then as soon as we've had a smoke and taken a cup of coffee with him, we split. Then if we run into him one day in the future, we'll say the same things again: 'Hey, good to see you! How have you been? I've been meaning to go visit you, but I just haven't had the time.' That's the way it is. People are superficially good, but they're usually not so good inside.

The great teacher taught Dhamma and Vinaya. It is complete and comprehensive. Nothing surpasses it and nothing in it needs to be changed or adjusted, because it is the ultimate. It's complete, so this is where we can stop. There's nothing to add or subtract, because it is something of the nature not to be increased or decreased. It is just right. It is true.

So we Buddhists come to hear Dhamma teachings and study to learn these truths. If we know them, then our minds will enter the Dhamma; the Dhamma will enter our minds.

Whenever a person's mind enters the Dhamma, that person has well-being, that person has a mind at peace. The mind then has a way to resolve difficulties, but has no way to degenerate. When pain and illness afflict the body, the mind has many ways to resolve the suffering. It can resolve it naturally, understanding this as natural and not falling into depression or fear over it. Gaining something, we don't get lost in delight. Losing it, we don't get excessively upset, but rather we understand that the nature of all things is that having appeared, they then decline and disappear. With such an attitude we can make our way in the world. We are *lokavidū,* knowing the world clearly. Then *samudaya,* the cause of suffering, is not created, and *taṇhā* is not born. There is *vijjā*, knowledge of things as they really are, and it illumines the world. It illumines praise and blame. It illumines gain and loss. It illumines rank and disrepute. It clearly illumines birth, ageing, illness, and death in the mind of the practitioner.

That is someone who has reached the Dhamma. Such people no longer struggle with life and are no longer constantly in search of solutions. They resolve what can be resolved, acting as is appropriate. That is how the Buddha taught: he taught those individuals who could be taught. Those who could not be taught he discarded and let go of. Even had he not discarded them, they were still discarding themselves – so he dropped them. You might get the idea from this that the Buddha must have been lacking in *mettā* to discard people. Hey! If you toss out a rotten mango are you lacking in *mettā*? You can't make any use of it, that's all. There was no way to get through to such people. The Buddha is praised as one with supreme wisdom. He didn't merely gather everyone and everything together in a confused

mess. He was possessed of the divine eye and could clearly see all things as they really are. He was the knower of the world.

As the knower of the world he saw danger in the round of saṃsāra. For us who are his followers it's the same. Knowing all things as they are will bring us well-being. Where exactly are those things that cause us to have happiness and suffering? Think about it well. They are only things that we create ourselves. Whenever we create the idea that something is us or ours, we suffer. Things can bring us harm or benefit, depending on our understanding. So the Buddha taught us to pay attention to ourselves, to our own actions and to the creations of our minds. Whenever we have extreme love or aversion to anyone or anything, whenever we are particularly anxious, that will lead us into great suffering. This is important, so take a good look at it. Investigate these feelings of strong love or aversion, and then take a step back. If you get too close, they'll bite. Do you hear this? If you grab at and caress these things, they bite and they kick. When you feed grass to your buffalo, you have to be careful. If you're careful when it kicks out, it won't kick you. You have to feed it and take care of it, but you should be smart enough to do that without getting bitten. Love for children, relatives, wealth and possessions will bite. Do you understand this? When you feed it, don't get too close. When you give it water, don't get too close. Pull on the rope when you need to. This is the way of Dhamma: recognizing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self, recognizing the danger and employing caution and restraint in a mindful way.

Ajahn Tongrat didn't teach a lot; he always told us, 'Be really careful! Be really careful!' That's how he taught. 'Be really careful! If you're not really careful, you'll catch it on

the chin!' This is really how it is. Even if he didn't say it, it's still how it is. If you're not really careful, you'll catch it on the chin. Please understand this. It's not someone else's concern. The problem isn't other people loving or hating us. Others far away somewhere don't make us create kamma and suffering. It's our possessions, our homes, our families where we have to pay attention. Or what do you think? These days, where do you experience suffering? Where are you involved in love, hate and fear? Control yourselves, take care of yourselves. Watch out you don't get bitten. If they don't bite, they might kick. Don't think that these things won't bite or kick. If you do get bitten, make sure it's only a little bit. Don't get kicked and bitten to pieces. Don't try to tell yourselves there's no danger. Possessions, wealth, fame, loved ones, all these can kick and bite if you're not mindful.

If you are mindful, you'll be at ease. Be cautious and restrained. When the mind starts grasping at things and making a big deal out of them, you have to stop it. It will argue with you, but you have to put your foot down. Stay in the middle as the mind comes and goes. Put sensual indulgence away on one side; put self-torment away on the other side. Put love to one side, hate to the other side. Put happiness to one side, suffering to the other side. Remain in the middle without letting the mind go in either direction.

Like these bodies of ours – earth, water, fire and wind – where is the person? There isn't any person. These few different things are put together and it's called a person. That's a falsehood. It's not real; it's only real in the way of convention. When the time comes the elements return to their old state. We've only come to stay with them for a while so we have to

let them return. The part that is earth, send back to be earth. The part that is water, send back to be water. The part that is fire, send back to be fire. The part that is wind, send back to be wind. Or will you try to go with them and keep something? We come to rely on them for a while; when it's time for them to go, let them go. When they come, let them come. All these phenomena, *sabhāva,* appear and then disappear. That's all. We understand that all these things are flowing, constantly appearing and disappearing.

Making offerings, listening to teachings, practising meditation, whatever we do should be done for the purpose of developing wisdom. Developing wisdom is for the purpose of liberation, freedom from all these conditions and phenomena. When we are free, then no matter what our situation is, we don't have to suffer. If we have children, we don't have to suffer. If we work, we don't have to suffer. If we have a house, we don't have to suffer. It's like a lotus in the water. 'I grow in the water, but I don't suffer because of the water. I can't be drowned or burned, because I live in the water.' When the water ebbs and flows it doesn't affect the lotus. The water and the lotus can exist together without conflict. They are together, yet separate. Whatever is in the water nourishes the lotus and helps it grow into something beautiful.

It's the same for us. Wealth, home, family, and all defilements of mind no longer defile us but rather help us develop *pāramī*, the spiritual perfections. In a grove of bamboo the old leaves pile up around the trees and when the rain falls they decompose and become fertilizer. Shoots grow and the trees develop, because of the fertilizer, and we have a source of food and income. But it didn't look like anything good at all. So be

careful – in the dry season, if you set fires in the forest, they'll burn up all the future fertilizer, and the fertilizer will turn into fire that burns the bamboo. Then you won't have any bamboo shoots to eat. So if you burn the forest, you burn the bamboo fertilizer. If you burn the fertilizer, you burn the trees and the grove dies.

Do you understand? You and your families can live in happiness and harmony with your homes and possessions, free of danger from floods or fire. If a family is flooded or burned, it is only because of the people in that family. It's just like the bamboo's fertilizer. The grove can be burned because of it, or the grove can grow beautifully because of it.

Things will grow beautifully and then not beautifully and then become beautiful again. Growing and degenerating, then growing again and degenerating again – this is the way of worldly phenomena. If we know growth and degeneration for what they are, we can find a conclusion to them. Things grow and reach their limit. Things degenerate and reach their limit. But we remain constant. It's like when there was a fire in Ubon city. People bemoaned the destruction and shed a lot of tears over it. But things were rebuilt after the fire and the new buildings are actually bigger and a lot better than what we had before, and people enjoy the city more now.

This is how it is with the cycles of loss and development. Everything has its limits. So the Buddha wanted us always to be contemplating. While we still live we should think about death. Don't consider it something far away. If you're poor, don't try to harm or exploit others. Face the situation and work hard to help yourself. If you're well off, don't become forgetful in your wealth and comfort. It's not very difficult for everything to be

lost. A rich person can become a pauper in a couple of days. A pauper can become a rich person. It's all owing to the fact that these conditions are impermanent and unstable. Thus, the Buddha said, '*pamādo maccuno padaṃ*': heedlessness is the way to death. The heedless are like the dead. Don't be heedless! All beings and all *saṅkhārā* are unstable and impermanent. Don't form any attachment to them! Happy or sad, progressing or falling apart, in the end it all comes to the same place. Please understand this.

Living in the world and having this perspective, we can be free of danger. Whatever we may gain or accomplish in the world because of our good kamma, is still of the world and subject to decay and loss; so don't get too carried away by it. It's like a beetle scratching at the earth. It can scratch up a pile that's a lot bigger than itself, but it's still only a pile of dirt. If it works hard it makes a deep hole in the ground, but it's still only a hole in dirt. If a buffalo drops a load of dung there, it will be bigger than the beetle's pile of earth, but it still isn't anything that reaches to the sky. It's all dirt. Worldly accomplishments are like this. No matter how hard the beetles work, they're just involved in dirt, making holes and piles.

People who have good worldly kamma have the intelligence to do well in the world. But no matter how well they do, they're still living in the world. All the things they do are worldly and have their limits, like the beetle scratching away at the earth. The hole may go deep, but it's in the earth. The pile may get high, but it's just a pile of dirt. Doing well, getting a lot, we're just doing well and getting a lot in the world.

Please understand this and try to develop detachment. If you don't gain much, be contented, understanding that it's

only the worldly. If you gain a lot, understand that it's only the worldly. Contemplate these truths and don't be heedless. See both sides of things, not getting stuck on one side. When something delights you, hold part of yourself back in reserve, because that delight won't last. When you are happy, don't go completely over to its side, because soon enough you'll be back on the other side with unhappiness.

Monastery of Confusion*

Staying or going is not important, but our thinking is. So all of you, please work together, cooperate and live in harmony. This should be the legacy you create here at Wat Pah Nanachat Bung Wai, the International Forest Monastery of Bung Wai District. Don't let it become Wat Pah Nanachat *Woon Wai*, the International Forest Monastery of Confusion and Trouble.** Whoever comes to stay here should be helping create this legacy.

The way I see it, the laypeople are providing robes material, almsfood, the dwelling place, and medicines in appropriate measure. It's true that they are simple country folk, but they support you out of their faith as best they can. Don't get carried away with your ideas of how you think they should be, such as, 'Oh, I try to teach these laypeople, but they do make me upset. Today is the observance day, and they came to take precepts. Then tomorrow they'll go casting their fishing nets. They'll drink their whisky. They do these things right out there where anyone can see. Then the next observance day, they'll come again. They'll take the precepts and listen to the Dhamma talk

*Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: '*Free From Doubt*'

**One of Ajahn Chah's favourite plays on words.

again, and then they'll go to put out their nets again, kill animals again, and drink again.'

You can get pretty upset thinking like this. You'll think that your activities with the laypeople don't bring any benefit at all. Today they take the precepts, and tomorrow they go cast fishing nets. A monk without much wisdom might get discouraged and feel he's failed, thinking his work bears no fruit. But it's not that his efforts have no result; it's those laypeople who get no result. Of course there is some good result from making efforts at virtue. So when there is such a situation and we start to suffer over it, what should we do?

We contemplate within ourselves to recognize that our good intentions have brought some benefit and do have meaning. It's just that the spiritual faculties of those people aren't developed. They aren't strong yet. That's how it is for now, so we patiently continue to advise them. If we just give up on such people, they are likely to become worse than they are now. If we keep at it, they may come to maturity one day and recognize their unskilful actions. Then they will feel some remorse and start to be ashamed of doing such things.

Right now, they have the faith to support us with material offerings, giving us our requisites for living. I've considered this; it's quite a big deal. It's no small thing. Donating our food, our dwellings, the medicines to treat our illnesses, is not a small thing. We are practising for the attainment of Nibbāna. If we don't have any food to eat, that will be pretty difficult. How would we sit in meditation? How would we be able to build this monastery?

We should recognize when people's spiritual faculties are not yet mature. So what should we do? We are like someone

selling medicine. You've probably seen or heard them driving around with their loudspeakers touting the different medicines they have for different maladies. People who have bad headaches or poor digestion might come to buy.

We can accept money from those who buy our medicine; we don't take money from someone who doesn't buy anything. We can feel glad about the people who do buy something. If others stay in their houses and don't come out to buy, we shouldn't get angry with them for that. We shouldn't criticize them.

If we teach people but they can't practise properly, we shouldn't be getting angry with them. Don't do that! Don't criticize them, but rather keep on instructing them and leading them along. Whenever their faculties have ripened sufficiently, then they will want to do it. Just like when we are selling medicine, we just keep on doing our business. When people have ailments that trouble them, they will buy. Those who don't see a need to buy medicine probably aren't suffering from any such conditions. So never mind.

Keeping at it with this attitude, these problems will be done with. There were such situations in the Buddha's time too.

We want to do it right, but somehow we can't get there yet; our own faculties are not sufficiently mature. Our *pāramī* are not complete. It's like fruit that's still growing on the tree. You can't force it to be sweet – it's still unripe, it's small and sour, simply because it hasn't finished growing. You can't force it to be bigger, to be sweet, to be ripe – you have to let it ripen according to its nature. As time passes and things change, people may come to spiritual maturity. As time passes the fruit will grow, ripen and sweeten of its own accord. With such an attitude you can be at ease. But if you are impatient and dissatisfied, you

keep asking, 'Why isn't this mango sweet yet? Why is it sour?' It's still sour because it's not ripe. That's the nature of fruit.

The people in the world are like that. It makes me think of the Buddha's teaching about four kinds of lotus. Some are still in the mud, some have grown out of the mud but are under the water, some are at the surface of the water, and some have risen above the water and blossomed. The Buddha was able to give his teachings to so many various beings because he understood their different levels of spiritual development. We should think about this and not feel oppressed by what happens here. Just consider yourselves to be like someone selling medicine. Your responsibility is to advertise it and make it available. If someone gets sick, they are likely to come and buy it. Likewise, if people's spiritual faculties mature sufficiently, one day they are likely to develop faith. It's not something we can force them to do. Seeing it in this way, we will be okay.

Living here in this monastery is certainly meaningful. It's not without benefit. All of you, please practise together harmoniously and amicably. When you experience obstacles and suffering, recollect the virtues of the Buddha. What was the knowledge the Buddha realized? What did the Buddha teach? What does the Dhamma point out? How does the Saṅgha practise? Constantly recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels brings a lot of benefit.

Whether you are Thais or people from other countries is not important. It's important to maintain harmony and work together. People come from all over to visit this monastery. When folks come to Wat Pah Pong, I urge them to come here, to see the monastery, to practise here. It's a legacy you are creating. It seems that the populace have faith and are gladdened

by it. So don't forget yourselves. You should be leading people rather than being led by them. Make your best efforts to practise well and establish yourselves firmly, and good results will come.

Are there any doubts about practice you need to resolve now?

Questions and Answers

Question: When the mind isn't thinking much, but is in a sort of dark and dull state, is there something we should do to brighten it? Or should we just sit with it?

Answer: Is this all the time or when you are sitting in meditation? What exactly is this darkness like? Is it a lack of wisdom?

Q: When I sit to meditate, I don't get drowsy, but my mind feels dark, sort of dense or opaque.

A: So you would like to make your mind wise, right? Change your posture, and do a lot of walking meditation. That's one thing to do. You can walk for three hours at a time, until you're really tired.

Q: I do walking meditation a couple of hours a day, and I usually have a lot of thinking when I do it. But what really concerns me is this dark state when I sit. Should I just try to be aware of it and let go, or is there some means I should use to counter it?

A: I think maybe your postures aren't balanced. When you walk, you have a lot of thinking. So you should do a lot of discursive

contemplation; then the mind can retreat from thinking. It won't stick there. But never mind. For now, increase the time you spend on walking meditation. Focus on that. Then if the mind is wandering, pull it out and do some contemplation, such as, for example, investigation of the body. Have you ever done that continuously rather than as an occasional reflection? When you experience this dark state, do you suffer over it?

Q: I feel frustrated because of my state of mind. I'm not developing samādhi or wisdom.

A: When you have this condition of mind the suffering comes about because of not knowing. There is doubt as to why the mind is like this. The important principle in meditation is that whatever occurs, don't be in doubt over it. Doubt only adds to the suffering. If the mind is bright and awake, don't doubt that. It's a condition of mind. If it's dark and dull, don't doubt about that. Just continue to practise diligently without getting caught up in reactions to that state. Take note and be aware of your state of mind, don't have doubts about it. It is just what it is. When you entertain doubts and start grasping at it and giving it meaning, then it is dark.

As you practise, these states are things you encounter as you progress along. You needn't have doubts about them. Notice them with awareness and keep letting go. How about sleepiness? Is your sitting more sleepy or awake?

(No reply)

Maybe it's hard to recall if you've been sleepy! If this happens, meditate with your eyes open. Don't close them. Instead, you can focus your gaze on one point, such as the light of a

candle. Don't close your eyes! This is one way to remove the hindrance of drowsiness.

When you're sitting you can close your eyes from time to time and if the mind is clear, without drowsiness, you can then continue to sit with your eyes closed. If it's dull and sleepy, open your eyes and focus on the one point. It's similar to *kasiṇa* meditation. Doing this, you can make the mind awake and tranquil. The sleepy mind isn't tranquil; it's obscured by hindrance and it's in darkness.

We should talk about sleep also. You can't simply go without sleep. That's the nature of the body. If you're meditating and you get unbearably, utterly sleepy, then let yourself sleep. This is one way to quell the hindrance when it's overwhelming you. Otherwise you practise along, keeping the eyes open if you have this tendency to get drowsy. Close your eyes after a while and check your state of mind. If it's clear, you can practise with eyes closed. Then after some time, take a rest. Some people are always fighting against sleep. They force themselves not to sleep, and the result is that when they sit they are always drifting off to sleep and falling over themselves, sitting in an unaware state.

Q: Can we focus on the tip of the nose?

A: That's fine. Whatever suits you, whatever you feel comfortable with and helps you fix your mind, focus on that.

It's like this: if we get attached to the ideals and take the guidelines that we are given in the instructions too literally, it can be difficult to understand. When doing a standard meditation such as mindfulness of breathing, first we should make

the determination that right now we are going to do this practice, and we are going to make mindfulness of breathing our foundation. We only focus on the breath at three points, as it passes through the nostrils, the chest and the abdomen. When the air enters, it first passes the nose, then through the chest, then to the end point of the abdomen. As it leaves the body, the beginning is the abdomen, the middle is the chest, and the end is the nose. We merely note it. This is a way to start controlling the mind, tying awareness to these points at the beginning, middle and end of the inhalations and exhalations.

Before we begin we should first sit and let the mind relax. It's similar to sewing robes on a treadle sewing machine. When we are learning to use the sewing machine, first we just sit in front of the machine to get familiar with it and feel comfortable. Here, we just sit and breathe. Not fixing awareness on anything, we merely take note that we are breathing. We take note of whether the breath is relaxed or not and how long or short it is. Having noticed this, then we begin focusing on the inhalation and exhalation at the three points.

We practise like this until we become skilled in it and it goes smoothly. The next stage is to focus awareness only on the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose or the upper lip. At this point we aren't concerned with whether the breath is long or short, but only focus on the sensation of entering and exiting.

Different phenomena may contact the senses, or thoughts may arise. This is called initial thought (*vitakka*). The mind brings up some idea, be it about the nature of compounded phenomena (*saṅkhārā*), about the world, or whatever. Once the mind has brought it up, the mind will want to get involved and

merge with it. If it's an object that is wholesome, let the mind take it up. If it is something unwholesome, stop it immediately. If it is something wholesome, let the mind contemplate it, and gladness, satisfaction and happiness will come about. The mind will be bright and clear as the breath goes in and out, and as the mind takes up these initial thoughts. Then initial thought becomes discursive thought (*vicāra*). The mind develops familiarity with the object, exerting itself and merging with it. At this point, there is no sleepiness.

After an appropriate period of this, take your attention back to the breath. As you continue on, there will be initial thought and discursive thought, initial thought and discursive thought. If you are contemplating skilfully on an object such as the nature of *saṅkhāra*, the mind will experience deeper tranquillity and rapture is born. There is the *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and that leads to happiness of mind. At this time there won't be any dullness or drowsiness. The mind won't be dark if we practise like this. It will be gladdened and enraptured.

This rapture will start to diminish and disappear after a while, so you can take up initial thought again. The mind will become firm and certain with it – undistracted. Then you go on to discursive thought again, the mind becoming one with it. When you are practising a meditation that suits your temperament and doing it well, then whenever you take up the object, rapture will come about: the hairs of the body stand on end and the mind is enraptured and satiated.

When it's like this there can't be any dullness or drowsiness. You won't have any doubts. Back and forth between initial and discursive thought, initial and discursive thought, over and over again and rapture comes. Then there is *sukha.*

This takes place in sitting practice. After sitting for a while, you can get up and do walking meditation. The mind can be the same in the walking. Not sleepy, it has *vitakka* and *vicāra*, *vitakka* and *vicāra*, then rapture. There won't be any of the *nīvaraṇa,* and the mind will be unstained. Whatever takes place, never mind; you don't need to doubt about any experiences you may have, be they of light, of bliss, or whatever. Don't entertain doubts about these conditions of mind. If the mind is dark, if the mind is illumined, don't fixate on these conditions, don't be attached to them. Let go, discard them. Keep walking, keep noting what is taking place without getting bound or infatuated. Don't suffer over these conditions of mind. Don't have doubts about them. They are just what they are, following the way of mental phenomena. Sometimes the mind will be joyful. Sometimes it will be sorrowful. There can be happiness or suffering; there can be obstruction. Rather than doubting, understand that conditions of mind are like *this*; whatever manifests is coming about due to causes ripening. At this moment this condition is manifesting; that's what you should recognize. Even if the mind is dark, you don't need to be upset over that. If it becomes bright, don't be excessively gladdened by that. Don't have doubts about these conditions of mind, or about your reactions to them.

Do your walking meditation until you are really tired, then sit. When you sit determine your mind to sit; don't just play around. If you get sleepy, open your eyes and focus on some object. Walk until the mind separates itself from thoughts and is still, then sit. If you are clear and awake, you can close your eyes. If you get sleepy again, open your eyes and look at an object.

Don't try to do this all day and all night. When you're in need of sleep, let yourself sleep. Just as with our food: once a

day we eat. The time comes and we give food to the body. The need for sleep is the same. When the time comes, give yourself some rest. When you've had an appropriate rest, get up. Don't let the mind languish in dullness, but get up and get to work – start practising. Do a lot of walking meditation. If you walk slowly and the mind becomes dull, then walk fast. Learn to find the right pace for yourself.

Q: Are *vitakka* and *vicāra* the same?

A: You're sitting and suddenly the thought of someone pops into your head – that's *vitakka*, the initial thought. Then you take that idea of the person and start thinking about them in detail. *Vitakka* picks up the idea, *vicāra* investigates it. For example, we pick up the idea of death and then we start considering it: 'I will die, others will die, every living being will die; when they die where will they go?' Then stop! Stop and bring it back again. When it gets running like that, stop it again; and then go back to mindfulness of the breath. Sometimes the discursive thought will wander off and not come back, so you have to stop it. Keep at it until the mind is bright and clear.

If you practise *vicāra* with an object that you are suited to, you may experience the hairs of your body standing on end, tears pouring from your eyes, a state of extreme delight, many different things occur as rapture comes.

Q: Can this happen with any kind of thinking, or is it only in a state of tranquillity that it happens?

A: It's when the mind is tranquil. It's not ordinary mental proliferation. You sit with a calm mind and then the initial

thought comes. For example, I think of my brother who just passed away. Or I might think of some other relatives. This is when the mind is tranquil – the tranquillity isn't something certain, but for the moment the mind is tranquil. After this initial thought comes, I go into discursive thought. If it's a line of thinking that's skilful and wholesome, it leads to ease of mind and happiness, and there is rapture with its attendant experiences. This rapture came from the initial and discursive thinking that took place in a state of calmness. We don't have to give it names such as first *jhāna,* second *jhāna* and so forth. We just call it tranquillity.

The next factor is bliss (*sukha*). Eventually we drop the initial and discursive thinking as tranquillity deepens. Why? The state of mind is becoming more refined and subtle. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* are relatively coarse, and they will vanish. There will remain just the rapture accompanied by bliss and one-pointedness of mind. When it reaches full measure there won't be anything, the mind is empty. That's absorption concentration.

We don't need to fixate or dwell on any of these experiences. They will naturally progress from one to the next. At first there is initial and discursive thought, rapture, bliss and one-pointedness. Then initial and discursive thinking are thrown off, leaving rapture, bliss, and one-pointedness. Rapture is thrown off,* then bliss, and finally only one-pointedness and equanimity remain. It means the mind becomes more and more tranquil, and its objects are steadily decreasing until there is nothing but one-pointedness and equanimity.

*The scriptures usually say, 'with the fading of rapture.'

When the mind is tranquil and focused this can happen. It is the power of mind, the state of the mind that has attained tranquillity. When it's like this there won't be any sleepiness. It can't enter the mind; it will disappear. The other hindrances of sensual desire, aversion, doubt and restlessness and agitation won't be present. Though they may still exist latent in the mind of the meditator, they won't occur at this time.

Q: Should we be closing our eyes so as to shut out the external environment or should we just deal with things as we see them? Is it important whether we open or close the eyes?

A: When we are new to training, it's important to avoid too much sensory input, so it's better to close the eyes. Not seeing objects that can distract and affect us, we build up the mind's strength. When the mind is strong, then we can open the eyes and whatever we see won't sway us. Open or closed won't matter.

When you rest you normally close your eyes. Sitting in meditation with eyes closed is the dwelling place for a practitioner. We find enjoyment and rest in it. This is an important basis for us. But when we are not sitting in meditation, will we be able to deal with things? We sit with eyes closed and we profit from that. When we open our eyes and leave the formal meditation, we can handle whatever we meet. Things won't get out of hand. We won't be at a loss. Basically we are just handling things. It's when we go back to our sitting that we really develop greater wisdom.

This is how we develop the practice. When it reaches fulfilment, it doesn't matter whether we open or close our eyes,

it will be the same. The mind won't change or deviate. At all times of the day – morning, noon or night – the state of mind will be the same. We dwell thus. There is nothing that can shake the mind. When happiness arises, we recognize, 'It's not certain,' and it passes. Unhappiness arises and we recognize, 'It's not certain,' and that's that. You get the idea that you want to disrobe. This is not certain. But you think it's certain. Before you wanted to be ordained, and you were so sure about that. Now you are sure you want to disrobe. It's all uncertain, but you don't see it because of your darkness of mind. Your mind is telling you lies, 'Being here, I'm only wasting time.' If you disrobe and go back to the world, won't you waste time there? You don't think about that. Disrobing to work in the fields and gardens, to grow beans or raise pigs and goats, won't that be a waste of time?

There was once a large pond full of fish. As time passed, the rainfall decreased and the pond became shallow. One day a bird showed up at the edge of the pond. He told the fish, 'I really feel sorry for you fish. Here you barely have enough water to keep your backs wet. Do you know that not very far from here there's a big lake, several metres deep where the fish swim happily?'

When the fish in that shallow pond heard this, they got excited. They said to the bird, 'It sounds good. But how could we get there?'

The bird said, 'No problem. I can carry you in my bill, one at a time.'

The fish discussed it among themselves. 'It's not so great here anymore. The water doesn't even cover our heads. We ought to go.' So they lined up to be taken by the bird.

The bird took one fish at a time. As soon as he flew out of

sight of the pond, he landed and ate the fish. Then he would return to the pond and tell them, 'Your friend is right this moment swimming happily in the lake, and he asks when you will be joining him!'

It sounded fantastic to the fish. They couldn't wait to go, so they started pushing to get to the head of the line. The bird finished off the fish like that. Then he went back to the pond to see if he could find any more. There was only one crab there. So the bird started his sales pitch about the lake.

The crab was sceptical. He asked the bird how he could get there. The bird told him he would carry him in his bill. But this crab had some wisdom. He told the bird, 'Let's do it like this – I'll sit on your back with my arms around your neck. If you try any tricks, I'll choke you with my claws.' The bird felt frustrated by this, but he gave it a try thinking he might still somehow get to eat the crab. So the crab got on his back and they took off.

The bird flew around looking for a good place to land. But as soon as he tried to descend, the crab started squeezing his throat with his claws. The bird couldn't even cry out. He just made a dry, croaking sound. So in the end he had to give up and return the crab to the pond.

I hope you can have the wisdom of the crab! If you are like those fish, you will listen to the voices that tell you how wonderful everything will be if you go back to the world. That's an obstacle ordained people meet with. Please be careful about this.

Q: Why is it that unpleasant states of mind are difficult to see clearly, while pleasant states are easy to see? When I experience happiness or pleasure I can see that it's something impermanent, but when I'm unhappy that's harder to see.

A: You are thinking in terms of your attraction and aversion and trying to figure it out, but actually delusion is the predominant root. You feel that unhappiness is hard to see while happiness is easy to see. That's just the way your afflictions work. Aversion is hard to let go of, right? It's a strong feeling. You say happiness is easy to let go of. It's not really easy; it's just that it's not so overpowering. Pleasure and happiness are things people like and feel comfortable with. They're not so easy to let go of. Aversion is painful, but people don't know how to let go of it. The truth is that they are equal. When you contemplate thoroughly and get to a certain point you will quickly recognize that they're equal. If you had a scale to weigh them their weight would be the same. But we incline towards the pleasurable.

Are you saying that you can let go of happiness easily, while unhappiness is difficult to let go of? You think that the things we like are easy to give up, but you're wondering why the things we dislike are hard to give up. But if they're not good, why are they hard to give up? It's not like that. Think anew. They are completely equal. It's just that we don't incline to them equally. When there is unhappiness we feel bothered, we want it to go away quickly and so we feel it's hard to get rid of. Happiness doesn't usually bother us, so we are friends with it and feel we can let go of it easily. It's not like that; it's not oppressing and squeezing our hearts, that's all. Unhappiness oppresses us. We think one has more value or weight than the other, but in truth they are equal. It's like heat and cold. We can be burned to death by fire. We can also be frozen stiff by cold and we die just the same. Neither is greater than the other. Happiness and suffering are like this, but in our thinking we give them different values.

Or consider praise and criticism. Do you feel that praise is easy to let go of and criticism is hard to let go of? They are really equal. But when we are praised we don't feel disturbed; we are pleased, but it's not a sharp feeling. Criticism is painful, so we feel it's hard to let go of. Being pleased is also hard to let go of, but we are partial to it so we don't have the same desire to get rid of it quickly. The delight we take in being praised and the sting we feel when criticized are equal. They are the same. But when our minds meet these things we have unequal reactions to them. We don't mind being close to some of them.

Please understand this. In our meditation we will meet with the arising of all sorts of mental afflictions. The correct outlook is to be ready to let go of all of it, whether pleasant or painful. Even though happiness is something we desire and suffering is something we don't desire, we recognize they are of equal value. These are things that we will experience.

Happiness is wished for by people in the world. Suffering is not wished for. Nibbāna is something beyond wishing or not wishing. Do you understand? There is no wishing involved in Nibbāna. Wanting to get happiness, wanting to be free of suffering, wanting to transcend happiness and suffering – there are none of these things. It is peace.

As I see it, realizing the truth doesn't happen by relying on others. You should understand that all doubts will be resolved by our own efforts, by continuous, energetic practice. We won't get free of doubt by asking others. We will only end doubt through our own unrelenting efforts.

Remember this! It's an important principle in practice. The actual doing is what will instruct you. You will come to know all right and wrong. 'The Brahmin shall reach the exhaustion of

doubt through unceasing practice.' It doesn't matter wherever we go – everything can be resolved through our own ceaseless efforts. But we can't stick with it. We can't bear the difficulties we meet; we find it hard to face up to our suffering and not to run away from it. If we do face it and bear with it, then we gain knowledge, and the practice starts instructing us automatically, teaching us about right and wrong and the way things really are. Our practice will show us the faults and ill results of wrong thinking. It really happens like this. But it's hard to find people who can see it through. Everyone wants instant awakening. Rushing here and there following your impulses, you only end up worse off for it. Be careful about this.

I've often taught that tranquillity is stillness; flowing is wisdom. We practise meditation to calm the mind and make it still; then it can flow. In the beginning we learn what still water is like and what flowing water is like. After practising for a while we will see how these two support each other. We have to make the mind calm, like still water. Then it flows. Both being still and flowing: this is not easy to contemplate.

We can understand that still water doesn't flow. We can understand that flowing water isn't still. But when we practise we take hold of both of these. The mind of a true practitioner is like still water that flows, or flowing water that's still. Whatever takes place in the mind of a Dhamma practitioner is like flowing water that is still. To say that it is only flowing is not correct. To say that it is only still is not correct. Ordinarily, still water is still and flowing water flows. But when we have experience of practice, our minds will be in this condition of flowing water that is still.

This is something we've never seen. When we see flowing water it is just flowing along. When we see still water, it doesn't flow. But within our minds, it will really be like this; like flowing water that is still. In our Dhamma practice we have samādhi, or tranquillity, and wisdom mixed together. We have morality, meditation and wisdom. Then wherever we sit the mind is still and it flows. Still, flowing water. With meditative stability and wisdom, tranquillity and insight, it's like this. The Dhamma is like this. If you have reached the Dhamma, then at all times you will have this experience. Being tranquil and having wisdom: flowing, yet still. Still, yet flowing.

Whenever this occurs in the mind of one who practises, it is something different and strange; it is different from the ordinary mind that one has known all along. Before, when it was flowing, it flowed. When it was still, it didn't flow, but was only still – the mind can be compared to water in this way. Now it has entered a condition that is like flowing water being still. Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, it is like water that flows, yet is still. If we make our minds like this, there is both tranquillity and wisdom.

What is the purpose of tranquillity? Why should we have wisdom? They are only for the purpose of freeing ourselves from suffering, nothing else. At present we are suffering, living with *dukkha,* not understanding *dukkha*, and therefore holding onto it. But if the mind is as I've been speaking about, there will be many kinds of knowledge. One will know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know the cessation of suffering and know the way of practice to reach the end of suffering. These are the Noble Truths. They will appear of themselves when there is still, flowing water.

When it is like this, then no matter what we are doing we will have no heedlessness; the habit of heedlessness will weaken and disappear. Whatever we experience, we won't fall into heedlessness because the mind will naturally hold fast to the practice. It will be afraid of losing the practice. As we keep on practising and learning from experience we will be drinking of the Dhamma more and more, and our faith will keep increasing.

For one who practises it has to be like this. We shouldn't be the kind of people who merely follow others: If our friends aren't doing the practice, we won't do it either because we would feel embarrassed. If they stop, we stop. If they do it, we do it. If the teacher tells us to do something, we do it. If he stops, we stop. This is not a very quick way to realization.

What's the point of our training here? It's so that when we are alone, we will be able to continue with the practice. So now, while living together here, when there are morning and evening gatherings to practise, we join in and practise with the others. We build up the habit so that the way of practice is internalized in our hearts, and then we will be able to live anywhere and still practise in the same way.

It's like having a certificate of guarantee. If the King is coming here, we prepare everything as perfectly as we can. He stays a short while and then goes on his way, but he gives his royal seal to acknowledge that things are in order here. Now many of us are practising together, and it's time to learn the practice well, to understand it and internalize it so that each of you can be a witness to yourself. It's like children coming of age.

Understanding Dukkha*

It sticks on the skin and goes into the flesh; from the flesh it gets into the bones. It's like an insect on a tree that eats through the bark, into the wood and then into the core, until finally the tree dies.

We've grown up like that. It gets buried deep inside. Our parents taught us grasping and attachment, giving meaning to things, believing firmly that we exist as a self-entity and that things belong to us. From our birth that's what we are taught. We hear this over and over again, and it penetrates our hearts and stays there as our habitual feeling. We're taught to get things, to accumulate and hold on to them, to see them as important and as ours. This is what our parents know, and this is what they teach us. So it gets into our minds, into our bones.

When we take an interest in meditation and hear the teaching of a spiritual guide, it's not easy to understand. It doesn't really grab us. We're taught not to see and to do things the old way, but when we hear the teaching, it doesn't penetrate the mind; we only hear it with our ears. People just don't know themselves.

Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: '*Giving up Good and Evil*'

So we sit and listen to teachings, but it's just sound entering the ears. It doesn't get inside and affect us. It's like we're boxing and we keep hitting the other guy but he doesn't go down. We remain stuck in our self-conceit. The wise have said that moving a mountain from one place to another is easier than moving the self-conceit of people.

We can use explosives to level a mountain and then move the earth. But the tight grasping of our self-conceit – oh man! The wise can teach us to our dying day, but they can't get rid of it. It remains hard and fast. Our wrong ideas and bad tendencies remain so solid and unbudging, and we're not even aware of it. So the wise have said that removing this self-conceit and turning wrong understanding into right understanding is about the hardest thing to do.

For us *puthujjana* to progress on to being *kalyāṇajana* is so hard. *Puthujjana* means people who are thickly obscured, who are in the dark, who are stuck deep in this darkness and obscuration. The *kalyāṇajana* has made things lighter. We teach people to lighten, but they don't want to do that because they don't understand their situation, their condition of obscuration. So they keep on wandering in their confused state.

If we come across a pile of buffalo dung, we won't think it's ours and we won't want to pick it up. We will just leave it where it is because we know what it is. That's what's good in the way of the impure. Evil is the food of bad people. If you teach them about doing good, they're not interested, but prefer to stay as they are because they don't see the harm in it. Without seeing the harm there's no way things can be rectified. If you recognize it, then you think, 'Oh! My whole pile of dung doesn't have the value of a small piece of gold!' And then you will want

gold instead; you won't want the dung anymore. If you don't recognize this, you remain the owner of a pile of dung. Even if you are offered a diamond or a ruby, you won't be interested.

That's the 'good' of the impure. Gold, jewels and diamonds are considered something good in the realm of humans. The foul and rotten is good for flies and other insects. If you put perfume on it, they would all flee. What those with wrong view consider good is like that. That's the 'good' for those with wrong view, for the defiled. It doesn't smell good, but if we tell them it stinks, they'll say it's fragrant. They can't reverse this view very easily. So it's not easy to teach them.

If you gather fresh flowers, the flies won't be interested in them. Even if you tried to pay them, they wouldn't come. But wherever there's a dead animal, wherever there's something rotten, that's where they'll go. You don't need to call them – they just go. Wrong view is like that. It delights in that kind of thing. The stinking and rotten is what smells good to it. It's bogged down and immersed in that. What's sweet smelling to a bee is not sweet to a fly. The fly doesn't see anything good or valuable in it and has no craving for it.

There is difficulty in practice, but in anything we undertake we have to pass through difficulty to reach ease. In Dhamma practice we begin with the truth of *dukkha,* the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of existence. But as soon as we experience this we lose heart. We don't want to look at it. *Dukkha* is really the truth, but we want to get around it somehow. It's similar to the way we don't like to look at old people, but prefer to look at those who are young.

If we don't want to look at *dukkha*, we will never understand *dukkha*, no matter how many births we go through. *Dukkha* is a

noble truth. If we allow ourselves to face it, we will start to seek a way out of it. If we are trying to go somewhere and the road is blocked, we will think about how to make a pathway. Working at it day after day we can get through. When we encounter problems we develop wisdom like this. Without seeing *dukkha* we don't really look into and resolve our problems; we just pass them by indifferently.

My way of training people involves some suffering, because suffering is the Buddha's path to enlightenment. He wanted us to see suffering and to see origination, cessation and the path. This is the way out for all the ariya, the awakened ones. If you don't go this way, there is no way out. The only way is knowing suffering, knowing the cause of suffering, knowing the cessation of suffering and knowing the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering. This is the way that the ariya, beginning with stream entry, were able to escape. It's necessary to know suffering.

If we know suffering, we will see it in everything we experience. Some people feel that they don't really suffer much. Practice in Buddhism is for the purpose of freeing ourselves from suffering. What should we do not to suffer anymore? When *dukkha* arises we should investigate to see the causes of its arising. Then once we know that, we can practise to remove those causes. Suffering, origination, cessation – in order to bring it to cessation we have to understand the path of practice. Then once we travel the path to fulfilment, *dukkha* will no longer arise. In Buddhism, this is the way out.

Opposing our habits creates some suffering. Generally, we are afraid of suffering. If something will make us suffer, we don't want to do it. We are interested in what appears to be good

and beautiful, but we feel that anything involving suffering is bad. It's not like that. Suffering is *saccadhamma,* truth. If there is suffering in the heart, it becomes the cause that makes you think about escaping. It leads you to contemplate. You won't sleep so soundly because you will be intent on investigating to find out what is really going on, trying to see causes and their results.

Happy people don't develop wisdom. They are asleep. It's like a dog that eats its fill. Afterwards it doesn't want to do anything. It can sleep all day. It won't bark if a burglar comes – it's too full, too tired. But if you only give it a little food, it will be alert and awake. If someone tries to come sneaking around, it will jump up and start barking. Have you seen that?

We humans are trapped and imprisoned in this world and have troubles in such abundance, and we are always full of doubts, confusion and worry. This is no game. It's really something difficult and troublesome. So there's something we need to get rid of. According to the way of spiritual cultivation, we should give up our bodies, give up ourselves. We have to resolve to give our lives. We can see the example of great renunciants, such as the Buddha. He was a noble of the warrior caste, but he was able to leave it all behind and not turn back. He was the heir to riches and power, but he could renounce them.

If we speak the subtle Dhamma, most people will be frightened by it. They won't dare to enter it. Even saying, 'Don't do evil,' most people can't follow this. That's how it is. So I've sought all kinds of means to get this across. One thing I often say is, no matter if we are delighted or upset, happy or suffering, shedding tears or singing songs, never mind – living in this world we are in a cage. We don't get beyond this condition of

being in a cage. Even if you are rich, you are living in a cage. If you are poor, you are living in a cage. If you sing and dance, you're singing and dancing in a cage. If you watch a movie, you're watching it in a cage.

What is this cage? It is the cage of birth, the cage of ageing, the cage of illness, the cage of death. In this way, we are imprisoned in the world. 'This is mine.' 'That belongs to me.' We don't know what we really are or what we're doing. Actually, all we are doing is accumulating suffering for ourselves. It's not something far away that causes our suffering, but we don't look at ourselves. However much happiness and comfort we may have, having been born we can not avoid ageing, we must fall ill and we must die. This is *dukkha* itself, here and now.

We can always be afflicted with pain or illness. It can happen at any time. It's like we've stolen something. They could come to arrest us at any time because we've done the deed. That's our situation. There is danger and trouble. We exist among harmful things; birth, ageing and illness reign over our lives. We can't go elsewhere and escape them. They can come catch us at any time – it's always a good opportunity for them. So we have to cede this to them and accept the situation. We have to plead guilty. If we do, the sentence won't be so heavy. If we don't, we suffer enormously. If we plead guilty, they'll go easy on us. We won't be incarcerated too long.

When the body is born it doesn't belong to anyone. It's like our meditation hall. After it's built spiders come to stay in it. Lizards come to stay in it. All sorts of insects and crawling things come to stay in it. Snakes may come to live in it. Anything may come to live in it. It's not only our hall; it's everything's hall.

These bodies are the same. They aren't ours. People come

to stay in and depend on them. Illness, pain and ageing come to reside in them and we are merely residing along with them. When these bodies reach the end of pain and illness, and finally break up and die, that is not us dying. So don't hold on to any of this. Instead, you have to contemplate the matter and then your grasping will gradually be exhausted. When you see correctly, wrong understanding will stop.

Birth has created this burden for us. But generally, we can't accept this. We think that not being born would be the greatest evil. Dying and not being born would be the worst thing of all. That's how we view things. We usually only think about how much we want in the future. And then we desire further: 'In the next life, may I be born among the gods, or may I be born as a wealthy person.'

We're asking for an even heavier burden! But we think that that will bring happiness. Such thinking is an entirely different way from what the Buddha teaches. That way is heavy. The Buddha said to let go of it and cast it away. But we think, 'I can't let go.' So we keep carrying it and it keeps getting heavier. Because we were born we have this heaviness. To really penetrate the Dhamma purely is thus very difficult. We need to rely on serious investigation.

Going a little further, do you know if craving has its limits? At what point will it be satisfied? Is there such a thing? If you consider it you will see that *taṇhā,* blind craving, can't be satisfied. It keeps on desiring more and more; even if this brings such suffering that we are nearly dead, *taṇhā* will keep on wanting things because it can't be satisfied.

This is something important. If we could think in a balanced and moderate way – well, let's talk about clothes. How many

sets do we need? And food – how much do we eat? At the most, for one meal we might eat two plates and that should be enough for us. If we know moderation, we will be happy and comfortable, but this is not very common.

The Buddha taught 'instructions for the rich'. What this teaching points to is being content with what we have. One who is content is a rich person. I think this kind of knowledge is really worth studying. The knowledge taught in the Buddha's way is something worth learning, worth reflecting on.

Then, the pure Dhamma of practice goes beyond that. It's a lot deeper. Some of you may not be able to understand it. Just take the Buddha's words that there is no more birth for him, that birth and becoming are finished. Hearing this makes you uncomfortable. To state it directly, the Buddha said that we should not be born, because that is suffering. Just this one thing, birth, the Buddha focused on, contemplating it and realizing its gravity. All *dukkha* comes along with being born. It happens simultaneously with birth. When we come into this world we get eyes, a mouth, a nose. It all comes along only because of birth. But if we hear about dying and not being born again, we feel it would be utter ruination. We don't want to go there. But the deepest teaching of the Buddha is like this.

Why are we suffering now? Because we were born. So we are taught to put an end to birth. This is not just talking about the body being born and the body dying. That much is easy to see. A child can understand it. The breath comes to an end, the body dies and then it just lies there. This is what we usually mean when we talk about death. But a breathing dead person? That's something we don't know about. A dead person who can walk and talk and smile is something we haven't

thought about. We only know about the corpse that's no longer breathing. That's what we call death.

It's the same with birth. When we say someone has been born, we mean that a woman went to the hospital and gave birth. But the moment of the mind taking birth – have you noticed that, such as when you get upset over something at home? Sometimes love is born. Sometimes aversion is born. Being pleased, being displeased – all sorts of states. This is all nothing but birth.

We suffer just because of this. When the eyes see something displeasing, *dukkha* is born. When the ears hear something that you really like, *dukkha* is also born. There is only suffering.

The Buddha summed it all up by saying that there is only a mass of suffering. Suffering is born and suffering ceases. That's all there is. We pounce on and grab at it again and again – pouncing on arising, pouncing on cessation, never really understanding it.

When *dukkha* arises we call that suffering. When it ceases we call that happiness. It's all old stuff, arising and ceasing. We are taught to watch body and mind arising and ceasing. There's nothing else outside of this. To sum it up, there is no happiness; there's only *dukkha*. We recognize suffering as suffering when it arises. Then when it ceases, we consider that to be happiness. We see it and designate it as such, but it isn't. It's just *dukkha* ceasing. *Dukkha* arises and ceases, arises and ceases, and we pounce on it and catch hold of it. Happiness appears and we are pleased. Unhappiness appears and we are distraught. It's really all the same, mere arising and ceasing. When there is arising there's something, and when there is ceasing, it's gone. This is where we doubt. Thus it's taught that *dukkha* arises and ceases,

and outside of that, there is nothing. When you come down to it, there is only suffering. But we don't see clearly.

We don't recognize clearly that there is only suffering, because when it stops we see happiness there. We seize on it and get stuck there. We don't really see the truth that everything is just arising and ceasing.

The Buddha summed things up by saying that there is only arising and ceasing, and nothing outside of that. This is difficult to listen to. But one who truly has a feel for the Dhamma doesn't need to take hold of anything and dwells in ease. That's the truth.

The truth is that in this world of ours there is nothing that does anything to anybody. There is nothing to be anxious about. There's nothing worth crying over, nothing to laugh at. Nothing is inherently tragic or delightful. But such experiencing is what's ordinary for people.

Our speech can be ordinary; we relate to others according to the ordinary way of seeing things. That's okay. But if we are thinking in the ordinary way, that leads to tears.

In truth, if we really know the Dhamma and see it continuously, nothing is anything at all; there is only arising and passing away. There's no real happiness or suffering. The heart is at peace then, when there is no happiness or suffering. When there is happiness and suffering, there is becoming and birth.

We usually create one kind of kamma, which is the attempt to stop suffering and produce happiness. That's what we want. But what we want is not real peace; it's happiness and suffering. The aim of the Buddha's teaching is to practise to create a type of kamma that leads beyond happiness and suffering and that will bring peace. But we aren't able to think like that. We can

only think that having happiness will bring us peace. If we have happiness, we think that's good enough.

Thus we humans wish for things in abundance. If we get a lot, that's good. Generally, that's how we think. Doing good is supposed to bring good results, and if we get that we're happy. We think that's all we need to do and we stop there. But where does good come to conclusion? It doesn't remain. We keep going back and forth, experiencing good and bad, trying day and night to seize on to what we feel is good.

The Buddha's teaching is that first we should give up evil and then practise what is good. Second, he said that we should give up evil and give up the good as well, not having attachment to it because that is also one kind of fuel. Fuel will eventually burst into flame. Good is fuel. Bad is fuel.

Speaking on this level kills people. People aren't able to follow it. So we have to turn back to the beginning and teach morality. Don't harm each other. Be responsible in your work and don't harm or exploit others. The Buddha taught this, but just this much isn't enough to stop.

Why do we find ourselves here, in this condition? It's because of birth. As the Buddha said in his first teaching, the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dhamma: 'Birth is ended. This is my final existence. There is no further birth for the *Tathāgata.*'

Not many people really come back to this point and contemplate to understand according to the principles of the Buddha's way. But if we have faith in the Buddha's way, it will repay us. If people genuinely rely on the Three Jewels, then practice is easy.

Wholehearted Training

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

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

the proper ways to earn a livelihood, to be moderate and thrifty in managing finances, to act without carelessness in all affairs.

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

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

Now, when we have our means of livelihood, our homes and possessions, our minds can be comfortable and upright, and we can have energy of spirit to help and assist each other. If

someone is able to share food and clothing and provide shelter to those in need, that is an act of loving-kindness. The way I see it, giving things in a spirit of loving-kindness is far better than selling them to make a profit. Those who have *mettā* aren't wishing for anything for themselves. They only wish for others to live in happiness.

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

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

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

I really believe that if you listen to the Dhamma, contemplating it and understanding it, you can make an end of your

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

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

The parents and the child see the situation differently. For the child it's too uncomfortable to take a bath in the winter. For the parents the child's smell is unbearable. The two views can't be reconciled. The Buddha didn't simply want to leave us as we are. He wanted us to be diligent and work hard in ways that are good and beneficial, and to be enthusiastic about the right path. Instead of being lazy, we have to make effort. His teaching is not something that will make us foolish or useless. He teaches us how to develop and apply wisdom to whatever we are doing – working, farming, raising a family, managing our

finances, being aware of all aspects of these things. If we live in the world, we have to pay attention and know the ways of the world. Otherwise we end up in dire straits.

We live in a place where the Buddha and his Dhamma are familiar to us. But then we get the idea that all we need to do is go hear teachings and then take it easy, living our lives as before. This is badly mistaken. How would the Buddha have attained any knowledge like that? There would never have been a Buddha.

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

family relations and our work can be smoother. Even if you aren't rich, you can still have ease of mind; you don't need to suffer over that.

If a family is not hard working, they fall on difficulty and when they see others with more than they have, they start to feel covetousness, jealousy and resentment, and it may lead to stealing. Then the village becomes an unhappy place. It's better to work at benefiting yourselves and your families, for this life and also for future lives. If your material needs are met through your efforts, then your mind is happy and at ease, and that is conducive to listening to Dhamma teachings, to learn about right and wrong, virtue and demerit, and to keep on changing your lives for the better. You can learn to recognize how doing wrong deeds only creates hardship, and you will give up such actions and keep improving. Your way of working will change and your mind will change too. From being someone ignorant you will become someone with knowledge. From being someone with bad habits you will become someone with a good heart. You can teach what you know to your children and grandchildren. This is creating benefit for the future by doing what is right in the present. But those without wisdom don't do anything of benefit in the present, and they only end up bringing hardship upon themselves. If they become poor, they just think about gambling. Then that finally leads them to becoming thieves.

We haven't died yet, so now is the time to talk about these things. If you don't hear the Dhamma when you are a human being, there won't be any other chance. Do you think animals can be taught the Dhamma? Animal life is a lot harder than our life. Being born as a toad or a frog, a pig or a dog, a cobra or a

viper, a squirrel or a rabbit. When people see them, they only think about killing or beating them, catching them or raising them for food.

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

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

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

These days things are pretty bad. It's hard for folks to get along. Even when a few people get together for a little meeting, it doesn't work out. They just look at each other's faces three times and they're ready to start killing each other. Why is it like this? It's only because people have no sīla or Dhamma in their lives.

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

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

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

Everything is business now. In the past no one would think of sending them away like that. The whole village would join

in showing hospitality. People would go and invite their neighbours and everyone would bring food and drink to share with the guests. Now that can't be done. After people eat their dinner, they lock the doors.

Wherever we look in the world now, this is the way things are going. It means that the non-spiritual is proliferating and taking over. We are generally not very happy and we don't trust anyone very much. Some people even kill their parents now. Husbands and wives may cut each other's throats. There is a lot of pain in society and it's simply because of this lack of sīla and Dhamma. So please try to understand this and don't discard the principles of virtue. With virtue and spirituality, human life can be happy. Without them we become like animals.

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

It's important for those of us who live in the forest to understand the forest. Living in the forest doesn't mean that our minds become wild, like those of forest animals. Our minds can become elevated and spiritually noble. This is what the Buddha said. Living in the city we live among distraction and disturbance. In the forest, there is quiet and tranquillity. We can contemplate things clearly and develop wisdom. So we take this quiet and tranquillity as our friend and helper. Because such an environment is conducive to Dhamma practice, we take it as our dwelling place; we take the mountains and caves for our refuge. Observing natural phenomena, wisdom comes about in such places. We learn from and understand trees and everything else, and it brings about a state of joy. The sounds

of nature we hear don't disturb us. We hear the birds calling, as they will, and it is actually a great enjoyment. We don't react with any aversion and we aren't thinking harmful thoughts. We aren't speaking harshly or acting aggressively towards anyone or anything. Hearing the sounds of the forest gives delight to the mind; even as we are hearing sounds, the mind is tranquil.

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

The sounds of humans are like this. They do not bring real comfort or happiness, unless words of Dhamma are being spoken. Generally, when people live together in society, they are speaking out of their own interests, upsetting each other, taking offence and accusing each other, and the only result is confusion and upset. Without Dhamma people naturally tend to be like that. The sounds of humans lead us into delusion. The sounds of music, and the words of songs agitate and confuse the mind. Take a look at this. Consider the pleasurable sensations that come from listening to music. People feel it's really something great, that it's so much fun. They can stand out in the hot sun when they're listening to a music and dance show. They can stand there until they're baked to a crisp, but still they feel they're having fun. But then if someone speaks harshly, criticizing or cursing them, they are unhappy again. This is how it is with the ordinary sounds of humans. But if the

sounds of humans become the sounds of Dhamma, if the mind is Dhamma and we are speaking Dhamma, that is something worth listening to, something to think about, something to study and contemplate.

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

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

'Where are you off to, Grandmother?'

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

I don't know if Grandma is taking the kids, or the kids are taking her. It doesn't matter how long or difficult a trip it might be. And they go again and again. They say they're taking the grandchildren to listen, but the truth is they just want to go themselves. To them, that's what a good time is. If you invite

them to come to the monastery to listen to Dhamma and learn about right and wrong, they'll say, 'You go ahead. I want to stay home and rest,' or, 'I've got a bad headache, my back hurts, my knees are sore, I really don't feel well.' But if it's a popular singer or an exciting play, they'll rush to round up the kids and nothing bothers them then.

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

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

Reflecting on our bodies, about the condition of the world and the lives of sentient beings, brings about weariness and dispassion. Thinking about the ordained life, that we have taken up this way of life to dwell and practise in the forest, and developing a constant attitude of disenchantment and

dispassion, our practice will progress. Thinking constantly about the factors of practice, rapture comes about. The hairs of the body stand on end. There is a feeling of joy in reflecting on the way we live, in comparing our lives previously with our lives now.

The Dhamma caused such feelings to fill my heart. I didn't know who to talk to about it. I was awake and whatever situations I met, I was awake and alert. It means I had some knowledge of Dhamma. My mind was illumined and I realized many things. I experienced bliss, a real satisfaction and delight in my way of life.

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

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

In the past I had one Dhamma companion who became more interested in study than in practice. He pursued the Pāli and *Abhidhamma* studies, going to live in Bangkok after a while, and last year he finally completed his studies and received a

certificate and titles commensurate with his learning. So now he has a brand name. Here, I don't have any brand name. I studied outside the models, contemplating things and practising, thinking and practising. So I didn't get the brand label like the others. In this monastery we had ordinary monks, people who didn't have a lot of learning but who were determined to practise.

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

My father was never ordained, but he told me how he went to pay respects to this meditation monk. It was the first time he saw a monk eating out of his bowl, putting everything together in the one alms bowl – rice, curry, sweet, fish, everything. He'd never seen such a thing, and it made him wonder what kind of monk this might be. He told me about this when I was a little child; that was a meditation monk.

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

* A highly respected monk of the forest tradition, considered to be an arahant and a teacher of Ajahn Mun.

back to my home village, I always thought about this forest. Then, when the time came to return to this area, I came to stay here.

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

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

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

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

One night, about nine o'clock, I heard someone walking out of the forest. One monk was extremely ill with fever and was

afraid he would die. He didn't want to die alone in the forest. I said, 'That's good. Let's try to find someone who isn't ill to watch the one who is; how can one sick person take care of another?' That was about it. We didn't have medicine.

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

Conditions were pretty rough. The laypeople didn't know much. They would bring us *plah rah* (fermented fish, a staple of the local diet), but it was made with raw fish, so we didn't eat it; I would stir it and take a good look at it to see what it was made from and just leave it sitting there.

Things were very hard then and we don't have those kinds of conditions these days – nobody knows about them. But there is some legacy remaining in the practice we have now, in the monks from those days who are still here. After the Rains Retreat, we could go *tudong* right here within the monastery. We went and sat deep in the quiet of the forest. From time to time we would gather, I would give some teaching and then everyone went back into the forest to continue meditating, walking and sitting. We practised like this in the dry season; we didn't need to go wandering in search of forests to practise in because we had the right conditions here. We maintained the *tudong* practices right here.

Now, after the rains everyone wants to take off somewhere. The result is usually that their practice gets interrupted. It's important to keep at it steadily and sincerely so that you come to know your defilements. This way of practice is something good and authentic. In the past it was much harder. It's like the saying that we practise to no longer be a person: the person should die in order to become a monk. We adhered to the Vinaya strictly and everyone had a real sense of shame about their actions. When doing chores, hauling water or sweeping the grounds, you didn't hear monks talking. During bowl washing, it was completely silent. Now, some days I have to send someone to tell them to stop talking and find out what all the commotion is about. I wonder if they're boxing out there; the noise is so loud I can't imagine what's going on. So, again and again I have to forbid them to chat.

I don't know what they need to talk about. When they've eaten their fill they become heedless because of the pleasure they feel. I keep on saying, 'When you come back from almsround, don't talk!' If someone asks why you don't want to talk, tell them, 'My hearing is bad.' Otherwise it becomes like a pack of barking dogs. Chattering brings about emotions, and you can even end up in a fistfight, especially at that time of day when everyone is hungry – the dogs are hungry and defilements are active.

This is what I've noticed. People don't enter the practice wholeheartedly. I've seen it changing over the years. Those who trained in the past got some results and can take care of themselves, but now hearing about the difficulties would scare people away. It's too hard to conceive of. If you make things easy, then everyone is interested, but what's the point? The reason

we were able to realize some benefit in the past is that everyone trained together wholeheartedly.

The monks who lived here then really practised endurance to the utmost. We saw things through together, from the beginning to the end. They have some understanding about the practice. After several years of practising together, I thought it would be appropriate to send them out to their home villages to establish monasteries.

Those of you who came later can't really imagine what it was like for us then. I don't know who to talk to about it. The practice was extremely strict. Patience and endurance were the most important things we lived by. No one complained about the conditions. If we only had plain rice to eat, no one complained. We ate in complete silence, never discussing whether or not the food was tasty. *Borapet* was what we had for our hot drink.

One of the monks went to central Thailand and drank coffee there. Someone offered him some to bring back here. So we had coffee once. But there was no sugar to put in it. No one complained about that. Where would we get sugar? So we could say we really drank coffee, without any sugar to sweeten the taste. We depended on others to support us and we wanted to be people who were easy to support, so of course we didn't make requests of anyone. Like that, we were continually doing without things and enduring whatever conditions we found ourselves in.

One year the lay supporters, Mr Puang and Mrs Daeng came to be ordained here. They were from the city and had never lived like this, doing without things, enduring hardship, eating as we do, practising under the guidance of an Ajahn and

performing the duties outlined in the rules of training. But they heard about their nephew living here so they decided to come and be ordained. As soon as they were ordained, a friend was bringing them coffee and sugar. They were living in the forest to practise meditation, but they had the habit of getting up early in the morning and making milk coffee to drink before doing anything else. So they stocked their kutis full of sugar and coffee. But here, we would have our morning chanting and meditation, then immediately the monks would prepare to go for alms, so they didn't have a chance to make coffee. After a while it started to sink in. Mr Puang would pace back and forth, thinking what to do. He didn't have anywhere to make his coffee and no one was coming to make it and offer it to him, so he ended up bringing it all to the monastery kitchen and leaving it there.

Coming to stay here, actually seeing the conditions in the monastery and the way of life of meditation monks, really got him down. He was an elderly man, an important relative to me. That same year he disrobed; it was appropriate for him, since his affairs were not yet settled.

After that we first got ice here. We saw some sugar once in a while too. Mrs Daeng had gone to Bangkok. When she talked about the way we lived, she would start crying. People who hadn't seen the life of meditation monks had no idea what it was like. Eating once a day, was that making progress or falling behind? I don't know what to call it.

On almsround, people would make little packages of chilli sauce to put in our bowls in addition to the rice. Whatever we got, we would bring it back, share it out and eat. Whether we had different items that people liked or whether the food was

tasty or not was never something we discussed; we just ate to be full and that was it. It was really simple. There were no plates or bowls – everything went into the almsbowl.

Nobody came here to visit. At night everyone went to their kutis to practise. Even dogs couldn't bear to stay here. The kutis were far apart and far from the meeting place. After everything was done at the end of the day, we separated and entered the forest to go to our kutis. That made the dogs afraid they wouldn't have any safe place to stay. So they would follow the monks into the forest, but when they went up into their kutis, the dogs would be left alone and felt afraid, so they would try to follow another monk, but that monk would also disappear into his kuti.

So even dogs couldn't live here – this was our life of practising meditation. I thought about this sometimes: even the dogs can't bear it, but still we live here! Pretty extreme. It made me a little melancholy too.

All kinds of obstacles ... we lived with fever, but we faced death and we all survived. Beyond facing death we had to live with difficult conditions such as poor food. But it was never a concern. When I look back to the conditions at that time compared to the conditions we have now, they are so far apart.

Before, we never had bowls or plates. Everything was put together in the almsbowl. Now that can't be done. So if one hundred monks are eating, we need five people to wash dishes afterwards. Sometimes they are still washing up when it's time for the Dhamma talk. This kind of thing makes for complications. I don't know what to do about it; I'll just leave it to you to use your own wisdom to consider.

It doesn't have an end. Those who like to complain will

always find something else to complain about, no matter how good the conditions become. So the result is that the monks have become extremely attached to flavours and aromas. Sometimes I overhear them talking about their ascetic wandering. 'Oh boy, the food is really great there! I went *tudong* to the south, by the coast, and I ate lots of shrimp! I ate big ocean fish!' This is what they talk about. When the mind is taken up with such concerns, it's easy to get attached and immersed in desire for food. Uncontrolled minds are roaming about and getting stuck in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations and ideas, and practising Dhamma becomes difficult. It becomes difficult for an Ajahn to teach people to follow the right way, when they are attached to tastes. It's like raising a dog. If you just feed it plain rice, it will grow strong and healthy. But give it some tasty curry on top of its rice for a couple of days and after that it won't look at the plain rice anymore.

Sights, sounds, smells and tastes are the undoing of Dhamma practice. They can cause a lot of harm. If each one of us does not contemplate the use of our four requisites – robes, almsfood, dwelling and medicines – the Buddha's way can not flourish. You can look and see that however much material progress and development there is in the world, the confusion and suffering of humans increase right along with it. And after it goes on for some time, it's almost impossible to find a solution. Thus I say that when you go to a monastery you see the monks, the temple and the kutis, but you don't see the *Buddhasāsana*. The *sāsana* is in decline like this. It's easy to observe.

The *sāsana*, meaning the genuine and direct teaching that instructs people to be honest and upright, to have loving-kindness towards each other, has been lost and turmoil and

distress are taking its place. Those who went through the years of practice with me in the past have still maintained their diligence, but after twenty-five years here, I see how the practice has become slack. Now people don't dare to push themselves and practise too much. They are afraid. They fear it will be the extreme of self-mortification. In the past we just went for it. Sometimes monks fasted for several days or a week. They wanted to see their minds, to train their minds: if it's stubborn, you whip it. Mind and body work together. When we are not yet skilled in practice, if the body is too fat and comfortable, the mind gets out of control. When a fire starts and the wind blows, it spreads the fire and burns the house down. It's like that. Before, when I talked about eating little, sleeping little and speaking little, the monks understood and took it to heart. But now such talk is likely to be disagreeable to the minds of practitioners. 'We can find our way. Why should we suffer and practise so austerely? It's the extreme of self-mortification; it's not the Buddha's path.' As soon as anyone talks like this, everyone agrees. They are hungry. So what can I say to them? I keep on trying to correct this attitude, but this is the way it seems to be now.

So all of you, please make your minds strong and firm. Today you have gathered from the different branch monasteries to pay your respects to me as your teacher, to gather as friends in Dhamma, so I am offering some teaching about the path of practice. The practice of respect is a supreme Dhamma. When there is true respect, there will be no disharmony, people will not fight and kill each other. Paying respects to a spiritual master, to our preceptors and teachers, causes us to flourish; the Buddha spoke of it as something auspicious.

People from the city may like to eat mushrooms. They ask, 'Where do the mushrooms come from?' Someone tells them, 'They grow in the earth.' So they pick up a basket and go walking out into the countryside, expecting the mushrooms will be lined up along the side of the road for them to pick. But they walk and walk, climbing hills and trekking through fields, without seeing any mushrooms. A village person has gone picking mushrooms before and knows where to look for them; he knows which part of which forest to go to. But the city folk only have the experience of seeing mushrooms on their plate. They hear they grow in the earth and get the idea that they would be easy to find, but it doesn't work out that way.

Training the mind in samādhi is like this. We get the idea it will be easy. But when we sit, our legs hurt, our back hurts, we feel tired, we get hot and itchy. Then we start to feel discouraged, thinking that samādhi is as far away from us as the sky from the earth. We don't know what to do and become overwhelmed by the difficulties. But if we can receive some training, it will get easier little by little.

So you who come here to practise samādhi and experience it as being difficult. I had my troubles with it, too. I trained with an Ajahn, and when we were sitting I'd open my eyes to look: 'Oh! Is Ajahn ready to stop yet?' I'd close my eyes again and try to bear a little longer. I felt like it was going to kill me and I kept opening my eyes, but he looked so comfortable sitting there. One hour, two hours, I would be in agony but the Ajahn didn't move. So after a while I got to fear the sittings. When it was time to practise samādhi, I'd feel afraid.

When we are new to it, training in samādhi is difficult. Anything is difficult when we don't know how to do it. This is

our obstacle. But training at it, this can change. That which is good can eventually overcome and surpass that which is not good. We tend to become faint-hearted as we struggle – this is a normal reaction and we all go through it. So it's important to train for some time. It's like making a path through the forest. At first it's rough going, with a lot of obstructions, but returning to it again and again, we clear the way. After some time we have removed the branches and stumps, and the ground becomes firm and smooth from being walked on repeatedly. Then we have a good path for walking through the forest.

This is what it's like when we train the mind. Keeping at it, the mind becomes illumined. For example, we country people grow up eating rice and fish. Then when we come to learn Dhamma we are told to refrain from harming: we should not kill living creatures. What can we do then? We feel we are really in a bind. Our market is in the fields. If the teachers are telling us not to kill, we won't eat. Just this much and we are at our wits' ends. How will we feed ourselves? There doesn't seem to be any way for us rural people. Our marketplace is the field and the forest. We have to catch animals and kill them in order to eat.

I've been trying to teach people ways to deal with this issue for many years. It's like this: farmers eat rice. For the most part, people who work in the fields grow and eat rice. So what about a tailor in town? Does he eat sewing machines? Does he eat cloth? Let's just consider this first. You are a farmer so you eat rice. If someone offers you another job, will you refuse, saying, 'I can't do it – I won't have rice to eat?'

Matches that you use in your home – are you able to make them? You can't; so how do you come to have matches? Is it only the case that those who can make matches have matches

to use? What about the bowls you eat from? Here in the villages, does anyone know how to make them? Do people have them in their houses? So where do you get them from?

There are plenty of things we don't know how to make, but still we can earn money to buy them. This is using our intelligence to find a way. In meditation we also need to do this. We find ways to avoid wrongdoing and practise what is right. Look at the Buddha and his disciples. Once they were ordinary beings, but they developed themselves to progress through the stages of stream entry on up to arahant. They did this through training. Gradually wisdom grows. A sense of shame towards wrongdoing comes about.

I once taught a sage. He was a lay patron who came to practise and keep precepts on the observance days, but he would still go fishing. I tried to teach him further but couldn't solve this problem. He said he didn't kill fish; they simply came to swallow his hook.

I kept at it, teaching him until he felt some contrition over this. He was ashamed of it, but he kept doing it. Then his rationalization changed. He would put the hook in the water and announce, 'Whichever fish has reached the end of its kamma to be alive, come and eat my hook. If your time has not yet come, do not eat my hook.' He had changed his excuse, but still the fish came to eat. Finally he started looking at them, their mouths caught on the hook, and he felt some pity. But he still couldn't resolve his mind. 'Well, I told them not to eat the hook if it wasn't time; what can I do if they still come?' And then he'd think, 'But they are dying because of me.' He went back and forth on this until finally he could stop.

But then there were the frogs. He couldn't bear to stop

catching frogs to eat. 'Don't do this!' I told him. 'Take a good look at them ... okay, if you can't stop killing them, I won't forbid you, but please just look at them before you do that.' So he picked up a frog and looked at it. He looked at its face, its eyes, its legs. 'Oh man, it looks like my child: it has arms and legs. Its eyes are open, it's looking at me.' He felt hurt. But still he killed them. He looked at each one like this and then killed it, feeling he was doing something bad. His wife was pushing him, saying they wouldn't have anything to eat if he didn't kill frogs.

Finally he couldn't bear it anymore. He would catch them but wouldn't break their legs like before; previously he would break their legs so they couldn't hop away. Still, he couldn't make himself let them go. 'Well, I'm just taking care of them, feeding them here. I'm only raising them; whatever someone else might do, I don't know about that.' But of course he knew. The others were still killing them for food. After a while he could admit this to himself. 'Well, I've cut my bad kamma by fifty percent anyhow. Someone else does the killing.'

This was starting to drive him crazy, but he couldn't yet let go. He still kept the frogs at home. He wouldn't break their legs anymore, but his wife would. 'It's my fault. Even if I don't do it, they do it because of me.' Finally he gave it up altogether. But then his wife was complaining. 'What are we going to do? What should we eat?'

He was really caught now. When he went to the monastery, the Ajahn lectured him on what he should do. When he returned home, his wife lectured him on what he should do. The Ajahn was telling him to stop doing that and his wife was egging him on to continue doing it. What to do? What a lot of suffering. Born into this world, we have to suffer like this.

In the end, his wife had to let go too. So they stopped killing frogs. He worked in his field, tending his buffaloes. Then he developed the habit of releasing fish and frogs. When he saw fish caught in nets he would set them free. Once he went to a friend's house and saw some frogs in a pot and he set them free. Then his friend's wife came to prepare dinner. She opened the lid of the pot and saw the frogs were gone. They figured out what had happened. 'It's that guy with the heart of merit.'

She did manage to catch one frog and made a chilli paste with it. They sat down to eat and as he went to dip his ball of rice in the chilli, she said, 'Hey, heart of merit! You shouldn't eat that! It's frog chilli paste.'

This was too much. What a lot of grief, just being alive and trying to feed oneself! Thinking about it, he couldn't see any way out. He was already an old man, so he decided to ordain.

He prepared the ordination gear, shaved his head and went inside the house. As soon as his wife saw his shaved head, she started crying. He pleaded with her: 'Since I was born, I haven't had the chance to be ordained. Please give me your blessing to do this. I want to be ordained, but I will disrobe and return home again.' So his wife relented.

He was ordained in the local monastery and after the ceremony he asked the preceptor what he should do. The preceptor told him, 'If you're really doing this seriously, you ought to just go to practise meditation. Follow a meditation master; don't stay here near the houses.' He understood and decided to do that. He slept one night in the temple and in the morning took his leave, asking where he could find Ajahn Tongrat.*

* Ajahn Tongrat was a well-known meditation teacher during Ajahn Chah's early years.

He shouldered his bowl and wandered off, a new monk who couldn't yet put on his robes very neatly. But he found his way to Ajahn Tongrat.

'Venerable Ajahn, I have no other aim in life. I want to offer my body and my life to you.'

Ajahn Tongrat replied, 'Very good! Lots of merit! You almost missed me. I was just about to go on my way. So do your prostrations and take a seat there.'

The new monk asked, 'Now that I'm ordained, what should I do?'

It happened that they were sitting by an old tree stump. Ajahn Tongrat pointed to it and said, 'Make yourself like this tree stump. Don't do anything else, just make yourself like this tree stump.' He taught him meditation in this way.

So Ajahn Tongrat went on his way and the monk stayed there to contemplate his words. 'Ajahn taught to make myself like a tree stump. What am I supposed to do?' He pondered this continuously, whether walking, sitting or lying down to sleep. He thought about the stump first being a seed, how it grew into a tree, got bigger and aged and was finally cut down, just leaving this stump. Now that it is a stump, it won't be growing anymore and nothing will bloom from it. He kept on pondering this in his mind, considering it over and over, until it became his meditation object. He expanded it to apply to all phenomena and was able to turn it inwards and apply it to himself. 'After a while, I am probably going to be like this stump, a useless thing.'

Realizing this gave him the determination not to disrobe. His mind was made up at this point; he had the conditions which came together to get him to this stage. When the mind is like this, there won't be anything that can stop it. All of us are in

the same boat. Please think about this and try to apply it to your practice. Being born as humans is full of difficulties. And it's not just that it's been difficult for us so far – in the future there will also be difficulty. Young people will grow up, grown-ups will age, aged ones will fall ill, ill people will die. It keeps on going like this, the cycle of ceaseless transformation that never comes to an end.

So the Buddha taught us to meditate. In meditation, first we have to practise samādhi, which means making the mind still and peaceful, like water in a basin. If we keep putting things in it and stirring it up, it will always be murky. If the mind is always allowed to be thinking and worrying over things, we can never see anything clearly. If we let the water in the basin settle and become still, we can see all sorts of things reflected in it. When the mind is settled and still, wisdom will be able to see things. The illuminating light of wisdom surpasses any other kind of light.

What was the Buddha's advice on how to practise? He taught to practise like the earth; practise like water; practise like fire; practise like wind.

Practise like the 'old things', the things we are already made of: the solid element of earth, the liquid element of water, the warming element of fire, the moving element of wind.

If someone digs the earth, the earth is not bothered. It can be shovelled, tilled, or watered. Rotten things can be buried in it. But the earth will remain indifferent. Water can be boiled or frozen or used to wash something dirty; it is not affected. Fire can burn beautiful and fragrant things or ugly and foul things – it doesn't matter to the fire. When wind blows, it blows on all sorts of things; fresh and rotten, beautiful and ugly, without concern.

The Buddha used this analogy. The aggregation that is us is merely a coming together of the elements of earth, water, fire and wind. If you try to find an actual person there, you can't. There are only these collections of elements. But for all our lives, we never thought to separate them like this to see what is really there; we have only thought, 'This is me, that is mine.' We have always seen everything in terms of a self, never seeing that there is merely earth, water, fire and wind. But the Buddha teaches in this way. He talks about the four elements and urges us to see that this is what we are. There are earth, water, fire and wind; there is no person here. Contemplate these elements to see that there is no being or individual, but only earth, water, fire and wind.

It's deep, isn't it? It's hidden deep – people will look but they can't see this. We are used to contemplating things in terms of self and other all the time. So our meditation is still not very deep. It doesn't reach the truth and we don't get beyond the way these things appear to be. We remain stuck in the conventions of the world and being stuck in the world means remaining in the cycle of transformation: getting things and losing them, dying and being born, being born and dying, suffering in the realm of confusion. Whatever we wish for and aspire to doesn't really work out the way we want, because we are seeing things wrongly.

Our grasping attachments are like this. We are still far, very far from the real path of Dhamma. So please get to work right now. Don't say, 'After I'm older, I will start going to the monastery.' What is ageing? Young people have aged as well as old people. From birth, they have been ageing. We like to say, 'When I'm older, when I'm older.' Hey! Young folks are

older, older than they were. This is what 'ageing' means. All of you, please take a look at this. We all have this burden; this is a task for all of us to work on. Think about your parents or grandparents. They were born, then they aged and in the end they passed away. Now we don't know where they've gone.

So the Buddha wanted us to seek the Dhamma. This kind of knowledge is what's most important. Any form of knowledge or study that does not agree with the Buddhist way is learning that involves *dukkha.* Our practice of Dhamma should be getting us beyond suffering; if we can't fully transcend suffering, then we should at least be able to transcend it a little, now, in the present. For example, when someone speaks harshly to us, if we don't get angry with them, we have transcended suffering. If we get angry, we have not transcended *dukkha*.

When someone speaks harshly to us, if we reflect on Dhamma, we will see it is just heaps of earth. Okay, he is criticizing me – he's just criticizing a heap of earth. One heap of earth is criticizing another heap of earth. Water is criticizing water. Wind is criticizing wind. Fire is criticizing fire.

But if we really see things in this way, others will probably call us mad. 'He doesn't care about anything. He has no feelings.' When someone dies we won't get upset and cry, and they will call us crazy again. Where can we stay?

It really has to come down to this. We have to practise to realize for ourselves. Getting beyond suffering does not depend on others' opinions of us, but on our own individual state of mind. Never mind what they will say – we experience the truth for ourselves. Then we can dwell at ease.

But generally, we don't take it this far. Youngsters will go to the monastery once or twice, then when they go home their

friends make fun of them: 'Hey, Dhamma Dhammo!' They feel embarrassed and don't feel like coming back here. Some of them have told me that they came here to listen to teachings and gained some understanding, so they stopped drinking and hanging out with the crowd. But their friends belittled them: 'You go to the monastery and now you don't want to go out drinking with us anymore. What's wrong with you?' So they get embarrassed and eventually end up doing the same old things again. It's hard for people to stick to it.

So rather than aspiring too high, let's practise patience and endurance. Exercising patience and restraint in our families is already pretty good. Don't quarrel and fight – if you can get along, you've already transcended suffering for the moment and that's good. When things happen, recollect Dhamma. Think of what your spiritual guides have taught you. They teach you to let go, to give up, to refrain, to put things down; they teach you to strive and fight in this way to solve your problems. The Dhamma that you come to listen to is just for solving your problems.

What kind of problems are we talking about? How about your families? Do you have any problems with your children, your spouses, your friends, your work and other matters? All these things give you a lot of headaches, don't they? These are the problems we are talking about; the teachings are telling you that you can resolve the problems of daily life with Dhamma.

We have been born as human beings. It should be possible to live with happy minds. We do our work according to our responsibilities. If things get difficult we practise endurance. Earning a livelihood in the right way is one sort of Dhamma practice, the practice of ethical living. Living happily and harmoniously like this is already pretty good.

But we are usually taking a loss. Don't take a loss! If you come here on the observance day to take precepts and then go home and fight, that's a loss. Do you hear what I am saying, folks? It's just a loss to do this. It means you don't see the Dhamma even a tiny little bit – there's no profit at all. Please understand this. Now you have listened to the Dhamma for an appropriate length of time today.

Knowing the World*

All things just as they are display the truth. But we have biases and preferences about how we want them to be. *Lokavidū* means knowing the world clearly. The world is these phenomena (*sabhāva*) abiding as they are. To sum it up simply, the world is *arom*.** That's an easy way to put it. The world is *arom*. If we say 'world', that's pretty vast. '*Arom* are the world' is a lot simpler. The world is *arom*. Being deluded by the world is being deluded by *arom*; being deluded by *arom* is being deluded by the world. *Lokavidū*, knowing the world clearly: however the world is, that's what we should know. It exists according to its conditions. So we should have full, present awareness of it.

Similarly, we should know *saṅkhāra* for what they are; develop wisdom that knows *saṅkhāra*. Whatever the truth of *saṅkhāra* is, however they really are, that's the truth we should know. That's called wisdom that accepts and knows without obstacles.

We need to develop a mind that has tranquillity together

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

**Arom: (*Thai*) All states (or objects) of mind, whether happy or unhappy, internal or external.

with wisdom in control of things. We talk about sīla, samādhi, paññā, and about samatha meditation and vipassanā meditation. But they are really all the same matter. They are the same, but we divide them into different categories and get confused. I've often made a simple analogy about it – there are things to compare it to – which can make it easier to contemplate and understand.

A little mango later becomes a large, ripe mango. Is the little mango the same piece of fruit as the large one? From the time it's just a bud flowering on the tree, it's the same one mango. As it grows into a small mango and then gets bigger and bigger, almost ripe, then finally ripe, it's only undergoing change.

The aspects of practice we talk about are the same. Sīla simply means giving up wrongdoing. A person without sīla is in a hot condition. Giving up wrongdoing and evil ways brings coolness, preventing harm or ill effects. The blessing that comes from this freedom from harmful effects is a tranquil mind – that is samādhi. When the mind is in samādhi, clean and pure, it will see many things. It's like water that is still and undisturbed. You can see your face in it. You can see things further away reflected as well. You can see the roof of the building over there. If a bird alights on the roof you can see it.

These factors are really all one, just like the one mango. The tiny fruit is that same one mango. The growing fruit is the same mango. The ripe fruit is the same mango. From green to yellow, it's the same mango; it's undergoing change, and that's why we see difference.

Having this kind of simple understanding can put us at ease. Doubts will diminish. If instead we are relying on texts and seeking detailed explanations, we are likely to end up in

confusion. So we have to watch our own minds. 'Bhikkhus! You should be watching over your minds. Those who watch over their minds shall escape the snares of Māra.' Both Māra and his snares. And it depends on our own investigation.

My way of practice was a little strange. After I ordained and started to practise, I had a lot of doubts and questions. But I didn't like to ask anyone about them very much. Even when I met Ajahn Mun, I didn't ask him many questions. I wanted to ask, but I didn't. I sat and listened to his teaching. I had questions, but I didn't ask. Asking someone else is like borrowing someone else's knife to cut something. We never come to have our own knife. That's the way I felt. So I didn't ask many questions of others. If I stayed with a teacher for a year or two, I'd listen to his discourses and try to work things out for myself. I would seek my own answers. I was different from other disciples, but I was able to develop wisdom; this way made me resourceful and clever. I didn't become heedless, rather I contemplated things until I could see for myself, increasing my understanding and removing my doubts.

My advice is to not let yourself get wrapped up in doubts and questions. Let them go and directly contemplate whatever you are experiencing. Don't make a big deal out of any physical pleasure or pain you experience. When you sit in meditation and start to feel tired or uncomfortable, adjust your position. Endure as much as you can, and then move. Don't overdo it. Develop a lot of mindfulness – that's the point. Do your walking and sitting meditation as much as you can; the aim is to be developing mindfulness as much as you can, knowing things fully. That's enough.

Please take my words to contemplate. Whatever form of

practice you're doing, when objects of mind arise, whether internally or externally, those are called *arom*. The one who is aware of the *arom* is called ... well, whatever you want to call it is OK; you can call it 'mind'. The *arom* is one thing, and the one who knows the *arom* is another. It's like the eye and the objects it sees. The eye isn't the objects, and the objects aren't the eye. The ear hears sounds, but the ear isn't the sound and the sound isn't the ear. When there is contact between the two, then things happen.

All states of mind, happy or unhappy, are called *arom*. Whatever they may be, never mind – we should constantly be reminding ourselves that 'this is uncertain'.

People don't consider very much, that 'this is uncertain'. Just this is the vital factor that will bring about wisdom. It's really important. In order to cease our coming and going and come to rest, we only need to say, 'this is uncertain.' Sometimes we may be distraught over something to the point that tears are flowing; this is something not certain. When moods of desire or aversion come to us, we should just remind ourselves of this one thing. Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, whatever appears is uncertain. Can't you do this? Keep it up no matter what happens. Give it a try. You don't need a lot – just this will work. This is something that brings wisdom.

The way I practise meditation is not very complicated – just this. This is what it all comes down to: 'it's uncertain.' Everything meets at this point. Don't keep track of the various instances of mental experience. When you sit, there may be various conditions of mind appearing, seeing and knowing all manner of things, experiencing different states.

Don't be keeping track of them* and don't get wrapped up in them. You only need to remind yourself that they're uncertain. That's enough. That's easy to do. It's simple. Then you can stop. Knowledge will come, but then don't make too much out of that or get attached to it.

Real investigation, investigation in the correct way, doesn't involve thinking. As soon as something contacts the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, it immediately takes place of its own. You don't have to pick up anything to look at – things just present themselves and investigation happens of its own. We talk about *vitakka,* 'initial thought.' It means raising something up. *Vicāra* is 'discursive thought.' It's investigation, seeing the planes of existence (*bhūmi*) that appear.

In the final analysis, the way of the Buddha flourishes through impermanence. It is always timely and relevant, whether in the time of the Buddha, in other times past, in the present age, or in the future. At all times, it is impermanence that rules. This is something you should meditate on.

The true and correct words of the sages will not lack mention of impermanence. This is the truth. If there is no mention of impermanence, it is not the speech of the wise. It is not the speech of the Buddha or the ariyas; it's called speech that does not accept the truth of existence.

All things have need of a way of release. Contemplation is not a matter of holding on and sticking to things. It's a matter of releasing. A mind that can't release phenomena is in a state of intoxication. In practice, it's important not to be intoxicated. When practice really seems to be good, don't be intoxicated by

*literally 'count'

that good. If you're intoxicated by it, it becomes something harmful, and your practice is no longer correct. We do our best, but it's important not to become drunk on our efforts, otherwise we are out of harmony with Dhamma. This is the Buddha's advice. Even the good is not something to get intoxicated by. Be aware of this when it happens.

A dam needs a sluiceway so that the water can run off. It's the same for us in practice. Using willpower to push ourselves and control the mind is something we can do at times, but don't get drunk on it. We want to be teaching the mind, not merely controlling it, so that it becomes aware. Too much forcing will make you crazy. What's vital is to keep on increasing awareness and sensitivity. Our path is like this. There are many points for comparison. We could talk about construction work and bring it back to the way of training the mind.

There is a lot of benefit to be had from practising meditation, from watching over your mind. This is the first and foremost thing. The teachings you can study in the scriptures and commentaries are true and valuable, but they are secondary. They are people's explanations of the truth. But there is actual truth that surpasses the words. Sometimes the expositions that are derived seem uneven or are not so accessible, and with the passing of time they can become confusing. But the actual truth they are based on remains the same and isn't affected by what anyone says or does. It is the original, natural state of things that does not change or deteriorate. The explanations people compose are secondary or tertiary, one or two steps removed, and though they can be good and beneficial and flourish for

some time, they are subject to deterioration.*

It's like the way that as population keeps increasing, troubles increase along with it. That's quite natural. The more people there are, the more issues there will be to deal with. Then leaders and teachers will try to show us the right way to live, to do good and solve problems. That can be valid and necessary, but it's still not the same as the reality those good ideas are based on. The true Dhamma that is the essence of all good has no way to decline or deteriorate, because it is immutable. It is the source, the *saccadhamma,* existing as it is. All the followers of the Buddha's way who practise the Dhamma must strive to realize this. Then they may find different means to illustrate it. Over time, the explanations lose their potency, but the source remains the same.

So the Buddha taught to focus your attention and investigate. Practitioners in search of the truth, do not be attached to your views and knowledge. Don't be attached to the knowledge of others. Don't be attached to anyone's knowledge. Rather, develop special knowledge; allow the *saccadhamma* to be revealed in full measure.

In training the mind, investigating the *saccadhamma*, our own minds are where it can be seen. When there is doubt about anything, we should pay attention to our thoughts and feelings, our mental processes. This is what we should know. The rest is all superficial.

In practising Dhamma, we will meet with many sorts of experiences, such as fear. What will we rely on then? When the mind is wrapped up in fear, it can't find anything to rely

*Because they are still in the realm of concepts.

on. This is something I've gone through; the deluded mind stuck in fear, unable to find a safe place anywhere. So where can this be settled? It gets settled right at that place where it appears. Wherever it arises, that is where it ceases. Wherever the mind has fear, it can end fear right there. Putting it simply: when the mind is completely full of fear, it has nowhere else to go, and it can stop right there. The place of no fear is there in the place of fear. Whatever states the mind undergoes, if it experiences *nimitta,* visions, or knowledge in meditation, for example, it doesn't matter – we are taught to focus awareness on this mind in the present. That is the standard. Don't chase after external phenomena. All the things we contemplate come to conclusion at the source, the place where they arise. This is where the causes are. This is important.

Feeling fear is a good example, since it's easy to see; if we let ourselves experience it until it has nowhere to go, then we will have no more fear, because it will be exhausted. It loses its power, so we don't feel fear anymore. Not feeling fear means it has become empty. We accept whatever comes our way, and it loses its power over us.

This is what the Buddha wanted us to place our trust in; he wanted us not to be attached to our own views, not to be attached to others' views. This is really important. We are aiming at the knowledge that comes from realization of the truth, so we don't want to get stuck in attachment to our own or others' views and opinions. But when we have our ideas or interact with others, watching them contact the mind can be illuminating. Knowledge can be born in those things that we have and experience.

In watching the mind and cultivating meditation, there can

be many points of wrong understanding or deviation. Some people focus on conditions of mind and want to analyse them excessively, so their minds are always active. Or maybe we examine the five khandhā, or we go into further detail with the thirty-two parts of the body; there are many such classifications that are taught for contemplation. So we ponder and we analyse. Looking at the five khandhā doesn't seem to get us to any conclusion, so we might go into the thirty-two parts, always analysing and investigating. But the way I see it, our attitude towards these five khandhā, these heaps that we see right here, should be one of weariness and disenchantment, because they don't follow our wishes. I think that's probably enough. If they survive, we shouldn't be overly joyful to the point of forgetting ourselves. If they break up, we shouldn't be overly dejected by that. Recognizing this much should be enough. We don't have to tear apart the skin, the flesh, and the bones.

This is something I've often talked about. Some people have to analyse like that, even if they are looking at a tree. Students in particular want to know what merit and demerit are, what form they have, what they look like. I explain to them that these things have no form. Merit is in our having correct understanding, correct attitude. But they want to know everything so clearly in such great detail.

So I've used the example of a tree. The students will look at a tree, and they want to know all about the parts of the tree. Well, a tree has roots, it has leaves. It lives because of the roots. The students have to know, how many roots does it have? Major roots, minor roots, branches, leaves, they want to know all the details and numbers. Then they will feel they have clear knowledge about the tree. But the Buddha said that

a person who wants such knowledge is actually pretty stupid. These things aren't necessary to know. Just knowing that there are roots and leaves is sufficient. Do you want to count all the leaves on a tree? If you look at one leaf, you should be able to get the picture.

It's the same with people. If we know ourselves, then we understand all people in the universe without having to go and observe them. The Buddha wanted us to look at ourselves. As we are, so are others. We are all *sāmaññalakkhaṇa,* all being of the same characteristics. All *saṅkhārā* are like this.

So we practise samādhi to be able to give up the defilements, to give birth to knowledge and vision and let go of the five khandhā. Sometimes people talk about samatha. Sometimes they talk about vipassanā. I feel this can become confusing. Those who practise samādhi will praise samādhi. But it is just for making the mind tranquil so it can know those things we have been talking about.

Then there are those who will say, 'I don't need to practise samādhi so much. This plate will break one day in the future. Isn't that good enough? That will work, won't it? I'm not very skilled in samādhi, but I already know that the plate must break someday. Yes, I take good care of it, because I'm afraid it will break, but I know that such is its future, and when it does break, I won't be suffering over that. Isn't my view correct? I don't need to practise a lot of samādhi, because I already have this understanding. You practise samādhi only for developing this understanding. After training your mind through sitting, you come to this view. I don't sit much, but I am already confident that this is the way of phenomena.'

This is a question for us practitioners. There are many

factions of teachers promoting their different methods of meditation. It can get confusing. But the real point of it all is to be able to recognize the truth, seeing things as they really are and being free of doubt.

As I see it, once we have correct knowledge, the mind comes under our command. What is this command about? The command is in *anicca*, knowing that everything is impermanent. Everything stops here when we see clearly, and it becomes the cause for us to let go. Then we let things be, according to their nature. If nothing is occurring, we abide in equanimity, and if something comes up, we contemplate: does it cause us to have suffering? Do we hold onto it with grasping attachment? Is there anything there? This is what supports and sustains our practice. If we practise and get to this point, I think every one of us will realize genuine peace.

Whether we are undertaking vipassanā meditation or samatha meditation, just this is what it's really about. But these days, it seems to me that when Buddhists talk about these things according to the traditional explanations, it becomes vague and mixed up. But the truth (*saccadhamma*) isn't vague or mixed up. It remains as it is.

So I feel it's better to seek out the source, looking at the way things originate in the mind. There's not a lot to this.

Birth, ageing, illness, and death: it's brief, but it's a universal truth. So see it clearly and acknowledge these facts. If you acknowledge them, you will be able to let go. Gain, rank, praise, happiness, and their opposites – you can let them go, because you recognize them for what they are.

If we reach this place of 'recognizing truth', we will be uncomplicated, undemanding people, content with simple food,

dwelling, and other requisites for life, easy to speak to and unassuming in our actions. Without difficulty or trouble, we will live at ease. One who meditates and realizes a tranquil mind will be like this.

At present we are trying to practise in the way of the Buddha and his disciples. Those beings had achieved awakening, yet they still maintained their practice as long as they were living. They acted for the benefit of themselves and for the benefit of others, yet even after they had accomplished all that they could, they still kept up their practice, seeking their own and others' well-being in various ways. I think we should take them as the model for our practice. It means not becoming complacent – that was their deeply ingrained nature. They never slackened their efforts. Effort was their way, their natural habit. Such is the character of the sages, of genuine practitioners.

We can compare it to rich people and poor people. The rich are especially hard-working, much more so than the poor. And the less effort poor people make, the less chance they have of becoming rich. The rich have knowledge and experience of a lot of things, so they maintain the habit of diligence in all they do.

If we want to take a break or get some rest, we will find rest in the practice itself. Once we've practised to get to the goal, know the goal, and be the goal, then when we are active, there's no way to incur loss or be harmed. When we are sitting still, there is no way we can be harmed. In all situations, nothing can affect us. Practice has matured to fulfilment and we have reached the destination. Maybe today we don't have a chance to sit and practise samādhi, but we are OK. Samādhi doesn't mean only sitting. There can be samādhi in all postures. If we are really practising in all postures, we will enjoy samādhi

thus. There won't be anything that can interfere. Such words as 'I'm not in a clear state of mind now, so I can't practise' will not be heard. We won't have such ideas; we will never feel that way. Our practice is well developed and complete – this is how it should be. When we are free of doubt and perplexity, we stop at this point and contemplate.

You can look into this: self-view, sceptical doubt, superstitious attachment to rites and rituals. The first step is to get free of these. The mind needs to get free of whatever sort of knowledge you gain. What are they like now? To what extent do we still have them? We are the only ones who can know this; we have to know for ourselves. Who else can know better than we? If we are stuck in attachment to self-view, doubt, superstition here, have doubt here, are still groping here, then there is the conception of self here. But now we can only think, if there is no self, then who is it that takes interest and practises?

All these things go together. If we come to know them through practice and make an end of them, we live in an ordinary way. Just like the Buddha and the ariyas. They lived just like worldly beings (*puthujjana*). They used the same language as worldly beings. Their everyday existence wasn't really different. They used many of the same conventions. Where they differed was that they didn't create suffering for themselves with their minds. They had no suffering. This is the crucial point; they went beyond suffering, extinguishing suffering. Nibbāna means 'extinguishing'. Extinguishing suffering, extinguishing heat and torment, extinguishing doubt and anxiety.

There's no need to be in doubt about the practice. Whenever there is doubt about something, don't have doubt about the doubt – look directly at it and crush it like that.

In the beginning, we train to pacify the mind. This can be difficult to do. You have to find a meditation that suits your own temperament. That will make it easier to gain tranquillity. But in truth, the Buddha wanted us to return to ourselves, to take responsibility and look at ourselves.

Anger is hot. Pleasure, the extreme of indulgence is too cool. The extreme of self-torment is hot. We want neither hot nor cold. Know hot and cold. Know all things that appear. Do they cause us to suffer? Do we form attachment to them? The teaching that birth is suffering doesn't only mean dying from this life and taking rebirth in the next life. That's so far away. The suffering of birth happens right now. It's said that becoming is the cause of birth. What is this 'becoming'? Anything that we attach to and put meaning on is becoming. Whenever we see anything as self or other or belonging to ourselves, without wise discernment to know it as only a convention, that is all becoming. Whenever we hold on to something as 'us' or 'ours', and it then undergoes change, the mind is shaken by that. It is shaken with a positive or negative reaction. That sense of self experiencing happiness or unhappiness is birth. When there is birth, it brings suffering along with it. Ageing is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering.

Right now, do we have becoming? Are we aware of this becoming? For example, take the trees in the monastery. The abbot of the monastery can take birth as a worm in every tree in the monastery if he isn't aware of himself, if he feels that it is really 'his' monastery. This grasping at 'my' monastery with 'my' orchard and 'my' trees is the worm that latches on there. If there are thousands of trees, he will become a worm thousands of times. This is becoming. When the trees are cut or meet with

any harm, the worms are affected; the mind is shaken and takes birth with all this anxiety. Then there is the suffering of birth, the suffering of ageing, and so forth. Are you aware of the way this happens?

Well, those objects in our homes or our orchards are still a little far away. Let's look right at ourselves sitting here. We are composed of the five aggregates and the four elements. These *saṅkhārā* are designated as a self. Do you see these *saṅkhārā* and these suppositions as they really are? If you don't see the truth of them, there is becoming, being gladdened or depressed over the five khandhā, and we take birth, with all the resultant sufferings. This rebirth happens right now, in the present. This glass isn't broken now, and we are happy about it now. But if this glass breaks right now, we are upset right now. This is how it happens, being upset or being happy without any wisdom in control. One only meets with ruination. You don't need to look far away to understand this. When you focus your attention here, you can know whether or not there is becoming. Then, when it is happening, are you aware of it? Are you aware of convention and supposition? Do you understand them? It's the grasping attachment that is the vital point, whether or not we are really believing in the designations of me and mine. This grasping is the worm, and it is what causes birth.

Where is this attachment? Grasping onto form, feeling, perception, thoughts, and consciousness, we attach to happiness and unhappiness, and we become obscured and take birth. It happens when we have contact through the senses. The eyes see forms, and it happens in the present. This is what the Buddha wanted us to look at, to recognize becoming and birth as they occur through our senses. If we know the inner senses and the

external objects, we can let go, internally and externally. This can be seen in the present. It's not something that happens when we die from this life. It's the eye seeing forms right now, the ear hearing sounds right now, the nose smelling aromas right now, the tongue tasting flavours right now. Are you taking birth with them? Be aware and recognize birth right as it happens. This way is better.

To do this requires having wisdom to steadily apply mindfulness and clear comprehension. Then you can be aware of yourself and know when you are undergoing becoming and birth. You won't need to ask a fortune-teller.

I have a Dhamma friend in central Thailand. In the old days we practised together, but we went our separate ways long ago. Recently I saw him. He practises the foundations of mindfulness, reciting the *sutta* and giving discourses on it. But he hadn't resolved his doubts yet. He prostrated to me and said, 'Oh, Ajahn, I'm so happy to see you!' I asked him why. He told me he had gone to some shrine where people go for divinations. He held the Buddha statue and said, 'If I have already attained the state of purity, may I be able to raise up this statue. If I have not yet attained the state of purity, may I not be able to raise it up.' And then he was able to raise it up, which made him very delighted. Just this little act, which has no real basis in anything, meant so much to him and made him think he was pure. So he had it engraved on a stone to say, 'I raised up the Buddha statue and have thus attained the state of purity.'

Practitioners of the Dhamma shouldn't be like that. He didn't see himself at all. He was only looking outside and seeing external objects made of stone and cement. He didn't see the intentions and movements in his own mind in the present

moment. When our meditation is looking there, we won't have doubts. So the way I see it, our practice may be good, but there's no one who can vouch for us. Like this chapel we are sitting in. It was built by someone with a fourth-grade education. He did a great job, but he has no brand name. He can't provide the guarantee or vouch for himself, showing qualifications like an architect who has the full training and education, but still he does it well. The *saccadhamma* is like this. Even though we haven't studied much and don't know the detailed explanations, we can recognize suffering, we can recognize what brings suffering, and we can let go of it. We don't need to investigate the explanations or anything else. We just look at our minds, look at these matters.

Don't make your practice confusing. Don't create a bunch of doubts for yourself. When you do have doubt, control it by seeing it as merely what it is, and let go. Really, there is nothing. We create the sense that there is something, but really there's nothing – there is *anattā.* Our doubtful minds think there is something, and then there's *attā.* Then meditation becomes difficult because we think we have to get something and become something. Are you going to practise meditation to get or be something? Is that the correct way? It's only *taṇhā* that gets involved in having and becoming. There's no end in sight if you practise like that.

Here, we are talking about cessation, extinguishing. We are talking about everything extinguished, ceasing because of knowledge, not in a state of indifferent ignorance. If we can practise like this and vouch for our own experience, then never mind what anyone else says.

So please don't get lost in doubts about the practice. Don't

get attached to your own views. Don't get attached to others' views. Staying in this middle place, wisdom can be born, correctly and to full measure. I've often made the simple analogy of comparing grasping to the place we live. For example, there is the roof and the floor, the upper and lower storeys. If someone goes upstairs, he knows he is up there. If he comes downstairs, he knows he is downstairs, standing on the floor. This is all we can recognize.

We can sense where we are, either upstairs or downstairs. But the space in the middle we aren't aware of, because there's no way to identify or measure it – it's just space. We don't comprehend the space in between. But it remains as it is, whether or not anyone descends from upstairs or not. The *saccadhamma* is like that, not going anywhere, not changing. When we say 'no becoming', that is the middle space, not marked or identified by anything. It can't be described.

For example, these days, the youngsters who are interested in Dhamma want to know about Nibbāna. What's it like? But if we tell them about a place without becoming, they don't want to go. They back off. We tell them that this place is cessation, it is peace, but they want to know how they will live, what they will eat and enjoy there. So there's no end to it. The real questions for those who want to know the truth, are questions about how to practise.

There was an *ājīvaka* who met the Buddha. He asked, 'Who is your teacher?' The Buddha replied, 'I was enlightened through my own efforts. I have no teacher.' But his reply was incomprehensible to that wanderer. It was too direct. Their minds were in different places. Even if the wanderer asked all day and all night, there was nothing about it he could understand. The

enlightened mind is unmoving and thus can not be recognized. We can develop wisdom and remove our doubts only through practice, nothing else.

So should we not listen to the Dhamma? We should, but then we should put the knowledge we gain into practice. But this doesn't mean that we're following a person who teaches us; we follow the experience and awareness that arise as we put the teaching into practice. For instance, we feel, 'I really like this thing. I like doing things this way!' But the Dhamma doesn't allow such liking and attachment. If we are really committed to the Dhamma, then we let go of that object of attraction when we see that it is contrary to Dhamma. This is what the knowledge is for.

A lot of talk – you're probably tired by now. Do you have any questions? Well, you probably do; you should have awareness in letting go. Things flow by and you let them go, but not in a dull, indifferent manner, without seeing what is happening. There has to be mindfulness. All the things I've been saying are pointing to having mindfulness protecting you at all times. It means practising with wisdom, not with delusion. Then we will gain true knowledge as wisdom becomes bold and keeps increasing.

The Dhamma Goes Westward

Question: A friend of mine went to practise with a Zen teacher. He asked him, 'When the Buddha was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, what was he doing?' The Zen master answered, 'He was practising zazen!' My friend said, 'I don't believe it.' The Zen master asked him, 'What do you mean, you don't believe it?' My friend said, 'I asked Goenka the same question and he said, "When the Buddha was sitting under the Bodhi tree, he was practising vipassanā!" So everybody says the Buddha was doing whatever they do.'

Answer: When the Buddha sat out in the open, he was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree. Isn't that so? When he sat under some other kind of tree, he was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree. There's nothing wrong with those explanations. 'Bodhi' means the Buddha himself, the one who knows. It's OK to talk about sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, but lots of birds sit beneath the Bodhi tree. Lots of people sit beneath the Bodhi tree. But they are far from such knowledge, far from such truth. Yes, we can say, 'beneath the Bodhi tree'. Monkeys play in the Bodhi tree. People sit there beneath the Bodhi tree. But this doesn't mean they have any profound understanding. Those who have deeper

understanding realize that the true meaning of the 'Bodhi tree' is the absolute Dhamma.

So in this way it's certainly good for us to try to sit beneath the Bodhi tree. Then we can be Buddha. But we don't need to argue with others over this question. When one person says the Buddha was doing one kind of practice beneath the Bodhi tree and another person disputes that, we needn't get involved. We should be looking at it from the viewpoint of the ultimate, meaning realizing the truth. There is also the conventional idea of 'Bodhi tree', which is what most people talk about; but when there are two kinds of Bodhi tree, people can end up arguing and having the most contentious disputes – and then there is no Bodhi tree at all.

It's talking about *paramatthadhamma,* the level of ultimate truth. So in that case, we can also try to get underneath the Bodhi tree. That's pretty good – then we'll be Buddha. It's not something to be arguing over. When someone says the Buddha was practising a certain kind of meditation beneath the Bodhi tree and someone else says, 'No, that's not right,' we needn't get involved. We're aiming at *paramatthadhamma*, meaning dwelling in full awareness. This ultimate truth pervades everything. Whether the Buddha was sitting beneath the Bodhi tree or performing other activities in other postures, never mind. That's just the intellectual analysis people have developed. One person has one view of the matter, another person has another idea; we don't have to get involved in disputes over it.

Where did the Buddha enter Nibbāna? Nibbāna means extinguished without remainder, finished. Being finished comes from knowledge, knowledge of the way things really are. That's how things get finished, and that is the *paramatthadhamma*.

There are explanations according to the levels of convention and liberation. They are both true, but their truths are different. For example, we say that you are a person. But the Buddha will say, 'That's not so. There's no such thing as a person.' So we have to summarize the various ways of speaking and explanation into convention and liberation.

We can explain it like this: previously you were a child. Now you are grown up. Are you a new person or the same person as before? If you are the same as the old person, how did you become an adult? If you are a new person, where did you come from? But talking about an old person and a new person doesn't really get to the point. This question illustrates the limitations of conventional language and understanding. If there is something called 'big', then there is 'small'. If there is small there is big. We can talk about small and large, young and old, but there are really no such things in any absolute sense. You can't really say somebody or something is big. The wise do not accept such designations as real, but when ordinary people hear about this, that 'big' is not really true and 'small' is not really true, they are confused because they are attached to concepts of big and small.

You plant a sapling and watch it grow. After a year it is one metre high. After another year it is two metres tall. Is it the same tree or a different tree? If it's the same tree, how did it become bigger? If it's a different tree, how did it grow from the small tree? From the viewpoint of someone who is enlightened to the Dhamma and sees correctly, there is no new or old tree, no big or small tree. One person looks at a tree and thinks it is tall. Another person will say it's not tall. But there is no 'tall' that really exists independently. You can't say someone is big

and someone is small, someone is grown up and someone else is young. Things end here and problems are finished with. If we don't get tied up in knots over these conventional distinctions, we won't have doubts about practice.

I've heard of people who worship their deities by sacrificing animals. They kill ducks, chickens and cows and offer them to their gods, thinking that will be pleasing to them. This is wrong understanding. They think they are making merits, but it's the exact opposite: they are actually making a lot of bad kamma. Someone who really looks into this won't think like that. But have you noticed? I'm afraid people in Thailand are becoming like that. They're not applying real investigation.

Q: Is that *vīmaṃsā*?

A: It means understanding cause and result.

Q: Then the teachings talk about *chanda,* aspiration; *viriya,* exertion; and *citta,* mind; together with *vīmamsā* these are the four *iddhipādā,* 'bases for accomplishment'.

A: When there's satisfaction, is it with something that is correct? Is exertion correct? *Vīmaṃsā* has to be present with these other factors.

Q: Are *citta* and *vīmaṃsā* different?

A: *Vīmaṃsā* is investigation. It means skilfulness or wisdom. It is a factor of the mind. You can say that *chanda* is mind, *viriya* is mind, *citta* is mind, *vīmaṃsā* is mind. They are all aspects of mind, they all can be summarized as 'mind', but here they are

distinguished for the purpose of pointing out these different factors of the mind. If there is satisfaction, we may not know if it is right or wrong. If there is exertion, we don't know if it's right or wrong. Is what we call mind the real mind? There has to be *vīmaṃsā* to discern these things. When we investigate the other factors with wise discernment, our practice gradually comes to be correct and we can understand the Dhamma.

But Dhamma doesn't bring much benefit if we don't practise meditation. We won't really know what it is all about. These factors are always present in the mind of real practitioners. Then even if they go astray, they will be aware of that and be able to correct it. So their path of practice is continuous.

People may look at you and feel your way of life, your interest in Dhamma, makes no sense. Others may say that if you want to practise Dhamma, you ought to be ordained as a monk. Being ordained is not really the crucial point. It's how you practise. As it's said, one should be one's own witness. Don't take others as your witness. It means learning to trust yourself. Then there is no loss. People may think you are crazy, but never mind. They don't know anything about Dhamma.

Others' words can't measure your practice. And you don't realize the Dhamma because of what others say. I mean the real Dhamma. The teachings others can give you are to show you the path, but that isn't real knowledge. When people meet the Dhamma, they realize it specifically within themselves. So the Buddha said, 'The *Tathāgata* is merely one who shows the way.' When someone is ordained, I tell them, 'Our responsibility is only this part: the reciting *ācariya* have done their chanting. I have given you the Going Forth and vows of ordination. Now our job is done. The rest is up to you, to do the practice correctly.'

Teachings can be most profound, but those who listen may not understand. But never mind. Don't be perplexed over profundity or lack of it. Just do the practice wholeheartedly and you can arrive at real understanding; it will bring you to the same place the teachings are talking about. Don't rely on the perceptions of ordinary people. Have you read the story about the blind men and the elephant? It's a good illustration.

Suppose there's an elephant and a bunch of blind people are trying to describe it. One touches the leg and says it's like a pillar. Another touches the ear and says it's like a fan. Another touches the tail and says, 'No, it's not a fan; it's like a broom.' Another touches the shoulder and says it's something else again from what the others say.

It's like this. There's no resolution, no end. Each blind person touches part of the elephant and has a completely different idea of what it is. But it's the same one elephant. It's like this in practice. With a little understanding or experience, you get limited ideas. You can go from one teacher to the next seeking explanations and instructions, trying to figure out if they are teaching correctly or incorrectly and how their teachings compare to each other. Some monks are always travelling around with their bowls and umbrellas learning from different teachers. They try to judge and measure, so when they sit down to meditate they are constantly in confusion about what is right and what is wrong. 'This teacher said this, but that teacher said that. One guy teaches in this way, but the other guy's methods are different. They don't seem to agree.' It can lead to a lot of doubt.

You might hear that certain teachers are really good and so you go to receive teachings from Thai Ajahns, Zen masters and

others. It seems to me you've probably had enough teaching, but the tendency is to always want to hear more, to compare and to end up in doubt as a result. Then each successive teacher increases your confusion further. There's a story of a wanderer in the Buddha's time that was in this kind of situation. He went to one teacher after the next, hearing their different explanations and learning their methods. He was trying to learn meditation but was only increasing his perplexity. His travels finally brought him to the teacher Gotama, and he described his predicament to the Buddha.

'Doing as you have been doing will not bring an end to doubt and confusion,' the Buddha told him. 'At this time, let go of the past; whatever you may or may not have done, whether it was right or wrong, let go of that now.

'The future has not yet come. Do not speculate over it at all, wondering how things may turn out. Let go of all such disturbing ideas – it is merely thinking.

'Letting go of past and future, look at the present. Then you will know the Dhamma. You may know the words spoken by various teachers, but you still do not know your own mind. The present moment is empty; look only at arising and ceasing of *saṅkhārā.* See that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and empty of self. See that they really are thus. Then you will not be concerned with the past or the future. You will clearly understand that the past is gone and the future has not yet arrived. Contemplating in the present, you will realize that the present is the result of the past. The results of past actions are seen in the present.

'The future has not yet come. Whatever does occur in the future will arise and pass away in the future; there is no point in

worrying over it now, as it has not yet occurred. So contemplate in the present. The present is the cause of the future. If you want a good future, create good in the present, increasing your awareness of what you do in the present. The future is the result of that. The past is the cause and the future is the result of the present.

'Knowing the present, one knows the past and the future. Then one lets go of the past and the future, knowing they are gathered in the present moment.'

Understanding this, that wanderer made up his mind to practise as the Buddha advised, putting things down. Seeing ever more clearly, he realized many kinds of knowledge, seeing the natural order of things with his own wisdom. His doubts ended. He put down the past and the future and everything appeared in the present. This was *eko dhammo*, the one Dhamma. Then it was no longer necessary for him to carry his begging bowl up mountains and into forests in search of understanding. If he did go somewhere, he went in a natural way, not out of desire for something. If he stayed put, he was staying in a natural way, not out of desire.

Practising in that way, he became free of doubt. There was nothing to add to his practice, nothing to remove. He dwelt in peace, without anxiety over past or future. This was the way the Buddha taught.

But it's not just a story about something that happened long ago. If we at this time practise correctly, we can also gain realization. We can know the past and the future because they are gathered at this one point, the present moment. If we look to the past we won't know. If we look to the future we won't know, because that is not where the truth is; it exists here, in the present.

Thus the Buddha said, 'I am enlightened through my own efforts, without any teacher.' Have you read this story? A wanderer of another sect asked him, 'Who is your teacher?' The Buddha answered, 'I have no teacher. I attained enlightenment by myself.' But that wanderer just shook his head and went away. He thought the Buddha was making up a story and so he had no interest in what he said. He thought it was not possible to achieve anything without a teacher and guide.

It's like this: you study with a spiritual teacher and he tells you to give up greed and anger. He tells you they are harmful and that you need to get rid of them. Then you may practise and do that. But getting rid of greed and anger didn't come about just because he taught you; you had to actually practise and do that. Through practice you came to realize something for yourself. You see greed in your mind and give it up. You see anger in your mind and give it up. The teacher doesn't get rid of them for you. He tells you about getting rid of them, but it doesn't happen just because he tells you. You do the practice and come to realization. You understand these things for yourself.

It's like the Buddha is catching hold of you and bringing you to the beginning of the path, and he tells you, 'Here is the path – walk on it.' He doesn't help you walk. You do that yourself. When you do travel the path and practise Dhamma, you meet the real Dhamma, which is beyond anything that anyone can explain to you. So one is enlightened by oneself, understanding past, future and present, understanding cause and result. Then doubt is finished.

We talk about giving up and developing, renouncing and cultivating. But when the fruit of practice is realized, there is

nothing to add and nothing to remove. The Buddha taught that this is the point we want to arrive at, but people don't want to stop there. Their doubts and attachments keep them on the move, keep them confused and keep them from stopping there. So when one person has arrived but others are somewhere else, they won't be able to make any sense of what he may say about it. They might have some intellectual understanding of the words, but this is not real understanding or knowledge of the truth.

Usually when we talk about practice we talk about entering and leaving, increasing the positive and removing the negative. But the final result is that all of these are done with. There is the *sekha puggala,* the person who needs to train in these things, and there is the *asekha puggala,* the person who no longer needs to train in anything. This is talking about the mind; when the mind has reached this level of full realization, there is nothing more to practise. Why is this? It is because such a person doesn't have to make use of any of the conventions of teaching and practice. This person has abandoned the defilements.

The *sekha* person has to train in the steps of the path, from the very beginning to the highest level. When they have completed this they are called *asekha*, meaning they no longer need to train because everything is finished. The things to be trained in are finished. Doubts are finished. There are no qualities to be developed. There are no defilements to remove. Such people dwell in peace. Whatever good or evil there is will not affect them; they are unshakeable no matter what they meet. This is talking about the empty mind. Now you will really be confused.

You don't understand this at all. 'If my mind is empty, how can I walk?' Precisely because the mind is empty. 'If the mind is empty, how can I eat? Will I have desire to eat if my mind is

empty?' There's not much benefit in talking about emptiness like this when people haven't trained properly. They won't be able to understand it.

Those who use such terms have sought ways to give us some feeling that can lead us to understand the truth. For example, the Buddha said that in truth these *saṅkhārā* that we have been accumulating and carrying from the time of our birth until this moment are not ourselves and do not belong to us. Why did he say such a thing? There's no other way to formulate the truth. He spoke in this way for people who have discernment, so that they could gain wisdom. But this is something to contemplate carefully.

Some people will hear the words, 'nothing is mine,' and they will get the idea they should throw away all their possessions. With only superficial understanding, people will get into arguments about what this means and how to apply it. 'This is not my self', doesn't mean you should end your life or throw away your possessions. It means you should give up attachment. There is the level of conventional reality and the level of ultimate reality – supposition and liberation. On the level of convention, there is Mr. A, Mrs. B, Mr. L, Mrs. N, and so on. We use these suppositions for convenience in communicating and functioning in the world. The Buddha did not teach that we shouldn't use these things, but rather that we shouldn't be attached to them. We should realize that they are empty.

It's hard to talk about this. We must depend on practice and gain understanding through practice. If you try to get knowledge and understanding by studying and asking others, you won't really understand the truth. It's something you have to see and know for yourself through practising. Turn inwards

to know within yourself. Don't always be turning outwards. But when we talk about practising people become argumentative. Their minds are ready to argue, because they have learned this or that approach to practice and have one-sided attachment to what they have learned. They haven't realized the truth through practice.

Did you notice the Thai people we met the other day? They asked irrelevant questions like, 'Why do you eat out of your almsbowl?' I could see that they were far from Dhamma. They've had modern education so I can't tell them much. But I let the American monk talk to them. They might be willing to listen to him. Thai people these days don't have much interest in Dhamma and don't understand it. Why do I say that? If someone hasn't studied something, they are ignorant of it. They've studied other things, but they are ignorant of Dhamma. I'll admit that I'm ignorant of the things they have learned. The Western monk has studied Dhamma, so he can tell them something about it.

Among Thai people in the present time there is less and less interest in being ordained, studying and practising. I don't know if it's because they are busy with work, because the country is developing materially, or what the reason might be. In the past when someone was ordained they would stay for at least a few years, four or five Rains. Now it's a week or two. Some are ordained in the morning and disrobe in the evening. That's the direction it's going in now. One fellow told me, 'If everyone were to be ordained the way you prefer, for a few Rains at least, there would be no progress in the world. Families wouldn't grow. Nobody would be building things.'

I said to him, 'Your thinking is the thinking of an earthworm.

An earthworm lives in the ground. It eats earth for its food. Eating and eating, it starts to worry that it will run out of dirt to eat. It is surrounded by dirt, the whole earth is covering its head, but it worries it will run out of dirt.'

That's the thinking of an earthworm. People worry that the world won't progress, that it will come to an end. That's an earthworm's view. They aren't earthworms, but they think like them. That's the wrong understanding of the animal realm. They are really ignorant.

There's a story I've often told about a tortoise and a snake. The forest was on fire and they were trying to flee. The tortoise was lumbering along, and then it saw the snake slither by. It felt pity for that snake. Why? The snake had no legs, so the tortoise figured it wouldn't be able to escape the fire. It wanted to help the snake. But as the fire kept spreading the snake fled easily, while the tortoise couldn't make it, even with its four legs, and it died there.

That was the tortoise's ignorance. It thought, if you have legs you can move. If you don't have legs, you can't go anywhere. So it was worried about the snake. It thought the snake would die because it didn't have legs. But the snake wasn't worried; it knew it could easily escape the danger.

This is one way to talk to people who have confused ideas. They feel pity for you if you aren't like them and don't have their views and their knowledge. So who is ignorant? I'm ignorant in my own way; there are things I don't know about, so I'm ignorant on that account.

Meeting different situations can be a cause for tranquillity. But I didn't understand how foolish and mistaken I was. Whenever something disturbed my mind, I tried to get away

from it, to escape. What I was doing was escaping from peace. I was continually running away from peace. I didn't want to see this or know about that; I didn't want to think about or experience various things. I didn't realize that this was defilement. I only thought that I needed to remove myself and get far away from people and situations, so that I wouldn't meet anything disturbing or hear speech that was displeasing. The farther away I could get, the better.

After many years had passed, I was forced by the natural progression of events to change my ways. Having been ordained for some time, I ended up with more and more disciples, more people seeking me out. Living and practising in the forest was something that attracted people to come and pay respects. So as the number of followers increased, I was forced to start facing things. I couldn't run away anymore. My ears had to hear sounds, my eyes to see. And it was then, as an Ajahn, that I started gaining more knowledge. It led to a lot of wisdom and a lot of letting go. There was a lot of everything going on and I learned not to grasp and hold on, but to keep letting go. It made me a lot more skilful than before.

When some suffering came about, it was OK; I didn't add on to it by trying to escape it. Previously, in my meditation, I had only desired tranquillity. I thought that the external environment was only useful insofar as it could be a cause to help me attain tranquillity. I didn't think that having *right view* would be the cause for realizing tranquillity.

I've often said that there are two kinds of tranquillity. The wise have divided it into peace through wisdom and peace through samatha. In peace through samatha, the eye has to be far from sights, the ear far from sounds, the nose far from

smells and so on. Then not hearing, not knowing and so forth, one can become tranquil. This kind of peacefulness is good in its way. Is it of value? Yes, it is, but it is not supreme. It is short-lived. It doesn't have a reliable foundation. When the senses meet objects that are displeasing, the mind changes, because it doesn't want those things to be present. So the mind always has to struggle with these objects and no wisdom is born, since the person always feels that he is not at peace because of those external factors.

On the other hand, if you determine not to run away but to look directly at things, you come to realize that lack of tranquillity is not due to external objects or situations, but only happens because of wrong understanding. I often teach my disciples about this. I tell them, when you are intently devoted to finding tranquillity in your meditation, you can seek out the quietest, most remote place, where you won't meet with sights or sounds, where there is nothing going on that will disturb you. There the mind can settle down and become calm because there is nothing to provoke it. Then, when you experience this, examine it to see how much strength it has. When you come out of that place and start experiencing sense contact, notice how you become pleased and displeased, gladdened and dejected, and how the mind becomes disturbed. Then you will understand that this kind of tranquillity is not genuine.

Whatever occurs in your field of experience is merely what it is. When something pleases us, we decide that it is good and when something displeases us, we say it isn't good. That is only our own discriminating minds giving meaning to external objects. When we understand this, then we have a basis for investigating these things and seeing them as they really are.

When there is tranquillity in meditation, it's not necessary to do a lot of thinking. This sensitivity has a certain knowing quality that is born of the tranquil mind. This isn't thinking; it is *dhammavicaya,* the factor of investigating Dhamma.

This sort of tranquillity does not get disturbed by experience and sense contact. But then there is the question, 'If it is tranquillity, why is there still something going on?' There is something happening within tranquillity; it's not something happening in the ordinary, afflicted way, where we make more out of it than it really is. When something happens within tranquillity the mind knows it extremely clearly. Wisdom is born there and the mind contemplates ever more clearly. We see the way that things actually happen; when we know the truth of them, then tranquillity becomes all-inclusive. When the eye sees forms or the ear hears sounds, we recognize them for what they are. In this latter form of tranquillity, when the eye sees forms, the mind is peaceful. When the ear hears sounds, the mind is peaceful. The mind does not waver. Whatever we experience, the mind is not shaken.

So where does this sort of tranquillity come from? It comes from that other kind of tranquillity, that unknowing samatha. That is a cause that enables it to come about. It is taught that wisdom comes from tranquillity. Knowing comes from unknowing; the mind comes to know from that state of unknowing, from learning to investigate like this. There will be both tranquillity and wisdom. Then, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we see the truth of things. We know that the arising and ceasing of experience in the mind is just like that. Then there is nothing more to do, nothing to correct or solve. There is no more speculation. There is nowhere to go, no escape. We

can only escape through wisdom, through knowing things as they are and transcending them.

In the past, when I first established Wat Pah Pong and people started coming to see me, some disciples said, 'Luang Por is always socializing with people. This isn't a proper place to stay anymore.' But it wasn't that I had gone in search of people; we established a monastery and people were coming to pay respects to our way of life. Well, I couldn't deny what they were saying, but actually I was gaining a lot of wisdom and coming to know a lot of things. But the disciples had no idea. They could only look at me and think my practice was degenerating – so many people were coming, so much disturbance. I didn't have any way to convince them otherwise, but as time passed, I overcame the various obstacles and I finally came to believe that real tranquillity is born of correct view. If we don't have right view, then it doesn't matter where we stay, we won't be at peace and wisdom won't arise.

People are trying to practise here in the West, I'm not criticizing anyone, but from what I can see, sīla (morality) is not very well developed. Well, this is a convention. You can start by practising samādhi first. It's like walking along and coming across a long piece of wood. One person can take hold of it at one end. Another person can pick up the other end. But it's the same one piece of wood, and taking hold of either end, you can move it. When there is some calm from samādhi practice, then the mind can see things clearly and gain wisdom and see the harm in certain types of behaviour, and the person will have restraint and caution. You can move the log from either end, but the main point is to have firm determination in your practice. If you start with sīla, this restraint will bring

calm. That is samādhi and it becomes a cause for wisdom. When there is wisdom, it helps develop samādhi further. And samādhi keeps refining sīla. They are actually synonymous, developing together. In the end, the final result is that they are one and the same; they are inseparable.

We can't distinguish samādhi and classify it separately. We can't classify wisdom as something separate. We can't distinguish sīla as something separate. At first we do distinguish among them. There is the level of convention, and the level of liberation. On the level of liberation, we don't attach to good and bad. Using convention, we distinguish good and bad and different aspects of practice. This is necessary to do, but it isn't yet supreme. If we understand the use of convention, we can come to understand liberation. Then we can understand the ways in which different terms are used to bring people to the same thing.

So in those days, I learned to deal with people, with all sorts of situations. Coming into contact with all these things, I had to make my mind firm. Relying on wisdom, I was able to see clearly and abide without being affected by whatever I met with. Whatever others might be saying, I wasn't bothered because I had firm conviction. Those who will be teachers need this firm conviction in what they are doing, without being affected by what people say. It requires some wisdom, and whatever wisdom one has can increase. We take stock of all our old ways as they are revealed to us and keep cleaning them up.

You really have to make your mind firm. Sometimes there is no ease of body or mind. It happens when we live together; it's something natural. Sometimes we have to face illness, for example. I went through a lot of that. How would you deal with

it? Well, everyone wants to live comfortably, to have good food and plenty of rest. But we can't always have that. We can't just indulge our wishes. But we create some benefit in this world through the virtuous efforts we make. We create benefit for ourselves and for others, for this life and the next. This is the result of making the mind peaceful.

Coming here to England and the US is the same. It's a short visit, but I'll try to help as I can and offer teaching and guidance. There are Ajahns and students here, so I'll try to help them out. Even though monks haven't come to live here yet, this is pretty good. This visit can prepare people for having monks here. If they come too soon, it will be difficult. Little by little people can become familiar with the practice and with the ways of the bhikkhusaṅgha. Then the *sāsana* can flourish here. So for now you have to take care of your own mind and make it right.

Right Restraint*

Exercise restraint and caution about the six sense faculties of the eye seeing forms, the ear hearing sounds, and so forth. This is what we are constantly teaching about in so many different ways. It always comes back to this. But to be truthful with ourselves, are we really aware of what goes on? When the eye sees something, does delight come about? Do we really investigate? If we investigate, we will know that it is just this delight that is the cause for suffering to be born. Aversion is the cause for suffering to be born. These two reactions actually have the same value. When they occur, we can see the fault of them. If there is delight, it is merely delight. If there is aversion, it is merely aversion. This is the way to quell them.

For example, we attach special importance to the head. From the time we are born, in this society, we learn that the head is something of the utmost significance. If anyone touches it or hits it, we are ready to die. If we are slapped on other parts of our body, it's no big deal; but we give this special importance to the head, and we get really angry if anyone slaps it.

*Note: The latter half of this talk has been published elsewhere under the title: '*Listening Beyond Words*'

It's the same with the senses. Sexual intercourse excites the minds of people, but it really isn't different from sticking a finger in your nostril. Would that mean anything special to you? But worldly beings have this attachment to the other entrance; whether it is animals or humans, it has special importance to them. If it were a finger picking a nostril, they wouldn't get excited over that. But the sight of this one inflames us. Why is this? This is where becoming is. If we don't attach special importance to it, then it's just the same as putting a finger in your nostril. Whatever happened inside, you wouldn't get excited; you'd just pull out some snot and be done with it.

But how far is your thinking from such a perception? The ordinary, natural truth of the matter is just like this. Seeing in this way, we aren't creating any becoming, and without becoming there won't be a birth; there won't be happiness or suffering over it, there won't be delight coming about. There is no grasping attachment when we realize this place for what it is. But worldly beings want to put something there. That's what they like. They want to work in the dirty place. Working in a clean place is not interesting, but they rush to work in this place. And they don't even have to be paid to do it!

Please look at this. It's just a conventional reality that people are stuck in. This is an important point of practice for us. If we contemplate the holes and entrances of our nose and ears and the rest, we can see that they are all the same, just orifices filled with unclean substances. Or are any of them clean? So we should contemplate this in the way of Dhamma. The truly fearful is here, nowhere else. This is where we humans lose our minds.

Just this is a cause, a basic point of practice. I don't feel that it's necessary to ask a lot of questions of anyone or interview a

lot. But we don't investigate this point carefully. Sometimes I see monks heading off carrying the big glot, walking here and there under the hot sun, wandering through many provinces. When I watch them, I think, 'That must be tiring.'

'Where are you going?' 'I'm seeking peace.'

I don't have any answer for that. I don't know where they can seek peace. I'm not disparaging them; I was like that too. I sought peace, always thinking it must be in some other place. Well, it was true, in a way. When I would get to some of those places, I was a little bit at ease. It seems people have to be like this. We always think some other place is comfortable and peaceful. When I was travelling I saw the dog in Pabhākaro's house.* They had this big dog. They really loved it. They kept it outside most of the time. They fed it outside, and it slept out there too, but sometimes it wanted to come inside, so it would go and paw at the door and bark. That bothered the owner, so he would let it in, then close the door behind it. The dog would walk around inside the house for a while, and then it would get bored and want to go out again: back to the door, pawing and barking. So the owner would get up and go to let it out. It would be happy outside for a little while, and then want to come back in, barking at the door again.

When it was outside, it seemed like being inside would be better. Being inside was fun for a spell, then it was bored and had to go out again. The minds of people are like that – like a dog. They are always in and out, here and there, not really understanding where the place is that they will be happy.

*Ajahn Chah is referring to his trip to England, France and the USA in 1979.

If we have some awareness of this, then whatever thoughts and feelings arise in our minds, we will make efforts to quell them, recognizing that they are merely thoughts and feelings. The grasping attachment to them is really important.

So even though we are living in the monastery, we are still far away from correct practice – very far away. When I went abroad I saw a lot of things. The first time, I gained some wisdom from it to a certain extent, and the second time to another extent. On my first trip, I made notes of what I experienced in a journal. But this time, I put down the pen. I thought, if I write these things down, will the people at home be able to bear it?

It's like us living in our own country and not being very comfortable. When Thai people go abroad, they think they must have some very good kamma to be able to get there. But you have to consider, when you go to a place that is strange to you, will you be able to compete with those who have lived their whole lives there? Still, we go there for a little while and we feel it is so great, and that we are some special kind of people who have such good kamma. The foreign monks were born there, so does that mean they have better kamma than we do? These are the kind of ideas people get from their attachment and grasping. What it means is that when people contact things, they get excited. They like being excited. But when the mind is excited it is not in a normal state. We see things we haven't seen and experience things we haven't experienced, and the abnormality occurs.

When it comes to scientific knowledge, I concede to them. As far as Buddhist knowledge goes, I still have something to tell them. But in science and material development, we can't compete with them.

In practice, some people have a lot of suffering and difficulty, but they keep on in the same rut that has been making them suffer. That's someone who hasn't made up his mind to practise and get to the end of suffering; it's someone who doesn't see clearly. Their practice isn't steady or continuous. When feelings of good and bad come, the person isn't aware of what is happening. 'Whatever is disagreeable, I reject' – this is the conceited view of the Brahmin. 'Whatever is pleasing to me, I accept.' For example, some people are very easy to get along with if you speak pleasingly to them. But if you say things they disagree with, then there's no getting along with them. That's extreme conceit (*diṭṭhi*). They have strong attachment, but they feel that's a really good standard to live by.

So the ones who will walk this path are few indeed. It's not different with us who live here; there are very few who have right view. When we contemplate the Dhamma, we feel it's not right. We don't agree. If we agreed and felt it were right, we would give up and let go of things. Sometimes we don't agree with the teachings. We see things differently; we want to change the Dhamma to be different from what it is. We want to correct the Dhamma, and we keep working at that.

This trip made me think about many things. I met some people who practise yoga. It was certainly interesting to see the kinds of postures they could get into – I'd break my leg if I tried. Anyhow, they feel their joints and muscles aren't right, so they have to stretch them out. They need to do it every day, then they feel good. I thought they were actually giving themselves some affliction through this. If they don't do it, they don't feel good, so they have to do it every day. It seems to me that they are making some burden for themselves this way and are not really being aware.

That's the way people are – they get into the habit of doing something. I met one Chinese man. He didn't lie down to sleep for four or five years. He only sat, and he was comfortable that way. He bathed once a year. But his body was strong and healthy. He didn't need to run or do other such exercises; if he did, he probably wouldn't feel good. It's because he trained himself that way.

So it's just our manner of training that makes us comfortable with certain things. We can increase or decrease illness through training. This is how it is for us. Thus the Buddha taught to be fully aware of ourselves – don't let this slip. All of you, don't have grasping attachment. Don't let yourselves be excited by things.

For example, living here in our native country, in the company of spiritual friends and teachers, we feel comfortable. Actually, there isn't really anything so comfortable about it. It's like small fish living in a large pond. They swim around comfortably. If a large fish is put in a small pond, it would feel cramped. When we are here in our own country, we are comfortable with the food and dwellings we have, and many other things. If we go somewhere everything is different, then we are like the big fish in the small pond.

Here in Thailand we have our distinct culture, and we are satisfied when everyone acts properly according to our customs. If someone comes here and violates our customs, we aren't happy about that. Now we are small fish in the large pond. If large fish have to live in a small pond, how will it be for them?

It's the same for natives of other countries. When they are in their homeland and everything is familiar, they are comfortable with those conditions – small fish in a big pond.

If they come to Thailand and have to adapt to different conditions and customs, it can be oppressive for them – like the big fish in the small pond. Eating, getting around, everything is different. The big fish is in a small pond now, and it can't swim freely anymore.

The habits and attachments of beings differ like this. One person may be stuck on the left side, another is stuck on the right side. So the best thing for us to do is to be aware. Be aware of customs in the different places we go. If we have Dhamma custom, then we can smoothly adapt to society's customs, abroad or at home. If we don't understand Dhamma custom, then there's no way to get along. Dhamma custom is the meeting point for all cultures and traditions.

I've heard the words of the Buddha that say, 'When you don't understand someone's language, when you don't understand their way of speaking, when you don't understand their ways of doing things in their land, you shouldn't be proud or put on airs.' I can attest to these words – they are a true standard in all times and places. These words came back to me when I travelled abroad, and I put them into practice these last two years when I was outside our country. They're useful.

Before I held tightly; now I hold, but not tightly. I pick something up to look at it, then I let it go. Before, I would pick things up and hold on. That was holding tightly. Now it's holding but not tightly. So you can allow me to speak harshly to all of you or get angry at you, but it's in the way of 'holding but not tightly', picking up and letting go. Please don't lose this point.

We can be truly happy and comfortable if we understand the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha. So I am always praising the

Buddha's teachings and practising to unite the two customs, that of the world and that of the Dhamma.

I gained some understanding on this trip that I'd like to share with you. I felt that I was going to create benefit, benefit for myself, for others, and for the *sāsanā;* benefit of the populace in general and of our Saṅgha, every one of you. I didn't just go for sightseeing, to visit various countries out of curiosity. I went for good purpose, for myself and others, for this life and the next – for the ultimate purpose. When you come down to it, everyone is equal. Someone with wisdom will see in this way.

Someone with wisdom is always travelling good paths, finding meaning in their comings and goings. I'll give an analogy. You may go to some place and encounter some bad people there. When that happens, some folks will have aversion to them. But a person with Dhamma will come across bad people and think, 'I have found my teacher.' Through that one comes to know what a good person is. Encountering a good person, one also finds a teacher, because it shows what a bad person is.

Seeing a beautiful house is good; we can then understand what an ugly house is. Seeing an ugly house is good; we can then understand what a beautiful house is. With Dhamma, we don't discard any experience, not even the slightest. Thus the Buddha said, 'O Bhikkhus, view this world as an ornamented and bejewelled royal chariot, by which fools are entranced, but which is meaningless to the wise.'

When I was studying Nak Tham Ehk,* I often contemplated this saying. It seemed really meaningful. But it was when I

*Nak Tham Ehk: The third and highest level of examinations in Dhamma and Vinaya in Thailand.

started practising that the meaning became clear. 'O Bhikkhus:' this means all of us sitting here. 'View this world:' the world of humans, the *ākāsaloka*, the worlds of all sentient beings, all existing worlds. If one knows the world clearly, it isn't necessary to do any special sort of meditation. If one knows, 'the world is thus' according to reality, there will be nothing lacking at all. The Buddha knew the world clearly. He knew the world for what it actually was. Knowing the world clearly is knowing the subtle Dhamma. One is not concerned with or anxious about the world. If one knows the world clearly, then there are no worldly dhammas. We are no longer influenced by the worldly dhammas.

Worldly beings are ruled by worldly dhammas, and they are always in a state of conflict. So whatever we see and encounter, we should contemplate carefully. We delight in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. So please contemplate. You all know what these things are. Forms the eye sees, for example, the forms of men and women. You certainly know what sounds are, as well as smells, tastes, and physical contacts. Then there are the mental impressions and ideas. When we have these contacts through the physical senses, mental activity arises. All things gather here.

We may be walking along together with the Dhamma a whole year or a whole lifetime without recognizing it; we live with it our whole lives without knowing it. Our thinking goes too far. Our aims are too great; we desire too much. For example, a man sees a woman, or a woman sees a man. Everyone is extremely interested here. It's because we overestimate it. When we see an attractive member of the opposite sex, all our senses become engaged. We want to see, to hear, to touch,

to observe their movements, all sorts of things. But if we get married, then it is no longer such a big deal. After a while we may even want to get some distance between us – maybe even go and ordain! But then we can't.

It's like a hunter tracking a deer. When he first spots the deer, he is excited. Everything about the deer interests him, the ears, the tail, everything. The hunter becomes very happy. His body is light and alert. He is only afraid the deer will get away.

It's the same here. When a man sees a woman he likes, or a woman sees a man, everything is so intriguing, the sight, the voice – we fixate on them, can't tear ourselves away, looking and thinking as much as we can, to the point where it takes control of our heart. Just like the hunter. When he sees the deer, he is excited. He becomes anxious that it will see him. All his senses are heightened, and he takes extreme enjoyment from it. Now his only concern is that the deer might get away. What the deer really is, he doesn't know. He hunts it down and finally shoots and kills it. Then his work is done. Arriving at the place where the deer has fallen, he looks at it: 'Oh, it's dead.' He's not very excited anymore – it's just some dead meat. He can cook some of the meat and eat it, then he will be full, and there's not much more to it. Now he sees the parts of the deer, and they don't excite him so much anymore. The ear is only an ear. He can pull the tail, and it's only a tail. But when it was alive, oh boy! He wasn't indifferent then. Seeing the deer, watching its every movement, was totally engrossing and exciting, and he couldn't bear the thought of it getting away.

We are like this, aren't we? The form of an attractive person of the opposite sex is like this. When we haven't yet captured it, we feel it is unbearably beautiful. But if we end up living

together with that person, we get tired of them. Like the hunter who has killed the deer and can now freely touch the ear or take hold of the tail. There's not much to it anymore, no excitement once the animal is dead. When we are married, we can fulfil our desires, but it is no longer such a big thing, and we end up looking for a way out.

So we don't really consider things thoroughly. I feel that if we do contemplate, we will see that there isn't really much there, not anything more than what I just described. It's only that we make more out of things than they really are. When we see a body, we feel we will be able to consume every piece of it, the ears, the eyes, the nose. The way our thinking runs wild, we might even get the idea that the person we are attracted to will have no shit. I don't know, maybe they think that way in the West. We get the idea there won't even be shit, or maybe just a little. We want to eat the whole thing. We overestimate; it's not really like that. It's like a cat stalking a mouse. Before it catches the mouse, the cat is alert and focused. When it pounces and kills the mouse, it's not so keen anymore. The mouse is just lying there dead, and the cat loses interest and goes on its way.

It's only this much. The imagination makes it out to be more than it is. This is where we perish, because of our imagination. Ordained persons have to forbear more than others here, in the realm of sensuality. *Kāma* means lusting. Desiring evil things and desiring good are a kind of lusting, but here it refers to desiring those things that attract us, meaning sensuality. It is difficult to get free of.

When Ānanda asked the Buddha, 'After the Tathāgata has entered Nibbāna, how should we practise mindfulness? How should we conduct ourselves in relation to women? This is an

extremely difficult matter; how would the Lord advise us to practise mindfulness here?'

The Buddha replied, 'Ānanda! It is better that you not see women at all.'

Ānanda was puzzled by this; how can people not see other people? He thought it over, and asked the Buddha further, 'If there are situations that make it unavoidable that we see, how will the Lord advise us to practise?'

'In such a situation, Ānanda, do not speak. Do not speak!'

Ānanda considered further. He thought, sometimes we might be travelling in a forest and lose our way. In that case we would have to speak to whomever we met. So he asked, 'If there is a need for us to speak, then how will the Lord have us act?'

'Ānanda! Speak with mindfulness!'

At all times and in all situations, mindfulness is the supremely important virtue. The Buddha instructed Ānanda what to do when it was necessary. We should contemplate to see what is really necessary for us. In speaking, for example, or in asking questions of others, we should only say what is necessary. When the mind is in an unclean state, thinking lewd thoughts, don't let yourself speak at all. But that's not the way we operate. The more unclean the mind is, the more we want to talk. The more lewdness we have in our minds, the more we want to ask, to see, to speak. These are two very different paths.

So I am afraid. I really fear this a lot. You are not afraid, but it's just possible you might be worse than me. 'I don't have any fear about this. There's no problem!' But I have to remain fearful. Does it ever happen that an old person can have lust? So in my monastery, I keep the sexes as far apart as possible. If there's no real necessity, there shouldn't be any contact at all.

When I practised alone in the forest, sometimes I'd see monkeys in the trees and I'd feel desire. I'd sit there and look and think, and I'd have lust: 'Wouldn't be bad to go and be a monkey with them!' This is what sexual desire can do – even a monkey could get me aroused.

In those days, women lay followers couldn't come to hear Dhamma from me. I was too afraid of what might happen. It's not that I had anything against them; I was simply too foolish. Now if I speak to women, I speak to the older ones. I always have to guard myself. I've experienced this danger to my practice. I didn't open my eyes wide and speak excitedly to entertain them. I was too afraid to act like that.

Be careful! Every *samaṇa* has to face this and exercise restraint. This is an important issue.

Really, the teachings of the Buddha all make sense. Things you wouldn't imagine really are so. It's strange. At first I didn't have any faith in sitting in meditation. I thought, 'What value could that possibly have?' Then there was walking meditation – I walked from one tree to another, back and forth, back and forth, and I got tired of it and thought, 'What am I walking for? Just walking back and forth doesn't have any purpose.' That's how I thought. But in fact walking meditation has a lot of value. Sitting to practise samādhi has a lot of value. But the temperaments of some people make them confused about walking or sitting meditation.

We can't meditate in only one posture. There are four postures for humans: standing, walking, sitting and lying down. The teachings speak about making the postures consistent and equal. You might get the idea from this that it means you should stand, walk, sit and lie down for the same number of hours

in each posture. When you hear such a teaching, you can't figure out what it really means, because it's talking in the way of Dhamma, not in the ordinary sense. 'OK, I'll sit for two hours, stand for two hours and then lie down for two hours.' You probably think like this. That's what I did. I tried to practise in this way, but it didn't work out.

It's because of not listening in the right way, merely listening to the words. 'Making the postures even' refers to the mind, nothing else. It means making the mind bright and clear so that wisdom arises, so that there is knowledge of whatever is happening in all postures and situations. Whatever the posture, you know phenomena and states of mind for what they are, meaning that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not your self. The mind remains established in this awareness at all times and in all postures. When the mind feels attraction or when it feels aversion, you don't lose the path; you know these conditions for what they are. Your awareness is steady and continuous, and you are letting go steadily and continuously. You are not fooled by good conditions. You aren't fooled by bad conditions. You remain on the straight path. This can be called 'making the postures even'. It refers to the internal, not the external; it is talking about mind.

If we do make the postures even with the mind, then when we are praised, it is just so much. If we are slandered, it is just so much. We don't go up or down with these words but remain steady. Why is this? Because we see the danger in these things. We see equal danger in praise and in criticism; this is called making the postures even. We have this inner awareness, whether we are looking at internal or external phenomena.

In the ordinary way of experiencing things, when some-

thing good appears, we have a positive reaction, and when something bad appears, we have a negative reaction. In this way, the postures are not even. If they are even, we always have awareness. We will know when we are grasping at good and grasping at bad – this is better. Even though we can't yet let go, we are aware of these states continuously. Being continuously aware of ourselves and our attachments, we will come to see that such grasping is not the path. Knowing is fifty percent even if we are unable to let go. Though we can't let go, we do understand that letting go of these things will bring peace. We see the danger in the things we like and dislike. We see the danger in praise and blame. This awareness is continuous.

So whether we are being praised or criticized, we are continuously aware. When worldly people are criticized and slandered, they can't bear it; it hurts their hearts. When they are praised, they are pleased and excited. This is what is natural in the world. But for those who are practising, when there is praise, they know there is danger. When there is blame, they know the danger. They know that being attached to either of these brings ill results. They are all harmful if we grasp at them and give them meaning.

When we have this kind of awareness, we know phenomena as they occur. We know that if we form attachments to phenomena, there really will be suffering. If we are not aware, then grasping at what we conceive of as good or bad gives rise to suffering. When we pay attention, we see this grasping; we see how we catch hold of the good and the bad and how this causes suffering. So at first we grasp hold of things and with awareness see the fault in that. How is that? It's because we grasp tightly and experience suffering. We will then start to seek a way to let

go and be free. We ponder, 'What should I do to be free?'

Buddhist teaching says not to have grasping attachment, not to hold tightly to things. We don't understand this fully. The point is to hold, but not tightly. For example, I see this object in front of me. I am curious to know what it is, so I pick it up and look; it's a flashlight. Now I can put it down. That's holding but not tightly. If we are told not to hold to anything at all, what can we do? We will think we shouldn't practise sitting or walking meditation. So at first we have to hold without tight attachment. You can say this is *taṇhā,* but it will become *pāramī.* For instance, you came here to Wat Pah Pong; before you did that, you had to have the desire to come. With no desire, you wouldn't have come. We can say you came with desire; it's like holding. Then you will return; that's like not grasping. Just like having some uncertainty about what this object is; then picking it up, seeing it's a flashlight and putting it down. This is holding but not grasping, or to speak more simply, knowing and letting go. Picking up to look, knowing and letting go – knowing and putting down. Things may be said to be good or bad, but you merely know them and let them go. You are aware of all good and bad phenomena and you are letting go of them. You don't grasp them with ignorance. You grasp them with wisdom and put them down.

In this way the postures can be even and consistent. It means the mind is able. The mind has awareness and wisdom is born. When the mind has wisdom, then what could there be beyond that? It picks things up but there is no harm. It is not grasping tightly, but knowing and letting go. Hearing a sound, we will know, 'The world says this is good,' and we let go of it. The world may say, 'This is bad,' but we let go. We know good

and evil. Someone who doesn't know good and evil attaches to good and evil and suffers as a result. Someone with knowledge doesn't have this attachment.

Let's consider: for what purpose are we living? What do we want from our work? We are living in this world; for what purpose are we living? We do our work; what do we want to get from our work? In the worldly way, people do their work because they want certain things and this is what they consider logical. But the Buddha's teaching goes a step beyond this. It says, do your work without desiring anything. In the world, you do this to get that; you do that to get this; you are always doing something in order to get something as a result. That's the way of worldly folk. The Buddha says, work for the sake of work without wanting anything. Whenever we work with the desire for something, we suffer. Check this out.

Even One Word is Enough

Whatever you will teach, it won't be outside of sīla, samādhi and paññā, or, to use another standard classification, morality, meditation and generosity.

People here are already pretty complicated. You have to look at those you are teaching and understand them. Because they are complicated you have to give them something they can relate to. Just to say, 'Let go, let go!' won't be right. Put that aside for the time being. It's like talking to older people in Thailand. If you try to speak bluntly, they will resent it. If I do that, it's OK – if they hear it from me, it pleases them – but otherwise they would get angry.

You can be able to speak well but still not be skilful. Right, Sumedho? It's like that, isn't it?

Ajahn Sumedho: It is. They (some of the other monks) speak the truth, but they don't do it skilfully, and the laypeople don't want to listen. They don't have the skilful means.

Ajahn Chah: Right. They don't have a 'technique'. They don't have the technique in speaking. Like construction – I can build things, but I don't have a technique for construction, to make things beautiful and long-lasting. I can speak, anyone can speak,

but it's necessary to have the skilful means to know what is appropriate. Then saying even one word can be of benefit. Otherwise, you can cause trouble with your words.

For example, people here have learned a lot of things. Don't go extolling your way: 'My way is right! Your way is wrong!' Don't do that. And don't merely try to be profound, either. You can lead people to madness by that. Just say, 'Don't discard other ways you may have learned. But for the time being, please put them aside and focus on what we are practising right now.' For example, mindfulness of breathing. That's something you can all teach. Teach to focus on the breath going in and out. Just keep teaching in the same way, and let people get an understanding of this. When you become skilled at teaching one thing, your ability to teach will develop of its own, and you will be able to teach other things. Coming to know one thing well, people can then know many things. It happens of its own. But if you try to teach them many things, they don't get a real understanding of any one thing. If you point out one thing clearly, then they can know many things clearly.

Like those Christians who came today. They just said one thing. They said one thing that was full of meaning. 'One day we will meet again in the place of ultimate truth.' Just this one statement was enough. Those were the words of a wise person. No matter what kind of Dhamma we learn, if we don't realize the ultimate truth, *paramatthadhamma,* in our hearts, we won't reach satisfaction.

For example, Sumedho might teach me. I have to take that knowledge and try to put it into practice. When Sumedho is teaching me, I understand, but it isn't a real or deep understanding, because I haven't yet practised. When I do actually practise

and realize the fruit of practising, then I will get to the point and know the real meaning of it. Then I can say I know Sumedho. I will see Sumedho in that place. That place is Sumedho. Because he teaches that, that is Sumedho.

When I teach about the Buddha, it's like that also. I say the Buddha is that place. The Buddha is not in the teachings. When people hear this they will be startled. 'Didn't the Buddha teach those things?' Yes, he did, but this is talking about ultimate truth. People don't understand it yet.

What I gave those people to think about was, this apple is something that you can see with your eyes. The flavour of the apple isn't something you can know by looking at it. But you do see the apple. I felt that was as much as they were able to listen to. You can't see the flavour, but it's there. When will you know it? When you pick up the apple and eat it.

The Dhamma we teach is like the apple. People hear it, but they don't really know the flavour of the apple. When they practise, then it can be known. The flavour of the apple can't be known by the eyes, and the truth of the Dhamma can't be known by the ears. There is knowledge, true, but it doesn't really reach the actuality. One has to put it into practice. Then wisdom arises and one recognizes the ultimate truth directly. One sees the Buddha there. This is the profound Dhamma. So I compared it to an apple in this way for them; I offered it to that group of Christians to hear and think about.

That kind of talk was a little 'salty'.* Salty is good. Sweet is good, sour is good. Many different ways of teaching are good.

*Not the same connotation as in English. Here it means 'hard' or 'direct'.

Well, if you've got something to say, any of you, please feel free to say it. Soon we won't have a chance to discuss things. Sumedho's probably run out of things to say.

Ajahn Sumedho: I'm fed up explaining things to people.

Ajahn Chah: Don't do that. You can't be fed up.

Ajahn Sumedho: Yes, I'll cut that off.

Ajahn Chah: The head teacher can't do that. There are a lot of people trying to reach Nibbāna, so they are depending on you.

Sometimes teaching comes easily. Sometimes you don't know what to say. You are at a loss for words, and nothing comes out. Or is it that you just don't want to talk? It's a good training for you.

Ajahn Sumedho: People around here are pretty good. They aren't violent and mean-spirited or troublesome. The Christian priests don't dislike us. The kinds of questions people ask are about things like God. They want to know what God is, what Nibbāna is. Some people believe that Buddhism teaches nihilism and wants to destroy the world.

Ajahn Chah: It means their understanding is not complete or mature. They are afraid everything will be finished, that the world will come to an end. They conceive of Dhamma as something empty and nihilistic, so they are disheartened. Their way only leads to tears.

Have you seen what it's like when people are afraid of 'emptiness'? Householders try to gather possessions and watch

over them, like rats. Does this protect them from the emptiness of existence? They still end up on the funeral pyre, everything lost to them. But while they are alive they are trying to hold on to things, every day afraid they will be lost, trying to avoid emptiness. Do they suffer this way? Of course, they really do suffer. It's not understanding the real insubstantiality and emptiness of things; not understanding this, people are not happy.

Because people don't look at themselves, they don't really know what's going on in life. How do you stop this delusion? People believe, 'This is me. This is mine.' If you tell them about non-self, that nothing is 'me' or 'mine,' they are ready to argue the point until the day they die.

Even the Buddha, after he attained knowledge, felt weary when he considered this. When he was first enlightened, he thought that it would be extremely troublesome to explain the way to others. But then he realized that such an attitude was not correct.

If we don't teach such people, who will we teach? This is my question, which I used to ask myself at those times I got fed up and didn't want to teach anymore: who should we teach, if we don't teach the deluded? There's really nowhere else to go. When we get fed up and want to run away from disciples to live alone, we are deluded.

A bhikkhu: We could be *Pacceka Buddhas.*

Ajahn Chah: That's good. But it's not really correct, being a *Pacceka Buddha*, because you simply want to run away from things.

Ajahn Sumedho: Just living naturally, in a simple environment, then we could naturally be *Pacceka Buddhas*. But these days it's not possible. The environment we live in doesn't allow that to happen. We have to live as monks.

Ajahn Chah: Sometimes you have to live in a situation like you have here first, with some disturbance. To explain it in a simple way, sometimes you will be an omniscient (*sabbaññū*) Buddha; sometimes you will be a *Pacceka*. It depends on conditions.

Talking about these kinds of beings is talking about the mind. It's not that one is born a *Pacceka*. This is what's called 'explanation by personification of states of mind' (*puggalā-dhiṭṭhāna*). Being a *Pacceka*, one abides indifferently and doesn't teach. Not much benefit comes from that. But when someone is able to teach others, then they are manifesting as an omniscient Buddha.

These are only metaphors. Don't be anything! Don't be anything at all! Being a Buddha is a burden. Being a *Pacceka* is a burden. Just don't desire to be. 'I am the monk Sumedho,' 'I am the monk Ānando.' That way is suffering, believing that you really exist thus. 'Sumedho' is merely a convention. Do you understand?

Believing you really exist, brings suffering. If there is Sumedho, then when someone criticizes you, Sumedho gets angry. Ānando gets angry. That's what happens if you hold these things as real. Ānando and Sumedho get involved and are ready to fight. If there is no Ānando or no Sumedho, then there's no one there – no one to answer the telephone. Ring ring – nobody picks it up. You don't become anything. No one is being anything, and there is no suffering.

If we believe ourselves to be something or someone, then every time the phone rings, we pick it up and get involved. How can we free ourselves of this? We have to look at it clearly and develop wisdom, so that there is no Ānando or no Sumedho to pick up the telephone. If you are Ānando or Sumedho and you answer the telephone, you will get yourself involved in suffering. So don't be Sumedho. Don't be Ānando. Just recognize that these names are on the level of convention.

If someone calls you good, don't be that. Don't think, 'I am good.' If someone says you are bad, don't think, 'I'm bad.' Don't try to be anything. Know what is taking place. But then don't attach to the knowledge either.

People can't do this. They don't understand what it's all about. When they hear about this, they are confused and they don't know what to do. I've given the analogy before about upstairs and downstairs. When you go down from upstairs, you are downstairs, and you see the downstairs. When you go upstairs again, you see the upstairs. The space in between you don't see – the middle. It means Nibbāna is not seen. We see the forms of physical objects, but we don't see the grasping, the grasping at upstairs and downstairs. Becoming and birth; becoming and birth. Continual becoming. The place without becoming is empty. When we try to teach people about the place that is empty, they just say, 'There's nothing there.' They don't understand. It's difficult – real practice is required for this to be understood.

We have been relying on becoming, on self-grasping, since the day of our birth. When someone talks about non-self, it's too strange; we can't change our perceptions so easily. So it's necessary to make the mind see this through practice, and then we can believe it: 'Oh! It's true!'

When people are thinking, 'This is mine! This is mine!' they feel happy. But when the thing that is 'mine' is lost, they will cry over it. This is the path for suffering to come about. We can observe this. If there is no 'me' or 'mine,' we can make use of things while we are living, without attachment to them as being ours. If they are lost or broken, that is simply natural; we don't see them as ours, or as anyone's, and we don't conceive of self or other.

This isn't referring to a mad person; this is someone who is diligent. Such a person really knows what is useful, in so many different ways. But when others look at him and try to figure him out, they will see someone who is crazy.

When Sumedho looks at laypeople, he will see them as ignorant, like little children. When laypeople consider Sumedho, they will think he is someone who's lost it. You don't have any interest in the things they live for. To put it another way, an arahant and an insane person are similar. Think about it. When people look at an arahant, they will think he is crazy. If you curse him, he doesn't care. Whatever you say to him, he doesn't react – like a crazy person. But he is crazy and has awareness. A truly insane person may not get angry when he is cursed, but that's because he doesn't know what's going on. Someone observing the arahant and the mad person might see them as the same. But the lowest is mad, the very highest is an arahant. Highest and lowest are similar, if you look at their external manifestation. But their inner awareness, their sense of things, is very different.

Think about this. When someone says something that ought to make you angry and you just let it go, people might think you're crazy. So when you teach others about these things,

they don't understand very easily. It has to be internalized for them to really understand.

For example, in this country, people love beauty. If you just say, 'No, these things aren't really beautiful,' they don't want to listen. If you talk about 'ageing', they're not pleased; 'death', they don't want to hear about it. It means they aren't ready to understand. If they won't believe you, don't fault them for that. It's like you're trying to barter with them, to give them something new to replace what they have, but they don't see any value in the thing you are offering. If what you have is obviously of the highest value, of course they will accept it. But now why don't they believe you? Your wisdom isn't sufficient. So don't get angry with them: 'What's wrong with you? You're out of your mind!' Don't do that. You have to teach yourself first, establish the truth of the Dhamma in yourself and develop the proper way to present it to others, and then they will accept it.

Sometimes the Ajahn teaches the disciples, but the disciples don't believe what he says. That might make you upset, but instead of getting upset, it's better to search out the reason for their not believing: the thing you are offering has little value to them. If you offer something of more value than what they have, of course they will want it.

When you're about to get angry at your disciples, you should think like this, and then you can stop your anger. It's really not much fun to be angry.

In order to get his disciples to realize the Dhamma, the Buddha taught a single path, but with varying characteristics. He didn't use only one form of teaching or present the Dhamma in the same way for everyone. But he taught for the single purpose of transcending suffering. All the meditations he taught were for this one purpose.

The people of Europe already have a lot in their lives. If you try to lay something big and complicated on them, it might be too much. So what should you do? Any suggestions? If anyone has something to talk about, now is the time. We won't have this chance again. Or if you don't have anything to discuss, if you've exhausted your doubts, I guess you can be *Pacceka Buddhas*.

In the future, some of you will be Dhamma teachers. You will teach others. When you teach others you are also teaching yourselves. Do any of you agree with this? Your own skilfulness and wisdom increase. Your contemplation increases.

For example, you teach someone for the first time, and then you start to wonder why it's like that, what the meaning is. So you start thinking like this and then you will want to contemplate to find out what it really means. Teaching others, you are also teaching yourself in this way. If you have mindfulness, if you are practising meditation, it will be like this. Don't think that you are only teaching others. Have the idea that you are also teaching yourself. Then there is no loss.

Ajahn Sumedho: It looks like people in the world are becoming more and more equal. Ideas of class and caste are falling away and changing. Some people who believe in astrology say that in a few years there will be great natural disasters that will cause a lot of suffering for the world. I don't really know if it's true, but they think it's something beyond our capabilities to deal with, because our lives are too far from nature and we depend on machines for our lives of convenience. They say there will be a lot of changes in nature, such as earthquakes, that nobody can foresee.

Ajahn Chah: They talk to make people suffer.

Ajahn Sumedho: Right. If we don't have mindfulness, we can really suffer over this.

Ajahn Chah: The Buddha taught about the present. He didn't advise us to worry about what might happen in two or three years. In Thailand, people come to me and say, 'Oh, Luang Por, the communists are coming! What will we do?' I ask, 'Where are those communists?' 'Well, they're coming any day now,' they say.

We've had communists from the moment we were born. I don't try to think beyond that. Having the attitude that there are always obstacles and difficulties in life kills off the 'communists'. Then we aren't heedless. Talking about what might happen in four or five years is looking too far away. They say, 'In two or three years Thailand will be communist!' I've always felt that the communists have been around since I was born, and so I've always been contending with them, right up to the present moment. But people don't understand what I'm talking about.

It's the truth! Astrology can talk about what's going to happen in two years. But when we talk about the present, they don't know what to do. Buddhism talks about dealing with things right now and making yourself well prepared for whatever might happen. Whatever might happen in the world, we don't have to be too concerned. We just practise to develop wisdom in the present and do what we need to do now, not tomorrow. Wouldn't that be better? We can wait for an earthquake that might come in three or four years, but actually, things are quaking now. America is really quaking. People's minds are so wild – that's your quake right there. But folks don't recognize it.

Big earthquakes only occur once in a long while, but this earth of our minds is always quaking, every day, every moment. In my lifetime, I've never experienced a serious earthquake, but this kind of quake is always happening, shaking us and throwing us all around. This is where the Buddha wanted us to look. But maybe that's not what people want to hear.

Things happen due to causes. They cease due to causes ceasing. We don't need to be worrying about astrological predictions. We can just know what is occurring now. Everyone likes to ask these questions, though. In Thailand, the officials come to me and say, 'The whole country will be communist! What will we do if that happens?'

'We were born – what do we do about that? I haven't thought much about this problem. I've always thought, since the day I was born the "communists" have been after me.' After I reply like this, they don't have anything to say. It stops them.

People may talk about the dangers of communists taking over in a few years, but the Buddha taught us to prepare ourselves right now, to be aware and contemplate the dangers we face that are inherent in this life. This is the big issue. Don't be heedless! Relying on astrology to tell you what will happen a couple of years from now doesn't get to the point. Relying on 'Buddhology', you don't have to chew over the past, you don't worry about the future, but you look at the present. Causes are arising in the present, so observe them in the present.

People who say those things are only teaching others to suffer. But if someone talks the way I do, people will say they are crazy. In the past, there was always movement, but it was only a little bit at a time, so it wasn't noticeable. For example, Sumedho, when you were first born, were you this size? This is

the result of movement and change. Is change good? Of course it is; if there were no movement or change, you never would have grown up. We don't need to fear natural transformation.

If you contemplate Dhamma, I don't know what else you would need to think about. If someone predicts what will happen in a few years, we can't just wait to see what happens before we do anything. We can't live like that. Whatever we need to do, we have to do it now, without waiting for anything in particular to happen.

These days the populace is in constant motion. The four elements are in motion. Earth, water, fire, and air are moving. But people don't recognize that the earth is moving. They only look at the external earth and don't see any movement.

In the future, in this world, if people are married and stay together more than a year or two, others will think there's something wrong with them. A few months will be the standard. Things are in constant motion like this; it's the minds of people that are moving. You don't need to look to astrology. Look to 'Buddhology' and you can understand this.

'Luang Por, if the communists come, where will you go?' Where is there to go? We have been born and we face ageing, sickness, and death; where can we go? We have to stay right here and deal with these things. If the communists take over, we will stay in Thailand and deal with that. Won't they have to eat rice, too?* So why are you so fearful?

If you keep worrying about what might happen in the future, there's no end to it. There is only constant confusion and speculation. Sumedho, do you know what will happen in two or

*Or: the communists will still let us eat rice, won't they?

three years? Will there be a big earthquake? When people come to ask you about these things, you can tell them they don't need to look so far ahead to things they can't really know for certain; tell them about the moving and quaking that is always going on, about the transformation that allowed you to grow to be as you are now.

The way people think is that having been born, they don't want to die. Is that correct? It's like pouring water into a glass but not wanting it to fill up. If you keep pouring the water, you can't expect it not to be full. But people think like this: they are born but don't want to die. Is that correct thinking? Consider it. If people are born but never die, will that bring happiness? If no one who comes into the world dies, things will be a lot worse. If no one ever dies, we will probably all end up eating excrement! Where would we all stay? It's like pouring water into the glass without ceasing, yet still not wanting it to be full. We really ought to think things through. We are born but don't want to die. If we really don't want to die, we should realize the deathless (*amatadhamma*), as the Buddha taught. Do you know what *amatadhamma* means?

It is the deathless – though you die, if you have wisdom it is as if you don't die. Not dying, not being born. That's where things can be finished. Being born and wishing for happiness and enjoyment without dying is not the correct way at all. But that's what people want, so there is no end of suffering for them. The practitioner of Dhamma does not suffer. Well, practitioners such as ordinary monks still suffer, because they haven't yet fulfilled the path of practice. They haven't realized *amatadhamma*, so they still suffer. They are still subject to death.

Amatadhamma is the deathless. Born of the womb, can we avoid death? Apart from realizing that there is no real self,

there is no way to avoid death. 'I' don't die; *saṅkhārā* undergo transformation, following their nature.

This is hard to see. People can't think like this. You need to get free of worldliness, like Sumedho did. You need to leave the big, comfortable home and the world of progress, like the Buddha did. If the Buddha had remained in his royal palace, he wouldn't have become the Buddha. It was by leaving the palace and going to live in forests that he attained that. The life of pleasure and amusement in the palace was not the way to enlightenment.

Who is it that tells you about the astrological predictions?

Ajahn Sumedho: A lot of people talk about it, often just like a hobby or a casual interest.

Ajahn Chah: If it really is as they say, then what should people do? Are they offering any path to follow? From my point of view, the Buddha taught very clearly. He said that the things we can't be sure about are many, starting from the time we were born. Astrology may talk about months or years in the future, but the Buddha points to the moment of birth. Predicting the future may make people anxious about what could happen, but the truth is that the uncertainty is always with us, right from birth.

People aren't likely to believe such talk, are they? If you (speaking to a layperson who was present) are afraid, then consider this: suppose that you were convicted of a crime that calls for capital punishment, and in seven days you will be executed. What would go through your mind? This is my question for you. If in seven days you will be executed, what will you do? If you think about it and take it a step further, you will realize that all

of us right now are sentenced to die, only we don't know when it will happen. It could be sooner than seven days. Are you aware that you are under this death sentence?

If you were to violate the law of the land and be sentenced to death, you would certainly be most distressed. Meditation on death is recollecting that death is going to take us and that it could be very soon. But you don't think about it, so you feel you are living comfortably. If you do think about it, it will cause you to have devotion to the practice of Dhamma. So the Buddha taught us to practise the recollection of death regularly. Those who don't recollect it live with fear. They don't know themselves. But if you do recollect and are aware of yourself, it will lead you to want to practise Dhamma seriously and be free from such fear.

If you are aware of this death sentence, you will want to find a solution. Generally, people don't like to hear such talk. Doesn't that mean they are far from the true Dhamma? The Buddha urged us to recollect death, but people get upset by such talk. That's the kamma of beings. They do have some knowledge of this fact, but the knowledge isn't yet clear.

* * *

To the Western Saṅgha newly arrived in England, 1979.

Index of Similes